



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 January 2023

by L J O'Brien BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25 April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/N5660/W/21/3289728

Horse & Groom, 122-124 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7RW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Raag Westminster Hotel Ltd against the decision of London Borough of Lambeth.
 - The application Ref 21/03211/FUL, dated 10 August 2021, was refused by notice dated 18 November 2021.
 - The development proposed is extension of the existing building and part change of use to Class C1 hotel accommodation to provide 32 hotel bedrooms, external alterations to the facade, and associated works (The Proposal) (LPA reference 21/03211/FUL) at 122-124 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7RW (The Site).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Raag Westminster Hotel Ltd against the London Borough of Lambeth. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The Council's original reasons for refusal included the fact that, in the absence of a Section 106 Agreement to secure a Healthy Routes Contribution, the transport impacts of the development would not be fully addressed. However, a Unilateral Undertaking setting out a contribution towards the Healthy Routes Plan has since been provided. The Council agree that this would overcome this reason for refusal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and the wider area; including whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Lower Marsh Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

5. The appeal property, No 122 – 124 Westminster Bridge Road is a hotel and pub located on a busy road within the Central Activities Zone (CAZ). The front elevation of the building hosts a variety of attractive, historic, architectural features. The rear elevation of the building is much simpler in design terms and has been altered over time. This elevation is, nevertheless, constructed of an

attractive brick and the alterations have been designed in such a way so as to remain subordinate to, and respect the character of, the host building.

6. The property is located within the Lower Marsh Conservation Area (CA) which is characterised by a varied mix of mostly 19th and 20th Century commercial buildings; including shops, offices, workshops and pubs. The area is considered to have evolved over time and larger, modern, development is interspersed between and around the historic buildings that characterise the area. The appeal building is an historic public house on a principal historic thoroughfare and represents one example of an historic building that has remained in place between modern development. For these reasons, the appeal property contributes positively to the significance of the CA.
7. The proposal is for the extension of the existing building and part change of use to Class C1 hotel accommodation to provide 32 hotel bedrooms, external alterations to the facade, and associated works. The existing public house at ground floor level would be retained and open to the public.
8. The proposed rear extensions would extend across almost the full width and height of the host building at points and would appear as visually dominant additions which would remove, or conceal, the existing rear elevation of the property almost entirely. The proposed additions would have flat roofs which would add to the perceived bulk of the extensions.
9. Furthermore, the existing rear elevation is well articulated by window openings and other features. In contrast the proposed extensions would include expanses of fairly uninterrupted brick work which would exacerbate the apparent size of the rear additions.
10. As a consequence, the proposal would appear as a bulky and disproportionately large rear addition which would not be sympathetic to, and would significantly detract from, the existing features, scale, proportions and massing of the host dwelling.
11. I note that the parties disagree in respect of the significance of the existing rear additions. In my view, these additions are subordinate and sympathetic to the original building and allow the building and its evolution over time to be read and understood. Even if I were to agree with the views of the appellant regarding the significance of these elements of the existing property, their replacement with the unsympathetic current proposal would, nevertheless, cause harm to the character and appearance of the host property.
12. Though I note that due to the orientation and layout of the site public views of the rear of the property are limited. However, the site is indeed visible, for example in views from Murphy Street to the rear and views from private land would also be possible.
13. For the reasons set out above, I therefore consider that the proposal would appear as a disproportionately large and visually jarring addition which would fail to assimilate well with the host building. Consequently, the proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the host property and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Lower Marsh Conservation Area. Due to the scale and nature of the proposed development, the harm to the heritage asset would be less than substantial.

14. Therefore, the proposal would fail to comply with Policy Q5 of the Lambeth Local Plan 2020-2035, adopted September 2021 (LP) which states that the local distinctiveness of Lambeth should be sustained and reinforced through new development and sets out that proposals will be supported where it is shown that the design of development is a creative and innovative contextual response to positive aspects of the locality and historic character in terms of, for example, built form (bulk, scale, height and massing) and quality and architectural detailing (including fenestration and articulation).
15. The proposal would also conflict with LP Policy Q11 which states that proposals for alterations or extensions of buildings will generally be expected to positively respond to the original architecture, roof form, detailing, fenestration (including design, materials and means of opening) of the host building. This Policy also goes on to say that development which unacceptably dominates the host building will not be permitted.
16. The development would also fail to meet the aims of LP Policy Q22 which sets out that development proposals affecting conservation areas will be permitted where they preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas.
17. The proposal would also fail to meet the guidance set out within the Building Alterations and Extensions Supplementary Planning Document, September 2015 (SPD). The SPD is clear that, amongst other things, extensions should positively respond to the character of the host building and be subordinate to the original building.

Other Matters and Planning Balance

18. The approach in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to a heritage asset, as in this case, that harm should be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal.
19. I note the appellant's view that the proposal would result in the efficient use of an existing site and would represent an investment into the building, including some works to the front elevation. I also understand that the proposal would provide additional, better quality, inclusive and accessible accommodation for visitors in a highly appropriate location well served by existing facilities and infrastructure. I recognise that the expansion of the business would also be likely to attract some additional visitors and would help to support the economy in the CAZ. I also acknowledge the economic benefits of engaging local professionals, trades and suppliers and the ongoing benefit of an increase in employment opportunities at the property. Additionally, I note the social and economic benefits associated with retaining the public house.
20. The benefits outlined above are, however, limited by the small scale of the proposal and must be considered in that context. Moreover, the specific information before me as part of this appeal is limited and, in any event, many of these benefits could also be achieved through an alternative, less harmful, scheme. I therefore afford these considerations moderate weight.
21. I also note the appellant's evidence that the proposal would not have adverse impacts in other respects and would meet other aims of the Council's Development Plan Policies as, for example, the proposed use is itself

acceptable and the proposal would be acceptable in respect of its effect on noise, privacy, light and outlook for neighbouring residents. However, the lack of harm in these respects is also a neutral factor and not a benefit of the scheme and as such this element does not carry additional weight in favour of allowing the proposal.

22. On the other side of the balance I have identified that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area and as such would not meet the statutory requirements set out in s72 (1) of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 and would cause harm to the significance of the heritage asset. The Framework indicates that great weight should be given to a heritage asset's conservation. Accordingly, the public benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the harm identified.
23. I have noted a number of other issues raised; however, as this proposal is to be dismissed for other reasons and the other concerns expressed do not have a direct bearing on the main issue, it is not necessary for these to be explored further as part of this appeal.

Conclusion

24. The proposed development would fail to accord with the development plan and the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. There are no other material circumstances which indicate that planning permission should be granted. Therefore, for the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should fail.

L J O'Brien

INSPECTOR