



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 August 2023

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H5960/W/22/3309856

1, 3, 5 and 7 Sisters Avenue, London SW11 5SP

- 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 Wandle Housing Association against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Wandsworth.
 - The application Ref 2022/2640, dated 29 June 2022, was refused by notice dated 24 August 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as 'retrospective application for the replacement of existing windows with UPVC windows to the flats within Nos. 1, 3, 5 and 7 of Sisters Avenue'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The application form indicates that the development applied for has been completed. However, while I saw some of the windows in place at my visit, it appeared that some of the windows currently present differ from those shown on the 'proposed' plans. For example, at least some top floor windows to the rear of 7 Sisters Avenue did not appear to be white uPVC in top hung casements as suggested on plan no 0308/C/101. For the avoidance of doubt, I have determined the appeal on the basis of the submitted plans.
3. In July 2023, after the appeal was submitted, the Council adopted the Wandsworth Local Plan 2023-2038 ('the LP'). The LP now forms part of the development plan for the area and supersedes policies of the Core Strategy 2016 ('CS') and Development Management Policies Document 2016 ('DMP') referred to in the Council's reason for refusal. The main parties were given the opportunity to comment on any implications of the change in policy, and I have taken the representations made into account. I am therefore satisfied that no prejudice would be caused by my determination of the appeal giving full weight to the policies of the LP, and I make no further reference to the CS or DMP.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host buildings, which are locally listed buildings, and the surrounding area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site includes a group of 4 detached buildings which are identified by the Council as locally listed buildings. The buildings therefore comprise 'non-designated heritage assets' in accordance with the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework').

6. The buildings are of relatively large scale, and are each of similar form and designs to one another and to buildings at 2-8 Sisters Avenue opposite, including front gable projections with curved bays to the ground and lower ground floor levels, columned entrance porches, balustraded balconies over the front bays and porches, and decorative moulded detailing. These attributes give the buildings an imposing appearance, and aside from the development subject of this appeal, they are generally well-preserved providing for a strong and distinctive sense of uniformity to the groups. This uniformity together with the retained original features contributes positively to the character and appearance of the host buildings and to the wider street scene and area, and in my view adds much to their significance as non-designated heritage assets. The windows are less prominent than the more elaborate architectural details, but they are nevertheless part of the buildings' overall composition and their design and detailing adds to the impression of consistency. While the windows may not in themselves be a defining feature, I find on that basis that they do contribute to the significance of the assets.
7. The appeal relates to the replacement of a number of timber sliding sash windows. At 1 Sisters Avenue, windows to the first and second floors would be replaced with top-hung white uPVC. Although not clearly illustrated on the elevations, annotations on the plans for 3 Sisters Avenue describe proposed uPVC top-hung casements. At 5 Sisters Avenue, all windows are shown to be replaced with white uPVC, with top-hung casements to the first and second floors and sliding sash to the ground and lower ground. At 7 Sisters Avenue, windows to the second floor and to the front and rear of the side return at all levels would be replaced with top-hung white uPVC.
8. The outward opening style of the top-hung replacement windows does not reflect the sliding sash windows that are typical of the host buildings and others on Sisters Avenue, and would lead to the casements projecting conspicuously beyond the face of the window at times when they are open. The frames and joinery of both the top hung and sliding sash style windows would also be notably thicker than the timber versions to be replaced, and would lack vertical glazing bars that were present to some of the original windows. Based on my observations, I cannot agree with the appellant that the replacements appear materially similar to the existing windows. In my assessment, they would sit awkwardly against the traditional materials and characteristic timber windows of the host buildings and would appear wholly unsympathetic.
9. Furthermore, not all of the windows to Nos 1-7 would be replaced, and the replacements that are proposed include a mixture of sliding sash and top-hung casements. Irrespective of their colour, the above factors mean that the replacements would stand out conspicuously against the retained windows to the host buildings, and would result in a mismatched appearance that would harmfully erode the uniformity and integrity of the group. The effect would be readily apparent from the street where replacement windows are to the fronts of the buildings, but changes to the rear would also be appreciable from neighbouring properties and gardens.
10. At my visit, I saw that timber windows are prevalent in the wider street scene with few apparent uPVC or alternative material replacements. I note that 10 Sisters Avenue close to the site does have uPVC windows, but it is not clear from the information before me that this is a locally listed building. The Council also comments that the windows match the glazing pattern of the originals,

and I saw that those to the front of the building at least were of sliding sash style. The circumstances are not therefore directly comparable to the current appeal where many of the windows proposed are top-hung, and the uPVC windows at No 10 do not provide a compelling justification for the harm that I have identified would be caused by the development before me.

11. I find for these reasons that the proposal would result in a discordant development that would detract from the character and appearance of the host buildings and group, with consequent detriment to the character and appearance of the area.
12. In weighing applications that affect non-designated heritage assets, the Framework advises that a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
13. The appellant refers to the environmental benefits of the windows in providing for improved energy efficiency and thermal performance and effective airflow offering an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions. I have no firm reason to doubt the use of recycled materials and that the windows would be low maintenance and appropriately durable. I also accept that there would be likely to be associated benefits in improving the quality of accommodation and reducing running costs for occupiers of the dwellings concerned. However, the small scale of the development means that I consider such benefits are likely to be limited in extent. Moreover, there is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate that these benefits could not be achieved with secondary glazing or sympathetic replacement windows in keeping with the appearance, detailing and opening type of the originals. These factors limit the weight that I afford to these matters in favour of the proposal.
14. The development would affect only a small part of the fabric of the buildings, but would notably reduce the uniformity of the group as well as detracting from their individual character and appearance which I consider would cause moderate harm to their significance overall. I appreciate that the site is not within a conservation area and in this regard, the proposal can be distinguished from example appeals referred to by the Council at Southolm Street, Prince of Wales Drive and Cowick Street. Even so, the Framework notes that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and highlights the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance. I find taking a balanced judgement that the benefits of the proposal are insufficient to outweigh the harm to the significance of the buildings, and I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the locally listed buildings and the surrounding area.
15. Accordingly, there would be conflict with Policies LP1, LP3 and LP5 of the LP. Amongst other things, these policies advise broadly that proposals will be supported where they sustain, preserve and where possible enhance the significance of heritage assets and require high quality development that relates positively to local character and that respects or complements the host building. The proposal would also be contrary to the Framework insofar as it seeks generally to conserve and enhance the historic environment and the significance of heritage assets.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal would conflict with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR