



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 July 2020

by Mrs H Nicholls FdA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/X1118/W/20/3251093

**3 & 5 Hartland House Apartments, The Esplanade, Woolacombe, N. Devon
EX34 7DJ**

- 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 Scott & Mrs Blowers against the decision of North Devon Council.
 - The application Ref 70671, dated 16 October 2019, was refused by notice dated 6 December 2019.
 - The development proposed is balconies to apartments 3 & 5.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated in Woolacombe Conservation Area (CA). I am required under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
4. As detailed in the Woolacombe Conservation Area Character Appraisal (Character Appraisal), the significance of the CA derives from its origins as an Edwardian/Victorian coastal resort town, the core of which is dominated by grand hotels and villa style houses. The mixture of late 19th Century architectural styles, combined with the coastal setting and planned layout, orientated to make the most of the sea views and walks along the shoreline, give the area its special character.
5. The appeal building is a Victorian villa, now converted into apartments. It occupies a prominent position on the seafront and is a noteworthy building owing to its scale and its attractive architectural features. It presents a triple gable frontage to the street and is constructed of Marland brick with red brick detailing. It also has a balanced composition of sash windows and other more decorative features, including gothic window heads and gable bargeboards.
6. The proposal seeks to introduce two small balconies on the front easternmost windows at both first and second floor levels. This would also necessitate changing the window arrangement to allow for access onto the balconies via

single width doors. The balcony balustrades would be constructed from wrought iron.

7. Given the layering of detailing on the building's frontage, it is already 'busy', yet balanced and attractive. Though there is a veranda projection on the ground floor level, the building otherwise has a smooth front elevation, free of the additions of balconies. Though the east bay is a later addition and differs slightly from the others with its shallower gable, this distinction is not so obvious so as to provide justification for adding balconies that would make the difference more notable.
8. Whilst balconies are referenced in the Character Appraisal as being a 'traditional' feature within the CA, and are noted as being a positive feature where they appear in a consistent run above shops overlooking the street, the appeal building is set behind a terraced frontage and the balconies would have little interaction with the street. Balconies would not be an authentic feature of the appeal building, unlike others where they appear as a more integral element, either atop a projecting bay window or as part of a larger wrap-around feature. In this instance, the 'add on' quality would not result in the building being more visually attractive than it is at present. As such, though the balconies would not necessarily be 'incongruous', they would clutter the front elevation and detract from its already well-balanced and elegantly detailed frontage and window arrangement, which contributes positively to the CA.
9. I do not consider that the slight curvature of the road that limits views from the north towards Hartland House is so pronounced that the balconies would not be noticeable. Whilst the walls and established planting may also draw the eyes from the street, they would not block views of the balcony additions at first or second floor level, or towards any domestic furniture or objects that could be placed thereon.
10. In view of this main issue, the proposal would harm the character and the appearance of Woolacombe Conservation Area and therefore conflicts with Policies DM04, DM07 and ST15 of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan¹. These Policies require, amongst other things, that new development reinforces the key characteristics and special qualities of the area and conserves the cultural, built, historic and archaeological features of national and local importance.

Other Matters

11. I note from the evidence that the balconies are intended to improve the living environment provided by apartments Nos 3 and 5, which do not have the benefit of any private amenity space otherwise. Given the limited size and lack of privacy that would be provided by the balconies, and the expansive views that are inevitably available through the existing windows, the enhanced enjoyment of the dwellings is a limited benefit of the appeal proposal.
12. I note the appellant's references to other less sympathetic alterations that may be undertaken to the building, although limited details have been provided in relation thereto. I also note the reference to a permission for a terrace on the front elevation, though the details pertaining to this are similarly lacking. It is not clear whether the appeal proposal has an impact on any other planned

¹ North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted 2018)

works to the building, or that allowing the appeal proposal is the only means of achieving the desired outcome.

Conclusions

13. The scheme would result in harm to the designated heritage asset, Woolacombe Conservation Area. In terms of the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 196, the magnitude of harm would be towards the lower end of 'less than substantial'. This harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
14. The limited public benefits of the proposal, which would derive from the minor enhancement of two dwellings, do not outweigh the identified harm.
15. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, including the absence of objections from neighbouring occupiers, the appeal is dismissed.

Hollie Nicholls

INSPECTOR