

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2017

by Jonathon Parsons MSc BSc(Hons) DipTP Cert(Urb) MRTPI

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

Decision date: 04 April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/N0410/W/16/3158840

Sorbon, 24-26 Aylesbury End, Beaconsfield HP9 1LW

- 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 David Howells (Sorbon Estates) against the decision of South Bucks District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00659/FUL, dated 12 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 1 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is single storey side extension and external alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The appeal site is referred to as 24-26 Aylesbury End. As detailed in its description, the adjoining listed building has been referred to as 20, 22 and 24 Aylesbury End. For the purposes of the appeal, I have referred to the listed building as 20 and 22 Aylesbury End (as the Council has) to avoid confusion.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are whether the proposed scheme would:
 - a) preserve the setting of grade II listed buildings; and
 - b) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Beaconsfield Old Town Conservation Area.

Reasons

Listed buildings

4. The appeal site comprises a three storey office building which is constructed in brick and render with a slate tiled roof. It roughly forms a L-shape extending back from the road frontage and sideways behind a grade II listed building at 20 and 22 Aylesbury End. Between the listed building and the rear part of the office building, there is an intervening courtyard area. On the office building's road frontage, there is an open carriageway type entrance that narrows leading to a rear part of the building adjacent to the courtyard. The carriageway entrance is attached to the side of the listed building at Nos 20 and 22. There
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are nearby listed buildings at 18 and 16 Aylesbury End, the latter being the United Reformed Church.

5. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 indicates special regard shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historical interest which it possesses.
6. The listed building at Nos 20 and 22 was a former timber framed public house dating back to the seventeenth century. At some point it was sub-divided to form three units with some evidence of shop uses being carried out. The listed building description indicates refronting works in the eighteenth century and it has an old tile pitched roof behind a panelled parapet on the frontage. The description further identifies architectural interest of the frontage fenestration and entrances, including a shop window. The rear of the building has newer traditional styled casement windows and has been recently painted, with the Appellant further indicating the exposed roof timbers and roof covering have been renewed.
7. The listed building's main architectural and historical interest lies to its front by reason of the parapet, fenestration and entrance detailing. Nevertheless there is still significant interest to the rear by virtue of the building's roofscape and general form including gables, and despite their more recent origin/renovation, its fenestration, roof covering and exposed timbers. The rear appearance of the building also identifies with a different phase of the building's life. Due to the identified architectural and historic interest, the listed building is of high value and significance, and the rear façade is an important and an integral part of this for the reasons indicated.
8. Although the listed building is within a dense historic and urban location, the experience of the listed building extends behind into the courtyard by reason of its size, including its width. The proposed atrium extension would enclose a significant part of the courtyard behind the listed building. There would be some outdoor space of the courtyard left remaining behind the listed building. The depth of the remaining outdoor space would also increase behind one end of listed building where it is adjacent to the site's boundary with the United Reformed Church.
9. However, the remaining space between the listed building and the atrium extension would be largely constrained. Its narrowness would result in the experience of the listed building being from a position close up behind it. Much of the upper parts of this wide two storey building including its roof, features and its overall form would be difficult to view and therefore appreciate.
10. From further back into the courtyard, the experience of the listed building would be diminished by reason of the atrium extension itself. Although the glazing of the atrium would be translucent, the framed structure comprises supporting columns and eaves bars would obscure much of the view of the listed building. It would also be an enclosed structure with more formalised floorspace which would discourage appreciation of the listed building through views compared to the outdoor space in the courtyard. There would be likely to be increased number of people using the space contained within the atrium during the year but this would not overcome the more limiting experience of the listed building from within a physical structure. In summary, the

extension would adversely affect the setting of the listed building for these reasons.

