



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 31 January 2024

by **S M Holden BSc (Hons) MSc CEng MICE CTPP FCIHT MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 February 2024

Appeal A Ref: APP/U1430/W/23/3324343

The George in Rye Hotel, 98 High Street, Rye, East Sussex, TN31 7JT

- 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 The George on High Ltd against the decision of Rother District Council.
 - The application Ref RR/2022/386/P, dated 15 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 19 December 2022.
 - The development proposed is described as: Retention of external colour scheme to front and side elevations (Retrospective).
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Appeal B Ref: APP/U1430/Y/23/3324344

The George in Rye Hotel, 98 High Street, Rye, East Sussex, TN31 7JT

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by The George on High Ltd against the decision of Rother District Council.
 - The application Ref RR/2022/387/L, dated 15 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 19 December 2022.
 - The works proposed are described as: Retention of external colour scheme to front and side elevations. (Retrospective).
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Decisions

1. **Appeal A** is allowed and planning permission is granted for the external colour scheme to front and side elevations (Retrospective) at The George in Rye Hotel, 98 High Street, Rye, TN31 7JT in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref RR/2022/386/P, dated 15 February 2022, and the following approved plans:

Site Location Plan Dwg No: 00620-20210PL-520/1,
External Paint Colours High Street: Elevations Dwg: P_01 Rev 2
External Paint Colours Lion Street: Elevations Dwg: P_02 Rev 2.

2. **Appeal B** is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the external colour scheme to front and side elevations. (Retrospective) at The George in Rye Hotel, 98 High Street, Rye, TN31 7JT in accordance with the terms of the application Ref RR/2022/387 dated 15 February 2022 and the following approved plans:

Site Location Plan Dwg No: 00620-20210PL-520/1,
External Paint Colours High Street: Elevations Dwg: P_01 Rev 2
External Paint Colours Lion Street: Elevations Dwg: P_02 Rev 2.

Applications for costs

3. Applications for costs have been made by The George on High Street Ltd against the decision of Rother District Council. These applications are the subject of separate decisions.

Preliminary Matters

4. The external painting of the building has already taken place and I was able to see and assess its effects on my site visit. However, 'retention' is not the appropriate term to adopt in the description of the development and works which have been applied for, having regard to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, or the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. I have therefore determined the appeals on the basis that retrospective permission is sought and have reflected this in the formal decisions.
5. The two appeals concern the same scheme under different, complimentary legislation. I have dealt with them together in my reasoning.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is whether the proposed works and development preserve The George in Rye Hotel, a Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, and whether the scheme would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Rye Conservation Area (RCA).

Reasons

Significance

7. The George Inn is an important and prominent building on the corner of High Street and Lion Street in Rye, one of England's most historic towns. It is an amalgamation of several original buildings, dating from the 15th to early 19th centuries, which have come together to form the hotel. It now comprises Nos 96, 97 and 98 High Street and Nos 12-14 Lion Street. The Lion Street frontage consists of two, two-storey, timber framed cottages, the southern cottage dates from 15th century and the northern one from about 1600. The upper storey is tile hung and has 19th century sash windows, whilst the lower storey is underbuilt with brick, now stuccoed, with bay windows, some with their original glazing bars.
8. The process of change, demolition, reconstruction, and amalgamation initially created an inn of hotchpotch appearance. However, the original gable ended buildings fronting the High Street were replaced with a hipped roof to transform the 16th century ranges into what appeared to be a single Georgian building. The main hotel block (No 98) is three storeys plus an attic. It has been underbuilt and has an 18th century façade which conceals the timber framed elements of the building to the rear. This presents a pleasing symmetry to the High Street frontage with sash windows on either side of a porch which has Doric columns. There is an iron railing above the porch in front of a pedimented window. This frontage façade is covered with mathematical tiles which have been heavily painted over the centuries.

