



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 September 2025

by Janine Laver BA (Hons) MSc PGDL MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2nd October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X1925/W/25/3368881

**The Old Grammar School, Broadway, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire
SG6 3NX**

- 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 Miss Beatrice Pryor (Emil Dale School of Performing Arts Ltd) against the decision of North Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/01812/FP.
 - The development proposed is alterations to the front access path and erection of new curved entrance walls and piers with integral signage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed in so far as it relates to the erection of new curved entrance walls and piers with integral signage. The appeal is allowed in so far as it relates to alterations to the front access path and planning permission is granted for that part of the proposal at The Old Grammar School, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3NX in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/01812/FP, and the plans submitted with it, so far as relevant to that part of the development hereby permitted and subject to the following condition:

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plan:

Drawing No. 102A: New walls and path to front entrance (in so far as relevant to the constant gradient block paving in grey herring bone pattern and low-level walls each side of the path with new coping stones, but excluding the curved rendered approach walls with sphere on front pier).

Preliminary Matters

2. The site address included on the appeal form and Council's decision letter is different to that included within the original planning application form. The parties confirmed in writing that the address on the planning application form was incorrect and that I should use the address on the appeal form and Council decision letter, which is The Old Grammar School, Broadway, Letchworth Garden City.
3. The description of development on the Council's decision letter is also different to that included on the original planning application form. I also note that the plans submitted with the application include annotations to "*illuminated signage over entrance door*" and "*new fire exit and path at the rear*", however, these do not appear to have been included in either the appellant's or the Council's description of development or considered in the Council officer's delegated report.

4. It was subsequently clarified in writing that the entrance door signage and fire exit/path proposals were considered and determined by separate planning applications. I have therefore proceeded to determine this appeal based only upon the alterations to the front access path and the new curved entrance walls and piers on either side of the access path with integral signage. I have amended the description of development accordingly to more accurately reflect only the development which forms part of this appeal. Moreover, I observed on site that the works proposed appear to have been carried out. Therefore, I have determined the appeal on the basis that the works have already occurred, having regard to the application plans and information.

Main Issue

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

Reasons

6. The application site is within the Letchworth conservation area. The site comprises part of the front lawn and front boundary of the former Grammar School site as it faces Broadway. The former grammar school building is an attractive two storey red brick building with regularly spaced full height Georgian timber sash windows and a central and slightly projecting stonework entrance with a cupola above.
7. The site sits immediately opposite Broadway Gardens (formerly known as The Town Square/Kennedy Gardens), which is a hub of one of the main spokes between the residential parts of the garden city and the town centre. Broadway Gardens and the adjacent roads, which form the thoroughfare between town and residential, are wide and greened with lines of regularly spaced trees and well-maintained wide grass verges and lawns, which all give a well-planned, civic feel to the location.
8. I noticed on my site visit that a few modern buildings have been erected into this part of Broadway, however, there is a notable absence of structures and incursions into the grassed lawned areas at the front of the buildings, which maintains the openness of the public realm. This analysis is reinforced by the Letchworth Conservation Area Appraisal (2001) (CAA), which although dated, provides a reasonable description of this area in a section dedicated to The Town Square (Kennedy Gardens).
9. The CAA states that the building layout strongly relates to the central gardens and surrounding road and that the space and grassed verges between the road and the frontages of the buildings are important to the open character of the square, complementing the central open space and relieving the sense of enclosure provided by the buildings. It adds that the green open character of Broadway and the green open character of the central gardens complement each other and provide openness and vistas along the main axis.
10. The new curved walls and piers with integral signage to the front of the Old Grammar School have introduced development which is out of character and out of place with the open and soft landscaped setting of Broadway. The new curved walls with piers and integral signage are also not reflective of the prevailing palette of materials associated with the Old Grammar School and the sandstone coloured render jars with the red brick and light stone, which prevails on the host building.

11. I saw no evidence of similar material or colour on the host building or in the immediate surroundings and I observed that the render was already chipping off and was starting to discolour. Thus, even if I were to find that the curved entrance walls were appropriate to the context, I would still consider that the materials are inappropriate as the focal point for this well-cared-for red-brick building. This part of the development results in less than substantial harm to the conservation area.
12. With regard to the other alterations to the front access path (block paving in grey herring bone pattern and low level walls each side of the path with new coping stones), these are low key alterations contained within the hedges that flank the pathway to the main entrance and are sympathetic to and do not detract from the open character of the conservation area, nor the appearance of the Old Grammar School building within the conservation area.
13. Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention to be paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. In addition, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets. Paragraph 215 of the Framework states that where a development proposal would 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.
14. I note the appellant's suggestions that the development delivers improved visitor orientation, formalises the front access and reinforces the active civic use of the building. However, the existing projecting centralised access surrounded by stonework with cupola above already makes clear where the site entrance is located. The photographs submitted with the appeal identifies that prior to the development taking place, the entrance pathway was already flanked by thick hedges, which ran the length of the pathway from footpath to door, thus would have easily steered people towards the main entrance. In addition, signage has already been approved and erected above the entrance to identify the active civic use. I am therefore not convinced that the proposed curved entrance walls with piers and integral signage provides public benefits that outweigh the harm to the heritage asset.
15. Overall, the proposed curved entrance walls with piers and integral signage fail to preserve the character, appearance and setting of the Letchworth conservation area and would conflict with Policies HE1 and SP9 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031, which together, and amongst other matters, state that new development should be well designed and located and respond positively to its context, and that the benefits of development proposals that would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets should outweigh such harm. This part of the development also conflicts with Chapter 16 of the Framework, which highlights that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets

Conditions

16. In deciding to issue a split decision, I have had regard to paragraph 57 of the Framework in terms of the use of planning conditions. The standard implementation condition is not required as the development has already taken place. However, I

have specified the relevant plan and the parts of that plan which are granted permission and the parts which are refused, as this provides certainty.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed in part and dismissed in part. The appeal is allowed in so far as it relates to the alterations to the front access path, comprising the laying of constant gradient block paving path in grey herring bone pattern and low-level walls each side of the path with new coping stones. However, the appeal is dismissed in so far as it relates to the new curved walls and piers with integral signage which are adjacent to the public footpath.

Janine Laver

INSPECTOR