
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 June 2024

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 June 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/E5330/D/24/3337967

183 Plum Lane, Plumstead, London SE18 3HQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Renuka Gupta against the decision of the Council of the Royal Borough of Greenwich.
 - The application Ref is 23/2994/HD.
 - The development proposed is 'ground floor wraparound extension, new garage, driveway extension, façade alteration, fence works, floor plan redesign and all associated works'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - i) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the Shrewsbury Park Conservation Area; and
 - ii) whether or not the proposed access and parking arrangements would be acceptable having regard to pedestrian and highway safety and policies seeking to support use of sustainable transport modes.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

3. The Shrewsbury Park Conservation Area ('the CA') is largely focussed around a 1930s planned estate designed by the housebuilder John Laing and Son. Streets within the Laing Estate are generally wide and lined by verges with extensive planting, and further mature landscaping is present within generous front and rear gardens which gives the area an attractively spacious and verdant character. In terms of buildings, the Shrewsbury Park Estate Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy 2013 ('the CAMS') highlights various standard house types and sub-types on the Laing Estate which provide for subtle and interesting variety to development. Nevertheless, there is a strong overarching sense of uniformity and coherence including as a result of consistency in architectural detailing, window designs and the common reddish-brown bricks and brown concrete or clay tiled roof materials. These factors together with the planned layout of the buildings and pattern of narrow driveways provides for a distinctive character and appearance to the area and a strong sense of place, from which I consider much of the significance of the CA derives.

4. The appeal site is within, but on the edge of, the CA and includes a detached dwelling of the Laing 'Olympia' house type as well as a detached garage. There have been some alterations to windows, but the dwelling retains many characteristic architectural features and it has a substantial garden to the side and rear, providing it with an especially spacious setting which is appreciable on entering the CA. Given these attributes, I find that the site makes a positive contribution to the character, appearance and thus significance of the CA.
5. The proposed extension would be set back from the front building line of the dwelling and would increase the width of the original house by no more than 50% in accordance with guidance in the Urban Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2023 ('the UDG'). However, it would wrap around the side and rear of the dwelling and the combined width and depth would result in a relatively large footprint against the host building. Moreover, the height of the extension would be significant, with the apex of the roof sitting at a similar height to the lower sill of most of the first-floor windows. The height would give the extension prominence and taken cumulatively with the width and depth would result in a large bulk and mass and considerable physical presence that I consider would lack sufficient subservience to the dwelling.
6. The extension would also sit very close to the two-storey canted bay to the rear of the building, to the extent that the eaves of its roof would appear to partly overlap the bay. The resulting juxtaposition would be visually jarring and would detract from the form and integrity of the bay which is a characteristic feature in the CA. Accordingly, I find that there would be a failure to adequately respect the architectural features of the dwelling, exacerbating the impression of a lack of subservience.
7. Moreover, the CAMS notes that the roofscape on the Laing estate is largely unaltered and an important visual characteristic, and states that rooflights are not considered acceptable on front or side elevations. A number of rooflights are proposed to the extension, including one to the northern side roofslope which would be highly visible from Plum Lane. Although in an extension rather than the original roof, the large size of the rooflight would be conspicuous and even if it were flush fitting, it would stand out as an uncharacteristic feature in the CA. Other glazing to the extension would additionally be of varying proportions and designs, including unusual glazing wrapping around one corner point. The full extent of the different glazing patterns would not be appreciable from the street, but I consider that there would be an awkward mix of fenestration that would not relate well to the dwelling or wider CA.
8. The UDG advises that wraparound extensions will not generally be supported in conservation areas. In this case, I acknowledge that the curved front bay and rounded corner entrance to the dwelling would be retained. However, I find that the overall scale of the extension together with its unsympathetic detailing would result in an imposing feature that would dominate and detract from the proportions and architectural composition of the building. It would also be a prominent and uncharacteristic feature within the CA.
9. I appreciate that there are varied extensions to other dwellings locally, but I have not been directed to any of comparable scale or design to that proposed here which would further occupy a prominent location in the CA. These examples do not therefore offer strong support for the appeal scheme.