9. The western half of No 98, the former Assembly Rooms, was built in 1818. At first floor level there are two, large, curved oriel bow windows. Beneath the western of the two is the entrance to the Stable Yard. This has been converted and enclosed by windows which are set back, but the full height external doors have been retained. The addition of a mansard roof makes this the tallest building of the group. Further west Nos 96 and 97 are three storeys, with more modest proportions and have commercial frontages more typical of the 19th and early 20th centuries. They read as retail units with living accommodation above. No 97 has bay windows on both first and second floors. No 96 has a bay at first floor and a sash window serving the second floor.
10. In 2019 The George suffered a catastrophic fire resulting in considerable loss of original historic fabric, especially at roof level and serious damage to other parts of the building. As part of its restoration every aspect of the building has been studied in detail. The supporting information to support the work restoring it fills several volumes and serves to emphasise the complexity of the building and the extraordinary way that it has been modified and adapted over the centuries.
11. During the course of the restoration works a paint analysis was undertaken. The study revealed that The George had been painted more than 53 times since the 18th century, namely approximately every 5-6 years. This demonstrated that a range of colours including cream, stone-coloured, light brown, and pinkish tones had all been applied to the walls over several centuries. Darker colours including dark brown, dark green and black had been used on windows, doors, the plinth and porch. Immediately prior to the fire the plinth, doors and frames were dark bluish grey/green, windows were an off-white/cream, and the upper floors were painted in tones of light green.
12. Taking all the above into consideration, the significance of The George is derived from its long history starting in medieval times and its evolution and adaptation over time as a hotel. The importance of the George as a hostelry led to significant investment in the building, particularly in the 18th century to update its appearance, concealing its earlier origins with the Georgian façade. The addition of the Assembly Rooms and ballroom in the early 19th century further enhanced its status in the street. The building's significance also comes from its wealth of historic fabric and features both internally and externally. These can be appreciated by current users and have enabled experts to interpret how the building has been modified over time. In this context the colour of the paintwork on the external elevations, which has also varied over time, makes a modest contribution to its overall significance.
13. The George is located on the south side of the High Street at the heart of the Rye Conservation Area (RCA). The town and RCA derive its significance from its origins as one of the ancient citadel towns that were full members of the Confederation of Cinque Ports. Its unique geographic position, on top of a rocky sandstone outcrop with good access to the sea, led to its development as a compact and cohesive fortified settlement which now overlooks the flat level marshland surroundings. Its distinctive form and position, together with its wealth of historic buildings, make it both picturesque and unique. The Citadel is medieval in origin and there are many surviving timber-framed and some stone buildings. Georgian and Victorian re-facing and gentrification reflected the wealth, status and fashions of the time. Consequently, the buildings and streets display considerable variety in their character and appearance.

14. Uniformity is not a characteristic of the RCA, with every building displaying its individuality through subtle variations in design details in their windows, doors, and external materials. Along the High Street frontages include brickwork (terracotta and lighter colours), exposed timbers, tile hanging and mathematical tiles (some of which are painted, others not) and paint colours ranging from creams, pale greens, greys to richer terracotta. Together these give the street a visually appealing variety. Features which provide a strong sense of cohesion include the modest variation in building heights, typically 2 and 3 storey, the presence of dormer windows (which differ in shape and style) and the consistency of roof tiles. The introduction of modern shop fronts has harmed the appearance of some buildings, but others have retained their older ones with a delightful variety of fenestration patterns.
15. In this context the setting of The George is quite contained. It is an integral element of a tightly packed and varied street scene along a continuous building line. Looking in an easterly direction along the High Street it is not particularly prominent, even though it is taller than the adjoining buildings. Viewing from the west it is slightly more conspicuous, due to its location on the corner with Lion Street. Of much greater visual dominance is the building opposite on the north side of the High Street, a Grade I listed building dating from 1636. Its height, bulk and darker brickwork stands out and contrasts with the rendered, painted or tile hung elevations around it. It is therefore only when in the immediate vicinity of The George that the width and height of its front elevation can be fully appreciated.

