



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 September 2023

by J Reid BA(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D3830/D/23/3321801

The Old Post Office, The Street, Bolney, West Sussex RH17 5PE

- 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 Mark Dawson against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
 - The application Ref DM/22/3404, dated 25 October 2022, was refused by notice dated 30 March 2023.
 - The development proposed is replacement of former shopfront with bay window, new off-street parking arrangement, new rear porch and conversion of attic space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matter and main issue

2. The description of the development proposed has been taken from the application form. However, amended plans submitted during the application process show that parts of the shopfront would be retained.
3. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Bolney Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is situated on the roughly east side of The Street within the historic core of the village of Bolney. The Street slopes down with the lie of the land from roughly north to south along or near the valley bottom, and the site slopes steeply down from its roughly east back to its frontage in The Street.
5. The Conservation Area is mainly characterised by its historic settlement pattern and relationship with the local landform, and 2 main groups of historic buildings of differing ages and styles. The appeal building is a dwelling within the more enclosed south part of the Conservation Area. The back of the site adjoins the churchyard of the Norman and later parish church of St Mary Magdalene (the church), which is listed in Grade I. The roughly C17 or earlier timber framed Walnut and Well Cottage, which is listed in Grade II, lies nearby to roughly south, on the other side of The Street. These and other listed and historic buildings within the Conservation Area contribute positively to its character and appearance. The range of mostly historic and traditional building forms and features, and use of local materials, are important to the appearance of the Conservation Area, and to its significance as a historic rural settlement.
6. The building includes a broadly late C19 to early C20 range set back a little from and roughly parallel to The Street, and an attached likely C17 or earlier

partly timber framed building, which includes a south range and north lean to almost at right angles to the front range. The ground floor in the front range is related to the street, but the lower floor of the back range, and the side garden to roughly south of the dwelling, are about half a storey above it. So, the side garden is reached by steps and retained by a stone faced wall by the road.

7. The front range includes the wide nearly storey height former post office shopfront, with its historic fascia, corbels, and generously glazed joinery, prominently sited in its wide front gabled projection, and the street entrance to the dwelling set back on one side. So, the shopfront is an integral part of the historic architecture of the front range. The change of use from post office on part of the ground floor to residential was permitted in around 2009. Even so, from the historic maps, a post office had been at the site since roughly 1879, so the building included that historically important local role for many years. The shopfront is a reminder of that role. Due to its historic character, former role, and siting close to other socially important buildings, including the church, school and public house, the historic and communal values of the building are important to the significance of the Conservation Area.
8. Due to the likely age of the earlier partly timber framed back range, and the architectural character and communal value of its front range, the building makes a significant positive contribution to the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area. The Council considers the building to be a non-designated heritage asset for similar reasons. As the building has been identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest, I see no reason to disagree.
9. Whilst the shopfront's fascia and corbels would remain, the part glazed panel in its door opening would be replaced with a solid door, the roughly stall riser height plinth would be replaced by taller walls with shallower glazing above, and the side lights in the door recess would be replaced with solid panels. Because these alterations would unacceptably erode the historic character and functional appearance of the shopfront, the significance of the building as a former post office would be harmfully diminished, to the detriment of the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area. As Redbrae and Southdown House are much further north, where the lower density character prevails, they provide little support for these harmful alterations.
10. The shopfront alterations aim to improve privacy and thermal performance in that part of the building. However, pedestrians would be able to see into that part of the dwelling, almost no details of likely energy savings have been put to me, and there is little evidence that other means of achieving those aims, such as internal panels, or secondary glazing, have been considered.
11. The steps up to the side garden from The Street, the nearby part of the retaining wall by the road, and almost all of the side garden, would make way for a wide ramped drive up to a hard surfaced parking area, which would be about as wide as the side garden, and which would extend into the back garden beyond the back of the dwelling. The character of that stone faced retaining wall differs from those in front of Bank and Church Steps Cottages and Forge Cottage, and the side garden is largely screened by the fence. However, the steps, wall, side garden, and sense of enclosure in The Street close by, are important to the character in this part of the Conservation Area, because they enable the underlying topography to be appreciated. The loss of enclosure in

The Street, the total or partial loss of these features, and the parking area seen beyond the access, would damage the local character, and the sense of place.

12. As there would be no restriction on vehicles parking in the road outside the site, the public benefit of the off-street parking would be small. The parking area would be partly screened from The Street by the proposed hedge of 'panel trees' and planting initially. However, even if the trees' trunk diameters were to exceed 75 mm, they would not be likely to meet the criteria for statutory protection. So, if those trees were to fail, their replacement could not reasonably be controlled by condition for more than a few years, so their screening effect could not be relied upon to endure in the long term. Moreover, that hedge would not overcome the damaging impacts of the wider gap for the access on the street scene, and on the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area. Whilst part of the side garden cannot be seen from The Street, it can be seen by the occupiers and their visitors, and, in any event, the exercise of my statutory duty in respect of the Conservation Area is not dependent on the ability of the public to see all of the heritage asset.
13. Due to its siting, the proposal would be within the wider settings of the church and Walnut and Well Cottage. As their settings would be expected to evolve over time, and due to the proposal's scale and relationships with those listed buildings, including its distance from them, their settings would be preserved.
14. However, in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area. All of the public benefits, including local jobs and support for local suppliers during construction, and possible on-site electric vehicle charging provision, would not outweigh the harm that the proposal would cause to the significance of the Conservation Area as a whole. Moreover, insufficient clear and convincing justification has been put to me to explain why the proposal would be necessary to conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the heritage asset.
15. Therefore, I consider that the proposed development would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. It would be contrary to Policy DP26 of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (LP) and Policy BOLD1 of the Bolney Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2031 which seek high quality design and respect for context, LP Policy DP34 which aims to conserve heritage assets, LP Policy DP35 which reflects the thrust of my statutory duty in respect of conservation areas, and the Framework which aims to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

Conclusion

16. I have found that the proposed development would be contrary to the Development Plan when taken as a whole. The other considerations in this case, including the Framework, do not outweigh that conflict.
17. For the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Reid

INSPECTOR