
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 24 August 2016

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 21 September 2016

Appeal A: APP/K3415/W/16/3150083

The George Hotel, 12-14 Bird Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6PR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Webb Hotels and Travel Ltd against the decision of Lichfield District Council.
 - The application Ref 15/00387/FUL, dated 6 March 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 3No. biomass boilers in existing store with pellet store in adjacent covered parking area.
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Appeal B: APP/K3415/Y/16/3150085

The George Hotel, 12-14 Bird Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6PR

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Webb Hotels and Travel Ltd against the decision of Lichfield District Council.
 - The application Ref 15/00388/LBC, dated 19 February 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The works proposed are the installation of 3No. biomass boilers in existing store with pellet store in adjacent covered parking area.
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Decisions

1. Both appeals are dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The appeal relates to the proposed installation of three biomass boilers in a single-storey outbuilding. The original application showed a well-spaced row of three 150mm diameter metal flues, one from each boiler, breaking through the roof next to the rear eaves, and rising to finish level with the ridge of the roof. This was later amended to show the row of three flues coming through the roof at ridge level and finishing 750mm above the ridge. Following Council concern about the dispersal of fumes, the height of the flues was increased to some 5.8m above ridge level, and the plans were amended¹ to show the three flues grouped together and supported by a tubular metal mast of the same diameter and height. It was originally proposed to store fuel pellets in a steel container, but the amended plans show the remaining part of the outbuilding to be used

¹ Drawing nos.3046-004 Rev C; 3046-005 Rev E

for this purpose. It was on this basis that the Council ultimately determined the two applications, and I have considered the appeals accordingly.

3. The Council raises no objection to the use of part of the outbuilding to house the proposed boilers or to the conversion of the adjoining part to store the fuel pellets. Although it was not possible to inspect the interior on my visit to the site, the proposed uses would be in keeping with the outbuilding's functional character, and I find no reason to disagree with the Council's assessment.

Main Issue

4. The main issue in both appeals is the effect of the proposed flues and their support mast on the special interest of the host listed building, on the setting of nearby listed buildings and on the character and appearance of the Lichfield City Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The George Hotel stands in the centre of Lichfield, with its main central block facing Bird Street, but encompassing buildings to each side and up to the corner of Market Street. The core of the building, which is listed Grade II*, dates from the late eighteenth century. The special interest of the listed building lies in its architectural expression and unbroken history as a hotel, originally a coaching inn serving the London to Chester road. The list entry records its evaluation by Pevsner as 'one of the best C18 hotel buildings in the land'.
6. Reflecting its coaching inn history, the rear wings of the building enclose a courtyard, now used as an outdoor eating and drinking area, with an archway access from Market Street. The appeal outbuilding, which is a tall single-storey or low two-storey brick building with a part-gabled, part-hipped roof, stands at the end of a small car park, linked back to the main building by an open-fronted single-storey wing. No clear analysis has been provided of the original form and function of the outbuilding, and its later evolution. It is not of any formal architectural merit, but makes a modest contribution to the significance of the listed building as an example of the range of functional vernacular buildings that would have supported the operation of the inn.
7. The addition of the proposed flues and their support structure would form a highly incongruous engineered feature that would be very much at odds with the modest scale and vernacular character of the outbuilding. Because of their great height, which would rise to 2m above the ridge of the three-storey rear wing of the hotel, the flue group would also detract from the setting of the principal element of the listed building. The flues would be prominently visible in conjunction with the hotel building on the approach from the main town centre car park to the rear. They would also be clearly seen from within rear-facing windows of the hotel and from the hotel courtyard, where they would detract from views of the spire of St Mary's Church.
8. The main car park is clearly a very well used public space. There are open views from the car park of the rear of the buildings on Bird Street and Market Street, several of which are listed, and which form an important component of the City Conservation Area. The rear elevations of these buildings have not always been sympathetically treated and there are a number of poor quality modern extensions and insertions. Nevertheless, the historic quality of the

group of buildings surrounding the outbuilding is discernible, and the traditional scale and form of the group quite legible. The varied roofline, marked by chimney stacks, plays an important part in this. The flue structure would form a stark insertion that would break the roofline when seen from the car park, drawing undue attention to its incongruous presence. Even allowing for the relatively functional backland character of this part of the city centre, there would be an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and on the setting of the listed buildings.

9. The Council acknowledges that the harm to the significance of designated heritage assets –the George Hotel, other listed buildings and the conservation area –would be less than substantial in each case. In such circumstances, the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') advises that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits, including securing the asset's optimum viable use.
10. In this case, there would be a minor public benefit through the switch to a more sustainable form of energy for the hotel. Any such investment in infrastructure or fabric improvement that would help to support the long-term future use of the building can also be regarded as a public benefit. The appellants have outlined that this would be part of a programme of investment in improving the hotel since they took ownership. The installation of the new boilers would also allow a prominently sited stainless steel flue to be removed from the rear wing of the hotel. Although no binding commitment to do so has been offered as part of the appeal proposal, the improvement in the appearance and fabric of the building as a result could also provide a public benefit. However, these benefits would be relatively modest in scope. In my assessment, because of the excessive scale and intrusive form of the proposed flue group, the benefits would not outweigh the harm caused.
11. I consider that the proposal would not comply with the statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting and to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. As a result, the proposal would be contrary to NPPF guidance and to Core Policy 14 and Policy BE1 of the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy (2015), which respectively seek to protect the historic environment and to secure high quality development, noting in particular the built vernacular and the importance of extensions and alterations respecting the scale and character of the surrounding area. It would also fail to comply with saved Policy C2 of the Lichfield District Local Plan (1998), which seeks to protect and enhance the character of conservation areas.
12. For the reasons set out above, and having taken careful account of the representations made, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR