



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 September 2022

by Laura Cuthbert BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19 October 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/22/3295157

16 Market Place, Wokingham RG40 1AL

- 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 Daniel Sear of Sears Property against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 213397, dated 26 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 11 January 2022.
 - The development is glass shopfront and door, bringing the door forward in line with the shopfront, introducing stall riser.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for glass shopfront and door, bringing the door forward in line with the shopfront, introducing stall riser at 16 Market Place, Wokingham RG40 1AL in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 213397, dated 26 November 2021, and the plans submitted with it: Unnumbered Site Location Plan - dated 14.07.21, Unnumbered Block Plan - dated 14.07.21 and Unnumbered Proposed Exterior Elevation - dated 28.09.21, and subject to the following condition:
 - 1) The hereby approved stall riser measuring 350mm high as set out on the approved drawing, Unnumbered Proposed Exterior Elevation - dated 28.09.21, shall be installed within 6 months of the date of this decision.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the heading above has been taken from the application form. The Council's decision notice also referred to the associated advertisement (a fascia sign and projecting sign) however this was subject to a separate advertisement application, and consequently a separate appeal¹. I have not considered them as part of this appeal.
3. At the time of my site visit, I saw that the changes to the shopfront have been substantially completed, apart from the installation of the new stall riser. I also note that the application has been submitted retrospectively. I have dealt with the appeal on that basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area.

¹ APP/X0360/Z/22/3290628

Reasons

5. 16 Market Place is a mid-terraced, brick built three storey building situated within the Market Place in Wokingham town centre. The shopfront alterations relate to the ground floor of the building.
6. The Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area (CA) covers a number of the key streets within the town centre, including Peach Street, Broad Street, Denmark Street and the Market Place. It is clear from the layout of the Market Place, with the Town Hall at the centre and the aforementioned streets leading from it, that this is the core of the town centre. Whilst this clearly has historic implications, with a number of historic buildings visible, there is also evidence of more modern buildings and alterations in the CA.
7. The shopfronts in both the immediate area and the wider CA are of a mixture of materials, mostly either timber or aluminium. Notably, there is an inconsistency in the depth and materials of the stall risers of the shopfronts, with brick, timber and aluminium stall risers all present within the CA. There is also a mixture of shopfronts, with or without recessed doorways. It is common for the windows of the upper floors to be of a more traditional form and materials, with the ground floor commercial units being more varied and modern in their fenestration detail and materials. This mixture of old and new contributes positively towards the character and appearance, and thus the significance, of the CA.
8. Due to the existing variety of the shopfronts within the CA identified above, the materials, scale and design of the shopfront alterations are all appropriate to the character and appearance of No 16 and the wider CA. The proportion of the two shopfront windows are similar to those of the previous shopfront windows. Whilst the aluminium shopfront has replaced the timber shopfront, the use of aluminium on the ground floor shopfront is not incongruous. The removal of the recessed doorway, and the door now being in line with the shopfront, does not stand out as being unduly out of character in the CA.
9. Whilst it would be shallower than some of the more traditional stall risers which remain in the CA, the depth of the proposed 350mm stall riser would be similar to other more modern stall risers that exist in the CA. The use of aluminium for the stall riser, finished in a matt grey colour, would be appropriate to the design and character of the new shopfront. It would tie in with the remainder of the shopfront alterations, as well as the wider CA.
10. In view of the above, I conclude that the development would preserve the character and appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre CA and would avoid harm to its significance. The development would comply with Policies CP3 and CP14 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (adopted 2010) which supports development which is of a high-quality design, with appropriate materials, and which has no detrimental impact upon important heritage features or interest, retaining the historic market town character of Wokingham. It would also be in accordance with Policy TB24 of the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) (adopted 2014) which requires work affecting heritage assets to demonstrate that the proposals would at least conserve the important character and special architectural or historic interest of the CA.

11. It would also be in accordance with guidance set out in the Wokingham Borough Council Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2012), which states that proposals should respond positively to the design of the building as a whole and that materials should be compatible with the character of the building and the area. The development would accord with paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) which states that great weight should be afforded to the conservation of designated heritage assets.
12. The reason for refusal also refers to Policy TB19 of the MDD. However, this is specifically related to outdoor advertising which as noted above, was subject to a separate advertisement application, and a separate appeal. Therefore, it would not be relevant to the development before me.

Other Matters

13. The appeal site is situated in between two listed buildings, 15 Market Place and 17 Market Place. Whilst the listed buildings are not mentioned in the refusal reason, they are briefly mentioned in the summary of the Delegated Officer Report. As required by section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, I have had special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of these listed buildings.
14. Their special interest and significance derives mostly from their historic built form, including their roofing materials, the fenestration details of their upper floors and the retention of a corbelled ridge chimney (No 15). Their setting derives from the commercial town centre surroundings within which they sit, which includes the variety of existing shopfronts identified above. Notably, both relevant listing descriptions confirm that the shopfronts are of 20th Century and are of 'no special interest'. Therefore, as I have found that the shopfront alterations are acceptable, subject to a condition ensuring the new stall riser is installed, they would have a neutral impact on the setting in which the listed buildings are appreciated and therefore their significance.

Conditions

15. The Council have not requested that any planning conditions be imposed. The standard time limit condition is not required as the development permitted has already been substantially implemented. However, Condition 1 is imposed to ensure that the proposed stall riser is implemented so as to make the development acceptable in planning terms and to preserve the character and appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre CA. There is a strict timetable for compliance because permission is being granted, in part, retrospectively.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above I conclude that the development would accord with the development plan as a whole and therefore the appeal should be allowed.

Laura Cuthbert

INSPECTOR