

Application Number 09/03870/FUL

Address:

1 St Lawrence Street
Bath BA1 1AN

Proposal:

Provision of new timber faced shopfront

Comment: Submitted at 30.11.09

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. The impact of this frontage is certainly dominating and although the shop front has some traditional elements such as hand painted signage such things as context, setting or credibility must be called into question.

Design and Access Statement

Under the heading **Character** it says" *contained within a traditional timber surround*"..... The surround is not timber it is rough plywood/MDF crudely finished. Plywood is not timber and neither is MDF. The finish is certainly not traditional.

Existing Examples

A selection from Antwerp, Paris and London. The London and Paris examples are traditional period buildings with the one in London most closely matching Southgate in terms of style and the one in Paris being a corner location. Both are however of a far higher standard of finish and less visually intrusive, both have a distressed finish. The London example is a traditional shop front with an antique feel, that in Paris a more muted pastel shade. None appear to have illumination or the skull motif.

That in Bath is an overbearing poorly executed design.

The Shopfront

The shop front as installed does not match the supplied drawings. View A shows the projecting sign installed in the first unit next to the tower, when in fact it has been installed to the left of that on the fascia under the tower. The drawings clearly show a transom on the tower elevation and different detailing on the pilasters. There is no transom installed and the pilasters lack the detail. The All Saints logo is shown on the fascia, it has been painted onto the window. A animal skull motif has been painted onto the fascia this is not shown in the drawing. Views B&C gain show a transom and signage on the fascias this does not match that installed.

No colour samples of samples of the distressed finish have been provided for public consultation, therefore we can only comment on that as seen which is a dull matt grey with patches of white bleeding through.

All though we can see the effect that is trying to be achieved it is crudely executed. The plywood/mdf is rough sawn and hastily erected using a nail gun, the level of detail is poor. There are gaps where it does not meet the pavement, water will therefore penetrate and the ply will rot from the inside out. We even noticed the off-cuts and rubbish being swept under the stall risers before they were nailed on.

The whole is overbearing and does not gel with the building above and as such detracts from the Conservation Area and impacts on the setting of the listed building in Lower Borough Walls.

The Signage

As stated above the signage does not match that shown in the drawings with the logos being painted onto the windows and the skull motif on the fascias. The illuminated pole does appear to comply with the drawings but fails on every other count. The rusty scrap metal finish and of course the illumination being unacceptable. We maintain our objection to illuminated signs in the Conservation Area and the World Heritage Site. A sewing machine has been attached to these pole signs they are not shown in the drawings.

There would be no objection to these in principle as they follow the pattern of other 'allusive' devices used for hanging signs.

The Interior

Not something that is usually commented upon and whilst it does not form part of the application it does impact given the visual prominence of the location. It looks like a leftover film set from a post apocalypse movie.

Once again another store that has the doors kept open and large heat screens installed. This fails to comply with the guidance contained in the Tenant Fit Out Guide Revision J February 2009.

Conclusion

If a shop front of real timber executed to a high standard had of been installed, one that was less boxy and chunky and had been finished in a distressed or antique timber effect, our comments may have been more favourable. This looks like a rush job to get the store open on time. It has a negative effect on the character of the Conservation Area that is magnified by its prominent location and the fact there are three elevations seen. What is installed does not comply with the drawings, therefore any approval based on these drawings will make the shop front as installed an enforcement issue. Along with the reasons stated above a main part of the objection must be the way the process has been followed

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. Part of the main objection to this application therefore has to be that the planning process has not been correctly followed. We cannot condone 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. 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.

Conclusion

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.