



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 July 2025

by **N Armstrong BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X5990/W/25/3365779

29-31 St John's Wood High Street, City of Westminster, London NW8 7NH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant full planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Babbo Group against the decision of City of Westminster Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/08640/FULL.
 - The development proposed is described as “fit out of existing Class E(b) unit to include new flooring, lighting and decorations. New glazed shopfront to include new full height glazed bi-folding doors. Existing shopfront to be powder coated bronze and mechanical awning with signage to be fixed to shopfront”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. The Council altered the description of the development to read “Installation of a new glazed shopfront including powder coated bronze and mechanical awning with signage to be fixed to shopfront. Fit out of existing Class E(b) unit to include new flooring, lighting and decorations.”. This is a more precise description of the proposal noting the submitted plans and application details, including fixed door openings. This is also used by the appellant in their appeal form, therefore this is the description that I have used in the decision.
3. I observed at the site visit that the appeal property was in use as a restaurant and a new shopfront with awnings had been installed. It is clear from the plans and evidence that the development that has taken place is the new shopfront and awnings referenced in the planning application. The appellant states that advertisement consent¹ has been granted for the display of an externally illuminated projecting sign and awnings with printed logo, which is not disputed by the Council. I have dealt with the appeal on the basis that planning permission is being sought retrospectively for the development of the new shopfront and awning as set out in the application.
4. The Council's second reason for refusal refers to the impact of tables and chairs on the flow of pedestrians and cleaning of the footpath. The plans submitted with the application indicate the siting of tables and chairs to the front of the appeal site. At the time of my visit, tables and chairs were in this area, which was enclosed by mobile planters and moveable barriers similar in appearance to the awnings. However, this element is not part of the description of development in either the

¹ Application ref 24/08641/ADV

application form or the Council's decision notice, and the decision notice suggests that the appellant is advised to submit a separate application for this aspect. The appellant states that a pavement licence for the placement of tables and chairs has been granted, and whilst this is subject to separate legislation, is not disputed by the Council. I note the Council's concerns on this aspect, however, I have based my decision on the proposed development as set out within the application and the above description of development, and the focus of this appeal is the shopfront alteration set out within the Council's first reason for refusal.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the existing building, and whether the development preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the St John's Wood Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

6. The appeal site comprises a commercial use at ground floor level in a town centre location on St John's Wood High Street and within the CA. The appeal property and the buildings in this part of the street comprise large, terraced, red brick buildings, which incorporate traditional timber windows with historic detailing around these and within the brickwork of the upper floors. These contribute to a very attractive group and setting in terms of the character and appearance of the area due to the large number of high quality and historic buildings.
7. The CA features a mix of residential and commercial development, and its significance is derived from the architectural and historic interest of the buildings within it. The appeal property contributes to the significance of the CA, being situated centrally within the group of historic buildings on the western side of St John's Wood High Street.
8. There are variations in the appearance of shopfronts within the area in terms of design and materials, indicating these have evolved over time, although more traditional shopfront designs are a predominant characteristic of the street. The existing shopfront plan submitted with the application does not provide full details of its previous design. However, the evidence of both parties includes images indicating its former appearance. Although I have not been provided with a copy of the St John's Wood Conservation Area Audit, the Council's evidence highlights that this refers to Nos 1–59 St John's Wood High Street as the most appealing group, distinguished by their projecting moulded dentil cornice, fluted pilasters, and moulded consoles.
9. The development has not resulted in the loss of an original shopfront. However, it has introduced a more modern shopfront in comparison to the previous design, which from the evidence before me, and despite the suggestion otherwise from the appellant, appeared to be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the building and the CA in terms of its design and materials. The new development includes a change in material from painted timber to powder coated aluminium frames in a bronze colour, as well as alterations to the proportions and subdivision of the glazing, and the height of the door openings and stallrisers.
10. Due to the combination of the material, full height door openings, limited height of the stallrisers and additional glazing bar detail, and despite some similarities to the proportions of the previous shopfront, the retention of pilasters and cornice lines,

-muted colouring of the frames and some symmetry across the two parts of the frontage, the design and detailing of the replacement shopfront has eroded the character and appearance of the historic building. The use of the powder coated aluminium for the frames and detailing does not achieve the same visual quality as timber in this instance, whilst the full height doors also appear overly large within the shopfront. The subdivision of the glazing and the limited height of the stallrisers also appear at odds with more traditional forms of shopfront in the area. Given the extent of this impact across the double frontage of the building, the new shopfront appears as a discordant addition within the street scene and to the historic character and appearance of the building. Consequently, the development does not achieve a high-quality design that relates well to the architectural quality of the building as a whole, or to other more traditional, sympathetic shopfronts and detailing in the surrounding area.

11. I have had regard to the Council's Shopfronts, Blinds and Signs – A Guide to their Design (the design guide). Amongst other things, this states that shopfronts of modern design can be successfully incorporated into traditional facades if respect is paid to the architectural form of the building and to its surroundings. However, for the reasons set out above, I do not find that the development satisfies these objectives or the overall principles of the design guide.
12. The development therefore has a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the building, and the contribution it makes to the significance of the CA is diminished. The development therefore fails to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, and it harms its significance.
13. Based on the evidence before me and my observations on site, as the change is localised in terms of the CA as a whole, the harm to the significance of the CA is less than substantial, and this harm is at the lower end of the scale in that respect. Regardless of the level of harm, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) at paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 215 of the Framework requires the less than substantial harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
14. The appellant refers to economic and social benefits of the development as public benefits that significantly outweigh any perceived design harm. These include contributing to the vitality of the street, reactivation of a long-vacant site, improved natural surveillance, legibility and pedestrian engagement, enhanced energy efficiency and security, and a significant uplift in public realm contribution. It would be reasonable to treat these aims as being public benefits inasmuch that they would contribute to economic and social objectives set out in the Framework in respect of supporting the existing business use and contributing to the vitality of the town centre location, as well as the ongoing use of the building in this part of the CA. Even so, these public benefits are given modest weight and are not sufficient to outweigh the harm to the CA. Furthermore, it has not been adequately demonstrated that this development is the only way to achieve those objectives.
15. I observed other examples of shop fronts highlighted by the appellant in their evidence, and I also note the response from the Council to these. Whilst there are variations in shopfronts in the locality, including those with more modern designs and materials, and some that are less sympathetic to the character and

appearance of the CA, I do not know the full circumstances under which other works were undertaken or their status regarding planning permission. I therefore cannot draw any direct comparison from these with the development that would weigh in its favour. Whilst they form part of the character of the CA, the presence of these does not justify the harm that I have found with the appeal scheme.

16. The appellant also suggests that the development is reversible, and it could be removed or updated in the future. However, the appellant is applying for a permanent permission that results in clear harm to the CA as set out above, and the possibility of a more sympathetic development in the future would not mitigate this harm. I therefore give this argument limited weight in my decision.
17. I conclude that the development has a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the building, and it fails to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. It therefore conflicts with Policies 38, 39 and 40 of the City of Westminster City Plan 2019 - 2040. Amongst other things, these seek that new development will incorporate exemplary standards of high quality, sustainable and inclusive urban design and architecture, preserve or enhance the character and appearance of Westminster's conservation areas, and be sensitively designed, having regard to matters including the prevailing character, materials, architectural quality and degree of uniformity in the surrounding townscape.

Other Matters

18. Where the proposal has been found to be acceptable in other respects by the Council, including the potential for noise and disturbance, these are neutral matters and do not weigh in favour of the development.

Conclusion

19. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

N Armstrong

INSPECTOR