



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 October 2025

by **Martin Andrews MA(Planning) BSc(Econ) DipTP & DipTP(Dist) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P1940/D/25/3371145

158 Hillcroft Crescent, Oxhey Hall, Watford WD19 4NZ

- 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 Neil Hoad against the decision of Three Rivers District Council.
 - The application Ref. is 25/0863/FUL.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing outbuilding and construction of two storey front and single storey side and rear extensions; replacement of windows; erection of front porch; Juliet balcony and side solar panels; provision of external insulation and render with internal alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for demolition of existing outbuilding and construction of two storey front and single storey side and rear extensions; replacement of windows; erection of front porch; Juliet balcony and side solar panels; provision of external insulation and render with internal alterations at 158 Hillcroft Crescent, Oxhey Hall, Watford WD19 4NZ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref. 25/0863/FUL and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions.
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this Decision;
 - 2) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building other than as indicated on the approved plans;
 - 3) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Drawing Nos. P-001; P-002 & P-003 Rev. C.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character or appearance of the host dwelling, the Hillcroft Crescent street scene and the Oxhey Hall Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset.

Reasons

Background and Process

3. I saw on my visit that the appeal dwelling No. 158 Hillcroft Crescent is one of a number of buildings of the same design and external materials in the road, albeit with some of these buildings exhibiting a range of alterations and additions. There are other house types in the conservation area, but a unifying feature and stand-out characteristic is the preponderance of white painted render exterior walls and the

simple hipped roof forms. I note and agree with the Council's Conservation Officer's view that the dwellings are *'good examples of 1930s Metroland architecture'*.

4. The appeal scheme is for the extension of, and alterations to, an unlisted building, one of dwellings of the same house type and date of origin in the conservation area. The application follows the approval of application reference 23/1111/FUL and the refusal of application reference 23/1104/FUL. The Officer's Report explains that the current application to some extent seeks to incorporate elements from both of its predecessors.
5. The appeal scheme includes different elements of development and the Officers' report provides a detailed description and appraisal of the proposals, taking account of the comments of the Conservation Officer. However, paragraph 7.13 of the report provides a summary of the Council's main objections and forms the basis of the Notice of Refusal.
6. In essence it is considered by Officers that the proposed part single, part two storey front extension including a new porch would be incongruous and too prominent, whilst the proposed external wall insulation, solar panels, and alterations to the fenestration, including a Juliet balcony, would harmfully erode the dwelling's original features. In this appeal I have assessed the Council's appraisal and objections in the light of local and national policy and the detailed counter-submissions in the grounds of appeal. The latter includes the Pictorial Appendix of other dwellings in the conservation area and the details of the proposed chimney flues, external wall insulation and solar panels.
7. As regards 'Process', if harm is caused to the conservation area, I am satisfied that as a householder application it should be regarded as being 'less than substantial'. In that event, paragraph 215 of Government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework, revised December 2024 ('the Framework'), would be invoked to assess whether the resulting harm would be outweighed by any public benefits arising because of the scheme.

Front Extension

8. In respect of the Council's assertions of incongruity and undue prominence, I do not consider that a direct comparison of the existing and proposed front elevations as shown on the submitted plans necessarily lends credence to the Council's case. I acknowledge that in principle it is not unreasonable for the Council's approach to the application to be that of seeking to restrict the extent and scale of alterations and additions to the original building when it is considered harm would be caused.
9. However, in this case the inclusion of the new area of crown roof and its size; the set-down from the main ridge, and the set-in from the boundary are in my view all proportionate to the existing dwelling and its context, and therefore not harmfully inappropriate. In support of the appeal, the appellant's evidence includes photographs of half a dozen similar extensions to houses of the same or very similar original design, presumably with planning permission.
10. These have not harmed the conservation area as they fall well short of having a noticeably adverse effect on the street scene that draws the eye of residents and visitors and is perceived as being harmfully out of keeping with either the dwelling itself or its surroundings. In the appeal scheme, the reduction in the stepped frontage, the inclusion of an extent of crown roof and the other features of the

proposed addition that the Council criticise are of the same ilk as the developments that have already been carried out. And these dwellings are part and parcel of the character and appearance of Hillcroft Crescent, making a positive contribution to it.

