
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 1 April 2021

by S Ashworth BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

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

Decision date: 13 April 2021

Appeal A: APP/B4215/W/20/3261564 65, Princess Street, Manchester M2 4EG

- 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 Colin Shenton against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref 127252/FO/2020, dated 24 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 October 2020.
 - The development proposed is installation of awnings and planters to building and siting of removable planters on footway.
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Appeal B: APP/B4215/Y/20/3261562 65, Princess Street, Manchester M2 4EG

- 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 Colin Shenton against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref 127253/LO/2020, dated 24 June 2020, was refused by notice dated 1 October 2020.
 - The works proposed are installation of awnings and planters to building and siting of removable planters on footway.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A: The appeal is dismissed.
2. Appeal B: The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

3. 65 Princess Street is the end property in a row of four terraced buildings, Nos 65-71, which are Grade II listed buildings dating from around the late 18th century. The site lies in the heart of the city centre within the Albert Square Conservation Area the character of which is defined in part by its civic spaces and impressive buildings, many of which are listed buildings.
4. The main issues in this case are the effect of the proposal on the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. Planning permission and listed building consent were granted for the change of use of the building to a hotel on 22 May 2020¹ (the approved scheme). Permission is now sought for the installation of a curved canopy above the entrance door, fabric awnings and planters to all the windows on the front elevation and removable planters to the pavement, as part of the scheme for the redevelopment and upgrading of the site.
6. The starting point for consideration of the proposal is the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Put simply, section 16(2) requires the decision maker, in deciding whether to grant consent for works affecting a listed building to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses.
7. The terrace was constructed as four townhouses in the late 18th century but has been in commercial use since around the mid-19th century. The list description indicates that the group is a rare survival of domestic buildings in the centre of the city. The appeal building is three storeys in height over a basement and is single fronted with a regular pattern of 3 windows at first and second floor level. The pattern is repeated on the other properties giving a uniformity and rhythm to the group. The domestic scale and proportions of the terrace, particularly in comparison with the substantial commercial buildings around it, and its simple architectural detailing and traditional brick facing material contribute to the special interest of the group.
8. The approved scheme would see the removal of a modern shopfront at No 65 and its replacement with windows and door, with a fanlight and open pediment, which would restore the historic frontage and the pattern of fenestration across the terrace. However, there is no evidence before me to suggest that the elements proposed in this appeal are historic features of the property and consequently, to my mind, they seem at odds with what is a carefully designed restoration scheme. Moreover, the entrance canopy, and awnings and window boxes above and below each of the eight windows, would add a considerable amount of detail to what is a relatively simply designed flat facade. The pavement planters, although in themselves not necessarily harmful, would add further visual clutter. In addition, the canopy would obscure the proposed pediment above the entrance door and the awnings would conceal the brick flat arched heads of the windows. As a result, the proposal would detract from the simple, elegant detailing of the refurbished front elevation of the property and the group as a whole.
9. I understand that it is intended that the awnings would be retracted in poor weather. Nevertheless, the housing for the awnings and window boxes would still constitute uncharacteristic projecting elements. In addition, given the purpose of the awnings is to identify the hotel it seems likely that they would be apparent for a significant amount of time. I acknowledge the need to distinguish the new hotel from the rest of the terrace, Nos 67-71, currently in use as a public house. However, I am unconvinced that this could not be achieved by alternative, more sympathetic means. Moreover, there is no evidence before me to demonstrate that the proposal is necessary to secure the long-term economic success of the business.

¹ Application Nos: 126003/FO/2020 126004/LO/2020

10. My attention has been drawn to awnings and canopies at other premises of various styles within the city centre including an awning at the neighbouring Greek restaurant. The majority of these examples are a single canopy to a ground floor shopfront rather than to windows to the upper storeys of a building and they are not thereby comparable in terms of their impact on the host building as the proposal before me. I noted the presence of canopies to second floor windows of 39 Princess Street which appear to have been granted permission some time ago. To my mind these canopies are of their time and do not constitute a good example of development to follow and moreover, are not a defining feature of the Conservation Area or of the particular terrace on which they would be situated.
11. For the above reasons the proposal would be detrimental to the character and appearance and special interest of the listed building. Accordingly, it would not meet the statutory requirement of s16 (2) of the Act. In addition, as the building is highly prominent in views along Princess Street, as well as from St Peter's Square, the proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
12. For these reasons the proposal would be contrary to Policies EN3, CC9, SP1 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy and saved policies DC18.1 and DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan which collectively seek to preserve or enhance heritage assets amongst other things by not permitting external alterations or additions to a listed building where there would be an adverse effect on its architectural or historic character.
13. In terms of the approach of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage assets. On that basis, paragraph 196 of the Framework requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
14. Considerable public benefits, in terms of the restoration of the listed building and its significance, will be gained through the implementation of the previous permission. However, there is no convincing evidence that the proposal is necessary to make the scheme economically viable and consequently there is no further benefit in that regard. I acknowledge that the arched canopy over the entrance may offer some shelter to members of the public on arrival at the hotel or whilst waiting for taxis and that the branding may also assist in identifying the hotel. These matters carry limited weight in support of the scheme. However, given that paragraph 193 of the Framework requires that great weight is given to the asset's conservation, the limited benefits of the proposal do not outweigh the identified harm.
15. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, including the letter of support from a third party, both appeals A and B are dismissed.

S Ashworth

INSPECTOR