

# Heritage Statement

Revised 4 April 2017

## Redeveloped dwelling at 24 Downs Hill Beckenham BR3 5HB

Planning ref: 17/00812/FULL1

### 1. Introduction

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 128 that:

*'In determining applications, local planning authorities (LPA) should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'.*

To help satisfy the LPA requirement the applicants have reviewed the earlier Heritage Statement in the light of their revised planning application. This revised statement supplements the information already contained within the revised Design and Access Statement. The statement sets out brief details of the history and development of the heritage asset that is the Downs Hill Conservation Area (DHCA) and follows information and advice set out in the DHCA SPG.

Both the information contained in this statement and in the Design and Access Statement is supported by photographic evidence and images showing the site context and the variety of designs and features found in the immediate area of the subject property and within the wider DHCA. The statement seeks to assess the contribution made by the current building at 24 Downs Hill and the potential for that contribution to be enhanced by the revised application and redesigned house now proposed. By cross-referencing images and drawings of the existing and proposed buildings, assessment is made of how the general asset of the DHCA and the application site's immediate neighbours might be affected and improved by the revised proposal.

It is not believed that there is any archaeological significance to the application site and no reference is made to any archaeological importance in the DHCA's SPG. An assessment of local archaeology is therefore not included in this statement.

The applicants believe that the content of this statement adequately assess the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the asset and justifies those works, both in terms of the benefits they will accrue to the DHCA, together with details of mitigation measures proposed.

## 2. Background

Prior to submitting this planning application, the applicants sought pre-application advice from the LPA. The written advice received contained, inter alia, the following statement of the LPA's view on the contribution made by the current building and its suitability for replacement:

### ***Demolition of the host building***

*It is not considered that the host dwelling makes a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Accordingly, an application to demolish the host dwelling and replace it by a new residential dwelling may be worthwhile, subject to the granting of planning permission for a replacement dwelling that would be at the very least preserve, but preferably enhance, the character and appearance of the conservation area.*

The applicants believe that their revised application will achieve this objective.

The heritage asset of the Downs Hill Conservation Area was established in 1989. The DHCA SPG describes the area as, *"the conservation area consists of detached dwellings unified by their common age of construction, unified by their reference to neo-Tudor and neo-vernacular elements. It is acknowledged that design and material vary somewhat through the area."*

The application site lies in the middle of the conservation area and the subject property, built in 1951, could be loosely described as following the style of the Arts and Craft Movement although, as pointed out by the LPA's pre-application advice, without any particular merit or feature as shown in the photograph below



Existing house at 24 Downs Hill as seen from the front drive

## Local character

The local character of the DHCA is one of large detached family dwellings in relatively generous plots. The SPG confirms that most of the area was built between the wars and the predominant design borrows loosely from the earlier developments of the Arts and Craft and Garden City Movements in a neo-Tudor, or neo-vernacular style.

The DHCA SPG points out, however, that there are a number of different styles and materials in use across the area, and that is particularly the case in the immediate vicinity of the application site. The photographs below show the four houses to the south of the application site. NB there is no number 22 Downs Hill.



14 Downs Hill showing pitched and hipped roof with feature gable and white rendered finish



16 Downs Hill with second-floor roof space accommodation



A building of more modern design and finish at 18 Downs Hill



Another modern design next door at 20 Downs Hill

Both 18 and 20 Downs Hill are of a modern design, built in the 1960s and finished in red brick with mono-pitch roof features. Number 18 projects both forward and rearwards of the more established building line in the street.

To the north of the application site, number 26 presents maybe as a more typical example of the character of the wider area with its feature gables and high pitched roof. The recent history of number 28 is similar to the application site. The original house was a fairly unremarkable building dating from the 1940s, of utilitarian design, that had been left to fall into disrepair. Planning permission was granted in the summer of 2014 for a far more substantial, four-storey house currently under construction.

There are no statutorily listed buildings in the DHCA and only one locally listed building, at 117 Foxgrove Road. Although uniquely different from any other building in the conservation area, this dwelling is recognised for *“its local architectural and historic significance.”*

The pre-application advice confirms that there is no recent planning history relating to the application site. There is nothing of historical significance about the existing house, its setting, or that of its neighbours. Although surrounded by some quite distinctive properties of differing designs and finishes, as the pre-application advice confirms, the existing property at the application site fails to make any significant contribution to the conservation area and would benefit from being replaced.

### **3. Impact of the proposals**

**Topography** – as its name suggests, Downs Hill is a sloping site. The land falls quite steeply from west to east; and more gradually from the application site to the south. As a result, the odd-numbered houses on the west side of Downs Hill are considerably elevated compared to the subject property and its neighbours on the eastern side of the road. This effect is exaggerated still further as the land at the application site, and its neighbours, continues to fall from the street and the houses are below the level of the road.

