

1 Church Passage, Barnet, Herts EN5 4QS

Representation by The Barnet Society

The Barnet Society strongly objects to the recent unauthorised recladding of no.1 Church Passage, both in principle and because of its inappropriate and detrimental execution.

St. John the Baptist's Church and churchyard are what remains of the historic heart of Chipping Barnet, dating from 1292 or earlier. No.1 Church Passage is one of an attractive sequence of buildings that perform an essential role defining the north-western side of the churchyard. After the Church itself, it is the landmark most visible to every traveller turning into the High Street from Barnet Hill, the main approach to the town centre.

On the matter of principle, the Council's planning policy (viewable on its website) clearly states,

It is an offence to demolish, alter or extend a building in a conservation area without the appropriate consent.

and

Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition, or part demolition, of an unlisted building within a conservation area. This provision seeks to preserve and enhance the character of the council's conservation areas by retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the area.

The recladding is a flagrant breach of this policy, which was adopted in July 2007. It is supported by the Council's Wood Street Conservation Area Character Appraisal Statement, which is illustrated by a photograph of the building in question at that date:



North West views onto High Street

This is the most serious and conspicuous of a number of infringements that have occurred in the Conservation Area in recent years – several of which, despite enforcement procedures, have yet to be rectified. Unless a stand is taken against it, the Council's policy will be widely perceived as worthless.

The Society's practical objections concern the inappropriateness of the materials and colour of the recladding, and their detrimental effect on the surroundings. The buildings around the churchyard, and characteristic of the Conservation Area, are mainly of warm red clay brick, flint, or render in white, cream or pastel shades. No.1 itself was originally of stock brick, another material typical of the area, as can be seen in the photograph below:



They do not include timber cladding, and where that is occasionally seen, for example in Moxon Street, it is weatherboarding, painted or stained dark. It would certainly not have been lurid yellow/orange stripey close-boarding. This is an unacceptably brash intrusion into the visual peace of the churchyard, and draws far too much attention to what are quite modest buildings. The new treatment competes with its architecturally far more distinguished, nationally and locally listed neighbours, St. John the Baptist's Church (largely by William Butterfield), Church House and the Hyde Institute (by T.G. Jackson). It particularly harms the latter, a skilful example of Edwardian brickwork that was formerly complemented well by the simple brickwork, and later white render, of No.1 Church Passage.

The Society and the Chipping Barnet Town Team have for some years been fighting to revive the High Street area, and have encouraged selective restoration and improvement of properties as part of the distinctive appeal of this attractive market town on the edge of London. Within the last two years, nearly £1 million has been spent on such work, which included a new canopy and signage to No.1 Church Passage – now trashed by the recladding. A successful appeal by the owner/developer would open the door to similar – or worse – disfigurements, at just the moment when significant redevelopments are being proposed in the High Street area at The Spires shopping precinct and Barnet Market.