

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2017

by G Rollings BA(Hons) MA(UD) MRTPI

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

Decision date: 24 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/L3625/W/16/3160902

21 High Street, Merstham, RH1 3BA

- 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 Ms Lisa Taylor (Total Relocation Services Ltd) against the decision of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/01700/F, dated 19 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 September 2016.
 - The development is two storage containers for a temporary period of up to three years.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The site within the Merstham Village Conservation Area. Three pitched-roof buildings clustered around the site's main entrance are visible from the street, with the largest of these positioned behind a hardstanding area. The two storage containers which are the subject of this appeal are in place and are stacked against the front wall of this larger building, adjacent to the northern site boundary.
 4. This part of the street has a mixed-use character, as the village centre, but the appearance of the appeal site clearly reflects its current function of industrial storage. At the time of my visit, a large commercial vehicle was partially blocking the view of the containers from high street. The site's predominantly industrial appearance currently sets it apart from other buildings in views along the high street, as these appear more domestic in nature.
 5. However, the stacked containers are clearly visible from the street and, despite being positioned against the largest building on the site, their size and incongruity draws the attention in this view, more so than the existing buildings and other industrial fixtures on the site. Although commercial vehicles which may be parked on the site may also be seen from the street, and would appear similarly out of place within the context of the high street surroundings, they are able to be moved around the site and as such, do not appear as semi-permanent fixtures in the same manner as the containers. Accordingly, given the large size and obtrusiveness of the containers, and the clear views of them
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from within the conservation area, they have a detrimental effect on the appearance of the site, and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

6. As such, the containers fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the designated heritage asset. Pursuant to the advice given within the *National Planning Policy Framework* (paragraph 134), I consider that the potential harm caused to its wider significance as a heritage asset would be less than substantial. However, in this case, I do not consider that there are any public benefits that would outweigh this harm.
7. I therefore conclude that the development would have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and conflicts with the adopted *Reigate and Banstead Borough Local Plan* (2005) Policies Em 3 and Pc 13. Together, these policies require development to respect the general pattern of development in the area and complement and enhance the character of conservation areas.

Other issues

8. I have taken into account the appellant's comments that the containers could be painted or screened in some way, but consider that their bulky and incongruous appearance, as well as their height, would provide only minimal and therefore ineffective mitigation for the harm that I have identified. The appellant also mentioned that the containers could be positioned differently, such as side-by-side, but in reaching my decision I have limited my considerations to the current layout, as presented in the plans before me.
9. I have considered whether a shorter temporary period of approval would be appropriate, but given the Council's advice that the containers have already been on the site some time, and also taking into consideration their harmful effects on the conservation area, this would not be appropriate. I further note the appellant's comments regarding compliance with the Council's business support policy, but these impacts are not sufficient to overcome the harm that I have set out above.

Conclusion

10. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

G J Rollings

INSPECTOR