



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 June 2025

by J Smith MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/V5570/W/25/3362859

19 St. John's Grove, Islington, London N19 5RW

- 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 Ben Feld against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Islington.
 - The application Ref is P2024/2988/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the conversion at 19 St John's Grove from 3 flats to 4 flats.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs has been made by Mr Ben Feld against the Council of the London Borough of Islington. This application is the subject of a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. In their decision notice, the Council utilised a description of development which did not match the description given in the application form. This change was undertaken without the consent of the appellant. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) notes that the local planning authority should not amend the description of development without first discussing any revised wording with the applicant or their agent. However, whilst the PPG does say that this action should not be undertaken, this is different to must not and therefore, this is not entirely definitive.
4. The PPG also notes that the local planning authority should be satisfied that the description of development provided by the applicant is accurate. In my analysis of the evidence before me, the result of the development would be the creation of four flats. Nevertheless, there are no changes which would require planning consent to the flats located on floor one and two. Notwithstanding the description of development set out above, which is taken from the application form, it is clear from the plans and accompanying details that the development comprises of the conversion of the existing lower and ground floor flat into two flats, a front cycle storage structure and other associated works. The Council have dealt with proposal on this basis and so shall I.
5. The proposal is located within the St Johns Grove Conservation Area (CA). I have therefore had special regard to Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are:
- whether the existing residential unit subject of this appeal is large enough to accommodate a residential conversion; and,
 - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host property and the St Johns Grove Conservation Area

Reasons

Residential conversion

7. The appeal site is host to three flats located across the four floors of 19 St. John's Grove. Each flat hosts their own kitchen, living and bathroom spaces. Policy H2 Part G of the Islington Strategic and Development Management Policies 2023 (SDMP) states that to maintain a supply of family homes, the conversion of a residential unit into a larger number of self-contained units will only be permitted where the total floor area of the existing dwelling is in excess of 125sqm, amongst other things. The supporting text of Policy H2 notes that for the purposes of this policy, units of two-bedrooms or more are considered to be family homes.
8. The flats located on the first and second floors are one-bedroom units. The ground floor flat, subject to this appeal, was not occupied during my site visit and it was not furnished. The existing plans suggest that this flat hosts a lounge and a living room. These rooms typically form a similar, if not the same function. As such, in taking a pragmatic view, this flat is of a size and layout which is alike that of a two-bedroomed unit. Notwithstanding the indicative use of each room as listed on the existing plans, this unit would be more akin to a two-bedroom property and therefore would be considered as a family home for the purposes of Policy H2 of the SDMP.
9. The appellant suggests that the application of Policy H2 Part G should account for the floorspace of the whole building. In reading this policy, Part G notes that this is applicable to the conversion of a residential unit. However, the policy and its supporting text do not stipulate whether in contexts such as this, a residential unit should be read as the building as a whole, or each flat within the host building.
10. The appellant also notes that the property has long been in use as three-self-contained flats. These flats host their own occupants with their own living arrangements, comings and goings and do not share a communal living or kitchen space. The residential property as a whole has not been used as a family home for an indiscriminate amount of time and cannot be used as a family home no matter the outcome of this appeal. Therefore, for these reasons, in its existing form and for the purposes of this appeal, each flat within 19 St. Johns Grove are their own residential units.
11. The ground and lower ground floor flat which is proposed to be subdivided has a gross internal area of 116sqm. Therefore, the existing dwelling is not in excess of the 125sqm size as set out in the requirement of Policy H2 Part G of the SDMP. By reason of its failure to meet this policy requirement, the ground and lower ground floor flat is not of an appropriate size to accommodate a conversion.

12. Reference has been made to a decision made by the Council at 3 Birnham Road. In this example, all of the residential units within the full building were proposed to be converted. The units found on floor one and two of the appeal building are one-bedroom units which would not change as a result of the proposed development. This is a key difference between this example and the appeal proposal.
13. To conclude, the proposal would conflict with Policy H2 Part G (i) of the SDMP.

Character and appearance

14. The appeal site is located within the St Johns Grove Conservation Area (CA). The CA largely consists of residential properties, with many of these being constructed in the mid-19th century. These buildings host fine detailing and materials. The materials utilised in the CA are important to this fine detailing, such as the original cast-iron railings and stone plinths found along the front boundaries to properties and a rhythm of symmetrical window detailing along terraced rows. Overall, the CA takes its significance from its intricate design of its buildings and the strong use of an attractive material palette.
15. The appeal site hosts a mid-terrace four storey property with a two-storey high bay window, with a low pitch hipped roof with metal railings located to its front boundary. This example broadly follows the same rhythm, fine detailing and scale as found along this terraced row along St. Johns Grove. As such, I therefore find that the appeal building makes a positive contribution to the CA.
16. The proposal includes a timber bicycle storage enclosure. This structure would be positioned with its full length across a significant area of the front boundary of the appeal site. When combined with its height, its orientated position across the front boundary would create a prominent and bulky structure which would be highly visible from public vantage points within the CA. It would therefore fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the host property and the CA.
17. Whilst vegetation may assist in screening this development, there is no guarantee that this would be retained for the lifetime of the development. No convincing evidence has been provided of examples of similar structures within St. Johns Grove and I did not note any similar examples within the street scene during my site visit.
18. To conclude, the proposal would conflict with Policies PLAN1, DH1 and DH2 of the SDMP, the Islington Urban Design Guide (2017) and the St John's Grove CADG (2002). Amongst other things, these policies and guidance require development to be of a high quality which makes a positive contribution to the local character, including where it would affect a designated heritage asset such as a conservation area.

Planning and Heritage Balance

19. The harm to the significance of the CA as a result of the proposed development would be less than substantial in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Paragraph 215 of the Framework notes that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

20. The proposal would deliver a net increase of one additional residential unit and utilise land which has been previously developed. In a time of a nationwide housing shortage, every home which would contribute to that supply in some way matters. This additional unit would also be located in an accessible location. I attach moderate weight to these above benefits.
21. The Framework makes clear that great weight should be given to a heritage assets conservation. Overall, the public benefits taken together do not outweigh the harm that would be caused to the CA. Given the absence of any significant public benefit, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the CA. The scheme thereby conflicts with the approach to heritage assets in section 16 of the Framework. Consequently, the Framework does not indicate in favour of the scheme.
22. Furthermore, I consider that the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole. Material considerations do not outweigh the conflict with the development plan. A decision should therefore be taken in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above and in taking all of the material considerations of the proposal into account, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Smith

INSPECTOR