



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 September 2025

by A Hickey MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W2845/W/25/3366734

The Unicorn Hotel, Bridge Street, Brackley NN13 7EP

- 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 P.S & J. K. Sohanpaul against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council.
 - The application Ref is 2024/4369/FULL.
 - The development proposed is replacement of existing windows with new, double glazed, polymer frames.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development and site address above from the application form. Although different to that given on the decision notice, no confirmation has been provided that a change was agreed.
3. The emerging local plan is at consultation stage (Regulation 18). Due to the draft plan's early stage, I have only afforded limited weight to its policies.
4. This appeal seeks to retain a number of already installed polymer windows. Consequently, the development is part retrospective.
5. For the avoidance of doubt, my decision relates to the building noted as blocks A & C (The Unicorn Hotel) as shown on drawing number 6618-05.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the development on the significance of the non-designated heritage asset (NDHA), The Unicorn Hotel, the setting of the nearby listed buildings, namely 6 and 8, Bridge Street and whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Brackley Town Centre Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

7. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) requires me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. Additionally, Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA) requires me, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to have special regard to the desirability of

preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

8. The Brackley Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) states that part of Brackley's special interest lies in its rich stock of historic buildings and that the town's built environment is of high quality, reflecting its long history as a market town.
9. The CAA identifies the appeal building within the Bridge Street Character Area as being a significant building, which is a positive feature within the CA. The significance of the host building as an NDHA is largely derived from its Victorian Gothic architectural appearance that marks the transition from the Bridge Street Character Area to the busy commercial Market Place Character Area. Whilst set back from the road, the space around the building enhances its prominence on this section of the road, to which its surviving historic fabric, pleasing architectural composition and use of traditional materials all positively contribute. The later additions to the building, whilst not of the same architectural merit, nonetheless assimilate with the older section of the building.
10. The significance of this part of the CA lies, in part, from its historic character with a strong horizontal emphasis, which serves to draw attention up the hill towards the Town Hall and the Market Place, that makes a positive contribution to the overall significance of the CA. The CAA advises that the key to retaining the character of this area is the retention or reinstatement of traditional timber windows and front doors. Additional threats to this area are identified through further loss of historic character including the loss of historic timber windows.
11. 6 and 8, Bridge Street is a Grade II listed building that lies immediately to the north of the appeal site. It appears to have originally consisted of two premises but is now a single restaurant, with the front elevation finished in stone rubble and a slate roof. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, the significance of this building stems from its historic development within Brackley and from the traditional materials it is constructed from, including timber frontage and windows.
12. It is a point of note that the CAA states that the quality of the Bridge Street Character Area is being eroded, in part, by insensitive window replacement. The replacement of timber windows with uPVC windows is identified as a particular problem therefore, the management plan for the CA seeks to restore and retain the original glazing materials and configurations.
13. The fenestration of a building is an important component in defining its visual and architectural character. Therefore, the retention and repair of a number of existing timber windows will help preserve the building. The windows that have been installed are polymer units, finished in a white colour which visually jar with the finer slimline traditional timber windows found on the host building.
14. I also note that some historic changes to the windows have taken place, incorporating aluminium frames. However, these windows fail to harmonise with the overall character and appearance of traditional timber frontages and windows found within the CA, nearby listed building and the appeal building.
15. The presence of existing aluminium windows on the building or polymer windows outside of the CA is not a strong point in favour of the appeal scheme, as the CAA identifies their presence as a specific problem. Moreover, Polymer is a material that

has an artificial texture and a more uniform finish, when new and when aging, than painted timber windows, and they would and do appear as modern insertions, which results in an incongruous intrusion within the surrounding historic environment. Consequently, harm would arise to the significance of the host building, CA and the nearby listed building.

16. Paragraph 212 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to an asset's conservation. In this case, I find that the proposal would lead to a less than substantial harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets. I consider that the level of harm would be at the lower end within the less than substantial harm category. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal
17. I recognise that the existing mature trees somewhat screen the appeal building to the front, and nearby public views are also limited. Nonetheless, this does not remove the need to incorporate materials that harmonise with nearby designated and non-designated heritage assets. In any event, the replacement windows being partially obscured from view is not a public benefit.
18. Whilst the polymer windows have been chosen for budget purposes, it has not been demonstrated why this matter is of public benefit in favour of the development. Nonetheless, there would be some benefit to bringing the building back into use as soon as possible. However, as it has not been demonstrated that less harmful alternatives could not also deliver similar benefits, I attached limited weight to this benefit.
19. I accept that some public benefit would also arise from the repair of several existing timber windows and the additional benefits from thermal improvement from the polymer windows. However, in the absence of substantive evidence that the previous windows were beyond repair, or that the replacement windows are the only way in which the required efficiencies and savings could be achieved, this is a matter of little weight.
20. All these factors limit the weight I attribute to the public benefits of the proposal to a modest level, which is insufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm to the relevant designated heritage assets.
21. As such, the proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, as well as the heritage protection aims of the Framework. The proposal would also be contrary to heritage aims of Policy SA of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) and Policies SS2, HE1, HE5 and HE6 of the South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan which together seek to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets.

Other Matters

22. Although it is unfortunate that the appellant believed the windows could be changed under permitted development, this does not affect the planning merits of the appeal or overcome the harm identified.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above, having regard to the development plan as a whole and all other material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A Hickey

INSPECTOR