



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 December 2024 by R Dickson BSC (Hons) MSC MRTPI

Decision by Mr A Spencer-Peet BSc(Hons) PGDip.LP Solicitor (Non Practising)

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1110/W/24/3348838

Manor Court, Dix's Field, Exeter, EX1 1UP

- 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 First Oak Exeter Developments Ltd against the decision of Exeter City Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/0130/FUL.
 - The development proposed is for the formation of new office ground floor entrance to Units 1 and 2 with additional lighting, new signage for the building, and additional cycle storage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by a representative of the Inspector whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Preliminary Matters

3. Subsequent to the decision made by the Council on the application to which this appeal relates, the Government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) on 12 December 2024. I consider that there have been no major changes relevant to the main issue in this appeal. It will therefore not prejudice any party by making my decision with regard to the revised Framework.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and area, having special regard to the significance of the Southernhay and The Friars Conservation Area (CA) and the setting of the Grade II* listed 13-15 Dix's Field.

Reasons for the Recommendation

5. The appeal site, Manor Court, is a commercial building which sits opposite a terrace of Georgian properties. Although more modern, Manor Court has been constructed in a similar style of the Georgian terrace opposite, and emulates its materials, design and detailing. The windows and doors on the façade have a rhythm which emulates a Georgian building, with the windows and doors on the ground floor being arched at the top, set in line with the windows on the upper floors.

6. The significance of the CA is, in part, derived from open greens with planted trees, Georgian terraced properties and its mixed use. The appeal site makes a neutral contribution to the CA within which it sits, owing to its design which complements the nearby buildings which have more historical importance. In accordance with the duty imposed on me by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I have given considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
7. Within the terrace of Georgian properties opposite, 13-15 Dix's Field are Grade II* listed. The Grade II* listed asset, as well as the other properties within the terrace appear to be used as commercial offices. The appeal site contributes to the setting of the listed building as it sits opposite and uses similar materials and detailing. A small green, planted with trees sits between the historic terrace of Georgian properties and the more modern appeal site, which also gives the area a sense of place. In accordance with my duty under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I have had special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of the nearby listed building.
8. One of the most striking features of the appeal building is the uniformity of the windows which are made of a number of smaller panes of glass. The proposal would introduce a new glazed entrance which would replace two rounded windows at ground floor level. The glazed entrance would be square, and would be made from larger panes of glass. The introduction of the large square opening would be at odds to the rest of the windows at ground floor level which are smaller with a rounded top. The double-wide opening would disrupt the pattern of windows and doors at ground floor level, and would not respect the character of the existing building.
9. The larger glass window panes would be a stark contrast to the smaller panes found within the existing windows, contributing to the incongruous appearance of the proposed entrance. While the proposal would clearly be visually read as a modern addition, it would not harmonise with the character of the host building, and would be harmful to its character and appearance. The proposed entrance would be a stark contrast with the area, and would distract from the listed buildings opposite, diminishing their significance. The proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the CA, harming its significance. It would also fail to preserve the setting of the Grade II* listed 13-15 Dix's Field.
10. The proposed two-tier cycle storage unit, which would be a large overly modern structure, would be positioned near to the green outside the appeal site. The character and appearance of the green, which is identified as a special feature within the CA, would be harmed owing to the placement of such a large modern structure, which would be an incongruous addition within the CA.
11. The existing signage for Manor Court is positioned next to the footpath on the green, beneath trees. It is constructed from red brick and is highly detailed, with a triangular top. The signage plinth immediately in front of the railings would be a departure from the existing signage, and would introduce an uncommon feature that would be harmful to the appearance of the building. The signage plinth on the green follows the same principle in terms of its placing as the existing sign. The square design would be more simplistic, and would complement the façade of the building, without harming the listed building opposite. The Council have argued that it should have a curved top to reflect the curvature of the windows and doors,

however this design detail is limited to only the tops of the windows and doors at ground floor level. As the sign and plinth would serve a different function, and would be separate from the ground floor windows and doors, it would not be out of character with the area.

12. Given that the harm to the setting of the listed buildings and CA in terms of the design of the proposed entrance, the cycle storage unit, and some of the signage, would only affect its immediate surroundings, the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the designated heritage assets. Accordingly, and in line with the provisions of the Framework, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme. In this instance, the additional cycle storage and lighting that would be brought forward with the proposal would be a benefit to sustainable transport and safety. Furthermore, the proposal could help optimise and enhance the existing business use of the site which in turn may provide some benefit to the city's economy. Cumulatively I attach moderate weight to those benefits. However, these benefits do not outweigh the harm caused to the identified designated heritage assets and to which I attach significant weight in this recommendation.
13. The proposal would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the host building, would cause harm to the setting of 13-15 Dix's Field, and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. As such, it would conflict with Policies C1 and DG1 of the Exeter Local Plan (2005), and Policy CP17 and Objective 8 of the Exeter City Council's Core Strategy (2012), which collectively seek to ensure that the design of any new development within historical areas improves the appearance of the area, and not have a detrimental effect on the character and setting of nearby listed buildings. The proposal would additionally conflict with those paragraphs of the Framework which concern the conservation of the historic environment, leading to less than substantial harm to the identified designated heritage assets, and which would not be outweighed by public benefits.

Conclusion and Recommendation

14. For the reasons given above and having had regard to all other matters raised, I recommend that the appeal should be dismissed.

R Dickson

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

15. I have considered all the submitted evidence and my representative's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

Mr A Spencer-Peet

INSPECTOR