
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 January 2017

by Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge BA (Hons) MTP MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 21 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/16/3160346

20-22 Station Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3BE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant consent, agreement or approval to details required by a condition of a planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by McCarthy & Stone Retirement Lifestyles Ltd against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/01644/1DOC, dated 27 June 2016, sought approval of details pursuant to condition No 3 of a planning permission Ref 13/02277/1, granted on 30 July 2014.
 - The application was refused by notice dated 16 September 2016.
 - The development proposed is erection of part two and part three storey building comprising 25 one and two bedroom retirement apartments with communal facilities and associated parking, access, landscaping and ancillary works following demolition of former garage buildings.
 - The details for which approval is sought are: Materials, to change from timber to uPVC.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. Condition 3 of planning permission ref 13/02277/1 requires details and/or samples of materials to be used on all external elevations and the roof of the approved development to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority before the development commences. The reason given is to ensure that the development will have an acceptable appearance which does not detract from the appearance and character of the surrounding area.
 3. From the evidence before me, it would appear that the appellant submitted relevant information on 24 October 2014 to discharge condition 3, which included windows, fascia and soffit in timber, coloured white. This was approved on 25 February 2015. The appellant subsequently sought approval to change from timber to uPVC for windows, external doors, fascia and soffit, which was refused and is now the subject of this appeal.
 4. At my site visit, the external construction works for the building were nearing completion. It was clear that uPVC windows, fascias and soffits have been installed on every elevation, with a mixture of aluminium and composite materials for external doors. Thus, I have assessed this appeal based on my site observations and the window details provided in the appellant's appeal statement.
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Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the materials preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Letchworth Conservation Area.

Reasons

6. Letchworth Conservation Area covers the core area of Letchworth Garden City including the town centre and adjoining residential streets. As one of the earliest examples of a garden city development, the conservation area has substantial architectural and historic interest. The significance of the conservation area is principally derived from the planned layout of streets and spaces and the consistency of architectural styles and detailing. Although there has been some loss of original details, including windows and doors, as well as later development incorporating modern materials, the contribution made by original details and materials to the significance of the conservation area is considerable.
7. Station Road contains a mixture of buildings and materials. It is evident that uPVC windows have been installed in some buildings, but others retain or utilise timber windows. I noticed that the adjoining site at Bennett Court, a relatively recent development of residential flats, contains timber sash windows on the front elevation, with uPVC windows on the flank and rear elevations. This ensures that the principal elevation facing Station Road is more sympathetic to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
8. The development at the appeal site is a large and prominent building in the street scene. The installed uPVC windows have a bland and bulky appearance and lack the finer detail of a timber equivalent, including the grain of the wood. The window details provided in the appeal statement are similarly unconvincing. The brackets supporting the oriel window on the second floor of the front elevation appear chunky and overly stark. Some of the casement windows do not open on a conventional hinge at the top and bottom corners, but tilt and turn on pivots toward the top of the window. This underlines their modern design and construction. Similarly, the external doors appear overly modern and lacking in detail. The fascias and soffits are less obvious from a distance given their positioning.
9. The overall effect of the uPVC materials on the character and appearance of the conservation area is modern, bland and jarring, particularly when seen from public vantage points. The appearance and detailing does not reflect the finer elements found within the conservation area, including on Station Road. Therefore, it does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and results in harm to its significance. As the development concerns detailing on a new building away from the principal streets and spaces of the conservation area, the harm is less than substantial. However, it is still significant given the importance of architectural materials and details within this conservation area. In line with paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), such harm is required to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
10. Arguments from the appellant concerning the aesthetic, maintenance, environmental performance, financial and security benefits of uPVC over timber are limited from the evidence before me. There is no reason to presume that properly constructed and maintained timber windows and doors cannot deliver

similar maintenance, performance, financial and security benefits while having a better aesthetic effect. Therefore, I find that there are limited public benefits which do not, in this case, outweigh the harm I have identified.

11. I am conscious that the Design and Access Statement that accompanied the original planning application in 2013 indicated uPVC materials for the windows and fascias, but it would appear that timber was required as evidenced by the subsequent letter from the appellant to discharge condition 3 in October 2014.
12. The appellant highlights that the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance for residential areas in Letchworth apparently accepts uPVC in certain circumstances if they match the existing or preferably original design which includes the method of opening. While this is a new build, it is evident to me that the windows do not match the design of existing or original timber windows found within the conservation area. Moreover, the appellant's reference to the Design Supplementary Planning Document, Policies 57 and 58 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 1996 and the Planning Practice Guidance does not strengthen their case as the extracts provided highlight the importance of materials to support local character.
13. The appellant also draws attention to a new residential site on Blackhorse Road in Letchworth where uPVC has been accepted. I visited this site, which is located beyond the conservation area on the edge of an industrial estate. Therefore, the circumstances of the two sites are not identical and I have determined this appeal on its own merits.

Conclusion

14. The change of materials from timber to uPVC does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. It is contrary to the design and conservation sections of the NPPF as it does not represent good design or sustain the significance of a conservation area. For these reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge

INSPECTOR