



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 January 2024

by **P. D. Biggers** BSc Hons MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15.02.2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/D/23/3334020

125 Catharine Street, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire CB1 3AP.

- 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 Alexander Mills and Kimberley Trapp against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application 23/02885/HFUL, dated 24 July 2023, was refused by notice dated 19 September 2023.
 - The development proposed is loft conversion including raising ridge line and construction of rear dormer.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. In the period since the appeal was submitted the Government has published a revised version of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (the Framework). None of the changes are relevant to this appeal but I have used the paragraph referencing from the new Framework in my decision below.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host dwelling, the terrace of properties and the Mill Road Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal property sits on the west side of Catharine Street and is an end of terrace, small, two storey property from the Victorian era in a short terrace of 5 similar properties. The terrace is built directly on the back of pavement to Catharine Street and a narrow side access to No 127 lies on the north side of the property. The front elevation of the terrace to Catharine Street is largely original and is uniform in its appearance including the slate roofscape. Similarly in terms of the rear elevation there are no rear box dormers on the immediate terrace; the closest appeared to be that to No 139.
5. I have been referred to other properties in the area where property ridgelines have been raised to accommodate a box dormer but, having viewed some of these on site, I am not persuaded that they would justify introducing the same arrangement in an otherwise uniform terrace frontage in the Conservation Area. I will therefore determine the appeal proposal on its own merits.
6. I acknowledge that the increase in ridge height proposed to accommodate the loft accommodation would be achieved by projecting the roof slope higher behind the

existing ridge and therefore minimising the impact on the plane of the front roof slope. Nevertheless, the increase in height compared to the rest of the terrace would still be readily visible from the opposite side of Catherine Street and from views up and down the street in which it would appear as an incongruous addition to the uniform terrace roof scape. In addition, the proposed front rooflight would further impact on the uniformity of the roof slope, there being no front rooflights on the terrace of 5 properties.

7. Arguably, however, it is the effect of the roof raise and box dormer to the rear that would have the more serious impact. The box dormer is proposed to extend over virtually the whole plane of the roof with minimal verges to the eaves and sides. Because of the raised ridge it would dominate and change the whole character and appearance of the rear elevation not just of the house but of the rear elevation of the terrace in which it would be highly intrusive, there being no other interruptions to the roof slope. The windows proposed, in particular the Juliet balcony, would bear no relationship to the positioning or scale of the windows below in the rest of the house.
8. In order to assist in the design of roof extensions the Council has produced *Appendix E Roof Extensions Design Guide* (REDG). The guide states that roof extensions are unlikely to be acceptable where they are insensitively designed, large, box type roof extensions which show little respect for the existing roofline or for the scale, design and proportions of the existing property and its neighbours. In respect of windows, the style should be influenced by the design, proportion and arrangement of existing windows in the building. With regard to ridge lines the guide states that, unless the street already lacks uniform roof heights or the ridge is not visible from the street, roof extensions that raise the ridge will not normally be supported. I have been invited to conclude that there is already variety in the roofscape of Catharine Street in terms of heights but this is not so true of the west side of Catharine Street and certainly not true of the terrace in question. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to observe any of the roof extension guidance.
9. It has been put to me that the rear facing dormer would not be visible from the front street but, whilst this is largely true, it was evident that there would be uninterrupted inward views of this large box dormer from the rear windows of Sedgwick Street properties. I accept that these would be private realm views. However, the impact of the development on character and appearance in these views is nevertheless important, as the character of the Conservation Area is not solely dependent on what can be seen from the public realm.
10. The Framework at paragraph 135 requires that developments must be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment amongst other things and in these respects the proposal fails. Policy 58 of the *Cambridge Local Plan* (CLP) controlling alterations and extensions to buildings reflects the Framework in requiring that developments do not adversely impact on the appearance of conservation areas. The policy goes on in respect of roof extensions and requires these to be sympathetic to the existing building and in keeping with the requirements of REDG. At CLP Policy 61 development proposals, to be supported, must conserve and enhance the significance of heritage assets including their settings and the *Mill Road Conservation Area Character Appraisal* identifies inappropriate extensions as a prime cause of the erosion of character in the Conservation Area. For the above reasons, i.e. the increase in ridge height, the scale, height and massing of the dormer and the arrangement of the fenestration, the proposal would have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of this Catharine Street terrace and the Mill Road Conservation Area.

11. As such the requirements of the Framework at paragraph 205 and CLP Policy 61 would not be met. I accept that the harm to the Conservation Area would be less than substantial and in these circumstances the Framework at paragraph 208 allows for any public benefits of the proposal to be taken into consideration. In this case the appellant has presented no public benefits. Any benefit from the roof extension would be an entirely private benefit to the owners of the property. As such the harm to the Conservation Area would not be outweighed. Sections 66 and 72 of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* require decision makers to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing conservation areas. In this case, for the reasons above, the proposal would fail to at least preserve the Conservation Area.

Other Matters

12. I understand the appellant's wish to make sustainable and effective use of housing land, an objective which is encouraged by the Framework in Section 11. I acknowledge that this national policy objective makes the principle of the development acceptable and is also supported by the CLP in increasing housing capacity in an area where new development is constrained. I also acknowledge the reason for the increase in height, in order to ensure the staircase can meet the Building Regulations. However, paragraph 128 in the same Section 11 of the Framework states that development should not be at the expense of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting. Sustainable and effective use of the dwelling by constructing the proposed roof extension would not therefore outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a result of the proposal.

Conclusion

13. In reaching my decision I have had regard to the matters before me but for the reasons above the appeal should be dismissed.

P. D. Biggers

INSPECTOR