

Camberwell Community Council Planning

Thursday 21 July 2011

7.00 pm

Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road, London, SE5 8UB

Supplemental Agenda – Item 6.2 Appendix 3

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Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 July 2010

by **Paul Jackson** B Arch (Hons) RIBA

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

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Decision date:
11 August 2010

Appeal Ref: APP/A5840/A/10/2119981

Camberwell United Reform Church, 64 Grove Lane, Camberwell, London SE5 8SN

X

- 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 Roy Powell, Pastor, Camberwell United Reform Church against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Southwark.
- The application Ref 09-AP-2368, dated 16 October 2009, was refused by notice dated 11 December 2009.
- The development proposed is demolition of a 1 and 2 storey 1960s brick/concrete church and perimeter hardstanding and steel fence. Erection of 9 x 3 bedroom dwellings in 4 storey block along Grove Lane, and erection of 2 storey church and community hall building on Love Walk. Change of use from D1 to D1 and C3.

Preliminary matters

1. The single application for planning permission and conservation area consent was acknowledged under the reference number 09-AP-2368. The documentation submitted with the questionnaire indicates that the Council also refused conservation area consent under S74 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 on 11 December 2009, with the reference 09-AP-2369. I have not been provided with a copy of the notice of refusal of conservation area consent. At the site visit, I was advised that the appellant had not received such notice of refusal. No appeal has been submitted against the refusal of conservation area consent and I do not consider this matter. Any procedural difficulties that the appellant perceives as a result are a matter for the Council and others to resolve.
2. The description of development on the application form is as set out above. The proposal was revised to include 8 No. 4 bedroom dwellings and a 3 bedroom house. The Council considered it on that basis and I do likewise.
3. Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5 *Planning for the Historic Environment* was issued in March 2010, superseding Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 15 *Planning and the Historic Environment*. I have considered the proposal in the light of the national policies contained in PPS5 and the accompanying Practice Guide as well as policies of the adopted Southwark Plan of 2007 (UDP).

Decision

X

4. For the reasons given below, the appeal is dismissed.

Main issues

- Whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Camberwell Grove Conservation Area;

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- The effect of the proposal on the setting of nearby listed buildings Grade II; and
- The effect of the proposal on the living conditions of adjacent occupiers, in terms of noise and disturbance.

Reasons

Background

5. The appeal property consists of a 1960s church and church hall. It occupies a corner site adjoining a late 18th century terrace of Georgian houses at Nos. 18-62 Grove Lane. Nos. 18-60 are listed at Grade II. No. 62, which adjoins the appeal property, is no longer included on the statutory list due to rebuilding work following bomb damage but is constructed of the same materials and is indistinguishable, in streetscape terms, from Nos. 18-60.
6. The site and the adjoining terrace lie in the Camberwell Grove Conservation Area. Camberwell Grove is a parallel street to Grove Lane to the east. The character of the conservation area derives mainly from the predominantly Georgian terraced and semi-detached houses which despite alterations and extensions of various kinds over the years retain, by and large, their pleasing proportions and external appearance. That is enhanced by the mature trees that line the streets, punctuate the footways and in the case of 18-62 Grove Lane, populate the long front gardens. Where later Victorian development such as the block of 4 houses opposite the appeal site, or more recent 20th or 21st century development has been carried out, it is similar in scale.
7. The church is constructed of brick but is otherwise of entirely different appearance compared to nearby houses. However, its massing is subordinate to the street scene and the terrace, the roof parapet being level with that of Nos. 52-60 and almost a whole storey lower than No. 62. In long views along Grove Lane, the church does not dominate. However, its rather austere modern architectural design and detailing are in stark contrast with both the Victorian tradition and the less flamboyant Georgian disciplined approach at Nos. 18-62. A conspicuous external ramp leading up and in to the elevated Grove Lane elevation is an incongruous element in the street scene. The building is in somewhat neglected condition. It is common ground that it does not make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
8. The proposal consists of a 4 storey block of maisonettes facing Grove Lane with a new 3 storey dwelling on the corner and a new church building behind, accessed from Love Walk. The upper maisonettes would be accessed from an upper external walkway reached from a stair contained in a small brick tower with a surmounting pergola.

The effect on the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings

9. There are 2 main elements to the proposal. The new church building would be a modest and simple hall with a symmetrical elevation to Love Walk and an understated 'bell' tower defining the entrance. I consider that it would complement the smaller scale of the buildings in Love Walk and substantially enhance the public realm locally. It would preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
10. The link block containing the stair would be a simple way of creating a transition between the church and residential accommodation. I do not consider that it would harm the character or appearance of the area.

