



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2020

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 April 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/W/19/3242383

Scorpios, 34 Crendon Street, High Wycombe HP13 6LS

- 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 M Gaine (Sparkhill Limited) against the decision of Wycombe District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/05921/FUL, dated 11 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 7 June 2019.
 - The development is a replacement shop window.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The original shopfront has been removed and replaced with a new shopfront. Since the date of the Council's refusal notice, the emerging Wycombe District Local Plan(LP) has been adopted in August 2019. It replaces the Wycombe District Local Plan 2011 (2004) and the Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2008).

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the shopfront has preserved or enhanced the character or the appearance of the High Wycombe Town Centre Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises a four storey building located on the eastern side of Crendon Street which was formerly a public house with ancillary accommodation above. The façade has an ordered design, with a stallriser, a stone fascia and pillars across the frontage. At the upper floors, there are sash windows and stonework detailing. It has been recently extended with a mansard roof and converted into 9 flats with a retail unit at the ground floor. The ground floor retail unit is accessed by glazed double doors and next to this, beyond a stone pillar, the unit has a one pane window shopfront. The site is located within High Wycombe town centre and its Conservation Area.
5. The Conservation Area has a range of different period buildings dating back to medieval times reflecting its status as a market town which is detailed in the Council's High Wycombe Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA). Within the CAA, Crendon Street is indicated to have been rebuilt between the 1930s and 1960s

in a neo-Georgian style. There is a variety of shopfronts and signage within it, with traditional style frontages with varying degrees of subdividing bars across windows and distinctly modern frontages with more open window expanses. Materials used for window frames and barring across them also vary. The CAA and its companion guide the High Wycombe Conservation Area Civic Area and Crendon Street Study 4 (2011) indicate the street signage relates poorly to the original buildings and that most of the original ground floor shop windows have been replaced. The neighbouring unit at Dralda House has a new modern shopfront with signage whilst further away at 3-5 and 7 Crendon Street, there are units with similar type shopfronts to that proposed.

6. However, much of the upper floors have retained original features and despite the number of replacement shopfronts, many of them still retain some barred glazing and therefore a strong sense of a traditional vernacular still remains. It is these important architectural, aesthetic and historic qualities that contribute to the heritage asset's significance and are of special interest to it as a Conservation Area.
7. In the companion guide, the building is confirmed not to be a 'building of interest' but it was nevertheless found to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area by virtue of the front elevation's composition and the balance created by the signage, pillars, stall risers, original windows and architectural detailing of the first and second floor levels. The previous shopfront consisted of three timber-framed windows, two plaster columns in between and three black-painted timber panels at the bottom which infilled a large, rectangular opening. UPVC double-glazed units were inside of this. The materials, workmanship and upkeep of the windows was not of great quality and it did not match the original windows in the mid-1950s.
8. However, the frontage window's subdivision still retained a traditional design quality and as a result, it would have contributed positively to the character and appearance of the area. The built shopfront has a simple design but it has a dominant expanse of glazing which is markedly out of proportion with the existing openings of the building. The fenestration above has distinct multi-paned windows breaking up areas of glazing. Whilst a ground floor window cannot realistically incorporate the same paned design as upper floors, the substantial expanse of glass appears visually awkward and unsympathetic within the traditional styled elevation. It fails to respond positively to the features of the site itself.
9. The appellant has a fall back position in being able to revert to the permitted shopfront. However, this five pane window would be a significant improvement over the modern expansive window in place at the moment, despite its use of an aluminium frame. It still retains some traditional design qualities in its incorporation of vertical and horizontal barring.
10. There is a large neighbouring building, Prospect House, at corner of Crendon Street and Castle Street, which is postwar and modern, but this is outside the Conservation Area. The Council has granted planning permission for the new expansive shopfronts at 3-5 and 7 Crendon Street. However, the full reasons for the Councils decisions, planning history or information on the appearance of the previous shopfront have not been provided. Notwithstanding this, these units are also closer to the town centre where there is a greater prominence of

larger commercial units and uses, and a different context. In any case, every proposal must be determined on its particular planning merits.

11. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes clear, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
12. In accordance with the Framework, the type of harm identified above is less than substantial. It is necessary that this identified harm is weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In this regard, the unit has been on the market for a considerable period of time and commercial agents have advised that the window as permitted would substantially reduce the attractiveness of the unit to tenants. Single large glazed windows allow commercial occupiers to more fully present their products and services. Along Crendon Street, there are estate agents, which have large windows through which they can advertise their properties. Utilisation of this unit for retail purposes would be a business benefit.
13. However, such a benefit has to be weighed against the adverse impact on the significance of the Conservation Area for which considerable importance and weight is required to be attached. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for commercial users to have windows with some barring. Additionally, there is a fall back position of an approved shopfront where the window is not greatly subdivided up by bars. There could also be a number of reasons, not before me, why the unit is not occupied. For all these reasons, the harm to the significance of the Conservation Area outweighs the scheme's benefits.
14. In conclusion, the shopfront fails to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Accordingly, there is a conflict with policies CP11 and DM31 of the LP, which collectively and amongst other matters, requires all development to conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment, and that great weight should be given to the conservation of the designated asset's significance. LP policy DM20 is not relevant because it does not relate to applications such as this.

Conclusion

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

Jonathon Parsons

INSPECTOR