

Background

With rising energy bills and a desire to reduce the carbon footprint there is a drive to make buildings more efficient. New building construction has to meet higher thermal efficiency standards with minimum standards controlled through the building regulations. Numerically the older building stock far outweighs new construction, and therefore upgrading the present stock of buildings is also important. There are a number of potential solutions ranging from enhancing existing components through to complete replacement. Without care, there is the likelihood that the character of towns and villages will be eroded through “quick fix” solutions. In response to this, English Heritage, the national heritage body, has created a dedicated website www.climatechangeandyourhome.org.uk which provides a raft of information on how to consider improving thermal efficiency in older properties. This seeks to achieve thermal efficiency while not undermining character. In doing so it is important to consider the issue holistically through an energy audit.

Assessment

The property forms part of a terrace row of properties split by The Robin Hood PH (grade II listed), all forming part of the St Faith's Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan adopted in 2007 identified the terrace as positively contributing to the conservation area. *“Homewell to the west of the church which also forms an important part of the setting of the church and is a particularly cohesive and attractive group; those forming the tight and intimate enclosure of The Pallant;”*

Windows are a strong component of a building's character, no more so than here. There has been some erosion of character with no's 1,2, 3, and 8 replaced as upvc units. The remainder survive close to their original form, (single-glazed timber vertically sliding sashes) with a common division of glazing bars and some attractive old glass. These make an important contribution to the architectural character of individual buildings and the terrace as a whole. The most significant windows, having the greatest prominence and contributing most to the conservation area are those at the front. The windows at the rear can be seen in longer distance views. The first floor window (unit 002) is a poor replacement.

From a limited inspection and without probing the front windows, they appear to be in need of maintenance and limited repair – replacement of the timber cill on lower ground floor sash, but repairable. Subject to a sufficient internal reveal, the most sympathetic method of upgrading thermal efficiency would be to overhaul (with the inclusion of a benign draught strip) and repair the existing windows to ensure they function easily and the introduction of secondary glazing adopting the same sight lines.

The property is a single family dwelling house. The Management Plan recommended the introduction of an Article 4 Direction to provide additional

planning controls, over more modest changes (such as window replacement) which cumulatively erode character. Due to limited resources this has currently not been pursued. Replacement windows on this property therefore fall outside planning control.

The Proposals

The proposals are to replace the front sashes in timber, with an attempt to replicate the existing glazing pattern using applied external glazing bars. I wish to ensure the design is for a traditional vertically sliding sash as opposed to a mock sash with top pivot opening window. I think this is the case from the partial information supplied. This detail is important for consistency throughout the two groups of terraces. A mock sash would jar with the terrace group.. At the rear the units are to be replaced in upvc modelled mainly on the existing casements.

Advice

The local planning authority's actions are constrained by the lack of planning control. However, property owners also have a valuable role in maintaining and enhancing the character of the conservation area. Retaining existing architectural features has been shown to enhance property values.

- (1) The applicant should be encouraged to overhaul and repair the existing sashes and provide the necessary enhancement in thermal efficiency through the introduction of secondary glazing. This could prove more cost effective.
- (2) If the applicant is determined to replace the front sashes, the replacement in timber adopting similar sections and replicating the glazing bar pattern is important. Also equally fundamental to maintaining character is the method of opening. A traditional vertically sliding sash should be employed.
- (3) The rear windows are seen within the conservation area but have less direct visual impact. I would therefore rather see these executed in upvc (as proposed) so that the focus is placed on achieving a high quality design on the street frontage.

The local planning authority used its planning powers successfully in the new development on the land adjoining 22 Homewell to achieve a positive quality development utilising traditional materials, while meeting current legislation in terms of thermal efficiency. A similar positive outcome is sought here.

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