

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 November 2016

by P W Clark MA MRTPI MCMI

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

Decision date: 29 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/D/16/3158804

The Dower House, Graffham Street, Graffham GU28 0NP

- 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 John Dyer against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/16/01496/HOUS, dated 29 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 22 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is a single storey side extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for a single storey side extension at The Dower House, Graffham Street, Graffham GU28 0NP in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SDNP/16/01496/HOUS, dated 29 March 2016, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 06/022-002 revision 7d, 06/022-004 revision 6d, 06/022-006 revision 7d, 06/022-007 revision 3a and unnumbered drawing indicating ground and finished floor levels.
 - 3) The face of the presently external brickwork to be enclosed within the extension shall remain exposed and not covered with render, plaster, paint or other material.

Main Issues

2. There are three. They are the effects of the proposal firstly on the character and appearance of the existing building which the Authority recognises as an undesignated heritage asset, secondly on the character and appearance of the Graffham Conservation Area and thirdly on the setting of a listed building.

Reasons

Existing building

3. The Dower House consists of two hipped roofed pavilions of differing heights unified by a common palette of materials. The more southerly pavilion projects further towards the road.
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4. The ground floor is built of brick with headers and stretchers of differing colours, red and purple. Above a dentilled string course the first floor is tile-hung with tiles of the same contrasting red and purple laid in a diapered pattern. On its south façade there is a rectangular bay window of white-painted wood under a hipped tiled roof. This cuts across the dentilled string course detail. There is also a porch with a gabled roof which also cuts across the dentilled string course detail.
5. On the east elevation, in the recess between the two pavilions is a hipped porch which sits beneath the dentilled string-course. It is on this elevation that the proposal is to add a large conservatory-style extension abutting a solid wall facing the boundary with Graffham House to the north. This is not the principal entrance elevation of the house (which faces south) and so in principle it is not inappropriate or damaging to the character of the property to add an extension to this subsidiary façade.
6. The extension would be substantial, equal to about one-third of the footprint of the existing house. But it would extend less than the full width of the eastern façade, retaining the long narrow window at ground floor level mentioned in the Authority's officer report and so would appear proportionate and subordinate to the house. It would be extensively glazed, as is the nature of conservatories. But there is no adopted planning policy barring conservatories in principle.
7. Contrary to the assertion in the Authority's report that the proposal would require the removal of historic fabric to the east façade in its entirety, no removal of historic fabric is indicated on the submitted drawings other than that implied by adapting an existing window opening to form an interior doorway. In contrast to the existing accretions to the façade, which cut across the architectural feature of the dentilled string course, the drawings show clearly that the extension would sit below that feature with which the Authority is concerned.
8. Its brick plinth would be constructed to match the brickwork of the original house. This could be secured by condition requiring compliance with what is shown on the plans. The conservatory would be translucent and so the attractive colours and patterns of the brickwork of the original house could still be appreciated, provided not covered with plaster or paint. The grounds of appeal state it to be the appellant's intention to retain exposed brickwork within the interior of the extension. This too could be secured by condition.
9. I conclude that the siting, design, glazing and other materials and respect for existing detailing of this proposal would not harm the character or heritage interest of this undesignated heritage asset. In this respect the proposal would comply with policies BE4, BE11, BE12 and RE1 of the Chichester District Local Plan First Review (the Local Plan) adopted in April 1999. These place a high priority on protecting the character and appearance of all buildings of architectural or historic interest and set criteria for assessing new development including its intrinsic merit in terms of design, scale, materials, siting and layout. Policy RE1, referred to in the reasons for refusal simply applies other local Plan policies to developments outside settlement policy areas but there is no information to show that the proposal would be outside a settlement policy area or that it would infringe any of those other policy requirements.

Conservation Area

10. Graffham is a village strung out along a mile or so of country lane at the northern base of the South Downs. It is, as the appellant's grounds of appeal state, a village of very mixed ages and styles, though I would not go so far as to agree that there is no historic vernacular. At its northern end there is some modern development around the village shop and hall but towards its southern end, where the appeal site is located, historic styles and buildings dominate, though with some more modern development present. Variety is still the rule; there is a mixture of gable-ended and hipped roof forms and materials range through brick, stone, tile and render. If there is a consistent character, it is one of rustic informality and dominant, steeply pitched roofs.
11. Even at its most formal, where Graffham House, on its eminence with the South Downs behind it, faces northwards down the village street, it does so at an informal angle, so that it also faces, at an angle, the Homes of Rest across an informally-shaped green. The village street swoops down an incline between Graffham House and the green and curves round past the Dower House and out of sight towards the southern extremity of the village where stands the church. The effect is casually picturesque.
12. The Dower House shares the eminence on which Graffham House is sited but, in complete contrast to the presence of the latter it is hidden to its rear, its upper floor barely visible from the public road behind retaining walls and an evergreen hedge totalling about 6-7m in height. From most public viewpoints the appeal proposal would not be visible.
13. It would be visible from and level with the southern part of the green in front of the Homes of Rest but would not form part of or interfere with the important three-way relationship between the front of Graffham House, the principal elevation of the Homes of Rest and the rear of the adjacent old peoples' bungalows. Its symmetry and relatively horizontal lines¹ would contrast somewhat with the irregular informality of this elevation of the Dower House but in view of the existing variety of built forms in this part of the village, the introduction of new forms and materials on an extension proportionate to the existing Dower House would do no harm, simply adding to the variety.
14. I conclude that the proposal would be consistent with the preservation of the character of the Graffham Conservation Area. It would comply with Local Plan policies BE6 which seeks to preserve or enhance the special architectural or historic character or appearance of the area and BE11 which seeks to ensure that new development will not detract from its surroundings.

Setting of listed building

15. Two listed buildings are mentioned in the Authority's report, Graffham House and the Homes of Rest. The setting of a heritage asset is not a fixed concept; it is concerned with the way the heritage asset is experienced. The setting of Graffham House has already been described earlier. The proposal would have no effect on this setting; the conservatory extension would be hidden behind a blank single storey wall, to be built in matching brickwork, in itself hidden behind a tall evergreen hedge. Graffham House would still stand dominant,

¹ I understand that it was the appellant's original intention to have a more steeply pitched roof lantern but that this was changed at the Authority's suggestion.

apparently isolated, on its eminence, facing down the village street with the backdrop of the South Downs behind it.

16. The Homes of Rest are also on an eminence rivalling that of Graffham House but on the opposite side of the village street and facing southwards, rather than northwards. When approaching from the south, the Dower House is almost invisible behind retaining walls and hedges, out of sight on the western side of the road. The extension would also be hidden. The green in front of the Homes of Rest rises up on the opposite side of the road. The dominance of the Homes of Rest would be unaffected in this view.
17. There is an important visual relationship between the two listed buildings, facing each other at an angle across the green and each dominating their parallel but opposite views. They symbolise a nexus between power and charity. The later old peoples' bungalows on the eastern side of the green, much less grand, nevertheless contribute to this relationship.
18. Although the Dower House is attached to the rear of Graffham House, the existence of boundary walls and hedges mean that it is not seen in the same view. In turn, the proposed extension, although attached to the Dower House in close proximity to Graffham House, would not be experienced in the same view and so would have no effect on the setting of that listed building.
19. Likewise, although the Dower House can be seen from the southern part of the green in front of the Homes of Rest and the extension would also be seen, it would be seen by turning to face west whereas the Homes of Rest are seen and experienced by facing north. The Dower House does not, and the extension would not, form any part of the visual relationship which exists between Graffham House, the Homes of Rest and the later old peoples' bungalows.
20. I conclude that the proposal would not adversely affect but would preserve the setting of both listed buildings. It would comply with Local Plan policy BE4 which seeks to preserve the settings of listed buildings.

Conclusion

21. This appeal concerns a substantial extension to a very attractive building in a symbolically sensitive part of the Graffham Conservation Area, so the Authority's caution in dealing with the proposal is understandable. But, having closely considered the matter, I am convinced that the proposal would not harm the character or heritage interest of the Dower House itself, would preserve the character of the Graffham Conservation Area and would preserve the settings of the two listed buildings nearby.
22. I therefore allow the appeal subject to the statutory condition limiting the validity of the permission and to a condition specifying which plans are approved and compliance with them. Because of the limited visibility of the proposal and the fact that the elevational drawing specifies matching brickwork and the use of timber windows a condition requiring a schedule of materials and large scale sectional drawings of the windows would be unnecessary. As mentioned earlier, a condition requiring the retention of the presently external brickwork to remain exposed within the envelope of the conservatory would be necessary.

P. W. Clark Inspector