10. The proposal also includes the replacement of the existing garage on the site with a larger structure, positioned on a different orientation. While the Council suggests that the angled orientation of the existing garage has been a feature since at least the 1950s, the proposed alignment parallel with the dwelling would be more in keeping with the typical arrangement of other structures to the side of dwellings in the CA. The garage would also be set well back from the front building line of the dwelling and would maintain clear separation to the extension.
11. Nevertheless, the timber cladding specified on the submitted plans would be decidedly out of keeping with the characteristic brick finish of other buildings in the CA including the host dwelling. Furthermore, roofs of garages within the CA are typically pitched or hipped. While there are some with flat roofs, the large width and depth of the proposed garage would result in an unusually large area of flat roof that would give the building a bulky and ungainly appearance at odds with the attractive detailing and architectural quality of the host property. I acknowledge that the existing garage has a monopitched roof and cladding to the exterior, but the larger scale of the proposed garage means that its visual impact would be greater. In my judgement, the garage's large overall size in combination with its unsympathetic form and design would result in an over-dominant feature to the side of the dwelling, including in views from Plum Lane, and it would detract from the character and the appearance of both the host dwelling and the CA.
12. Furthermore, the extended driveway to the front of the garage would be significantly wider than the narrow original driveway design that predominates on the Laing Estate and would be wide enough for two cars contrary to guidance in the CAMS that drives should normally be large enough to accommodate only one. I note that there are some examples of relatively wide driveways on Plum Lane, but I saw that these were generally on the opposite side of the street, outside the boundary of the CA. Although it may not therefore stand out as an isolated feature in the street scene, the proposed drive would be clearly wider than those to the closest neighbours within the CA at 185-195 Plum Lane. It would erode the pattern of narrow driveways which contributes to the character and appearance of the CA and irrespective of the potential for a more sympathetic surface treatment, I find that this element of the proposal would not therefore preserve the CA.
13. Cumulatively, the proposed development would lead to a fairly significant increase in built form on the site which would inevitably cause some reduction in openness. Be that as it may, there would remain significant separation between buildings and boundaries to the side and rear of the site and the dwelling would also retain a very generous garden relative to many of those nearby. As a result, I am satisfied that the spacious character and appearance of the area would not be meaningfully eroded. Had I found the proposal to be otherwise acceptable, I also consider that further details of the proposed replacement fence and driveway materials could appropriately be sought by planning conditions to ensure that they were acceptable.
14. However, for the reasons given above, I find that the proposed extension, replacement garage and extension to the driveway would each be unsympathetic and conspicuous. Particularly when taken in combination, they would cause marked harm to the character and the appearance of the dwelling and appeal site, and the proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the CA.

15. Given the nature of the development and that the effect would be localised, I consider that the harm to the significance of the CA as a whole would be less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework'). The Framework therefore indicates that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
16. In the absence of substantive evidence to demonstrate a clear existing highway or pedestrian safety issue at the site and that any such issue would be addressed by the development, the weight that I afford to this as a potential benefit is limited. The appellant states that the property is not currently fit for their family to live in, noting the presence of asbestos, but there is little firm evidence to demonstrate that the dwelling is uninhabitable. Nor is it clear that works to address asbestos or the condition of the building would be dependent on the appeal proposal. I appreciate that the development would provide additional and enhanced living space for occupiers of the site and I am sympathetic to the appellant's desires to improve the accommodation available for their family. However, these benefits would be mostly private, and would be limited by the small scale of the development. Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence to show that these benefits would be dependent on an extension of the actual scale and design proposed and could not be achieved by a potential less harmful alternative.
17. The Framework states that heritage assets are irreplaceable and great weight should be given to their conservation. Although the harm to the CA would be less than substantial, this matter attracts considerable importance and weight and I find that the limited public benefits of the proposal are insufficient to outweigh that harm.
18. I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA in accordance with Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. For the reasons above, I conclude that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the character and the appearance of the host dwelling and the Shrewsbury Park CA. It would accordingly conflict with Policies D3 and HC1 of the London Plan 2021 ('the LP') and Policies DH1, DH3 and DH(h) of the Core Strategy with Detailed Policies 2014 ('the CS') insofar as they together broadly seek high quality design, development that responds positively to local context, and the conservation or enhancement of heritage assets including conservation areas. It would similarly be contrary to requirements in the Framework seeking well-designed places and the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Access and Parking

19. While the driveway would be extended, the 'Proposed Block Plans' drawing includes an annotation 'existing drop kerb to be retained'. It indicates that part of the boundary to the front of the widened section of driveway would be removed which could well lead to vehicles accessing the driveway travelling over a wider section of the footway than currently. However, the unaltered dropped kerb and bollards and trees that I saw are present within the verge to either side would seem to restrict any significant increase in access points to the highway. Given also the separation that would be retained to other accesses nearby and the distance that the driveway width would increase, I

consider that meaningful detriment to pedestrian or highway safety would be unlikely and there would be no loss of on-street parking.

20. Nevertheless, the appellant's evidence does not expressly refute the concerns raised by the Council and the highway authority that the availability of parking on the site would be increased from the existing situation which would appear to me to be the case based on the arrangement shown. Increased parking provision would support, if not encourage, use of private vehicles. This would be contrary to Policy IM4 of the CS which includes a requirement for development to reduce use of the private car. It would also be at odds with Policies T6 and T6.1 of the LP insofar as they specify standards for maximum parking provision, and contrary to Policies T1 and T2 of the LP insofar as they broadly seek to reduce the dominance of vehicles on London's streets and increase trips made by foot, cycle or public transport.
21. While I am satisfied that there would not be unacceptable harm to pedestrian or highway safety and access would be acceptable, the proposal would conflict with Policies T1, T2, T6 and T6.1 of the LP and Policy IM4 of the CS insofar as they broadly seek to support use of sustainable transport modes. As a consequence, I conclude that the parking arrangements would be unacceptable.

Conclusion

22. 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