11. The United Reformed Church comprises a Bethesda 1870s non-conformist chapel and an original 1800 chapel attached to it, and has a grand entrance facing onto the road. It does have a wide setting in the area by reason of its height but from the courtyard, much of the side and rear of the listed building is obscured by existing buildings along Aylesbury End and boundary treatments. For this reason, the impact on its setting would be negligible. At 18 Aylesbury End, the listed building is a seventeenth century timber fronted building facing onto the road which is largely enclosed by 20 and 22 Aylesbury End and the United Reformed Church. Similarly, it is obscured by existing buildings in the courtyard and therefore there is a negligible impact on the setting of this listed building.
12. In conclusion, the proposed extension would harm the setting of a listed building at 20 and 22 Aylesbury End, a grade II listed building. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to policies C6 and EP3 of the South Bucks District Local Plan (LP) 1999 and policy CP8 of South Bucks District Local Core Strategy (CS) 2011, which collectively and amongst other matters, states that development should be in scale with surrounding development and not detract from the historic interest of a building or its setting.

Conservation Area

13. As the site is within a Conservation Area, I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area in accordance with the statutory duty under s72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
14. The Beaconsfield Old Town Conservation Area is dominated by a medieval street pattern with converging roads meeting in a central crossroads. The Beaconsfield Old Town Character Appraisal 2008 indicates the medieval nature of the area based on agriculture and its later development as a major coaching stopping point during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. The cross roads were where the main routes from Oxford and Windsor Royal Castle converged. During this period, there was new prosperity manifesting itself in inns and building refurbishment including re-fronting of timber buildings.
15. The history of the area has resulted in a variety of older traditional built buildings, many listed, and wide open roads leading in and out of the settlement. Some of these buildings have historical carriageway entrances, either open or enclosed reflecting the coaching era of the town. These historic and architectural qualities are of value and significance and are of special interest to the Conservation Area.
16. The office building at 24-26 Aylesbury End is not unattractive aesthetically but its size dominates in a road of predominantly small-scale vernacular and classical buildings. Its open entrance does not relate to the more traditional carriageway openings of older buildings in the Conservation area. In this regard, the entrance is modern designed with a glass/steel feature overhang and has a noticeable narrowing of the entrance within, identified from the street by an angled brick wall window/panel. The building has a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

17. By reason of its modern design, the infilling of the building's open entrance would not adversely affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area because it does not contribute to its significance. Additional vehicle parking arising from the extension would not be visually intrusive because the need would be negligible. The new floorspace would be used for meetings/lunchs/breaks which would replace the existing outdoor space used for that purpose. Furthermore, the office building would be in a location well-served by public transport and therefore there would be no requirement for additional car parking in accordance with LP policies TR5 and TR7. Thus, there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area on the basis of significant additional vehicle car parking.
18. However, there would be harm to the setting of a listed building that contributes to the significance of the Conservation Area by reason of its historical and architectural qualities. The development would therefore fail to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area for this reason. Accordingly, the proposal would be contrary to policies C1 and EP3 of the LP and policy CP8 of CS, which collectively and amongst other matters, require a high standard of design, development in scale with surrounding development and special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Other matters

19. Listed building; in terms of paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to a heritage asset. Paragraph 134 of the Framework advises that where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated asset, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits for the proposal.
20. The existing business provides employment and would contribute to the local economy. Although the atrium extension would provide an enclosed area of business floorspace, the proposal would be mainly enhancing existing facilities by replacing an existing outdoor recreational/meeting space and thus the public benefit would be limited. In the balance, this benefit has to be weighed against the adverse impact on the setting of the listed building for which considerable importance and weight has to be attached. Therefore, while the harm to the significance of the heritage asset is less than substantial, the public benefits would not be sufficient to outweigh that harm for the reasons indicated.
21. Conservation Area: as with my assessment of the proposal's implications for the listed building, the impact of the scheme upon the Conservation Area as a designated heritage asset would fail to accord with the same policy requirements of the Framework as indicated above and there are no overall public benefits sufficient to override the less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area.
22. In the absence of any further car parking need, the proposal would not result in any harm to the living conditions of residents, workers and visitors to the town by the inconvenience of finding vehicle parking space in the area.

Conclusion

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

Jonathon Parsons

INSPECTOR