



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 October 2024

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4th November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D3830/W/24/3346017

18 High Street, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3AW

- 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 Mr Stuart Pilbrow against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
 - The application Ref is DM/23/3073.
 - The development proposed is 2no Entrance doors to access the retail units.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the East Grinstead Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is situated on the roughly south side of the High Street, within the Conservation Area, which includes the historic core of the well-preserved medieval market town of East Grinstead. The appeal building is reached from the raised pavement, which is set back from the road, so it is prominent in views from the High Street. The Grade II listed buildings at 10 to 14 (even), and at 16 High Street lie roughly west, and the Grade II listed buildings at 22 and 24, and at 26 and 28 High Street lie roughly east. Whilst the appeal building is a modern building, the composition of its shopfront, with its mainly glazed shallow canted bay shop windows each side of its roughly central front entrance, along with its pilasters, fascia and stallrisers, is sympathetic to the historic character and appearance of the shopfronts in the nearby listed buildings, and it is important to the consistent character and appearance in the row of shopfronts.
4. The Conservation Area is mainly characterised by its historic settlement pattern, its setting in the Wealden landscape, and the diversity in its many listed and historic buildings. The mostly historic and traditional forms and features of its buildings, and their use of a wide range of local and traditional building materials are important to its appearance. Together, the character and the appearance of the Conservation Area contribute positively to its special character, and to its significance as the historic core of the market town. The contrast between the tight-knit urban grain and the spaciousness within the nearby part of the High Street, the domestic scale of many buildings, and the commercial activity, are important to the sense of place.

5. The ground floor premises at the front of the appeal building are occupied, but the street facing front door has been removed. The roughly central main door opening in the existing shopfront, with its fanlight above, leads to a lobby from which doors lead to each side of the ground floor premises and to the staircase to the upper floor. The plans show that the ground floor premises can also be reached from the yard at the back.
6. The proposal would divide the ground floor premises into 2 offices, each of which would be reached from the High Street by an entrance door in the centre of each of the existing bays. However, due to their scale and siting, the mostly glazed doors would unacceptably erode the existing stallrisers either side of the present front doorway, to the detriment of these important features. Because the doors would be taller and wider than the existing front door opening, they would damage the composition of the shopfront, and as the shopfront would include 3 doorways instead of one, it would be harmfully cluttered. So, due to its incongruous character and discordant appearance, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. For the same reasons, and because the proposal would disrupt the consistency in the existing row of shopfronts, it would fail to preserve the settings of the listed buildings at 10 to 14 (even), 16, 22 and 24, and 26 and 28 High Street.
7. There are few vacant ground floor premises nearby, so there is almost nothing to explain why the proposal would be necessary to attract a future occupier or occupiers. So, as the proposal would not be necessary to sustain the vitality of the High Street, its economic benefits attract little weight.
8. In the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area. Even so, the public benefits of the proposal would not outweigh that harm. Moreover, insufficient clear and convincing justification has been put to me to explain why the proposal would be necessary to conserve or enhance the significance of the Conservation Area.
9. 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 EG3 of the East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan (NP) which seek high quality design and respect for context, LP Policies DP 34 and DP35 and NP Policy EG4 which reflect the thrust of my statutory duties regarding listed buildings and conservation areas, and the Framework which aims for heritage assets to be conserved 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

10. 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.
11. For the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Reid

INSPECTOR