

Mrs Charlotte Hawkins

Sent by email only

28 June 2019

Dear Charlotte

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

Background

In my letter of 4 June I suggested that the application should be refused for the following reasons:

- 1. 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.
- 2. 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 noted 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 the conservation area would not be outweighed by public benefits as required by the NPPF.

Review of recent correspondence

The following points are, in my view, relevant to any decision made by the committee.

As a planning professional who is a design and conservation specialist, I have evaluated literally thousands of applications for planning permission over my professional career, and have acted as a case officer for a number of important planning applications and applications

hankinson duckett associates

† 01491 838175 † 01491 838997 e consult@hda-enviro.co.uk w www.hda-enviro.co.uk

The Stables, Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8BA

for listed building consent. As you are aware, I was formerly the Principal Conservation and Design Officer at West Berkshire.

I respect the opinions of experienced former colleagues, with whom I worked for a number of years. However, my assessment of the impact of proposals on the spaciousness of this part of the conservation area differs from that of the current Principal Design and Conservation Officer, Mrs Inston, as expressed in her email of 19 June.

Assessments of whether, and the extent to which, a proposal would erode spaciousness will inevitably be subjective. I am firm in my opinion, having visited the site and experienced views from the neighbouring property, No.23, that the spaciousness of this part of the conservation area, an important contributor to its character and appearance, would be seriously eroded by the proposal.

Mrs Inston is silent in relation to other aspects of the first suggested reason for refusal, notably the overbearing effect of the proposal on No.23. The effects of the proposal in this respect are not addressed in any detail in the applicant's heritage specialist's report: I anticipate that he may not have viewed the site from your property, No.23. I am firm in my opinion, having visited the site and experienced views from within your property, that the proposal would have an overbearing effect on No.23.

In her email of 19 June, Mrs Inston agrees with my second reason for refusal, namely that the proposal would result in harm to the significance of the conservation area and to the significance of undesignated heritage assets. I note that recent decisions made by the Courts make it clear that considerable importance and weight must be given to such harm in decision-making.

It is notable that the case officer does not accept the advice given by Mrs Inston, the Council's in-house specialist in matters relating to conservation and design.

The case officer (and the applicant's heritage specialist) compare the proposed extension favourably to the extension to No. 25. The officer's comparison fails to take account of the contexts of the two extensions, which are quite different. Indeed, the Council's other Principal Conservation and Design Officer, Mr Greenway, points out in an email of 8 May that there is a 'unique relationship' between Nos. 24 and 23.

No. 25 is close to No. 26, which has previously been extended, and is, in general terms, similar to No. 25 in its size, scale and relationship to the street. The space between No. 24 and its neighbour, No. 23, results in a feeling of spaciousness (as noted above), and allows views to vegetation beyond which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. No. 23 is a much smaller dwelling than No. 24, and is set much further back from the street.

The applicant's heritage specialist notes that the prominence of No. 24 (also noted by the case officer in an email of 29 April) is emphasised by the open space in front of Nos. 22 and 23. That open space means that the large area of unrelieved wall on the proposed west

elevation of the extension would also be highly prominent in views from the southwest. (His Figure 7 makes this very clear).

I have commented that the proposed roof form would detract from the silhouette of the building, and again I am firm in my opinion in this regard. I note that Mrs Inston supports, in her email of 19 June, concerns raised by me relating to the roof form proposed. I do not know what the case officer means when he refers to 'manor houses' and I do not agree with his statement to the effect that the proposed roof form will not be readily appreciable from the street 'by anyone who isn't specifically looking for it.'

The fact that there are ridges which run parallel to the street on other extensions within the locality does not mean that the roof form proposed is appropriate to the particular circumstances of this application. I note that Mr Greenway advised in an email of 25 April that most of the older properties on north side of the Square have been extended 'usually with a good set back from the front and with gabled roofs facing the main road.'

I find it odd that the case officer uses the word 'we' in his report when he says 'we decided to place the perpendicular ridge at the front.....' He notes that the amended design was created as a 'compromise' and suggests that the roof form proposed is acceptable because it is preferable to alternatives such as a flat roof, which would otherwise be necessitated by the plan form and number of storeys proposed. I note that it is not a given that an extension with the plan form and number of storeys proposed is acceptable.

A related point is that I am concerned that he bases his recommendation for approval on his assessment that the current proposal represents an improvement on the scheme as originally submitted.

The proposal as presently submitted should be considered on its merits: it should not be approved because it is considered to be preferable to an alternative scheme.

Conclusion

Having reviewed information available on line subsequent to my previous letter, my views are unchanged and I would reiterate that the application should be refused for the reasons previously outlined.

I trust that the above is helpful,

Kind regards

Christina Duckett RIBA MTRPI