



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 February 2022

by David Cross BA(Hons) PgDip(Dist) TechIOA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/21/3287092

67 Main Street, North Sunderland, Seahouses, Northumberland NE68 7TN

- 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 Edward Campbell of The Rolling Pig against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 21/00656/FUL, dated 22 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 20 October 2021.
 - The development proposed is described on the Council's decision notice as "Retrospective: replacement of all windows and doors".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of the development given on the planning application form has been replaced by a more concise version on the Council's decision notice and subsequent appeal documents. There is also some variation in the address of the appeal site given in the various planning application and appeal documents. I have taken the description and address from the Council's decision notice as I consider that these accurately represent the proposal.
3. The planning application was submitted retrospectively, and replacement windows and doors were in place at the time of my visit.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Seahouses Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is a single storey building in retail use. At my visit, I saw that modern windows and doors had been installed in the shop front as well as in an elevation to the side.
6. The appeal site is located within the Seahouses Conservation Area (the CA), the significance of which is set out in the CA Character Appraisal (the Appraisal). The comments from the Council's Built Heritage and Design Officer includes a summary of this significance, and refers to the historical development of the village influenced by the form of the original harbour. The Appraisal divides the character of the CA into a number of zones, and the

appeal site is located in the Main Street zone which is the focus of activity for Seahouses and includes a number of commercial uses serving the local population and tourists. The appeal site is close to the edge of the CA, where the character of the streetscape transitions from a commercial emphasis to a residential character.

7. The Appraisal specifically highlights the contribution that the previous shopfront of the appeal site made to the CA, referring to it as a "*rather quirky but delightful gothic style confection*". This summary reflects the photographic evidence provided to me, where the previous shopfront included delicate supporting columns and top panes with similarly delicate glazing bars of an interesting design with coloured glass. The evidence suggests that the shopfront and door were also constructed from the traditional material of painted timber.
8. In contrast, the replacement shopfront is of an unfortunate and relatively clumsy appearance. The delicate supporting columns have been replaced by thicker and flatter supports, and the top panes contain glazing bars of a pastiche Georgian design which do not reflect the decorative finesse of the previous design. The use of modern materials also adds to this unsympathetic appearance, compared to the evidence in respect of the traditional construction of the previous shopfront.
9. The elevation to the side of the building is not as visible within the streetscape. It has also not been demonstrated that the previous windows and doors in this elevation were of architectural or historic interest. Based on the evidence before me, I consider that the replacement doors and windows in the side elevation are of a neutral effect on the CA. However, this does not outweigh my concerns in respect of the harm arising from the alterations to the shop front.
10. There are a number of commercial and residential properties in the vicinity which have windows and doors of modern designs and materials. However, this adds to the importance of retaining features in the streetscape which make a positive contribution to the CA.
11. The appellant questions whether the previous windows were original to the building, and whether the use of 'gothic' design features were appropriate. However, based on the evidence before me the previous shopfront was of an established, attractive and distinctive design which made a positive contribution to the CA regardless of whether it was original to the building.
12. I am mindful of the public benefits arising from the proposal, including the continuation of a commercial use serving the area and the benefits to the local economy; as well as benefits in respect of condensation, safety and energy efficiency. The appellant also emphasises that the previous frames and doors were showing signs of rot and some had been poorly maintained. The proposal would also help to diversify the appellant's farming business as it faces the challenges of Brexit and Covid-19, and would help to support their family. However, these issues could have been addressed by a shopfront of a more appropriate design, and therefore these public and other benefits as a whole carry no more than limited weight in favour of the appeal scheme.
13. I note the comments made by the appellant in respect of the advice leading up to the works and subsequent appeal, and it is clear that they acted in good

faith. I also note that no objections were received from nearby occupiers or the Parish Council. However, these matters do not lead me to a different conclusion in respect of the harm arising from the proposal.

14. For the reasons stated, I conclude that the replacement of the previous shopfront with the appeal proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. Whilst the harm to the CA would be less than substantial, this does not diminish the great weight I give to that harm and the conservation of the CA as a designated heritage asset. The limited public and other benefits arising from the appeal proposal would not outweigh the identified harm to the CA. The Council has not referred to policies of the development plan in its reason for refusal, but the proposal would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of conserving and enhancing the historic environment.
15. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Cross

INSPECTOR