
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 January 2015

by J Dowling BA(Hons) MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 10 February 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/X5210/A/14/2228421
17b and 17c Lancaster Grove, London, NW3 4EU

- 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 & Mrs JM Wober against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref 2014/3077/P, dated 1 May 2014, was refused by notice dated 21 August 2014.
 - The development proposed is install glass balustrade to front bay window, garden access stair to rear; alterations to existing tool shed/shed roof of 17c; new window to shower room of 17b; bicycle store at common patio of no. 17.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. 17 Lancaster Grove is a house that has been sub-divided into flats. Although the application form states that the site address is 17c Lancaster Grove the proposed works are to the ground floor flat (17c) and the basement flat (17b). Both flats are owned by the appellant. I intend to proceed with determining the appeal on this basis.
3. The appellant and the Council disagree over the description of the proposed development. For clarity I understand that the appeal proposal is for the installation of a glass balustrade to front bay window; new external staircase and terrace to 17c; insertion of window to flank elevation of 17b; alterations to existing shed of 17c; replacement of gate to flank wall at lower ground floor level and creation of bicycle store at common patio to no. 17. I consider that this accurately describes the proposed works and is the description that I have therefore used in considering this appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect on the character and appearance of the existing building and whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Belsize Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The Belsize Conservation Area covers a large area which consists of a number of well-defined areas including Belsize Park, Belsize Village and Belsize Park

Road. Lancaster Grove is at the western end of the conservation area which is characterised by mid 19th century Italianate brick and stuccoed villas. Like the appeal property, these are typically three storeys in height with a lower ground level. Although some of the properties have been unsympathetically altered, many retain original features providing a consistency in appearance. These features contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole and its significance as a designated heritage asset.

6. The Council has indicated that their concern relates to the glass balustrade and the new external staircase and terrace. The other elements of the scheme they consider acceptable. Having visited the site I note that the cycle store and alterations to existing shed would replace a similar structure and be within the existing side access and rear garden area. An existing high boundary wall and the replacement gate would screen these elements from the streetscene. The replacement window would reflect the design of existing windows in the side elevation.
7. I therefore agree with the Council and consider that these elements of the scheme would not adversely impact on the character and appearance of the existing building or the Belsize Conservation Area.
8. I acknowledge that the glass balustrade has been designed to minimise its visual impact and from visiting the site I noted several similar examples on properties in neighbouring streets. However, in this section of Lancaster Grove there are no examples of original balustrades on front elevations. Where balustrades have been added, they take the form of modern horizontal bars as can be seen at Nos 9, 11 and 13 and at the first floor of the appeal property.
9. I therefore consider that the introduction of a different form of balustrade would further erode the character and appearance of the conservation area and due to its contrasting appearance, would be at odds with the upper floor of the appeal property and neighbouring buildings. I therefore consider that by way of design and materials the balustrade would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Belsize Conservation Area.
10. The external staircase would be located at the rear of the property adjacent to the common boundary with No 19. Access would be via the existing bay window onto a terrace which would be of a simple modern design constructed from galvanised steel. To address overlooking from the terrace and stair a timber screen would be erected along the edge of the terrace and staircase.
11. I note from my site visit and the evidence submitted with the appeal that a number of neighbouring properties have rear access stairs in a similar location with boundary screening. However, unlike the appeal proposal these and the adjacent terrace areas are often original features of a traditional design and materials. The terrace areas tend to be of more modest dimensions than the one proposed.
12. Whilst the Belsize Conservation Area Statement (2002) does not contain specific guidance for rear terraces and access stairs it advocates that extensions should be in harmony with the original form and character of the house and historic pattern of extensions within the group.

13. I consider that due to their size, design and the proposed materials the stairs, terrace and timber screen would not reflect or respect the design of the original or neighbouring buildings. Furthermore, given the open nature of the surrounding rear garden areas and in particular the height of the proposed boundary fence they would be a highly visible incongruous feature out of character with the host and adjoining buildings. While I recognise that the impact of this change would affect the rear of the property rather than the more public front elevation, nevertheless I believe that it would appear out of character with the property and the Belsize Conservation Area.
14. For these reasons I consider that that the balustrade; external terrace; screen and stair would cause a degree of harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset, albeit that such harm would be less than substantial. Furthermore, there would be no public benefit that would arise from the scheme that would be sufficient to outweigh the impact on the Belsize Conservation Area.
15. Having come to the conclusions above, it follows that the proposal adversely impacts on the appearance of the existing building and would therefore not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Belsize Conservation Area. The proposal would therefore be contrary policies CS14 of the Camden Core Strategy 2010-2025 and policies DP24 and DP25 of the Camden Development Policies 2010-2025 which seek to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Borough's conservation areas. This is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework's principles of conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Conclusion

16. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Jo Dowling

INSPECTOR