
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2025

by **C Hall BSc MPhil MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/D5120/W/24/3353861

25-27 Watling Street, Bexleyheath DA6 7QJ

- 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 Mr D Harris against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Bexley.
 - The application Ref. is 24/01147/FUL.
 - The development proposed is for erection of three-storey rear extension to provide 3 residential units with associated parking, amenity space, secure cycle and bin storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. My attention has been drawn to previous appeals at the site (Inspectorate references APP/D5120/A/12/2170690 & W/19/3233004). I shall have regard to this background when considering the merits of this scheme.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on:
 - the character and appearance of the Locally Listed Building; and
 - the living conditions of the occupants of existing flats with regard to outlook.

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site comprises a three-storey building that has been divided into flats, with parking at the rear accessed via a track to the side of the property. I saw at my visit that the surrounding area consists of mainly residential and office uses with no prevailing architectural style; the neighbourhood is characterised by buildings of differing age, size, design, detailing and external materials. In this respect, I concur with the previous Inspector's reasoning in 2019 that *'this mixed appearance contributes positively to the character of the area'*.
4. The proposed extension would introduce a three-storey element projecting from the rear elevation of the property. It would be screened from the road behind the host building, ensuring that the attractive facade would retain its original proportions and appearance. To my mind, the concerns of the Inspector for the 2019 scheme purely in relation to appearance from the front would consequently be resolved; there would be no increase in height above the existing ridge line to appear awkward and unbalanced.

5. This matter notwithstanding, the rear extension would be of substantial mass and bulk. Whilst I acknowledge that the back of the property is less cohesive and imposing, and construction would use external materials to match, the rearward projection is considerable. In this respect I share the concerns of the Council's Heritage Officer that the depth would exceed that of the original host building, and although not visible from the front, the proximity of the roof to the existing ridge line would mean that the proposal has no sense of subservience. Moreover, the infill element lacks any degree of uniformity to its external wall, with large areas of brickwork surrounding a single window that does not align with any other opening. The formation of a large swathe of crowned roof over the infill emphasises a deep-plan form which is not seen elsewhere on the building.
6. Overall, I consider that the scheme lacks architectural subtlety and would dominate the rear elevation. Although I appreciate that the proposal would have a limited effect on the public domain due to a lack of visibility, it would be clearly evident from the grounds of the local primary school and the rear parking and amenity spaces of surrounding properties, having a detrimental impact by virtue of its scale and extent. In any event, just because a proposal cannot readily be viewed from the public domain does not obviate the obligation to ensure that it would be well-designed and is not so large that it dominates and competes with the original building.
7. I therefore conclude that the scheme would materially harm the character and appearance of the Locally Listed Building. Consequently, the proposal would fail Policy DP14 of the Bexley Local Plan April 2023 (LP) Policy HC1 of the London Plan (LonP) and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Together these seek to ensure development is of an acceptable scale and design that conserves the significance of heritage assets and their particular characteristics.

Living conditions

8. The 2012 appeal was for a detached structure at the rear of the property, and is not therefore directly comparable to the scheme before me. The plans show that external windows would have been relocated, but ultimately views would still be afforded in a southerly direction from lounge and kitchen areas in the original building.
9. Conversely, by attaching to the rear wall of the property, the presence of the development would mean kitchens of flats EX2, EX4, EX5, EX7 and EX8 would have no external openings. This would provide for an oppressive environment for future occupiers, with the bedsits of EX2, EX5 and EX8 in particular being served by only one north-facing window.
10. Kitchen windows would be retained to units EX3, EX6 and EX9. Whilst the outlook would be diminished, views in a broadly south-westerly direction would still be retained, and I am mindful that relationship between the openings and the development would be similar to that under the 2012 appeal. Therefore the scheme would not be so unneighbourly as to warrant refusal of permission on this ground alone.
11. I find that the proposal would be detrimental to the living conditions of the occupants of certain existing flats with regard to outlook. This would contravene Policy DP11 of the LP, Policy D6 of the LonP and the Framework in relation to the protection of amenity.

Other Matters

12. I recognise that the site is positioned in an accessible location for walking to Bexleyheath Town Centre and is served by several bus routes. The scheme would contribute to local housing supply, and the site is not at risk of flooding from the rivers or the sea and is also not at risk to surface water flooding. Moreover, the existing 9 car parking spaces to the rear would be retained along with secure cycle and bin storage, and no objections have been raised in respect of archaeology, fire safety and ecology. However, these matters do not counterbalance the harm I have identified above.

13. I observed the modern block of apartments on the adjacent site. Whilst it is of greater scale than the Locally Listed Building, it is a stand-alone development in its own right, and as I have previously alluded the juxtaposition of old and new buildings of different size and design contributes positively to the setting. The presence of the new apartments does not justify an extension to the appeal property itself that would be deleterious to character, appearance and living conditions.

Conclusion

14. Having regard to the above and all other matters advanced, the appeal fails.

C Hall

INSPECTOR