

uPVC replacement windows in the Bridgnorth Conservation Area – briefing.

Background

Replacement windows are normally Permitted Development if they are of a similar size and appearance to those they are replacing. Notable exceptions are in Listed Buildings and in a Conservation Area where an Article 4 Direction is in force (an Article 4 direction can withdraw permitted development rights).

There are 4 Conservation Areas within the Town Council's area; the Bridgnorth Conservation Area covers a large part of the centre of Bridgnorth and there are separate Conservation Areas in Innage Gardens, Oldbury and Quatford. The Bridgnorth Conservation Area has an Article 4 direction (made in April 2000) throughout, withdrawing all Permitted Development rights. The other Conservation Areas do not.

There are a wide variety of ages and styles of building within the Bridgnorth Conservation Area. Historically Shropshire Council has permitted replacement uPVC windows on many of the more modern buildings, but taken a more restrictive stance on older buildings which might be considered "non-designated heritage assets". The preference has generally been to repair windows which might be considered historic fabric, but replacement might be considered where repair is not practical. Where replacement is considered acceptable, double glazing has been permitted subject to the window profile being a good match to the historic one, but the Council has tended to insist on the use of timber frames and refused uPVC as an unsuitable material. Bridgnorth Town Council has generally supported this approach in its comments on planning applications.

The resistance to uPVC on older buildings has been challenged by window manufacturers anxious to establish the suitability of their "heritage" ranges, and there have been a number of appeals.

Recent Appeal decisions

In respect of an application for replacement uPVC windows on the front elevation of 9 Bernards Hill, the Inspector decided in January 2022 (Shropshire Council ref 21/02962/REF) to dismiss the appeal. The Inspector felt that the existing windows, and their detailing, made an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In particular, the Inspector stated that *"The introduction of uPVC double glazing would introduce modern materials in what is presently a largely intact historic property. The installation of uPVC would therefore remove important historical fabric of this property and not replace 'like for like'. The frames of the uPVC windows would also appear thicker than the existing thinner timber-frames."*

An application for replacement windows at 39 Whitburn Street was also appealed (Shropshire Council ref 22/03045/REF). This appeal was decided in July 2023. Whilst this appeal was also dismissed, the Inspector included a statement in his report that *".....whilst the use of PVCu may not be an unsuitable material in historic areas, I am unconvinced that the design of these proposed frames would be sufficiently similar to the existing frames to replicate their character and appearance."*

Counc. David Cooper
Chair – Planning Committee
Bridgnorth Town Council

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