

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 September 2016

by Les Greenwood MRTPI

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

Decision date: 30 September 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/X5990/W/16/3150863

395 Strand, London WC2R 0LP

- 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 Subramaniam Kamalanathan against the decision of City of Westminster Council.
 - The application Ref 16/01981/FULL, dated 4 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 April 2016.
 - The development proposed is a shop front change.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the building and the Covent Garden Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The Strand is a major commercial street characterised by a mix of older and more modern buildings. There is a wide variety of shopfronts here, ranging from modern designs with extensive areas of unarticulated glazing to more highly crafted traditional designs with smaller panes. No 395 is a narrow frontage Victorian building of some character, with an arched opening at ground floor level. Its shop front was evidently altered a few years ago to a traditionally designed timber framed version which the Council suggests replicates the original 1895 shopfront. The proposal is to alter this again – still in timber but with a new, wider sliding door opening and a revised glazing pattern.
 4. Although the existing shopfront is relatively new, it does represent a starting point for the assessment of this proposal. In comparison, the proposed replacement shopfront would not sit comfortably with the period architecture of the building. The arched top would be crudely infilled with rectangular glazing and another piece of rectangular glazing below this would work against the existing vertical emphasis of the architecture. The wider opening with sliding doors and the lack of stall risers would not be characteristic of the building's period or traditional shopfront design.
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5. The quality of shopfronts in this area is quite variable and the appellant has drawn my attention to a few other non-traditional shopfronts nearby. Each of these buildings is different architecturally, however. These other shopfronts do not provide a justification for the installation of an unsympathetic design at No 395.
6. I conclude that the proposal would unduly harm the character and appearance of the building and the conservation area. It therefore conflicts with the shared aims of Westminster City Plan Policies S25 and S28, City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan Policies DES1, DES5 and DES10 and the Council's guidance *Shopfronts, Blinds and Signs – A Guide to their Design* (the Guide), to secure a high standard of excellence in design quality and to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas.
7. I fully recognise the need for shopfronts to contribute to the viability of the shop by attracting customers. The appellant argues that some customers pass the unit by at present, not knowing that it is a shop. The nature of the premises is, however, clearly indicated by the goods displayed on the pavement and by signage. As suggested by the Guide, there is a counter-argument here as well - the overall attractiveness of a shopping street impacts on its commercial success. I see no economic or other public benefit in this case that would outweigh the harm caused.
8. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed.

Les Greenwood

INSPECTOR