
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 October 2016

by Elaine Benson BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 15 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/B1605/Y/16/3146950

Rotunda Buildings, Montpelier Street, Cheltenham GL50 1SJ

- 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 Morgan Associates Ltd against the decision of Cheltenham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 15/00894/LBC, dated 19 May 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 September 2015.
 - The works proposed are described as 'to replace existing illuminated signage to fascias on left and right hand elevations of the building. To update the front fascia signage with a black painted background and bonded vinyl lettering being fixed in place. To repaint all door and window frames, mullions, cills, pilasters and plinths in Dulux goose wing grey. To repaint all ground floor doors in black gloss finish'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed and listed building consent is refused insofar as it relates to replacement of existing illuminated signage to fascias on left and right hand elevations of the building. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted insofar as it relates to front fascia signage with black painted background and bonded vinyl lettering and repainting of all door and window frames, mullions, cills, pilasters and plinths in Dulux goose wing grey and all ground floor doors in black gloss finish at Rotunda Buildings, Montpelier Street, Cheltenham GL50 1SJ in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 15/00894/LBC, dated 19 May 2015, so far as relevant to that part of the works hereby permitted.

Main Issues

2. The Council's objections relate to the fascia panels with back lit lettering which are displayed on the left and right elevations of the building. This decision therefore focusses on the matters in dispute and the main issues in this appeal are whether the size, design, colour, lighting and materials used for the fascia signage on these elevations preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the listed building and those of the Central Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The listing description describes the Rotunda Buildings as 3 storey, Grade II listed shops with offices above. It dates from c1820-34 with later additions and alterations, including a full height bow and shopfronts. The building comprises stucco over brick and its detailing includes pilasters with horizontal rustication to either side of the bow through the ground and first floors. At the right angle
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of the building is a double, part-glazed entrance door with an overlight in a round arch surround with a keystone which supports the bowed lower part of the flying upper storey. The later C19th curved shopfront is glazed with slender pilasters in the bow, a central part-glazed door, dentil frieze and overlight.

4. The listing description continues that the left elevation has irregular fenestration on the upper floors. The ground floor shopfront comprises plate-glass between slender mullions and carved decoration to the spandrels. There is a part glazed door with a lower panel, dentil frieze, pediment and overlight. The right elevation has regular fenestration and a shopfront with a tripartite window with ashlar mullions and tooled architrave, a further shopfront with slender mullions and caps and glazing canted into a part-glazed door with a dentil frieze.
5. The Rotunda Buildings stand in the Montpelier Character Area of the Central Conservation Area, in a prominent corner position on the approach from the A40 towards Montpelier and the town centre. The architecture and extensive detailing of the building and its setting within the conservation area contribute towards its significance and special interest.

Fascia signage on the left and right elevations

6. The appeal premises now comprise a ground floor estate agency with offices above. In my judgement the signage displayed on the 2 side elevations is overly conspicuous and incongruous on this listed building. Whilst I have noted no specific objection to the use of the colour black at fascia level; the materials, size and internal illumination of the signs combine to form an advertisement display which visually detracts from the building's architectural detailing. It also conceals the upper shopfront detailing on the left elevation. The internally illuminated signage therefore harms the character and appearance of the listed building. Furthermore, although the 2 signs are different, neither is representative of fascia signage found in the surrounding area which for the most part is restrained and consistent with the Council's policy requirements for high quality design. The appeal signage on the left and right elevations therefore harms the character and appearance of the conservation area. Consequently the display harms the significance of both heritage assets.
7. The harm I have identified would be 'less than substantial' and in accordance with Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) the harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Benefits put forward include that the appellant contributes significantly to the upkeep and maintenance of the building, which is not disputed. Whilst there is an acknowledged commercial need for signage and I note that the appellant considers that the proposed signage design is in keeping with modern day themes, I have found that the type of signage being displayed is harmful. Furthermore, this decision does not preclude the submission of an alternative signage scheme which would achieve the appellant's commercial requirements whilst also respecting its historic context. I have considered all of the benefits put forward on their merits within the context of the public benefits sought by the Framework. I am not convinced that the fascia signs are essential for the continued upkeep and maintenance of the listed building.
8. There is some dispute about whether the previous signage on the building had consent. Furthermore, in summary, the appellant considers that the signage is

a direct replacement for a display which was approved some 20 years ago and prior to the listing of the building. I have taken into account the photographic evidence of backlit signs displaying the names of a number of previous occupiers of the premises. However, in this appeal I am required to determine the effect on the listed building and conservation area of the advertisement display before me. Whether or not there have previously been backlit signs does not affect my conclusions.

9. For the reasons set out above the illuminated fascia signs also conflict with Policy BE17 of the Adopted Cheltenham Borough Local Plan (LP) which states that adverts and signs on listed buildings in commercial use will be permitted where they would not detract from the integrity of the building design, historical character, structure, or setting. The signage also conflicts with LP Policy BE13 which indicates that advertisements and signs in conservation areas should be appropriate in type, size, colour, illumination & location to the character of the building or site where they are displayed and to the surrounding area and should be of an appropriately high standard of design, materials and finish. These are similar to the requirements of LP Policy BE12 which relates to the effect on visual amenity or distinctive local character of advertisements and signs in areas where there would be no effect on heritage assets. There is further conflict with the Council's SPD which provides detailed advice and guidance about appropriate signage in areas of historic importance.

Painting and curved fascia sign

10. The various elements of the proposed works are clearly severable and can be assessed on their individual merits. As indicated above, the Council raises no objection to the repainting of the external doors, door and window frames, mullions, cills, pilasters and plinths. There are no reasons to disagree. Whilst noting the Council's preference for hand painted signage or individual applied lettering on the curved fascia, I agree with its conclusion that the applied vinyl lettering in this position and the repainting works preserve the character and appearance of the listed building and the conservation area. These aspects of the proposed works do not conflict with the policies and guidance referred to above and can be approved. As the works have already been carried out it is not necessary to impose any conditions.

Overall Conclusions

11. I have had special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. For the foregoing reasons I conclude that the illuminated advertisements on the left and right elevations are unacceptable as they fail to preserve the character and appearance of the listed Rotunda Buildings and the Central Conservation Area. The appeal should therefore be dismissed in this regard.
12. The curved front fascia signage and the repainting of the building preserve the character and appearance of the listed Rotunda Buildings and the Central Conservation Area and are therefore allowed.

Elaine Benson

INSPECTOR