Assessment

16. The colours now applied to the High Street and Lion Street frontages have undoubtedly changed the appearance of the building. However, the paint analysis showed that Georgian paint colours varied far more than is often realised and were not only creams and off-whites. The colour palette grew stronger over time. Whereas pale greens and blues were initially the default colours, by the end of the 18th century the colour choice extended to earthy tones of deep reds, reddish browns, terracotta, salmon, deep grey/green or brown/green in addition to off-white and cream. Darker colours were particularly used on doors and windows.
17. The colour scheme now applied has been based on evidence of different tones used over the years, although paint analysis did not demonstrate categorically that they are identical to colours used in the past. However, it illustrated how different owners made use of the paint technology available at the time, reflected the fashions of the period and put their individual stamps on the building. There is no evidence to suggest that former owners sought to retain the use of a consistent colour over an extensive period. It therefore does not follow that retaining the same colour on every successive painting is necessary to preserve the building's significance.
18. The Council contends that the use of the darker shades on a façade as large as that of The George does not sit comfortably with the light and elegant character of the wider conservation area. However, very few other buildings appear to be uniformly white or cream in colour. Moreover, the previously uniform, nondescript colours on walls and windows did not assist passers-by to appreciate the distinction between the two principal buildings or the classical proportions and details of their fenestration arrangements.

19. It also could be said that the terracotta palette blurs the distinction between the colours of the roof and walls. Whilst this might appear to be the case from the submitted plans, from the street the paintwork appears somewhat lighter whereas weathering of the tiles has resulted in darker tones. The difference between the colours and the materials has therefore been retained.
20. I agree that an expanse of stronger colour might be overwhelming if The George was located where its front elevation was prominent in long views from the surrounding area. However, this is not the case as the only place where its entire width can be seen is from the opposite side of the road and for short length of the High Street. In my view the colours used are neither garish nor dominant but resonate with other materials that are found on nearby buildings and throughout the RCA. Although darker coloured buildings tend to be due to the natural reds of brick and tile hanging, there are instances of deep colours of paint. One example is No 104, which also occupies a prominent corner position, and is painted in a much brighter red.
21. The use of two different terracotta shades helps to break up the considerable width of the High Street frontage and increases the legibility of the two buildings that comprise No 98. The use of a shade of mushroom on No 97, provides a greater contrast, breaks up the width of the group and is also a less intense colour. To my mind this enables the collection of buildings which have been amalgamated to form The George to retain a sense of individuality whilst also appearing cohesive. I am therefore satisfied that the colour scheme has not resulted in the building appearing overwhelming, or that it has removed the sense of adhoc, piecemeal development that contributes to the overall character of the town.
22. Furthermore, the current paint palette has not resulted in the loss of any historic fabric. On-going maintenance will be required, so repainting is highly likely to be necessary with each successive decade that passes. It is a modest change compared with previous alterations to the building and would not prevent a return to lighter colours in the future.
23. Taking all these factors into consideration, I conclude that the colour scheme has not caused material harm to the significance of The George in Rye Hotel, a Grade II listed building. In avoiding such harm, the scheme has preserved its special architectural and historic interest, in accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. I am also satisfied that there would not be any conflict with paragraph 205 of the Framework 2023, which states that great weight should be given to conserving a designated heritage asset's significance.
24. I also conclude that the colour scheme has not resulted in harm to the character or appearance of the RCA, which has been preserved. I therefore find no conflict with Policies OSS4, EN2, RY1 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy 2014. These policies collectively seek to protect the character and historic environment of Rye and ensure clear legibility of locally distinctive vernacular buildings including their fabric and materials. The scheme also complies with Policies D1 and E3 of the Rye Neighbourhood Development Plan which requires development to have regard to the characteristics set out in the Rye Conservation Area Appraisal and the restricted palette of materials which contribute to its character and appearance.

Conditions

25. As the works have already been implemented, no conditions are necessary. However, for the sake of clarity my formal decisions refer to the painting scheme shown on the drawings submitted with the applications.

Conclusion

26. I conclude that the scheme is acceptable and that the appeals should be allowed.

S M Holden

INSPECTOR