

Planning Application 09/03845/FUL

17 St Lawrence Street,
Bath BA1 1AN 'Azendi'

Bath Heritage Watchdog objects to this application:

- *When determining all applications for new shop fronts 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 shop fronts.*
- *Design, materials and workmanship should be of the highest quality.*
- *Any proposed or altered shop front 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.*

(Bath City Council. Bath Shop Fronts, Guidelines for Design and Conservation 1993)

Bath Heritage Watchdog has been paying particular attention to shop fronts fitted in Bath as Bath has one of the finest collections of period shop fronts in the country. There are fine examples from Georgian through to Victorian and Edwardian into the 20C (including Art Deco, etc) right up to the present day where traditional shop fronts have been installed to replace inferior designs in both listed and unlisted buildings.

Introduction

The opening of Phase One of the SouthGate development gave us the opportunity to see exactly what had been installed prior to consent and whether it matched the supplied drawings in colour, materials and finish. Its impact on the Conservation Area could be judged and the reaction of the public could also be gauged.

In terms of colour, materials and finish it does largely what it says on the tin. The colour is satin black, the materials appear to be the stock standard low grade ply. The signage is bright and shiny steel and the only thing at fault is that it is made of the wrong materials. However, the finish of the shop front is poor with joints and seams lifting and screw heads popping through the surface. It will not stand the test of time. With regard to the design itself, it is basic. Section B-B is a gaping void with no detail. A number of people the Watchdog spoke to voiced concern over the pre-dominance of black in the scheme and said that in particular the end towers should have had stone pilasters as originally shown.

Further Additional Comment

Not an auspicious start. With regard to our opinion that the shop front will not stand the test of time, all the signage has already been taken down and the fascias have been skimmed over with a levelling plaster. The paintwork is now being repainted. The plywood installed is clearly not of a standard required for a Conservation Area and the World Heritage Site or that expected in a prestige development. Similar work has also taken place on the H&M store opposite. We would expect to see these plywood structures replaced with hardwood timber.

The comments below were written before we knew the shop front had been installed and therefore are more along the lines of “if the planning process had been correctly followed this is what we would have expected to see”.

Supporting Document

The applicants state their shop front appears to comply with the guide, and in some respects this is true as the laxities introduced in the revised guide have led to lower standards of design. However, the supporting document states that “... *if we were to add columns in line with the architectural features this would prevent us from achieving the number of shop front display units required ...*” The units are apparently an integral feature forming a corporate image. This is preposterous to remove architectural features to make way for display units!

It is the next sentence that is key. “... *I understand there are similar designs and therefore wish to make reference to the design and appearance of the unit opposite in Block D and unit to the south west in Block B ...*” As it has been and will be until 4 November impossible to see what is being installed in this position of Block D, we cannot comment. However, the unit referred to in Block B must be H&M which occupies a similar position. The applicants have clearly seen that they have got away with removing the columns along with various others devices and want to do the same.

The fault here lies with the guide and the total inability of those that permitted it to foresee the consequences of what its rewording would be. The warnings were sounded but went unheeded. SouthGate and Bath will be the worst for it.

Despite what other stores have got the applicants should be reminded that as yet they all remain unpermitted development and we would ask them to adapt.

The Elevations

Elevation A-A shows a basically acceptable design for the main frame, but no details are provided as to materials. We will point out again that what has been installed so far in other units in terms of material is not acceptable. The fascias must be made of hardwood timber (from sustainable sources) and not low grade rough ply. Concern remains over the spacing of the door columns which we feel should either be moved apart to align with the recessed arch or be reduced in width. Unfortunately, the whole is spoiled by the lack of a frame for the windows and a transom. The drawings show no detail so it is assumed that this is frameless glazing. The doors also appear to be floating unsupported. No stall riser of any substance is provided.

There is no objection to the scale and positioning of the signage only its material. Bright stainless steel is not appropriate for a Conservation Area - the lettering should be of fret cut wood or a brushed anodised metal. Unfortunately, within yards lies the corporate symbols of H&M and, yes, they are in stainless steel. It would be hard then to refuse this but would ask the applicants to adapt.

There is no major objection to the colour proposed but there are concerns over the predominance of black and similar dark colours in the overall scheme. The satin finish is appropriate.

Return Elevation B-B suffers from the removal of the columns which leaves the window above looking unsupported. We would ask the applicants to reconsider and not just follow others' examples. From the drawings it looks perfectly feasible to incorporate columns. The elevation would also be improved by the addition of some form of framing and the inclusion of a transom and stall riser.

Our previous comments relating to the signage apply.

Conclusion

It is a shame the applicants appear more intent on looking at what others have got away with and the position of their display units as opposed to providing a shop front worthy of a Conservation Area in a World Heritage Site. A shame because with a little effort, this could have been achieved. Put the columns back! Put in a timber frame! Put up signs in correct materials! Put the others to shame!

For the reasons stated above in its current form the application contravenes Local Plan Policies BH1, BH2, BH6, BH17, BH19, S5, D2 & D4 and with guidance contained within PPG15 and should therefore be refused.

Unfortunately, this will not be the case as the shop front is already installed. There is no way the proposals will be amended and no-ones comments will be taken into account. The result is a fait accompli and an abuse of the democratic planning system.