



Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 17/01051/LBA

ADDRESS: 1-3 James Street West

PROPOSAL: External alterations for the display of external advertising to shop

CASE OFFICER: Anna Jotcham

DATE: 8 April 2017

COMMENT: **STRONG OBJECTION**

Bath Heritage Watchdog strongly objects to this application.

The original building was the last remaining wartime 'make do and mend' repaired building in Bath, and although other bomb damaged buildings are preserved elsewhere in a derelict state it is believed that this was the last wartime repaired survivor in the whole of the country that was still fit for use in its wartime repaired state, and the Genesis Trust would have been happy to continue using it. The war-scarred building stood as a reminder of the tragic events in the Bath Blitz and as a memorial to those who lost their lives. It was treated locally as an unofficial war memorial.

Sadly, consent was granted for the demolition of the majority of the building leaving just the façade. As a consequence any proposals for the remaining façade have to be very carefully considered and thought out in order not to cause physical harm and public offence.

When determining all applications for new shopfronts and signage we ask that the following guidelines are observed.

The context, or general setting, of Bath should be understood, respected and reflected in any proposed work to shopfronts.

Design, materials and workmanship should be of the highest quality.

Any proposed or altered shopfront should be historically credible.

House styles which do not meet the requirements of style, lettering, materials and signs are not acceptable. Multiples should be required to adapt their proposals to the special conditions of the city.

Standard designs of any sort are not acceptable. They should be specifically designed for their context.

Having studied the Heritage, Design & Access Statement very carefully we fundamentally disagree with its content and therefore do not consider that the applicants have properly assessed the situation before submitting this application. Effectively standard corporate signage has been retrofitted to the building.

3.3 External Environment states that ‘*The building is situated in a part of the city in which much of the historic fabric has been lost, this being replaced with modern construction in the last 30 years.*’ This seems to be being offered as a reason to accept anything other than the highest quality proposal. Ironically it was partly the Blitz that has led to such poor development, though there is much more historic fabric than this statement seems to be accounting for.

5.4 Fabric – ‘*It is the physical evidence of bomb damage that is of interest. Efforts should be made to ensure that this is not covered up in the development of the signage scheme.*’ It should be taken as read that features of interest are not covered up, however features of interest should not be distracted from either. The building has already been compromised from the addition of the upper levels. We are of the opinion that the historic building must be unsullied from anything which distracts from the sobriety of its importance. This is something borne out by the Conservation Officer who requested the change from gold/bronze metal panels/strips - ‘*should be a sober grey colour.*’

5.5 Detail – ‘*If the signage pays due respect to the original detailing however, this will ensure that the signage is not overly prominent in the streetscene.*’ Unfortunately these proposals do not adhere to this statement. Indeed it could be said that the signage ‘sticks out like a sore thumb.

7.0 Assessment of proposed works – ‘*The areas proposed for the new signage were identified as ‘Signage Zones’ in the elevations approved under planning application 14/01896/FUL. Set in these locations, the signage should appear sufficiently subservient to the historic structures.*’ We have searched the planning application and cannot find any reference to advertising at all, let alone in these specific locations. We would request that the applicants provide the evidence.

8.0 – Conclusion – ‘*Number 1 to 3 James Street forms an important link with the City’s past by preserving evidence of bomb damage from the last war. The proposal to install signage to the commercial unit entrance and shop front will not be detrimental to the Heritage Value of the building. The proposed new signage can be placed in positions which respect the heritage value of the original details.*’ This statement is fundamentally wrong. The overt commercialisation of the historic structure as proposed here in such poor signage is harmful and offensive.

1.1 Description – ‘*Nisbets Ltd proposed to erect signage that complies with the Council’s guidance for signage, in order to limit the impact on the Heritage Asset and the wider context.*’

Unfortunately this is not the case – quoting just some of the guidelines to which this application does not adhere:

- Historic colours for signage will be encouraged.
- Subtle tones of other colours may be acceptable, depending on location.
- Bright or strident colours do not compliment the background of the various hues and tones of Bath Stone.

- A matt or satin finish will be sought.
- Shiny, reflective or highly glossy materials including plastic and acrylics will be resisted.
- Natural traditional materials such as timber and non-reflective metal will be sought.
- Lettering should preferably be traditionally sign-written or applied individual letters mounted on minimal pins.
- It should respect the character of the shop or business to which it relates, and be of proportionate size and extent.
- Use of national chain 'house styles' is unlikely to be acceptable.
- A bespoke approach to corporate brand signage will be encouraged based on these principles.
- Where high quality transfers are proposed a material sample will be required for consideration.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

The remaining façade is a unique structure for which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find any signage that will not cause harm. It is unfortunate that consideration for such signage was not given at the time of the original application. Certainly that submitted in this application is wholly inappropriate.

The first thing we would state is that there is an excessive amount of signage proposed - 7 signs for what is now a diminutive building is unacceptable.

We take each sign in turn:-

SIGN 1

This sign is completely superfluous and is extremely harmful to the listed façade. It should be removed from proposals.

SIGN 2

A sign in this position is considered tolerable as it is a prominent corner and its position is distanced from the historic stonework thus lessening the harm.

However the sign as proposed will straddle two fascia sections. We believe that any signage should be located in the recess. Aluminium is not considered an appropriate material since the facade remains a listed structure, and we would therefore suggest that in this case appropriate offset lettering in anodised metal is utilised.

The colours are strident and should be removed and any signage should consist purely of the company name, removing the border and red stripe.

SIGN 3

This sign is completely superfluous and is extremely harmful to the listed façade and the positioning of the Bath Blitz informative plaque. It should be removed from proposals.

SIGN 4

We strongly object to the addition of a projecting or hanging sign to the historic and fragile stonework. In addition a bus stop style sign is never acceptable on a listed building. It should be removed from proposals.

SIGN 5

Although we do not object to a sign in this position we do not favour the use of vinyls. We believe the possibility of a traditionally signwritten sign in this position should be explored. In addition we believe that the design and colours of the signage need to be improved reflecting the importance of the listed building.

We also note that the door that has been installed to the building below this sign is unauthorised. The planning permission and listed building consent both show the original timber door and this unauthorised substitution should be addressed as an Enforcement issue.

SIGNS 6 & 7

We do not believe that these signs are required and should be removed from proposals.

SUMMARY

The examples of shop signage provided are all on non-listed buildings. They cannot therefore be taken as a precedent and indeed they demonstrate how inappropriate the design and materials would be on a listed building. Unfortunately not all buildings can take "house-style" signage and we believe this building to be a case in point. The previous occupants found a single sign above the main entry doors to be perfectly adequate.

Applicants should be prepared to tailor their signage to reflect the very special circumstances in Bath and we would recommend that this application is withdrawn and the specialist advice of the Local Authority Conservation Officers sought prior to resubmission.

The works, by virtue of the use of strident colours, inappropriate materials, introduction of a hanging sign and an excessive number of signs is considered to be detrimental to the special architectural and historic character and interest of the listed building, adjacent listed buildings and the conservation area contrary to S16 and S72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 12 'Conserving & Enhancing the Historic Environment of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies B1, B2 and CP6 of the BANES Core Strategy and saved policies BH2, BH6 and BH17 of the BANES local plan and should be refused in its current format.