



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 September 2023

by M Clowes BA (Hons) MCD PG CERT (Arch Con) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/X5210/W/23/3317699

Bloomsbury Hotel, Coram Street, London WC1N 1HT

- 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 Reon Van Wijk [IPA Architects] against the decision of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref 2022/2989/P, dated 13 July 2022, was refused by notice dated 8 February 2023.
 - The development proposed is raising existing refuse yard wall and install new metal screen gates to three existing vehicles access points and insert a series of louvred metal panels to screen refuse yard.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for raising existing refuse yard wall and install new metal screen gates to three existing vehicles access points and insert a series of louvred metal panels to screen refuse yard at Bloomsbury Hotel, Coram Street, London WC1N 1HT in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 2022/2989/P, dated 13 July 2022 and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions;
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved drawings;

Site location plan drawing number 22021.EX.001

Proposed ground floor plan drawing number 22021.LO.100 Rev 02

Proposed elevations drawing number 22021.LO.100 Rev 02

CGI proposals and material samples drawing number 22021.EX.005.
 - 3) All new external work shall be carried out in materials that match in colour and texture those of the existing building.

Procedural Matters

2. In September 2023 the Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The revisions relate to national planning policy for onshore wind development rather than anything relevant to the main issues in this appeal. Consequently, I have not invited further comments.
3. The description in the banner heading above is taken from the planning application form, as there is no evidence before me that the appellant agreed to that shown on the Council's decision notice.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in relation to this appeal are;
 - i) whether the proposal would preserve the setting of the Grade II listed building of Frames Coach Station; and
 - ii) the effect of the development upon the character and appearance of the area including the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (BCA).

Reasons

Setting of Listed Building

5. The appeal site lies to the east of the Frames Coach Station, a Grade II listed former garage and office building designed for Daimler Car Hire Ltd by Wallis, Gilbert and Partners, known for their art deco buildings. Constructed in 1931 of concrete with large rectangular metal framed windows of small horizontally set lights, it has a modernistic appearance¹. The sweeping spiral ramp and lift shaft are expressed externally which along with the wide ground floor openings and cobbled forecourt provide evidence of the function of the building as a garage. The significance of the listed building therefore derives from its historical, aesthetic, evidential and associative interest.
6. Insofar as is relevant to this appeal, the special interest and significance of the listed building, is experienced and appreciated in immediate and wider views from within Herbrand Street. This street is characterised by tall buildings of various ages, styles and materials in a densely urban environment. Neighbouring buildings are generally large, tall structures that due to their position close to the edge of the pavement, frame and afford long linear views of the street into which the listed building assimilates. The appeal site is one such large building comprising a modern 20th century hotel, with a functional appearance and little architectural merit.
7. Whilst tall², the increased height of the proposed boundary wall would contain and screen the existing refuse yard including the associated bins, compactors and cages from open views, as well as maintaining the sense of enclosure within the street scene. There would be no real difference to the setting of the listed building and how it is appreciated from within Herbrand Street, particularly given that the existing street trees would filter views of the proposal. Even if there was any limited harm from the scale of the proposed wall, it would be offset by the screening of the refuse paraphernalia, such that the overall effect on the setting of the listed building would be neutral.
8. As a result, the proposal would not harm the significance and would preserve the setting of the listed building as described above. The proposal therefore accords with Policy D2 of the Camden Local Plan (CLP) 2017, which seeks to resist development that would cause harm to the significance of a listed building through an effect on setting.

Character and Appearance

9. The appeal site lies outside but adjacent to the Bloomsbury CA which essentially surrounds the perimeter block on which the hotel building is sited.

¹ Historic England official list entry.

² Circa 3.5m above ground level as cited by the Council in its appeal statement.

In accordance with the duty imposed by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.

10. The significance of the CA insofar as it relates to this appeal, is in its historic grid pattern of planned streets and interrelated formally landscaped squares with buildings largely constructed of brick, containing the street. As explained above, the immediate context of the appeal site is that of assorted building styles and forms of differing commercial and residential uses. Whilst of no particular architectural merit, the hotel building is constructed in brick and its height provides containment to the street as experienced from pedestrian level.
11. Paragraph 5.6 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (2011) advises that small scale additions such as refuse and recycling storage can have a cumulative impact on the character of the area. In this case, the refuse yard is already in situ and the Council acknowledges that the proliferation of bins of various sizes and colours, cages and refuse compactors currently detract from the appearance of the street scene.
12. The Camden Planning Guidance on 'Design' (CPG) advises amongst other things, that bins must be secured or not accessible to the public footway because of the risk of fire, theft and hazard for pedestrians, and measures should be taken to ensure that the visual impact of waste storage is minimised. The proposal to enclose the currently open yard with a taller wall would therefore, be beneficial in both visual and public safety terms, in compliance with the CPG.
13. Despite the existing hotel being set at an angle away from the pavement, the refuse yard being of poor visual quality and containing a tall timber structure and additional equipment some of which are over 2m high, does not make a particularly positive contribution to openness within the street scene.
14. Consequently, the proposed wall would not be markedly imposing or result in undue bulk when considered in the context of an urban street framed by tall buildings. Views to the large-scale residential building on Coram Street would remain, as would views in and out of the neighbouring BCA. The proposal would appear as a single storey enclosure to a much higher building, akin to that already in existence to the south of the building.
15. The proposed articulation of the wall with decorative metal panels to match the colour of the windows and cladding within the existing hotel³, would help its assimilation as well as adding texture and visual interest to lessen the solidity of the wall such that it would not have a 'back of house' appearance. Furthermore, the existing street trees would soften and filter views of the proposal from within the street. Even if it could be considered harmful to the appearance of the street scene, such harm would be limited and offset by the enclosure and screening of the refuse paraphernalia. In being a largely brick structure that contains the street, I find it would preserve the significance of the BCA as described above.
16. Hence, for the above reasons, the proposal would not adversely affect the character and appearance of the area, including the adjacent BCA. Accordingly,

³ As shown on the CGI proposals plan drawing number 22021.EX.005.

it would comply with Policies D1 and D2 of the CLP which amongst other things, aim to resist development of a poor design outside of a CA that causes harm to the character or appearance of the CA.

Other Matters

17. The Council suggests that the appeal site is considered to be out of scale in the CAAMS. However, it seems to me that the references to the Holiday Inn Hotel within this document, relate to a different building elsewhere within the BCA.
18. A modulated wall with railings, suggested as an alternative by the Council would not follow the clearly defined horizontal proportions of the host building and is likely to appear more contrived. Railings would also enable a greater penetration of views through to the refuse yard. Regardless, I am required to assess the scheme before me, which I have found would bring about a visual improvement over and above the existing situation. Any future proposal for roofing over the yard area would need to be carefully considered at the relevant time, in accordance with the development plan.

Conditions

19. The Council's suggested conditions have been considered and the wording varied where necessary, to ensure compliance with the Planning Practice Guide and paragraph 56 of the Framework. Along with the standard time limit, conditions are imposed to require the use of matching materials in the interests of consistency of appearance and to list the plans in the interest of certainty.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons give above, having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is allowed.

M Clowes

INSPECTOR