



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 February 2025

by **C Carpenter BA MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1945/W/24/3349315

8 Station Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 1EG

- 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 Mr Rupasinghe (Lloyds PR Solicitors) against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/00297/FUL.
 - The development proposed is dormer window to front elevation and rear elevation and hip to gable roof alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was updated in December 2024. However, insofar as the contents are relevant to this appeal, the Framework has not changed. Therefore, I am satisfied no party would be disadvantaged by not having the opportunity to comment on the revised Framework.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area, including its effect on the significance of 6 Station Road, a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises half a building originally constructed as a pair of semi-detached houses. The building is of traditional brick and stucco design, with a hipped roof and central chimney stack. The original frontage details are largely unaltered, giving the semi-detached structure a strikingly symmetrical appearance. This contributes to the character of the north side of Station Road, where most of the buildings, although now in commercial use, are former dwellings in traditionally designed symmetrical pairs or groups. The balanced roof-form at Nos 8 and 10 can also be appreciated to the rear from Bridle Path.
5. Having regard to the Council's document 'Locally Listed Buildings in Watford', 6 Station Road was constructed somewhat later than the appeal premises as a bespoke detached dwelling with a large, rendered gable to one side of its steep, pitched roof. Other distinctive features include its flat-topped dormer with four-light casement and timber mullions, and several brick chimneys. The property is locally listed for its architectural significance, its contribution to the structure and character

- of the streetscape in Station Road and Bridle Path, and its historic connection to the leading developers of Watford at the turn of the 20th century.
6. The older buildings on the north side of Station Road are integral to the context in which No 6 was designed and built, so they contribute to its setting and significance as a non-designated heritage asset. In particular, the symmetry and hipped roof-form of Nos 8 and 10 provide a foil at both front and back for No 6's imposing gables and tall western chimney stacks.
 7. The proposed reconfiguration of No 8's roof room and insertion of a front roof dormer would fundamentally impair the symmetry of the semi-detached building. This deleterious change would undermine the host building's balanced appearance and erode the symmetrical character of the north side of Station Road, notwithstanding the presence of larger purpose-built office blocks opposite.
 8. These proposed alterations would in turn weaken the integrity of the context in which No 6 was constructed, thereby diminishing the setting of the locally listed building. Further, the proposed creation of a taller flank wall in place of the current hip next to No 6 would lessen appreciation of that building's distinctive gables and chimneys at both front and back. The resulting harm to the significance of the locally listed building would be moderate. This harm would cause further detriment to the character of the street scene in both Station Road and Bridle Path. Taken together, the overall level of harm would be significant.
 9. I have considered the argument that the proposed development would 'bookend' the row of former dwellings on Station Road owing to a similar change in roof room at No 28, at the opposite end. However, that building is on a prominent junction with the main St Albans Road, which is a dual carriageway, so the context is very different from that before me. In addition, due to the presence of No 6, the appeal property does not form a visual end to the row. The proposed change from hip to gable with added front dormer would therefore disrupt rather than counterbalance the appearance of the run of older buildings on the north side of Station Road. The fact that No 6 itself has a prominent original gable end does not alter this finding, and the suggested 'bookend' would not enhance that asset's significance.
 10. I recognise the proposed front dormer would be appropriate in scale and siting to the proposed roof, and matching materials would be used, as sought by the Council's Residential Design Guide. I also acknowledge some other buildings in this section of Station Road have been altered and some include front dormers. Nevertheless, except for No 28 noted above, even if other front dormers are later additions, neither they nor roof alterations have resulted in an asymmetrical appearance to their host buildings as is proposed here. There is little to substantiate the suggestion that asymmetrical roof alterations to semi-detached houses are commonplace elsewhere in Watford. In the case of No 6, the front dormer is part of its original architecture as noted above, which is anyway quite different in style from that of the host building in this appeal.
 11. Consequently, these considerations do not outweigh the harm I have identified.
 12. For the above reasons, I conclude the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area, including its effect on the significance of 6 Station Road, a non-designated heritage asset. This is contrary to Policies QD6.1, QD6.2 and QD6.4 of the Watford Local Plan (WLP), which require buildings to reinforce distinctive local

character, enhance the positive qualities of the area and take design cues from existing buildings. It is also contrary to WLP Policy HE7.3, which is before me even though it was not mentioned in the Council's reason for refusal: it seeks to preserve and enhance the setting of non-designated heritage assets and resists adverse effects on their significance.

Other Matters

13. The appellant submitted the proposal following pre-application advice and the Framework stresses the benefits of early engagement. I appreciate the appellant has attempted to overcome some of the concerns previously raised by changing the proposed design. Nevertheless, the amendments would still result in a proposal that would harm the character and appearance of the area, including the significance of the adjacent locally listed building, for the reasons I have outlined.
14. The public house at the end of Station Road occupies a Grade II listed building known as Benskin's House. Formerly a hotel, this imposing Italianate structure was built shortly after the opening of the adjacent Watford Junction Station in the mid-19th century. Its significance as a designated heritage asset is therefore partly historic. It is also architectural, derived from features including its stuccoed ground floor front, central porch, upper floor windows with moulded and stuccoed details, and tall corniced brick chimneys. The building forecourt, adjoining stable block and Station approach provide the principal setting for the listed building, contributing to its significance. The appeal site is not central to this immediate context and the proposed development would not materially affect it, so the setting of the listed building would be preserved.
15. The appeal site is within the WLP Core Development Area (CDA) and Clarendon Road Primary Office Location. The proposal would add office floorspace by optimising use of an existing building in this well-connected location and there would be an economic benefit from up to six additional jobs and from construction. This would accord with WLP Policy SS1 and support business growth and productivity in line with the Framework's economic objectives. However, whilst I recognise complete redevelopment of the site would not be feasible for the appellant, given the modest scale of the proposal relative to the quantum of new office development sought in the CDA, I give this benefit only moderate weight.
16. Even if the proposal would improve the thermal efficiency of the building, there is little to demonstrate the appeal scheme would be the only way to achieve this. I therefore give this benefit minimal weight.

Planning Balance

17. According to Framework paragraph 216, in weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the asset.
18. I have found the proposal would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area, including the harm to the significance of the adjacent non-designated heritage asset. This is contrary to Framework paragraph 135, where it seeks developments that are sympathetic to local character and history and maintain a strong sense of place. I am also mindful of the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, recognised at paragraph

210 of the Framework. I therefore give significant weight to the harm I have identified. The weights I have attached to the economic and environmental benefits of the proposal are not sufficient to outweigh this.

Conclusion

19. I have found the proposal conflicts with the development plan, read as a whole. No other material considerations, including the Framework, have been shown to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

C Carpenter

INSPECTOR