



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 April 2024

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29th April 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/H4315/D/24/3336323

5 Victoria Terrace, Rainhill, St Helens L35 0LH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Samantha Richardson against the decision of St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref P/2023/0635/HHFP, dated 8 November 2023, was refused by notice dated 23 December 2023.
 - The development proposed is external wall insulation to be installed to the front and rear of the property.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the proposal is in a conservation area, I have had special regard to section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 20 December 2023 and it is a material consideration in the determination of the appeal. As the Council's officer report refers to policies in the revised Framework, I am satisfied that the interests of neither party would be prejudiced by my taking the revisions into account.
4. The planning application form indicates the development was completed in August 2023. However, while I observed the external rendered insulation at the time of my visit, the development that has been implemented does not match the proposal illustrated on the plans. Therefore, I have determined the appeal on the basis of the plans that were considered by the Council.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, with particular regard to the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Rainhill Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

6. The CA covers the historic core of the settlement, this being a mixed area that includes the railway station and associated urban commercial and residential development, together with the more open and verdant townscape along the A57. In this regard, Victoria Terrace comprises densely developed workers' dwellings, dating from the late 19th or early 20th century, arranged on the south side of the street with the brick boundary wall of Victoria Works to the north.

The residential terraces have regular facades with repeating architectural details and traditional materials. Given the above, I find the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the uniformity of the historic terraces.

7. In this regard, No 5 is a modest mid-terrace property forming part of a coherent group of substantially similar properties finished in brick, with painted cill bands, ground floor bay windows and stone lintels to window and door openings. However, No 5 has previously been altered, including externally rendered, resulting in the loss of some architectural details such as lintels and disrupting the uniformity of the terrace.
8. As noted, the appeal scheme has been implemented insofar as the external wall insulation (EWI) has been attached to the front and rear elevations of No 5. The proposal would additionally include a cill band formed from 30mm EPS boards and painted black to match the cill band covered by the EWI.
9. The appellant considers that the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of No 5 or the area because the property was previously finished in painted render. However, the EWI differs from the former rendered finish in a number of ways. It protrudes forward from the front elevation of the property, resulting in a noticeable step in the front building line of the terrace. As a result of the increased depth of the front elevation, the eaves line and gutter also step forward from the neighbouring eaves and gutters. The increased depth of the EWI results in an awkward and unsympathetic relationship with the plinth and the ground floor bay window, including due to the height and depth of the conspicuous gap between the EWI boards and the pitched roof of the bay. Moreover, the sharp corners and uniform, flat surface of the EWI create a bland, hard and overtly contemporary frontage.
10. Notwithstanding that the EWI would be painted white as was the former rendered finish, the proposal would be prominent and visually obtrusive and it would erode the historic terrace. The former render does not provide a justification for the scheme. The proposed cill band would be at the height of, but it would be markedly stepped forward from, the continuous cill band that spans the terrace. It would serve to emphasize the discordant depth of the front elevation and it would not mitigate the adverse visual impact of the EWI.
11. While the EWI will also result in a step in the rear elevation between No 5 and its neighbours, the rear of the terrace does not appear to be of particular architectural merit nor is the rear of No 5 prominent in the townscape. However, the proposal as it affects the front elevation would be conspicuous and discordant and poorly related to the surrounding built environment. It would erode the strong sense of place and local distinctiveness of the historic terrace and the wider street scene. Consequently, it would harm the character and appearance of the CA and it would fail to preserve its significance.
12. Paragraph 205 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 206 states that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of the asset and that any harm should have a clear and convincing justification. Given the scale of the proposal, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.

13. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, paragraph 208 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The insulation would improve the energy efficiency of the property and contribute to climate change mitigation. This would be a moderate private benefit but only a limited public benefit, taking into account the scale of the proposal. There would be limited economic benefits during the works. The appellant suggests the proposal would mitigate noise pollution, reduce the emission of pollutants such as carbon dioxide, sulfur oxide and nitrogen oxide, and extend the lifespan of the building. However, there is little evidence to substantiate that there would be public benefits in these regards.
14. The Framework advises that significant weight should be attached to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to domestic buildings. However, where proposals affect conservation areas, the policies that protect heritage assets continue to apply. The Framework advises that harm to designated heritage assets should be given great weight. Consequently, the limited benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified.
15. Given the above, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would not conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Rainhill CA. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 205 of the Framework and conflict with policies LPD04 and LPC11 of the St Helens Borough Local Plan Adopted July 2022 that seek, among other things, to ensure that proposals respect or enhance the appearance and character of dwellings and the area, avoiding harm to heritage assets unless public benefits outweigh the harm. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan.

Other Matters

16. The appellant is concerned about potential structural damage and the need for extensive repairs if the boards and wall fixings are removed. However, there is little evidence that the removal of the EWI would compromise the building and repair costs are not a matter that weigh in favour of the scheme.
17. The appellant's desire to improve energy efficiency and reduce energy bills is understandable. However, it has not been demonstrated that alternative solutions, with similar benefits but without the harm that I have found, have been explored and reasonably discounted. In this regard, I am aware that other property owners in the area have installed internal property insulation.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the proposal would conflict with the development plan and there are no material considerations that would outweigh that conflict.
19. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR