

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 October 2016

by Roger Catchpole DipHort BSc(hons) PhD MCIEEM

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

Decision date: 8 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/Y/16/3152407

Church View, Slaley, Hexham NE47 0AD

- 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 Mr Steve Best against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref: 15/03878/LBC, dated 8 November 2015, was refused by notice dated 23 March 2016.
 - The works proposed are described as the 'installation of PV cells to south face of roof of converted garage'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed and listed building consent is refused for the 'installation of PV cells to south face of roof of converted garage'.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the works affect a listed building I have had special regard to section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. The proposed works have already occurred and the application has been made retrospectively. I have seen its effect and I am not satisfied that it has been carried out according to the plans that have been submitted because it comprises twelve panels rather than ten. However, as the Council contend that it covers the same area and given my own observations, I am satisfied that this is only a minor material change. This is the basis upon which this appeal has been determined.
4. For the purposes of the Act, a listed building includes any structure that is within its curtilage which has existed since before 1st July 1948. As the outbuilding is within the curtilage and has a principal and accessory relationship to the main building, it is also consequently listed. Whilst not of interest in the list description, listings are primarily for identification purposes and do not provide an exhaustive or complete description of the special interest. This is the basis upon which this appeal has been determined.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether or not the proposed works preserve Church View, a Grade II listed building, and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.
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Reasons

6. The building was listed in 1986 and was originally constructed in the 17th century. It was remodelled in 1769 by Thomas Teesdale. It comprises a main house and a substantial adjoining outbuilding which has since been converted to residential use. The principal elevation of the main house is constructed from squared stone with three bays and a stone slate roof. The outbuilding extends from the eastern gable end of the main house and is only marginally set back from both its front and rear elevations. The ridgeline of the outbuilding is subservient and is constructed from coursed rubble, as is the case for the rear elevation of the main house. A substantial outshut dominates the rear elevation of the main house whilst the outbuilding is characterised by ad hoc openings and two segmental archways indicative of past agricultural use. The roof of the outbuilding is constructed from Welsh slate which contrasts with the soft tonal quality of the stone roof of the main house. Despite this contrast, the rear elevation has a cohesive quality which arises from use of common natural materials and consistent architectural features, such as rusticated quoins.
7. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the vernacular design and materials of the main house and adjoining outbuilding.
8. The appeal property is located on the main thoroughfare of the small linear settlement of Slaley which lies to the southeast of Hexham. The size of the front garden is such that the building is setback from the road by a significant extent. Residential properties flank its curtilage on either side and the rear garden is bounded by open countryside to the south. The proposed PV array has already been installed on the southern roof slope of the converted outbuilding. It comprises twelve panels arranged in two rows with black edge trims that match the colour of the main panels. An aluminium frame connects it to the roof. No harm to the historic fabric of the building has resulted from this installation as the roof has been replaced, such that no original structural features remain, as confirmed during my site visit.
9. I observed that the appearance of the array has a degree of visual consistency with the slates of the southern roof slope of the outbuilding. Despite this fact, its highly reflective surface and aluminium frame negatively contrast with the matt appearance of the underlying roof tiles. More significantly, I observed that the array has a highly incongruent, alien appearance when the full visual extent of the rear elevation is considered. This is because it is dominated by the extended roof slope of the main house which has a natural brindle colour which is complemented by the light tonal quality of the supporting walls. The starkly, uncompromising form of the array has significantly eroded the harmonious use of materials and thus detracts from a key architectural feature. This impact is not mitigated by the lack of prominence of the rear elevation because all listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the building can be gained.
10. The appellant is of the opinion that the historical significance of the different elements of the listed building, most notably its front and rear elevations, have been established by the permissions and consents previously granted by the Council. These have permitted, among other things, the installation of double glazing and a French door on the rear elevation as well as the 'borrowing' of

original sandstone slates from the southern roof slope. I also note that a small roof light was permitted on the northern roof slope of the outbuilding. I accept that the Council's approach to the front and rear elevations has differed in the past and that some changes to, what the appellant considers to be, the most sensitive elevation have been permitted.

11. However, I do not have evidence proportionate to the assets' importance before me to justify the continuation of such an approach in relation to the proposed works which the Council also find unacceptable. In particular, the heritage statement makes no attempt to define the historical significance of specific architectural elements and simply relies on the list entry. Even if I were to accept that the rear elevation is of lesser significance, I do not find the diminutive nature of the roof light on the northern roof slope of the outbuilding comparable to the highly incongruent extent of the array on the southern roof slope. As a result, its presence offers little justification for the array.
12. Given the above, I find that the works have failed to preserve the special interest of the listed building and I consequently give this harm considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of this appeal.
13. Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets. Given that the array has not led to any direct impact on original fabric, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance.
14. Under such circumstances, paragraph 134 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes the securing of optimal viable use. The appellant is of the opinion that the works are beneficial because of the environmental benefits of renewable energy. I accept that the proposal makes an, albeit small, contribution to meeting national renewable energy targets. This is apparent from the undisputed evidence on the pattern of energy usage at the property. However, the magnitude of this benefit does not outweigh the harm that I have identified. Furthermore, the continued viable use of the property as a residential dwelling is not dependent on the proposed works as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence.
15. Whilst the harm to the significance of the heritage asset would be less than substantial, I have no substantiated evidence before me to suggest that the public benefits outweigh that harm. I therefore conclude that the works have failed to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building. This conflicts with paragraph 134 of the Framework and local policies insofar as they seek to implement the Act.

Other Matters

16. The appellant is of the opinion that the array complies with pre-application advice on standard PV conditions. However, advice is just that and the Council is entitled to reach a decision on the basis of all the available evidence. Similarly, I must consider all the evidence before me in reaching my decision. Consequently this matter carries little weight in the balance of this appeal.

17. Additional matters were raised by the appellant with regard to the reversible nature of the installation; a long-term commitment to renewable energy; public awareness-raising; and the reduced cost of operating dehumidifiers required as a result of the building restoration. Whilst I have taken these matters into account in the determination of this appeal, they are not sufficient to outweigh my concerns.

Conclusion

18. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Roger Catchpole

INSPECTOR