

Mrs Charlotte Hawkins

Sent by email only

4 June 2019

Dear Charlotte

19/00806/HOUSE 24 Donnington Square, Newbury. Conservation and design issues

Further to my site visit and our previous correspondence, I have identified the following key issues based on information relating to the proposed 3 storey extension available on West Berkshire Council's website at 3 June 2019.

1. Impact on the character or appearance of a conservation area;
2. Impact on the significance of a conservation area;
3. Impact on the significance of non-designated heritage assets;
4. Design.

Context

Decisions on planning applications must be taken in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations dictate otherwise. In this case, key policies in the Development Plan include Policy CS14 Design Principles, and Policy CS19 Historic Environment and Landscape Character, within West Berkshire Council's Core Strategy, adopted 2012.

The National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019) (NPPF) is also relevant to consideration of this application, notably Section 4 Decision-making; Section 12 Achieving well-designed places; and Section 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

West Berkshire Council's Quality Design SPD (2006) is also relevant.

Conservation areas are a type of 'designated heritage asset', 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.' I note that Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 states that with respect to any buildings or other land within a conservation area, in the exercise of relevant functions under the Planning Acts, *special attention* shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area (my italics).

I note also that the NPPF requires that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation... irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.' 'Substantial harm' is a high test: where harm is 'less than substantial' such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The Council has no conservation area appraisal for Donnington Square Conservation Area, the extent of which is shown on the extract from the Council's mapping system, below.

The applicant has not submitted a statement of significance as required by the NPPF.

The Newbury Historic Character Study 2005 describes Donnington Square (Area 57), and notes that 'large individually designed, 19th century, mainly semi-detached houses are arranged around three sides of a square. They are usually three storeys plus basement.' It notes that there is also some 20th century development, and that 'This area has a distinct character, not paralleled elsewhere in the town.'

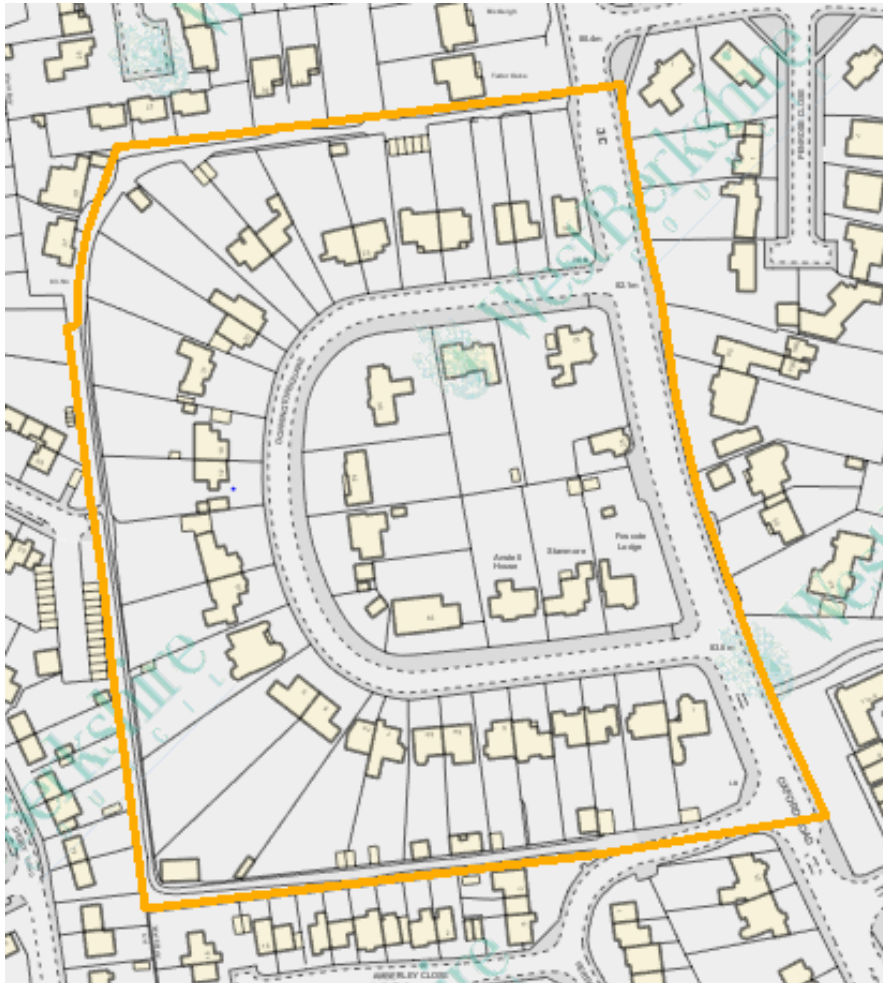
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The 19th century houses may, due to their architectural and historic interest, be considered as non-designated heritage assets. Some have been extended.

As shown on the map, No. 24 Donnington Square is one of an originally symmetrical pair of semi-detached 19th century houses, 3 storeys plus basement. Its neighbour, No. 23, is one of a pair of 20th century houses, 2 storeys tall, their frontage set back from the building line of older development. It is understood that No. 22 and 23 replaced earlier development destroyed by fire.



The conservation area

The significance of the Donnington Square conservation area derives from its 19th century houses, which are, individually of some interest. The distinctive character and appearance of the conservation area derives largely from the quality of those buildings and from their layout. Later buildings, which are generally less tall than the 19th century properties, trees, and other vegetation also contribute to character and appearance. The spaces between buildings and the fact that building frontages are set back from the carriageway give this quiet enclave a feeling of spaciousness.

Assessment

Whilst a number of the older properties within the conservation area, including No. 25, have been extended such that the distance to the boundary from their side wall has been reduced, the circumstances of this application are unique in a number of key respects, both in terms of the planning

context and the physical context. The relationship between No. 24 and its neighbour, No. 23, is very different from the relationships between other properties, due to differences in the position, size and scale of buildings.

I would therefore suggest that the application should be refused for the following reasons:

- The proposal, by virtue of its location, form and massing, size, and scale relative to the neighbouring property, No. 23, would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The spaciousness of this part of the conservation area would be eroded, and the development would have an overbearing effect on No. 23. Any adverse effects of the difference in scale of the two dwellings as existing would be exacerbated by the narrowing of the gap between them and by the form, massing, size and scale of the proposed development.
- The proposal would result in harm to the significance of the conservation area and to the significance of undesignated heritage assets. As noted above, the significance of the conservation area derives from its 19th century houses, which are individually of some interest. No 24 is of an elegant design, presently largely unaltered, presenting a gable to the street, the arrangement of its major and subsidiary elements resulting in a building form which has an attractive and well-composed appearance with cascading roof slopes. The proposal would detract from that appearance, notably by introducing a roof form which would detract from the silhouette of the building and would present incongruous horizontal ridge and eaves lines on the principal elevation of the building.

I note that the proposal would fail to comply with Policy CS14 of the Development Plan in that it would not 'enhance the character and appearance of the area', and with Policy CS19 in that it would not be 'appropriate in terms of location, scale and design' and would not result in the 'conservation' or 'enhancement of heritage assets and their settings.' Further, any harm to the significance of heritage assets would not be outweighed by public benefits as required by the NPPF.

I trust that the above is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Christina Duckett RIBA MRTPI