



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 February 2023

by James Blackwell LLB (Hons) PGDip

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/22/3308963

Flats 1–4, 51 and 53 Alexandra Road, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 7RQ

- 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 Glynn Evans against the decision of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01549/RET, dated 26 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 25 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is retrospective application to replace the windows in a Conservation Area in white UPVC to match the originals in size, style, mouldings etc.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the development preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the Brookvale West Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is an end of terrace property situated on the corner of Alexandra Road and George Street, and sits within the Brookvale West Conservation Area (CA). Whilst the property is not listed, it is identified as a "Building of Group Value" on the Conservation Area Appraisal Map.
4. An Article 4(2) Direction was put in place at the time that the CA was first designated in 1999, which restricts a number of permitted development rights in the area. As set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal, part of the justification for the Article 4(2) Direction states "joinery is of particular importance in the Conservation Area. It was used in various forms to distinguish houses of otherwise similar design". This highlights the importance of traditional timber fenestration to the significance of the CA, which is still readily apparent on many properties in the area.
5. The original timber windows on the appeal property have been replaced with white UPVC windows. Visually, these changes lead to notable differences in the profile and dimensions of the window frames, including significant increases to the glazing bars. The new frames also introduce a shiny finish, in comparison to the matt finish of the original painted timber. These changes undermine the traditional timber appearance of the fenestration, which partly characterises the CA. Indeed, the Council's Design and Sustainability SPD¹ (Design SPD)

¹ Design and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document 2008, The Historic Environment: Conservation Areas

highlights that “architectural detailing is often overlooked, and the appearance of an area can be greatly affected by the gradual loss of defining features such as timber sash or casement windows”.

6. I note numerous properties within the wider CA now incorporate UPVC windows. In turn, UPVC has, to a degree, become characteristic of the CA. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of the buildings within the CA do still retain original timber fenestration. This includes the property on the opposite corner junction of Alexandra Road and George Street. Given the prominence of these two corner plots, the traditional joinery detailing on this pair of properties is particularly important to the CA’s character, and in turn, the harm attributed to any further erosion of such joinery features is more acute in this location.
7. I acknowledge the appellant’s contention that the UPVC windows are essential for thermal efficiency, compliance with Building Regulations and associated insurance purposes. However, limited technical evidence has been submitted to corroborate these assertions. On the available evidence, I am therefore not persuaded that these same objectives could not be achieved through repair or upgrade, which may enable a more traditional appearance to be retained. Indeed, Historic England’s Guidance² states that “for most buildings in conservation areas, surviving historic fenestration is an irreplaceable resource which should be conserved and repaired wherever possible”.
8. For these reasons, I consider that the development would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, and thus its significance. Whilst I consider this harm would be less than substantial as it would only affect a small part of the CA, as per the National Planning Policy Framework (2021), great weight must be attributed to any harm to a heritage asset (in this case the CA), irrespective of whether such harm is “less than substantial” or otherwise.
9. Set against this harm, the proposal would improve the property’s thermal and energy efficiency. However, as mentioned, it has not been demonstrated that such improvements necessitate the current UPVC design. In turn, I only attach modest weight to these benefits, which would not be sufficient to outweigh the harm to the CA.
10. The development therefore conflicts with Policy EM11 of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011 – 2029), which seeks to preserve or enhance the quality of the borough’s heritage assets, in a manner appropriate to their significance. The development also conflicts with the heritage conservation objectives of the Design SPD and the Heritage Supplementary Planning Document (2019).

Other Matters

11. Whilst I note there may be examples where the Council has approved UPVC windows within the CA, I do not have sufficient details of these approvals before me, so I cannot properly draw any direct comparisons. Indeed, it may be that more robust evidence was presented in these cases, to demonstrate need for the changes. In any case, each case must be considered on its own merits, and the prominent corner location of the appeal property means any associated harm is more readily experienced in this instance.

² Historic England: Traditional Windows, Their Care, Repair and Upgrading (2015)

Conclusion

12. The development conflicts with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the provisions of the Framework, which outweigh this finding. Therefore, for the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

James Blackwell

INSPECTOR