11. The Council has no dispute with the principle of replacement of the church with a structure of greater mass. In my opinion, there is sufficient variety in the age, character, design and appearance of other buildings in this part of the conservation area to justify a larger building. Three of the original buildings on the site were 4 storeys high, similar to No. 62. In addition, the roof line of the listed terrace (incorrectly shown on the application drawings in respect of Nos. 18 and 20; a point acknowledged at the site visit) extends to 4 storeys in several places. The 3 storey house would adequately reduce the scale of the development where it turns the corner into Love Walk.
12. Having said that, the terraced houses at Nos. 18-62 are of great significance as a heritage asset. They have a particular character stemming from a strong easily recognised architectural heritage, convincing domestic scale and quality of materials and workmanship. In many ways, not least because it is the largest and longest individual structure present, it is the group of buildings that does most to define the character of the whole street. As such, it is highly sensitive to new adjoining development and the character of the area would be disproportionately affected by an unsympathetic new building on the appeal site.
13. The adjacent houses at Nos. 18-62 have an informal residential character despite being in a long continuous terrace. This is enhanced by the variations in overall height and subtle changes in sill and head heights as the ground levels rise, visible in the foreshortened views along Grove Lane from Love Walk and from Kerfield Crescent. Seen on the corner, as it would be in long views down Grove Lane, I consider that the proposed building would be uniform, monolithic and formal in comparison. That impression would be particularly reinforced by the regular pattern of the windows above ground floor which make no concession to rising ground levels or to the alignment of windows in the listed buildings. The ground floor elliptical arched openings would respond to the rising ground but would appear squeezed against the label course and the floor above. In my opinion this aspect would be unconvincing and proportionally weak, diminishing the architectural significance of the ground floor generally and very different to the strong emphasis given to the ground floors of the listed buildings, which are raised up. The fall from the public footway to most of the proposed front entrances compounds this.
14. I accept that there are particular challenges in designing a modern building which preserves or enhances the character of the area and yet does not copy or imitate. The Practice Guide to PPS5 encourages the best contemporary design that is informed and inspired by its local surroundings. There are important architectural principles that make the existing buildings what they are, make them valued; and by extension, define the quality of the wider environment. The existing church is anachronistic but subservient; by virtue of its function and bland almost windowless design, it does not compete. By contrast, the new building would introduce neighbouring residential accommodation which consequently desires and needs to have a 'conversation' with its immediate neighbours; in other words, desires to relate to it in an understandable architectural language that involves and enhances existing historical elegance. However, because of the combination of window arrangement, fenestration design, roof treatment and bulk, it would differ so much that it would not appear to be part of the composition of the terrace as a whole but would contrast, dominate and in my opinion, diminish.
15. I recognise the extensive efforts made over some time to reach an agreed design with Council officers and residents' groups and do not seek to analyse the merits of numerous earlier submissions or forensically dissect the process which led to the

submitted proposal in the form that it has taken. I have to decide on the merits of the scheme before me; and conclude that the proposal would not enhance or better reveal the setting of the listed buildings and would not sufficiently recognise or respect the character and appearance of the conservation area. As such, it would conflict with the heritage protection aims of policies 3.12, 3.13, 3.16 and 3.18 of the UDP.

The effect on living conditions

16. The proposal incorporates 4 roof level terraces to the top floor maisonettes each of which would be in the region of 14 square metres in area with an additional full width raised planting bed, plus a sheltered garden utility and storage area including a sink. I consider that they have the potential to accommodate a group of people and the drawings indicate outdoor furniture able to seat 4 easily with plenty of space for more. Given the absence of any other private external areas for these 4 bed homes, they are very likely to be fully used. That may well occur at times such as summer evenings when adjacent occupiers would have their windows open for ventilation purposes. Noting that the minimum height of the parapet scales at about 1.35 metres on the application drawings, but assuming that a minimum 1.6 metre high solid parapet could be achieved as suggested, I consider that at the very least, the occupants of bedrooms in adjacent units and at No. 62 Grove Lane on the floor beneath would be very likely to be unacceptably disturbed by noise. This could not be reasonably controlled by imposing planning conditions. I conclude on this issue that the proposal would conflict with the amenity protection objectives of policy 3.2 of the UDP.

Conclusion

17. I have had regard to all the other matters raised, including the impact on privacy and outlook. I do not find that that the living conditions of existing adjacent occupiers, whose gardens are already overlooked to some extent by adjacent dwellings, would be unacceptably worsened by the proposal. There would be no increased overlooking of the private rear areas close to the houses. Nor do I consider that their outlook would be compromised unreasonably, to the extent that the UDP policy would be breached. However, the harmful impact of the scheme on the historic significance of the listed terrace and the character and appearance of the conservation area; and the detrimental effect on living conditions in terms of noise and disturbance, are compelling. I conclude that planning permission must be refused.

Paul Jackson

INSPECTOR

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