
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 July 2021 by Ifeanyi Chukwujekwu BSc MSc MIEMA CEnv Assoc RTPI

Decision by S. Ashworth BA (Hons) BPI MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/X1355/Z/21/3270819

Old Co Op Buildings, Unit 5 Front Street, Burnopfield NE16 6LX

- 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 Trustees of the Capital Watch Pension Scheme against the decision of Durham County Council.
 - The application Ref DM/20/02039/FPA, dated 21 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 18 December 2020.
 - The development proposed is retrospective application for the installation of a shop frontage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by an Appeal Planning Officer whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Main Issue

3. The appeal site is located within the Burnopfield Conservation Area (the 'CA'). The main issue is the effect of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the host property, which is a non-designated heritage asset, and whether it would conserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA.

Reasons for the Recommendation

4. Unit 5 is one of a number of commercial units at ground floor level that comprise the Old Co-op Buildings. This is a large two storey building located towards the eastern end of Front Street which is the main route through Burnopfield. The building comprises commercial units at ground floor level and residential units at the first floor. According to the Burnopfield Conservation Area Appraisal (2009) (the 'CA appraisal'), this building is a landmark of the village¹.
5. The building is constructed with traditional stone walls. The CA appraisal states that timber was traditionally used for windows, doors and shopfronts. Over

¹ Pages 21 and 22

time, many have been replaced with modern designs and materials, which have served to undermine the character of the area. However, some examples of traditional joinery have survived and where this is the case they contribute greatly to the character of the building and the area, such as I observed on other shop frontages of the host building.

6. Shopfronts at the Pickled Cherry and CA Beauty and Academy, for example, feature timber vertical bars between the panes of glass and timber flat arches at the tops. These arches continue above the entrance doors. I understand that prior to its replacement, the shopfront at Unit 5 reflected this design. The use of a traditional material, as well as the consistency in the row of shopfronts, made a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the building and wider conservation area.
7. In contrast, the replacement uPVC shop front has a glossy white finish, which is bulkier, brighter, flatter and smoother in finish than the traditional timber units, giving it a modern and less refined appearance. It contrasts starkly with the retained, decorative traditional timber shopfronts which are of a dark colour and thereby visually recessive, and as such is highly prominent when viewed from various vantage positions along the road.
8. Consequently, the uPVC shopfront appears as an incongruous addition which detracts from the quality of the ground floor shopfronts of this building and diminishes the contribution the building makes to the character of the CA. As a result, it is harmful to the character and appearance of the host building and the CA.
9. The appellant contends that other shopfronts feature materials which are unsympathetic to the character of the building, such as roller shutters. Be that as it may, shutters are rolled up, out of view when shops are open and moreover, there is nothing to indicate that timber shopfronts have not been retained behind the shutters. Furthermore, the existence of uPVC windows at the first floor does not justify further undermining the character of the building. Similarly, whilst I notice that the fascia sign has been granted consent, it does not justify the shopfront.
10. The harm caused to the heritage assets would be less than substantial but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. In line with paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework I am required to balance that harm against any public benefits of the proposal. The appellant considers that the new shop front has improved and enhanced the appearance of the building due to the poor state of repair of the previous frontage. However, there is nothing to indicate the poor quality of the original shopfront or why it could not have been restored or replaced with similar material. Accordingly, this matter carries limited weight. Consequently, the public benefits outlined do not outweigh the harm to the character and appearance of the building and the wider CA.
11. Consequently, I find that uPVC shop frontage fails to conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the building and the CA. Accordingly, the scheme would conflict with Policy 44 of County Durham Plan (2020) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which amongst other things seek to ensure that development proposals sustain the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting.

Conclusion and Recommendation

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

Ifeanyi Chukwujekwu

APPEALS PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

13. I have considered all the submitted evidence and the Appeal Planning Officer's report, and on that basis, I agree with the recommendation and shall dismiss the appeal.

S Ashworth

INSPECTOR