



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2011

by Simon Miles BA(Hons) MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 12 December 2011

Appeal Ref: APP/X5210/A/11/2159505
76 Neal Street, London WC2H 9PL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Versatile Apparel Ltd against the decision of the London Borough of Camden Council.
 - The application Ref 2011/0826/P, dated 15 February 2011, was refused by notice dated 7 April 2011.
 - The development proposed is change to shopfront and replacement of doors and windows.
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Procedural Matter

1. The development, as described above, has already been carried out and I have considered the appeal accordingly.

Decision

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

3. This is whether the development preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal relates to 76 Neal Street, a terraced property with ground floor shop unit. The site is within the Seven Dials Conservation Area, which derives much of its special character from its fine stock of period properties. Neal Street, whilst having a mix of old and new, nevertheless contains a significant proportion of traditional shopfronts, incorporating features such as timber frames and stallrisers. The evidence available to me indicates that the former shopfront, whilst not necessarily of exceptional quality and perhaps requiring repair or refurbishment, was of just such a traditional design. Indeed, it was identified in the Council's conservation area statement as a shopfront of merit.
 5. I therefore share the Council's concern about its replacement, which is of an overtly modern design incorporating extensive glazing and lacking traditional features such as the timber frames, stallrisers and toplights that characterise
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the traditional shopfronts. Although a limited number of modern shopfronts have been installed elsewhere in the road, each proposal must be assessed on its merits, having regard to the circumstances and policies pertaining at the time.

6. Moreover, these other modern shopfronts are not of sufficient number to have fundamentally altered the character of the street scene. Neither is there any evidence to indicate that any of them replaced shopfronts of merit, as identified in the Council's conservation area statement. It therefore remains the case that the loss of the traditional shopfront, and its replacement with an unsympathetic modern design, would further erode the historic character of the street scene. I cannot therefore avoid the conclusion that the development fails to preserve the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.
7. It follows that the development contravenes Policy CS14 of the adopted Camden Core Strategy 2010, Policies DP24, DP25 and DP30 of the adopted Camden Development Policies 2010 and the adopted Camden Planning Guidance 1 *Design*, insofar as these seek to ensure that development respects local character and context, including the general characteristics of shopfronts in the area, whilst preserving or enhancing heritage assets. Although the draft National Planning Policy Framework, which is a material consideration, seeks to support economic growth and development, this too is concerned to protect the built and historic environment.
8. In other respects, whilst I appreciate that the appellant is seeking to maximise the attractiveness of the premises, this must be weighed against the need to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. Furthermore, I see no reason why a more appropriate design should not also achieve the appellant's objectives in terms of visibility, security, etc.
9. Overall, given my findings on the main issue and having considered all the relevant matters, the balance in this case weighs against approval. Therefore the appeal does not succeed.

Simon Miles

INSPECTOR