
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 November 2016

by Mike Hayden BSc DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 14 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/H0520/Y/16/3151261

26 Market Square, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 2PJ

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Jeffrey Mills Solicitors against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 15/01690/LBC, dated 23 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 4 December 2015.
 - The works comprise new signage (retrospective).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed and listed building consent is refused for the new signage.

Procedural Matter

2. At the time of my visit the works had already taken place. Therefore, the proposal seeks to retain the signage and I have dealt with the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the signage on the significance of the listed building.

Reasons

4. The appeal property is part of a row of late Georgian/early Victorian buildings forming the frontage along the south side of St Neots Market Square. Their well-preserved, classically designed period architecture define the character of Market Square. The historical and architectural significance of the appeal building and its group is recognised by its Grade II listing. Particular features of special interest include a unique series of arched entrances punctuating the frontage. The list description for 26 Market Square also mentions the fielded and panelled door within the semi-elliptical arch forming the eastern entrance to the building.
5. The signage the subject of this appeal has been fixed to the wooden panel above the door. Although set back within the arch, the signage conceals the decorative panelling, obscuring its special interest and the contribution it makes to the architecture of the building. The sign is also large and prominent when viewed from the square. I recognise it is designed to draw the eye, but the sign is the dominant feature within the archway. Its size, position and materials are

unsympathetic to the traditional design, features and materials of the building. As such, the signage causes harm to the significance of the listed building.

6. Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) expects that when considering the impact of a development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, such as a listed building, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Where the harm is less than substantial, paragraph 134 of the Framework expects that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the development.
7. In this case the harm caused is less than substantial. In weighing any public benefit, I acknowledge the need for the appellant to draw customers' attention to their business and the contribution the business makes to the vitality of St Neots town centre. Whilst I give this some limited weight, it does not justify the size and placement of the signage nor does it outweigh the harm which the sign causes to the significance of the listed building.
8. I have considered the other advertisements within Market Square referred to by the appellant. However, in each case these respect the architectural features and design of their host buildings. At 44 Market Square, the fascia sign is displayed in the appropriate position within the shopfront entablature and the hanging sign is a traditional feature which does not conceal the architecture of the building. The hanging sign granted consent at 36 Market Square, although not displayed at the time of my visit, was designed to be in traditional materials and approved to hang within the archway not obscuring any of the features of the building. The oval sign for the chiropractic clinic is positioned above the archway at 28 Market Square aligned with other shopfront fascia signs along the frontage.
9. Accordingly, I conclude that the appeal signage causes unacceptable harm to the significance of the listed building. Although the harm is less than substantial, it is not outweighed by any public benefit which the sign provides. Consequently, it conflicts with paragraphs 132 and 134 of the Framework. It also fails to comply with Policy CS1 of the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy (2009) and saved Policy EN2 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Part 1 (1995), which seek to preserve the distinctiveness of the district's buildings of architectural and historic importance.

Conclusion

10. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should fail.

M Hayden

INSPECTOR