



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2023

by Robert Naylor BSc (Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 November 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W5780/W/23/3320678

316 to 324 and 316e Ilford Lane, Ilford IG1 2LT

- 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 Asad Chaudry of Interface Properties against the decision of the Council for the London Borough of Redbridge.
- The application Ref 2378/22, dated 20 June 2022, was refused by notice dated 20 October 2022.
- The development proposed is described as a 3 storey office front extension.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development cited in the planning application form differs to that contained within the decision notice and appeal form. There is no evidence that this change was formally agreed. In the interests of clarity, I rely upon the description included in the application form for the purposes of the heading above.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on i) the character and appearance of the area; and ii) the occupants of the existing offices at Ilford Business Centre with specific regard to outlook and light.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The appeal site consists of a terrace of single storey commercial/retail units fronting Ilford Lane (A123), with a four-storey office building (Ilford Business Centre) adjoining the site to the rear. The surrounding area is mixed-use with residential, service, commercial, retail and office facilities all located in close proximity to one another. Building heights range from single storey such as the appeal site, to six storeys provided by the flatted development opposite. As such, there is no defined architectural style or building type which predominates this area. Nevertheless, the area does have a more domestic appearance and scale to it, typified by the significant number of residential units in the intersecting side streets.
5. Given its flat roofed appearance and single storey nature, the appeal site does appear underutilised within the surrounding area and there is scope for the site to be used more intensively. Whilst the existing development at the ground floor already sits forward of the building line at Nos. 326–330 Ilford Lane, the provision of an additional three storeys over the existing footprint in this

location would provide a significant increase in the bulk and mass of development, contrary to the more domestic scaled properties adjoining the proposal.

6. The increased mass, coupled with a lack of articulation along the street scene would provide excessive width, depth and height at the appeal site providing a bulky appearance at the upper floor level. Furthermore, the use of the high-end structural glazing, whilst lightweight and transparent, would create an appearance significantly different to the existing vernacular and would be an overly assertive and dominant feature when viewed from the street.
7. The constrained nature of the plot and the close relationship with Nos. 326–330 would provide a development that would appear uncomfortable within the site and within the area in general. Given the prominent position of the proposal, coupled with its relationship with the four-storey Ilford Business Centre behind, it would provide an overly dominant and disproportionate feature to the existing built form. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are other taller properties within the immediate vicinity, such as the flatted developments opposite, these are set in larger plots providing a more open and spacious feel, unlike the scale of built development proposed here, which would appear cramped and dominant in its setting.
8. Notwithstanding the presence of the flatted developments opposite and the existing Ilford Business Centre itself, the proposal would create a visually dominant feature, at odds with the general domestic scale in the area, appearing as a discordant feature out-of-keeping within its context. Consequently, the proposal does not take available opportunities to improve the character and appearance of the area, nor the way it functions.
9. The appellant draws my attention to other properties in the vicinity that have also been extended, notably at Nos. 208-210 Ilford Lane and other properties along Ilford Lane. However, I have been presented with little substantive evidence relating to their planning history or any planning policy in place at the time when these developments were constructed. As such, I am unable to directly compare these examples, and they carry limited weight. In any event, I have determined this appeal on its own merits based on all the evidence presented.
10. Accordingly, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and thus would conflict with Policy D3 of The London Plan (LP), March 2021 and Policy LP26 of the Redbridge Local Plan (RLP) 2015-2030, adopted March 2018, which collectively seek development to provide a high standard of design which respects and responds to the local character of the area, makes a positive architectural and urban design contribution to its context and location, is well integrated and has regard to and respects the surrounding area, amongst other things. It would also conflict with the objective of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) to achieving well-designed places and in particular paragraph 130 which states, amongst other things, that developments should function well, add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive, be sympathetic to local character and create attractive, welcoming, and distinctive places.

Effect of the proposal on the occupants of the Ilford Business Centre

11. RLP Policy LP26 also seeks new development that does not result in an adverse impact upon the amenity of neighbouring occupiers in relation to overlooking and privacy, daylight/sunlight, outlook, and respects the scale, massing and height of surrounding buildings, amongst other things.
12. The existing office suites within the Ilford Business Centre have several windows at first, second and third floors overlooking the appeal site at close quarters. From the plans submitted the majority of these windows provide the only outlook and source of natural light for the offices on the eastern side of the building.
13. I have not been provided with any daylight/sunlight report nor any assessment in accordance with the British Research Establishment (BRE) tests on light. However, from my site observations and limited information provided, the impact on sunlight as a result of the proposal would be experienced mainly in the early morning on the existing offices, given their orientation, the course of the sun and direction of shadowing. However, without a more detailed BRE assessment, I cannot be certain that the proposal would maintain a reasonable relationship with the adjacent property and not lead to an excessive loss of daylight and/or sunlight. As such I have adopted a precautionary approach.
14. With regard to outlook, it is acknowledged that the proposal has been set away from the front windows of the Ilford Business Centre, however any increase in height and mass in this location would have a significant impact on the outlook experienced in the existing offices by enclosing their views. The modest proposed separation distance, coupled with the height of the building would provide a dominant view of the proposal from these windows, leading to poor outlook and a feeling of enclosure.
15. Furthermore, given the close relationship of the existing and proposed building, the windows in the rear elevation of the proposal would provide unobscured views to the existing offices at close quarters. Whilst a degree of mutual overlooking is to be expected in this type of setting, the extremely close relationship would create unacceptable overlooking from the appeal site into the existing offices and vice versa. It is acknowledged that the proposed windows could be fixed shut and fitted with obscured glazing to prevent overlooking or loss of privacy between the sites, however this would not overcome the above concerns regarding outlook, and would in fact lead to a heightened sense of enclosure and a feeling of being hemmed in.
16. For the reasons above, the proposal would unacceptably harm the quality of office accommodation for the adjoining occupiers at Ilford Business Centre due to the sense of enclosure, overlooking and the impact on outlook. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with the objectives of RLP Policy LP26 which seeks, among other things, for developments to avoid any adverse impact on the amenity of surrounding buildings. The proposal would also be contrary to the relevant section of RLP Policy LP14 in so far as it seeks to promote business and employment and maintain the viability of existing employment sites. It would also be contrary to Paragraph 130 f) of the Framework which, amongst other things, also seeks a good standard of amenity for all existing occupants of buildings.

Other Matters

17. The appellant and third parties draw my attention to the provision of an increase in the range of good quality office facilities within Redbridge to meet its employment needs, as a result of the proposal. They also highlight other benefits of the scheme such as additional security for the existing site, more accessible facilities and a roof terrace to improve amenity. Nevertheless, none of these matters are in dispute, and in any case would be neutral in the planning balance. Consequently, they would not outweigh the identified harm to the character and appearance of the area, nor to the quality of existing office accommodation for the adjoining occupiers at Ilford Business Centre, which I have identified above.

Conclusion

18. The proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations, including the Framework, that indicate a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

Robert Naylor

INSPECTOR