



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 July 2024

by C Carpenter BA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 July 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/K2230/W/23/3331189

Ebbfleet Rainbow Centre, Rose Street, Northfleet, Kent DA11 9EQ

- 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 Mr Chukwuma Okoruwe against the decision of Gravesham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 20221135.
 - The development proposed is described as: The ground floor to remain as F2(b) community hall and the change of use of upper ground floor into F2(a)-retail shop at the above address with part single and part two storey extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the heading above has been taken from the planning application form. In Part E of the appeal form it is stated that the description of development has not changed but, nevertheless, a different wording has been entered. Neither of the main parties has provided written confirmation that a revised description of development has been agreed. Accordingly, I have used the one given on the original application.
3. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was updated in December 2023, during this appeal. However, insofar as the contents are relevant to this appeal, the Framework has not changed. Therefore, I am satisfied no party would be disadvantaged by not having the opportunity to comment on the revised Framework.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area.

Reasons

5. The host building is a former Methodist chapel of modest proportions. Despite small-scale additions at both ends, the structure's original T-shaped plan form can be clearly appreciated from its prominent position in the public realm. This provides a visual connection to the building's original function as a place of worship within a residential community. The area surrounding the appeal site comprises a mix of modest homes and community buildings of varied architectural styles.

6. The proposed two-storey extension would be longer than the main body of the host building and would present a large area of blank façade to the street, which would be dominant. The extension's front-facing flank wall would be flush with the gable end of the building's side-wing, which would erode the original form of the building. The proposed additional front-facing window would be very close to the eaves of the extension, which would look out of place and ill-related to the existing windows on this façade. The right-side elevation would be seen as an incongruous mix of one and two storey elements not clearly subordinate in scale or position to the main structure.
7. Overall, the configuration of the proposed extension would be confused and out of proportion, undermining the integrity of the host building. This would diminish its identity as a former chapel, notwithstanding that the building is not a recognised heritage asset. Given the appeal site's prominence in the street scene, the proposal would also have a detrimental effect on the appearance of the surrounding area, despite its varied character.
8. The proposed alignment of floor levels and use of matching materials and design details would not overcome the dominance of the proposed extension or the harm I have identified to the form of the host building.
9. The Framework's support for optimising site potential is not at the expense of good design that is sympathetic to the surrounding built environment.
10. For the above reasons, I conclude the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area. This is contrary to Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014, which requires new development to be visually attractive, with design, layout and form derived from a robust analysis of local context and character. It is also contrary to the Framework, which seeks developments that are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, and sympathetic to local character.

Other Matters

11. I note the appeal scheme is a resubmission following a previously withdrawn application and I appreciate the appellant has attempted to overcome concerns previously raised by the Council. However, the amendments would still result in a proposal that would harm the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area for the reasons I have outlined.
12. The proposal would result in social, environmental and economic benefits by providing refurbished facilities, new services and employment to the local community, within walking and cycling distance of where many people live. I also recognise the proposal would bring an empty building back into use, which could reduce crime affecting the empty premises. However, these benefits would not be significant enough to alter or outweigh my conclusion on the main issue. There is no pertinent evidence before me to substantiate the suggestion of viability issues affecting the building, so I give this limited weight.
13. The Council has raised no concern with the proposed change of use at first floor level or with the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. On the evidence before me I see no reason to disagree. Nevertheless, an absence of harm in these respects is a neutral factor. Energy efficiency is a requirement of other regulatory regimes, so does not weigh in favour of the proposal.

14. The proposed block plan is inconsistent with the proposed floor plans and elevations because it does not show the whole of the proposed extension. As I am dismissing the appeal, I do not need to consider this matter further.

Conclusion

15. I have found the proposal conflicts with the development plan, read as a whole. No other material considerations, including the Framework, have been shown to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it. Therefore, the appeal should be dismissed.

C Carpenter

INSPECTOR