

Application Number: 09/03863/FUL

Address:

13 St Lawrence Street
Bath BA1 1AN

Proposal:

Provision of new shop front

Comment: Submitted at 25/11/2009

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.

Compared with some of what has been installed and what is in the process of being installed this is a different animal.

The Application Form

The application form clearly states work has already started yet the application is not marked as retrospective. In this form it should not have been validated.

The Shopfront

The supplied drawings are not of a quality that should be considered acceptable, there are no details of materials or dimensions. The proposed elevation drawing does not match what has been installed, showing frameless glass doors as opposed to the timber frame as installed. The fascia and surround is the usual plain design as installed elsewhere and we would assume made of the same low grade ply. There is a decent stall riser. The fenestration however is lack-lustre and uninspiring. The colour though bold is acceptable and far preferable to the sea of dark greys and black that predominate. The paint finish is considered appropriate.

The signage is well scaled and correctly positioned. The letters themselves are described as stainless steel in the documentation but appear to be made of acrylic, either way not materials considered acceptable in a Conservation Area.

There appears to be little point to the plain timber band as it merely looks like unfinished work.

Illumination

The signage is illuminated and we maintain our objection to illuminated signs in the Conservation Area and the World Heritage Site.

Green Issues

Great claims were made about the green credentials of the Southgate scheme, yet this is another store that has the doors kept open and a heat screen blasting down all day. This fails to comply with guidance laid down in the tenants fit out guide.

The Process

We are consistently informed that comments are considered right up to the determination date. Again, this case stretches the credibility of such claims. The store was open a week before the site notice was posted. In fact we cant remember seeing a site notice. Part of the main objection to this application therefore has to be that the planning process has not been correctly followed. We cannot condone or support what is unauthorised work.

The Tenant Fit Out Guide Revision J February 2009 Section 5.2.7 states ***“works may only commence on site after the preconditions listed have been satisfied”***. On that list are the words ***“Planning Consent where applicable”***.

The works at present are unauthorised. The application form states the work has started yet the documentation is not marked as retrospective. What is taking place is an abuse of the democratic planning system.

We would also ask that the following is taken into account:

Following a less than democratic passage through the planning process that led to the approval of the latest revisions to the SouthGate Shop Front Guide, all current proposals submitted for SouthGate that take advantage of the newly introduced laxity in the guide fall far short of what is considered appropriate for a World Heritage City in both style and materials despite what is theoretically deemed acceptable.

We would draw your attention to the fact that all proposals submitted so far are contrary to the advice given by Bath & North East Somerset Council's Senior Conservation Officer whose clear statement of ***“not acceptable in the current form”*** was ignored. Therefore the statement in the tenants fit out guide section 5 Design Policy and approval Procedure. That ***“there are strict guidelines regarding tenants shop front as agreed with B&NES and Environmental Heritage”*** is untrue as it quite clearly does not have the support of the Senior Conservation Officer in its current form.

We cannot understand the logic of any shop moving into a prestige development and installing shop fronts and signage that detracts from its surroundings.

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.