Most houses in the area are 70 or 80 years old and even the more recent homes were built 50 or more years ago. And, of course, the landscape in which the buildings are set is of a similar age or older. The undulations of the topography and the mature landscape in which the buildings sit combine to screen many house from the road and from each other. In much of the DHCA there is little of what might be described as an architectural ‘street scene’. Driving along the streets or walking along pavements only affords the occasional glimpse of individual houses rather than a row of buildings viewed collectively. Although there are several fine buildings in the area many can only really be appreciated from within their own plots

**Design approach** – as already stated, the current house on site was built about 65 years ago. It runs the full width of the site and is fairly utilitarian in its design.

Like the reconstruction currently taking place at 28 Downs Hill, the revised proposal is to replace a poorly laid out building of indifferent design, with a bespoke family home of distinct character that makes far better use of the space available to provide flexible, ergonomic living for a growing family.

Following the feedback and advice given at the pre-application enquiry several changes and improvements are proposed from the original application. The scale of the earlier application has been reduced with a smaller footprint that no longer excavates a rear basement level. The layout of the proposed accommodation has been revised accordingly and the redevelopment now represents a distinct building sited comfortably within its plot, clearly detached from its neighbours and yet designed to blend with and complement the surroundings and setting as an integral part of the DHCA.

The character of the DHCA is one of substantial family houses in generous plots. In the immediate area of 24 Downs Hill, with the exception of number 18, all the properties run almost the full width of their plots. Both numbers 26 and 20 touch their southern boundaries and the existing house at number 24 touches both boundaries.

The proposed redesign and reconstruction now being applied for no longer makes use of the existing foundations or any of the external walls. Instead, the proposal now sits uniquely in its plot and draws the building further back particularly from its northern boundary. Although it will be difficult to perceive some of these changes from the street, this redesign improvement will further position the

new house more distinctly within its own plot and better respect the neighbouring buildings than the current arrangement does.

The proposed redeveloped building extend rearwards of the existing building, but it will still be substantially within the rear building lines established by its near neighbours. Both 18 and 28 Downs Hill project beyond the rear building line, number 18 considerably so.

The originally proposed basement level is not included in the revised application.

As identified in the DHCA SPG, many houses in the DHCA have second floor accommodation set into the roof spaces with dormer windows and roof lights. The proposed remodelled house follows this tradition.

As can be seen in the elevational perspectives below, the redesign of the new building echoes design features of its neighbours and others found across the conservation area. Deep pitched roofs following the height of neighbouring roof lines, allowing for variations in the topography of the land; front and rear gables with feature windows; discrete second floor accommodation set into the roof space. Other design perspectives are included in the Design and Access Statement for the application.



*Proposed redevelopment seen from the front with all trees, plantings and boundary treatments removed.*





*Proposed redevelopment seen from the rear again with all trees, plantings and boundary treatments removed to aid comparison.*

**Landscaping, trees and environment** – because of their relatively common age, most houses in the conservation area and in the immediate area of the subject property, have mature gardens with a number of mature trees (see accompanying Tree Survey). At the application site, and in the wider area, the number, density and scale of the trees and landscaped vegetation offers considerable screening of properties from the street; from each other; and indeed, within sites themselves.

To the rear of the property, the garden continues to slope away from the house and the hillside affords dramatic views over the wooded valley and railway, towards Bromley and Chislehurst to the east. In common with its neighbours, the application site has an existing terraced garden on several different levels. The general area is heavily wooded with many mature trees, landscaped plantings, hedging and screening. Many of the homes within the DHCA present as ‘buildings in a landscape’, the trees and landscape is what one sees first and the buildings come second.

In common with its neighbours, the existing house at 24 Downs Hill has a rear outdoor terrace at ground-floor level. The proposals retain this feature although, because of the reward projection to bring the redeveloped building into line with neighbouring properties, the level of the proposed terrace has been dropped by 1m to alleviate any possibility of overlooking to, or from, the next-door properties.

The proposals will retain all existing trees, fences, hedges and other boundary treatments.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The applicants understand and respect the importance of the heritage asset that is the Downs Hill Conservation Area.

The proposed new home has been carefully designed to make best use of the available space while blending in scale and size with its neighbours without encroaching on their space, or dominating the plot or the street scene, or in any way overlooking the houses to either side.

The revised design criteria that have been established to create a new home for the Bloomers sets out to replace an unremarkable house at the end of its useful life with a well-designed, distinct family home that will enhance the setting of the conservation area, its character and appearance. The proposed new home will also provide a far better use of the site and reduce the current carbon-footprint of the site and contribute to the Council's aspirations for improved sustainable living in the borough.

The application continues to follow the guidance set out in DHCA SPG and the advice contained in the pre-application feedback.