11. Moreover, as I mention in paragraph 3 above, there are several other house types in the road. Along with the changes that have been made to the dwellings of the same design as No. 158, the individual differences of these dwellings provide an extent of variation in the character and appearance of the conservation area that enables and, in some respects, facilitates its ongoing evolution to meet the aspirations of householders to increase and upgrade their accommodation. Overall, therefore, I am not of the view that such changes either individually or cumulatively have harmed the significance of the heritage asset.

External Wall Insulation / Alterations to Fenestration including a Juliet balcony / Solar Panels,

12. In the Council's view these alterations and additions would contribute to the erosion of the host dwelling's original features, and I therefore again refer firstly to the need to have regard to alterations previously made to dwellings of the same design, and secondly to balance any perceived harmful effect of the proposals in the appeal application against the benefits of improvements to the property.
13. From the evidence of conditions in the house as regards damp, I am satisfied that the external wall insulation is a reasonable method of remediation. And if applied correctly, including the slight re-positioning of windows outwards and the retention of the period features, it will not be apparent. The appellant has provided details of both method and materials in his appeal documentation, and I have no reason to doubt that the alterations and additions would not be in accordance with the information provided.
14. As regards the fenestration, the Council has a number of detailed objections to the proposed alterations arguing that they would lead to a loss of the building's character. However, some of the changes are clearly necessitated by the need for greater energy efficiency. And with the benefit of the additional technical and illustrative information in the Pictorial Appendix submitted with the appeal and the acknowledgement that the absence of replacement shutters was an error, I do not share the Council's concern that the fenestration, particularly that visible from the public realm, would be demonstrably out of keeping with the existing dwelling. The proposed Juliet balcony to bedroom 3 is a feature of modest size and would be out of public view. It complements the residential amenity of the building, and I see no reason for its omission from the scheme.
15. Solar panels are in my view a modernism that might reasonably be resisted within a conservation area because they are inherently inappropriate. However, the principle of their role in the Government's energy policies is well-established and the appellant's evidence cites precedents in Hillcroft Crescent, including some installed in front roofs. Nonetheless, I agree with the Council's reservations as to the appropriateness and necessity of solar panels on the more prominent northern roof slope.
16. With that said, I note the appellant's assertion that the scale proposed has been limited to what is operationally necessary for energy needs and CO2 savings. Details of their appearance and performance are included in the Pictorial Appendix,

and it would not be reasonable for the appeal to be dismissed because of my reservations on this relatively minor element within the appeal proposal.

Finding of whether harm is caused

17. If the appeal dwelling was a listed building, or if together with others of the same original design it represented an integral part of a manifestly uniform street scene, this would support the Council's somewhat overly forensic approach to this householder application. With that said, I appreciate that some flexibility in the applicant's favour might be regarded as an incremental erosion of the conservation area's significance as a designated heritage asset.
18. However, I do not equate the statutory requirement for development to at least preserve the character and appearance of the asset with a need to preclude what I consider in this case to be reasonably modest changes essential to increase and improve living space in the dwelling and provide for its future maintenance. In my view the requirement of paragraph 212 of the Framework to give 'great weight' to the asset's conservation can still be achieved without conceding to each and every detailed objection raised by the Local Planning Authority.
19. Accordingly, and taking account of my observations at the appeal site and along the full length of Hillcroft Crescent and the detailed evidence of both the Council and the appellant, I find on balance that the proposed development would not cause harm to either the character or the appearance of the host dwelling, the Hillcroft Crescent street scene and the Oxhey Hall Conservation Area. As regards the latter there would therefore be no adverse effect on its significance as a designated heritage asset.
20. It follows that there would be no harmful conflict with Policies CP1 & CP12 of the Three Rivers Core DC Strategy 2011; Policies DM1, DM3 and Appendix 2 of the Three DC Rivers Development Management Policies LDD 2013; the Oxhey Hall Conservation Area Appraisal 2007 and Section 16: 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' of the Framework. Paragraph 215 thereof is not engaged, as in my assessment no harm has been caused to the significance of the designated heritage asset.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons explained above the appeal is allowed. A condition requiring matching external materials will secure a harmonious form of development in the Conservation Area. A condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans is needed for the avoidance of doubt and is in the interests of proper planning.

Martin Andrews

INSPECTOR