



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 March 2023

by Alison Partington BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 April 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/M2270/D/22/3290916

4 Howes Cottages, Talbot Road, Hawkhurst, Cranbrook, TN18 4LX

- 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 Josh Mullett against the decision of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 21/03762/FULL, dated 9 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 12 January 2022.
 - The development proposed is the replacement of the existing front door and side window to front elevation ground floor.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed

Main Issue

2. The main issue in the appeal is whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Hawkhurst – The Moor Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is located in Hawkhurst – The Moor Conservation Area. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention to be had to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area.
4. Hawkhurst – The Moor Conservation Area covers the historic core of the village centred around the village green, the public house and the church. The area contains buildings that reflect the development of the village over time and so vary in age, type, scale and design. Nonetheless, the widespread use of traditional building materials, including timber weatherboarding, red brick and clay tiles gives a strong sense of unity to this part of the village, and is a key characteristic of the conservation area along with the open spaces and significant tree cover.
5. The area around the appeal site consists largely of 2 storey residential properties with white weatherboarding and white woodwork. The Hawkhurst Conservation Areas Appraisal (September 1999) identifies that Nos 1-5 Howes Cottages make a prominent statement on Talbot Road by virtue of their white painted timber cladding, painted brickwork and white picket fence surrounding tiny front gardens. As such, they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

6. I observed that although the buildings in the conservation area exhibited a range of window styles there was a high degree of consistency in the use of timber frames. The use of modern materials for windows and doors was rare and where found detracted from the character and appearance of the conservation area.
7. It is not disputed that the current front door and adjacent window are not historic and are not of any particular architectural interest, nor that the styles of the windows and doors on Nos 1-5 vary, and are not always sympathetic to the character of the conservation area. Nonetheless, the current door and window are timber and so are consistent with this strong characteristic feature of the conservation area.
8. It is proposed to replace the door and window with a composite door and a uPVC window. The door would retain a glazing panel within it and leaded casement style window to match the existing design. It is proposed to use a "Residence 9" conservation window which is a specialist type of window which much more accurately reflects the proportions and design of traditional timber windows.
9. In some conservation areas, the use of these conservation style windows can be acceptable, and this is reflected in the appeal decision¹ referred to by the appellant. However, in this case, the use of traditional building materials including the use of timber windows and doors is one of the defining features of the conservation area. As such, the use of a composite door and a uPVC window, however well designed, would be inappropriate as it would not respect, and would be detrimental to, the character and appearance of the conservation area.
10. Therefore, I consider that the proposal would fail to preserve, and would unacceptably harm, the character and appearance of Hawkhurst – The Moor Conservation Area. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with Policy 4 of the *Tunbridge Wells Borough Core Strategy (adopted June 2010)*, Policy EN5 of the *Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (adopted March 2006)* and Policy HD4 of the *Hawkhurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2033 (as modified) (made March 2018)* which seek to ensure that heritage assets are conserved and enhanced, and that developments use materials that preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, and are informed by the traditional form, layout, character and style of the Parish's vernacular architecture.
11. Having regard to paragraph 202 of the *National Planning Policy Framework*, the harm caused to the conservation area would be less than substantial, and so needs to be weighed against the public benefits.
12. The appellant has indicated that the new window and door would help improve the energy efficiency of the house. However, this is a private rather than a public benefit. Moreover, I am not persuaded that this is the only way more energy efficient openings can be provided for the house. As such, there are no public benefits which outweigh the harm the proposal would cause to the conservation area.
13. It has been highlighted that the upper floor windows on the property are already uPVC, although the Council have stated that they do not benefit from

¹ Appeal reference APP/D1590/D/17/3192210

planning permission. As highlighted above, these and other non-timber windows and doors are very much in the minority in the conservation area. The few that do exist, in my opinion, confirm that the use of non-traditional materials is detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area. As a result, they do not set a precedent that should be followed.

Other Matters

14. The appeal site is located within High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) where the *National Planning Policy Framework* indicates great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty. The small scale nature of this development, which would not alter the volume or footprint of the building, would ensure that the proposal would not have any detrimental impact on the AONB.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons set out above, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

Alison Partington

INSPECTOR