
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 24 October 2016

by Jonathan Hockley BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 18 November 2016

Appeal A: Ref: APP/C3105/W/16/3153900

Tythe Barn, Goose Walk, Bloxham, Oxfordshire OX15 4JD

- 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 Mr Jonathan Tibbetts against the decision of Cherwell District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00719/F, dated 15 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 June 2016.
 - The development proposed is the conversion of Dovecote to Library.
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Appeal B: Ref: APP/C3105/Y/16/3153906

Tythe Barn, Goose Walk, Bloxham, Oxfordshire OX15 4JD

- 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 Jonathan Tibbetts against the decision of Cherwell District Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00720/LB, dated 15 April 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 June 2016.
 - The works proposed are the conversion of Dovecote to Library.
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Decisions

1. The appeals are dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in both appeals is whether the proposed extension would preserve the special architectural and historical interest of the Grade II* curtilage listed building.

Reasons

3. Rectory Farmhouse is a Grade II* listed dwelling, which lies on Church Street in the historic heart of the attractive village of Bloxham. The farmhouse, noted by the listing to date from the mid 15th century with remodelling in the 16th century and extensions of the 17th and 18th centuries, is constructed of regular coursed ironstone rubble with a stone tile roof. A barn just to the south of the farmhouse is separately listed at Grade II. This is also constructed in coursed ironstone rubble, and shares the characteristic of a steeply pitched roof with the farmhouse.
 4. Tythe Barn lies to the rear of Rectory Farmhouse, and is accessed off Goose Walk. The barn has been converted into residential accommodation relatively recently. Although now under separate ownership, the Barn is curtilage listed
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due to its historic association with Rectory Farmhouse. The 2 storey barn is now L shaped; a new extension was constructed to link the building with a range of single storey outbuildings to the east. These outbuildings include a former dovecote, which lies at the western end of the outbuilding range and is therefore attached to the new extension.

5. The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special interest to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features or architectural interest it possesses. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, and that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration of a heritage asset.
6. The external significance of Rectory Farmhouse is derived from the fine quality of the storied 18th century building, including the partial preservation of the original form of the medieval house, the materials used in the property, its setting directly onto the street opposite the Parish Church and the deceptively large property hidden behind this façade. The surrounding outbuildings, including the appeal site itself add to the buildings overall significance. Bloxham Conservation Area is of a roughly linear shape, largely following the main village street from north to south. In the vicinity of the appeal site many properties are detached. The high quality of the local buildings and their interaction together in the street scene contribute significantly to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Goose Walk itself is fairly insular in nature and views of the appeal site from the main road, although possible, are reasonably restricted.
7. The Cherwell Local Plan (the Local Plan) was adopted in 1996. Saved policies C28 and C30 of this Plan state control will be exercised over all new development, including conversions to ensure that they are sympathetic to their context, the street scene, and the building's curtilage. In conservation areas development will be expected to be of a high standard. Policy C18 of the same plan states that special regard shall be paid to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and any features of special architectural or historic interest they possess. Only internal and external alterations which are minor and sympathetic will be approved. Policy ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031, 2015 (the new Local Plan) states that new development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context, conserve, sustain and enhance designated heritage assets.
8. The proposal seeks to convert the dovecote into a library. Two doorways would be inserted into the structure in its east and west walls to allow access to the internal area of the buildings beyond. Existing modern doors to the front of the dovecote would be replaced by non-opening doors which would be similar in design to the existing, albeit with larger areas of glazing to provide more natural light to the library.
9. Inside, the dovecote is a narrow, fairly tall space. Bird nesting holes are set above the ground floor area, in the parts of the wall which form the steeply pitched roof. At my site visit the walls to the dovecote has been cleaned to reveal various wooden battens and struts. These indicated that at one time an internal floor would have been present, an indication confirmed by the existence of a first floor doorway through to the loft area from the outbuildings

to the east. Birds would have accessed the structure through an aperture at the top of the building, with access to humans provided by the first floor opening. It is reasonable to assume therefore that the ground floor area of the building would have been used for storage or similar use.

10. Historical photographs of the dovecote and adjoining barns detail a structure attached to the barns to the east but not to the west. Due to the dilapidated state of the buildings in the photographs the openings to the front of the dovecote are not clear but appear to show a large opening to ground floor level and a subsidiary small opening at the first floor to the loft area of the building. These appear to have been replicated to a certain extent by the current fenestration, which is timber with glazed areas.
11. The proposed new external non-opening door would have larger windows at ground floor level but would be designed in a similar manner. The larger expanses of glass would not be particularly noticeable in views from Church Street due to intervening features such as the gates to the property's curtilage. However, from views closer in I consider that they would cause the property to appear overly domesticated. Whilst the buildings at present are already, to a certain extent, fairly obviously domesticated, the additional glass would make the building appear even less like a dovecote and more like a domestic extension.
12. Whilst on site it appeared that there may have previously been a doorway at ground level from the dovecote to the outbuildings to the east, this did not appear to be the case to the west. Given the evidence concerning the first floor access to the dovecote I consider that the introduction of an access to the east would not harm the functional significance of the dovecote. However, and despite the evidence of a previous floor separating the functional area of the dovecote from the ground floor area, the creation of the proposed access to the west, through what appeared to have been the original external wall of the dovecote would result in the loss of some historic fabric from the building and insert an opening into a wall which previously did not appear to have one. A new through route would be created in the structure which would be a new domesticating feature, reducing the significance of the building.
13. The appellant considers that the dovecote and surrounding buildings have lower heritage significance than the fabric of Rectory Farmhouse itself, and notes that the listing does not specifically refer to the dovecote. Whilst this may well be the case, it does not mean that the dovecote has no significance. The building remains curtilage listed. The appellant's heritage statement¹ considers that the location of the west, originally external, wall is of high significance. I agree with this assessment and consider that the introduction of a new opening into this wall, whilst not affecting its location, would still adversely affect its significance.
14. With reference to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I consider that the combined harm caused by the creation of a new opening in the west wall of the dovecote and the external appearance of the building through the new proposed non-opening doors would be less than substantial. In such cases the Framework states that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum use.

¹ Heritage Matters; Heritage Statement Tythe Barn, Goose Walk, Bloxham, Version 3.0 April 2016

15. The appellant considers that the public benefits of the proposal arise from the building being in residential use and therefore likely to be better maintained, and that more people will see the dovecote due to it being part of the residential accommodation. However, whilst used for storage, the building is already in, and surrounded by residential use, and appears in sound condition. I am not convinced therefore that the proposal would necessarily result in the building being better maintained. Whilst the use of the dovecote as a library may lead it to being used more frequently by the owners of the property, I am not persuaded that this could be termed as a public benefit. I therefore consider that what public benefits may arise from the proposal would not outweigh the less than substantial harm that the proposal would cause to the curtilage listed building.
16. I therefore conclude that the proposal would not preserve the special architectural and historical interest of the Grade II* curtilage listed building. For the same reasons the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Bloxham Conservation Area. The proposal would be contrary to the Framework and Policies C28 and C30 of the Local Plan, as well as to policy ESD15 of the new Local Plan.
17. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeals should fail.

Jon Hockley

INSPECTOR