

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 April 2017

by Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge BA (Hons) MTP MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 27th April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/J1535/Z/17/3169628

McColls, 277 High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4DA

- 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 McColls Retail Group against the decision of Epping Forest District Council.
 - The application Ref EPF/2957/16, dated 8 November 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 January 2017.
 - The development proposed is installation of security shutter to shopfront.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. Epping Conservation Area incorporates the town centre of Epping with its retail and commercial focus. The High Street contains numerous historic buildings and shopfronts that contribute greatly to the character and appearance of the conservation area as well as its significance. The appeal site has a modern shopfront in an evidently modern building, but it has a simple and unobtrusive design that results in a neutral effect on the conservation area.
 4. The appellant highlights a number of units along the High Street which have external security shutters. From my site visit observations, few contained protruding shutter boxes and so are not directly comparable to the appeal proposal. In addition, I have not been provided with the planning history for any of the highlighted examples and note that they remain in the minority compared to the whole High Street. Furthermore, they are primarily located within the south-western half of the High Street. In contrast, the north-eastern half of the High Street in which the appeal site lies appears to have few examples of such development.
 5. The proposed security shutters would not be completely solid, and would be finished in white powder coating, but the punched laths design across a wide expanse would still result in a visually dominant barrier in front of the existing shopfront. Although the shutters would only be closed overnight when passers-by would be at their fewest, it would still produce a deadening effect on the conservation area and obscure the shopfront window. The protruding
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shutter box beneath the existing fascia would be particularly prominent at any time of day and would appear bulky and unsightly. The proposal would thus have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area and result in harm to its significance.

6. The harm to significance of the conservation area would be less than substantial given the modern design of the existing shopfront, but still important as it would introduce an incongruous feature into the High Street where such features are in the minority. In accordance with paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), this harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. I acknowledge the crime issues identified by the appellant and the benefit that increased security would bring. However, I am not convinced that the proposed development represents the only way to improve the security of the shopfront, noting that other solutions have been suggested by the Council and are in use elsewhere on the High Street such as internal shutters. Therefore, there are no public benefits related to the proposal that outweigh the harm to the significance of the conservation area.
7. In conclusion, the proposed development would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of Epping Conservation Area. Thus, it would not accord with Policies HC6 and HC7 of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 1998 or Policy TC5 of the Local Plan Alterations 2006. Amongst other things, these policies seek development that is sympathetic to the character and appearance of conservation areas and maintains the retail character of town centres. The development would also be contrary to the NPPF in terms of not sustaining the significance of the conservation area, where the public benefits would not outweigh the harm.

Conclusion

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

Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge

INSPECTOR