

Application no: EPF/2486/19

Site Address: 5 Staples Road, Loughton, IG10 1HP

Submission by Jake Marshall and Amanda Marshall (owners of the property)

When we bought our house over two years ago, one of the main attractions for us was the setting opposite the forest, with the front of the house playing a key part in the truly special streetscape of Staples Road. We have already spent a lot of time and money preserving the front of our house and intend to carry on doing so.

As the Committee Members will have seen from the images in the Design & Access Statement, the back of the house, however, is a different story. Frankly, it is a bit of a mess – a hotchpotch of extensions that have been added over the years. There is a two storey extension on one side (dating from around 1994), with an unheated lean-to type porch structure around the back door in the middle (which I think pre-dates the double height extension) and a balcony under the window at the back of the living room that has been used as the roof for a timber-walled shed underneath.

Due to the house having been built on the side of a hill, the main living space is currently on street level. The rooms run from front to back either side of the front door, meaning that they start level with Staples Road at the front, but are about one storey up at the back (with the kitchen currently running into the top part of the two-storey extension). We then have lower-ground floor rooms on the back half of the house together with a sort of conservatory /garden room on the downstairs level of the two-storey extension – the lower-ground floor rooms and garden room are all level with the back garden. The way the house is configured (i.e. with the main living area on the Staples Road level) and the fact that the rooms on the lower-ground floor are unheated with low ceilings means that the lower-ground floor of the house is generally used for storage rather than for living.

Our main goals for the renovation/building project that we have planned are: (1) to replace the hotchpotch of existing extensions on the back of the house with a single cohesive structure (made from high quality materials that are in-keeping with the house) which will enhance and improve the overall look of the back of the house; and (2) make the ground floor and lower-ground floor space inside the house suitable for modern family living. The overall surface area of the house will be no bigger as a result of this work, but the lower-ground floor space we do have will be much more usable (i.e. with a kitchen/dining room on the lower ground floor that opens on to the garden) whilst maintaining a connection and flow with the rest of the house.

We engaged with architects and the Local Planning Authority at an early stage in the design process, conscious of the limitations that come with living in a conservation area as well as striving to ensure minimal overall change for our neighbours. We also made changes to the design following input from the Conservation Officer. With that in mind, we have been surprised at the objections raised:

Unsafe and unsound – The Parish Council raised an objection that it would be unsafe and unsound to grant our application *“by virtue of the increase of cubic capacity of this building and the possible greater number of applicants living there”* (an intensification of use concern). We have had an email exchange with Debra Paris (the Planning and Licensing Committee Clerk) and understand that this objection relates to protecting the Epping Forest SAC. Ms Paris clarified that *“upon reflection, as this extension does not concern increasing the number of bedrooms it is not likely to increase the footfall on the forest and it would not appear applicable”*.

Not in keeping – We do not agree that the design is out of keeping with the property. In any event, we understand that the relevant test is whether our proposed changes will “*preserve or enhance*” the character of the conservation area (and not whether the design is in keeping with the host building). First, it is important to note that none of our proposed new building would be visible from Staples Road. Second, we would be replacing multiple structures on the back of the house that are incoherent and not appealing to the eye with a single coherent structure made from traditional building materials that we believe complements the house and enhances the conservation area.

Flooding – We don’t understand why flooding risk has been raised as a concern. We are not in a Flood Zone and cannot predict when/where Thames Water infrastructure may fail. Further, there is no reason why any risk of flooding or water run-off would be any greater with the new design than it is now. However, if a Basement Impact Assessment is necessary, we are of course willing to comply.

We thank the Sub-Committee for their consideration of our application.

Jake and Amanda Marshall