
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 September 2016

by J Flack BA Solicitor

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

Decision date: 5 October 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/Y/16/3152645

4 Princes Street, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 3PA

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against the grant of listed building consent subject to conditions.
 - The appeal is made by Oliver James Property Services against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - Listed building consent Ref 15/01431/LBC was granted on 8 January 2016 subject to conditions.
 - The works proposed are improvements and alterations including signage.
 - The condition in dispute is No 2 a) i) which states that:
 - a) The works and signs hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans listed in the table above but notwithstanding the submitted details:*
 - i) the proposed sign adjoining the side door on the south elevation on drawing 1276/1 (design in appendix B of the Design & Access Statement) is excluded from approval.*
 - The reason for the condition is: *For the avoidance of doubt to ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the approved plans and details.*
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background and Main Issue

2. 4 Princes Street is a Grade II listed building. I understand that until recently the ground floor had been vacant for three years, having last been used as a shop, but it is now occupied by the appellant's business. To facilitate the new use, the appellant applied to the Council for listed building consent for a scheme of internal alterations and signage, the latter comprising a projecting sign to the front of the building, a wall mounted sign on the rear elevation above the ground floor windows, and a further wall mounted sign on the south side elevation at ground floor level.
3. This last sign (the appeal sign) is the subject matter of this appeal. Various aspects of the proposed signage were the subject of negotiation during the Council's consideration of the application and led to amendments to the proposals. However, no agreement was reached on the appeal sign. In order to allow consent to be granted for the remainder of the scheme, the appellant was willing for the appeal sign to be excluded by the disputed condition, this allowing for the matter to be pursued further by appeal. This the appellant has done, seeking the removal of this condition in order to reinstate the appeal sign to the consented works. The appellant draws attention to the Council's willingness to consider a smaller sign in the location of the appeal

sign. Whilst I note this, my assessment is limited to the merits of the proposal before me at appeal.

4. Accordingly, the main issue is whether the provision of the appeal sign by deletion of the disputed condition would preserve the special historic and architectural interest of the listed building.

Reasons

5. The appeal listed building lies within the historic centre of Huntingdon which forms the Huntingdon Conservation area. The building fronts directly onto Princes Street. To both sides and to the rear of the building are pedestrian walkways which lead into St Benedicts Court, a large modern retail development, beyond which is the pedestrianised High Street. The building has a notably isolated appearance, deprived of its historic context and enclosed by bulky modern development.
6. Although the building is now wholly in commercial use, the list description records that this commenced comparatively recently in the late C20, and states that the principal reason for designation is that it is of special historic and architectural interest as a substantially intact late C18 house. It is appropriate that the current commercial use of the building be recognised by a degree of signage. However, the underlying designed character of the building as a house is readily apparent from its form and fenestration, and given the principal reason for designation it is very important that this character and its legibility is not eroded. Moreover, whilst the wide areas of pedestrian walkway to the rear and south side of the building provide openness which allows the building to be appreciated, the features of the immediate setting I have noted above mean that it is not otherwise sympathetic to the building. This is another factor which renders the building sensitive to further interventions.
7. At present, the southern elevation of the building is devoid of signage, and there is no indication in the evidence before me that any signs have been consented on this elevation in the past. The appeal sign would be substantially smaller than the consented sign to the rear elevation, but the latter sign is a replacement of a previous sign in this location and the Council accepted it on that basis. The appeal sign would be materially larger than the modest consented hanging sign to the front elevation, and its ground floor position would make it more prominent in the view of passing pedestrians than the consented signs. Moreover, although the appeal sign would share the colours and the traditional materials and construction of the consented signs, the greater quantity of text would give it a more complex and busy design which would add to its prominence. Viewed from the southern walkway on entering this from Princes Street, the appeal sign would unacceptably diminish the unadorned integrity of the southern elevation, and when viewed from the rear of the building the appeal sign would materially add to the visual impact of the rear sign and the illuminated property details displayed in the rear ground floor window of the building's front range.
8. I saw on my visit that that a free standing sign advertising the appellant's business was positioned on the southern walkway close to the proposed location of the appeal sign, but I have no information as to whether this benefits from any necessary consents and accordingly do not regard it as

material to my assessment. The two narrow pillar signs advertising St Benedicts Court positioned in the northern and southern walkways adjacent to Princes Street do benefit from consent, but the officers report before me indicates that they were a remodelling of existing signs. In any case, these signs are not directly comparable with or justify the appeal sign. They read clearly as part of the St Benedicts Court development and distinct from the listed building, and although the sign in the northern walkway sign is positioned very close to the listed building, the southern walkway sign is separated from it by a small brick planter.

9. The appellant also draws attention to the consented signage at Nos 10 -10A Princes Street. Whilst this is a Grade II listed building located opposite No 4, the characteristics and circumstances of every listed building are unique, and I have no reasons to disagree with the findings of the Council's officers report that the building was an ancillary stable building to Lawrence Court which has limited historic value, having suffered from numerous alteration and many repairs. Whilst therefore I have noted the various signs in the vicinity of the appeal listed building, I do not consider that they serve to justify the appeal sign.
10. For the above reasons I conclude that the appeal sign would fail to preserve the special historic and architectural interest of the listed building. This would in turn diminish the positive contribution which the building makes to the character and appearance of the conservation area and so fail to preserve these. I agree with the Council that for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) the harm would amount to less than substantial harm. I have therefore balanced this harm against any public benefits (paragraph 134), but noting that great weight is to be given to conservation of heritage assets (paragraph 132).
11. I acknowledge that the appellant has brought the ground floor of the building back into beneficial use after a substantial period of vacancy, and this is a material public benefit. However whilst I accept that signage is an integral part of this beneficial use of the building, the evidence before me does not demonstrate that the appeal sign is necessary to the continued viability of the business within a town centre area which appears to enjoy significant vitality.
12. I conclude therefore that the public benefits of the appeal proposal are not such as to outweigh the harm it would cause. I have also concluded that the appeal sign would fail to preserve the listed building, and identified that the conservation area would thus not be preserved. Removal of the disputed condition so as to give consent to the appeal sign would therefore be contrary to the historic environment policies of the Framework, and there would also be conflict with objectives of policies of the development plan which seek to preserve heritage assets.
13. For the above reasons, the appeal is dismissed.

J Flack

INSPECTOR