
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 23 May 2017

by Roger Catchpole DipHort BSc(hons) PhD MCIEEM

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

Decision date: 13 June 2017

Appeal A: APP/H1840/W/17/3166519

HSBC Bank, 32 Bridge Street, Evesham WR11 4RU

- 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 Ben French (HSBC Corporate Real Estate) against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
 - The application Ref: W/16/01143/PN, dated 26 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 4 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is described as "Removal of external step to provide level access to branch. Removal of timber entrance doors and replaced with new – to match existing side entrance timber doors. Installation of additional AC condenser unit to rear – installed above existing units."
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Appeal B: APP/H1840/Y/17/3166518

HSBC Bank, 32 Bridge Street, Evesham WR11 4RU

- 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 Mr Ben French (HSBC Corporate Real Estate) against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
 - The application Ref: W/16/01142/LB, dated 26 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 4 July 2016.
 - The works proposed are described as "Various internal and external works. Level access works. Removal of external step and replacement of existing timber entrance doors. Section of internal floor to be lowered to create level access. Platform lift installed. Replacement of existing signage with 'HSBS UK' equivalent. Installation of additional external condenser unit above existing units. Internal branch refurbishments. New tills, decorations, new flooring."
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Decision

Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal B

2. The appeal is dismissed and listed building consent is refused for works described as "various internal and external works. Level access works. Removal of external step and replacement of existing timber entrance doors. Section of internal floor to be lowered to create level access. Platform lift installed. Replacement of existing signage with 'HSBS UK' equivalent. Installation of additional external condenser unit above existing units. Internal branch refurbishments. New tills, decorations, new flooring."

Preliminary Matter

3. As the proposal is in a Conservation Area and affects a Listed Building I have had special regard to sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issues

4. The main issues are whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, Midland Bank, and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Evesham Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The building is part of a commercial frontage on a pedestrianised street near the centre of Evesham. The proposal comprises the removal of three entrance steps and a lowering of an area of internal floor space to provide a level access point to the building. The wooden doors of this entrance would be replaced with ones in the style of an existing door on the western side of the front elevation. The existing frame and fanlight would be retained and incorporated into the new doorway. A lift would be installed to enable access to the higher, internal floor level. Planning permission was also sought for the installation of an external air conditioning condenser unit to the rear of the building. Additionally, listed building consent was sought for the above works as well as approved signage (Ref: W/16/01141/AA) and an internal refurbishment that would comprise redecoration, new flooring and tills.
6. The Evesham Conservation Area (CA) encompasses the historic core of the town and straddles the River Avon. It has a contrasting character with a range of uses, materials and architectural styles. The buildings overlay an established pattern of earlier settlement which still remains legible in the layout of its roads, plots and buildings. A significant number of well-preserved buildings remain, mostly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Bridge Street marks the principal thoroughfare of the early settlement with some buildings dating from the 15th century. Generally, the buildings in this part of the CA are large and comprise three stories. Their main elevations reflect a polite architectural style with a strong emphasis on symmetry and verticality. Given the above, I find that the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the classical proportions and architectural detailing of its historic buildings.
7. The building was listed in 1977 and dates from the 18th century. It is constructed from red brick and comprises three stories. It has ornamented brick cornices at first and second floor levels. Six over six pane, sash windows are arranged in a regular grid pattern. This pattern is five windows wide with doorways set at ground floor level directly below the outermost, vertically arranged windows on each side. These are recessed with pilasters and segmented pediments that form distinctive architraves with three steps elevating the feature above street level. Despite changes to the ground floor windows, the building retains a pleasing symmetry in its fenestration and architectural detailing. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the balanced composition of the architectural features of its main façade.

8. I observe from the plans and my site visit that whilst all other aspects of the proposal would be acceptable this would not be the case for the changes in level. This is because the removal of the three steps would unbalance the composition of the main façade and lead to a loss of original fabric. The steps and flanking plinths serve to highlight the architectural detail of the doorway architraves by lifting them above the adjoining street level. They also stress the high status of the building by creating more imposing, elevated points of entry than would have otherwise been the case had the doorways been constructed at street level. Their removal would not only have a negative impact on the listed building but also the CA given the loss of this architectural detail and the erosion of the Classical proportions of this building. Given the above, I find that the removal of the steps and resulting change in level would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building and the significance of the CA. Consequently, I give these harms considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of this appeal.
9. Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets. Given the limited scope of the works, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Under these circumstances, paragraph 134 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes the securing of optimal viable use of listed buildings.
10. The appellant is of the opinion that the proposed works would be beneficial because they would improve accessibility for customers. It is maintained that this would help to secure the long term viable use of the building as a commercial premises. I accept that improving access would be a public benefit and acknowledge that a ramp was ruled out by the Highway Authority. However, I have no substantiated evidence before me to suggest that a full range of alternative measures were considered through an integrated review of the access arrangements at this particular location. As such, I am not satisfied that the continued viable use of the appeal property is dependent on the proposed works or that its ongoing commercial use would cease in their absence. Consequently, no substantiated public benefits would accrue either in relation to the listed building or the CA.
11. Given the above and in the absence of any substantiated benefits, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building and the character and appearance of the Evesham Conservation Area. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 134 of the Framework and conflict with SWDP 6 and SWDP 24 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 that seek, among other things, to ensure the conservation of heritage assets and the sympathetic adaptation of historic buildings. As a result the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

12. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

Roger Catchpole

INSPECTOR