

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 May 2024

by C Billings BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th July 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/W/23/333392

54 Bell Street, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire HP27 0AD

- 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 Mrs Rita List of W&G Properties Ltd against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/05683/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the erection of attached timber framed building within rear grassed area to be used as ancillary premises in connection with beauty salon at 54 Bell Street, resubmission of 18/05669/FUL.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and surrounding area, including whether the proposal would protect or enhance the character or appearance of the Princes Risborough Conservation Area and the setting of the host building as a non-designated heritage asset.

Reasons

3. As the site lies within the Princes Risborough Conservation Area (CA) and the host building, 54 Bell Street (No 54) is a non-designated heritage asset, I am mindful of my statutory duty to have special regard to section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) to consider the significance of these heritage assets in reaching my decision.
4. The CA comprises the retail centre of Princes Risborough, a traditional small market town of medieval origin. The CA focuses on the High Street with radiating streets at either end, which include Bell Street. The historic texture and structure of the CA remains relatively intact. There are a wealth of listed buildings and other significant, non-designated buildings within the CA. In the part of the CA which includes Bell Street, the buildings are predominately 2-storey set within a continuous dense form, set back of the pavement with long burgage plots. Therefore, the overall significance of the CA derives from its historic retail use, traditional medieval town layout, dense building form set back of footways, long burgage plots, and also the quality of its intact building architecture.
5. The appeal property is an early 19th century brick and flint cottage set within a row of three, which together offer a pleasant traditional feel, important to the

town's character. Its attractive form, layout, design, and traditional rural, quaint character are contributing factors to its significance as a non-designated heritage asset and, for the same reasons it makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA.

6. The proposed building would be located within the rear grassed area of the plot, behind and attached to two existing timber storage outbuildings associated with the beauty salon at No 54. While the host property and the two attached cottages historically had a long shared burgage plot at the rear, the plots have since been truncated and the appeal site now encompasses the whole area in association with No 54 extending across the rear of all three cottages. However, despite the existence of the outbuildings, due to their height and scale and the lawn area, the plot maintains a spacious feel to it.
7. The Character Survey for the CA recognises the importance of existing burgage plots and advises that development that threatens or destroys surviving plots will be resisted. The existing single storey outbuildings, while of moderate size, are detached from each other and orientated lengthways along the plot, following the traditional burgage plot form and layout. Even though the proposed building would be of similar size and design to these, it would be attached at right angles to the ends of both resulting in a 'U' shaped arrangement. As such the proposal would not follow the traditional burgage plot form, typical within the CA.
8. The resultant combined buildings would create an overly bulky structure, having an overall floor area significantly exceeding that of the host property and covering an area similar to that of the total ground floor area of all three non-designated cottage properties. Thereby, the proposal would not appear subordinate to, nor maintain the character and setting of the host property.
9. While I appreciate that a previous Inspector¹ noted the host property and CA would not be harmed by additional development of a high quality, they found that the previous proposal was of unacceptable functional design, harmful to the CA and host property. They found it would not respect the general evolution of burgage plots, where the roof runs perpendicular to the main ridgeline and steps down and away from the host property. I find that the layout and form of the proposal similarly would not respect the general evolution of the burgage plots, due to its non-perpendicular roof design and position and the combined bulk of the proposal and existing outbuildings.
10. Although there would be no public views of the appeal building from Bell Street, the CA also extends around the rear of the property. The modern dwellings on the land at the rear of the site, set at a higher ground level, the large, modern retail unit to the north and, the building attached to 44 Bell Street do not impact on the original burgage plot form of the site, nor reduce the spacious feel of it. Furthermore, unlike the appeal property, these buildings do not make a positive contribution to the special qualities of the CA. Thereby, lack of public visibility from Bell Street and the surrounding buildings do not justify the harm that would be caused by the proposed development.
11. For the above reasons, I find the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA as a whole, thereby harming its significance. Also, it would fail to respect the character and appearance of the host property,

¹ Appeal decision ref. APP/K)425/W/18/3206133 for erection of prefabricated building within rear grassed area to be used as ancillary premises in connection with beauty salon at 54 Bell Street.

harming its significance as a non-designated heritage asset. This would be contrary to the statutory presumption of the Act, which carries considerable importance and weight. The harm caused to the special qualities of the CA, and significance of the host property, would conflict with Policies CP9 and CP11 of the Wycombe District Local Plan, August 2019, (LP) and the CA Character Survey (1998) which require conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Also, there would be conflict with Policies DM35 and DM37 of the LP, which require, amongst other matters, that development respect or improve the character and appearance of the building and its surroundings.

12. In the terms of the Framework and bearing in mind the scale of the proposed development, I find the harm caused to the significance of the CA and non-designated heritage asset would be less than substantial. Paragraph 208 of the Framework requires that such harm be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
13. The proposed development would support the expansion of the existing local business in a town centre location, providing additional local employment opportunities and contributing to the vitality and viability of the town centre. However, I do not have any substantive evidence to demonstrate that the existing business would fail without the proposal and so, the vitality of the town centre would not be unduly affected. Also, I note from the application form that the proposal would only generate 1 additional 1 FTE employee. Therefore, I give limited weight to these public benefits.
14. The success and desire to further grow the business, whilst maintaining its roots in its current location and, the consideration of rental costs of larger premises elsewhere are acknowledged, although such matters would provide private rather than public benefits.

Other Matters

15. There is a grade II listed building, the former Old White Lion Public House close to the appeal site. Due to the distance from the appeal site, together with the separate and intervening structures and other buildings, the proposed building would not be visible nor affect the setting of this listed building. Therefore, I consider it would not affect its significance.

Heritage Balance and Conclusion

16. In view of the above, the public benefits of the proposal would not outweigh the less than substantial harms I have found in relation to the significance of the CA and the non-designated heritage asset and, the failure to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of these heritage assets.
17. The proposal therefore conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Accordingly, I conclude the appeal should be dismissed.

C Billings

INSPECTOR