



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 January 2023

by K Stephens BSc (Hons) MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th February 2023.

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/W/22/3305700

Conservative and Unionist Club, High Street, Biddulph ST8 6AR

- 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 Mr Mike Robinson for the Conservative and Unionist Club against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
 - The application Ref SMD/2021/0630, dated 28 September 2021, was refused by notice dated 7 July 2022.
 - The development proposed is the reduction in height (approx. 500mm) of two chimney stacks to the north and south ends of the building.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the reduction in height (approximately 500mm) of two chimney stacks to the north and south ends of the building at the Conservative and Unionist Club, High Street, Biddulph ST8 6AR, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SMD/2021/0630, dated 28 September 2021 and the plan SMDC.001/22 submitted with it.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of the development above is taken from the application form but I have omitted the explanatory text of why the works were undertaken, as this does not fall within the definition of development.
3. Despite the development having already been carried out, as was evident on my site visit, I have dealt with the appeal on its planning merits.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the building and the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal site comprises a large red brick 2-storey Edwardian building that fronts the High Street in Biddulph town centre, occupying a prominent corner location. The building has a striking symmetrical elevation with large sash-style windows, although these appear to be modern replacements. The building also has a number of decorative features such as a projecting central gable above an arched porch and front door with elaborate fan light, brick detailing and banding on the corners of the building and across the elevation, and decorative dentil friezes. Submitted photographs show the building had 2 tall chimney stacks, each with bands of decorative brickwork and an array of chimney pots.

6. The High Street is predominantly retail and commercial in character and appearance, with mainly traditional two-storey brick properties fronting the street displaying some variety of designs and styles. Opposite, there is the contemporary Town Council and Police Station building and close by is the modern Sainsbury's supermarket. With its decorative elevations, the imposing appeal building positively contributes to the character and appearance of the High Street and Biddulph town centre, and creates a strong sense of place.
7. I understand the chimney stacks were in need of urgent repair to stabilise them. Submitted photographs show missing mortar in places, dislodged bricks and coping stones and some broken chimney pots but nothing, in my view, that could not be repaired. The chimney stacks were also redundant and causing damp inside the building, thus affecting the fabric of the building. In the urgency to rectify the damaged chimney stacks, and with alleged difficulties of sourcing replacement bricks or roof tiles, the appellant decided to reduce the height of each chimney stack by about 500mm, instead of repairing them.
8. The Council's Design Guide¹ advises that alterations should be undertaken with care and that insensitive changes can easily spoil a building. The aim should be to revitalise the building without altering its fundamental character.
9. The chimney stacks have been reduced to a height beneath the line of decorative brickwork and no longer have their chimney pots. As a result, they are truncated and plainer in comparison to their former selves and the decorative front and principal elevation of the building.
10. Nonetheless, the building still retains two chimney stacks symmetrically located, one at each end of the building. They are still visible when approaching the building from either direction along the High Street. The principal elevation of the building is largely unaffected as it still retains its decorative features, and maintains its striking elevation onto the High Street and its prominent presence in the street scene. The building therefore still positively contributes to the character and appearance of the street and Biddulph town centre, such that there remains a notable and positive sense of place, which was evident to me on my visit.
11. In conclusion, the reduced height of the chimney stacks, although regrettable, does not significantly change, or detract from, the character and appearance of the building or the street scene as to cause harm to them. Accordingly I do not find conflict with Policy DC1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan, which seeks to ensure development is designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place. The development does not conflict with the Council's Design Guide as the building's fundamental character is not lost.

Conclusion

12. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should succeed.

K Stephens
INSPECTOR

¹ Supplementary Design Guide adopted February 2018