

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 November 2016

by Thomas Bristow BA MSc MRTPI

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

Decision date: 01 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/X1118/D/16/3159325

Merrivale Cottage, Meridian Place, Ilfracombe EX34 9HH

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr David Wood against the decision of North Devon District Council.
 - The application Ref 61235, dated 16 May 2015, was refused by notice dated 27 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is described in the application form as the '*installation of external wall insulation to all elevations of the property in a neutral colour (white/cream/ grey)*'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for Costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr David Wood against North Devon District Council, which is the subject of a separate decision.

Procedural Matters

3. Although I have used the address given in the application form, Merrivale Cottage was signed on the door to the property as 'Merridale'. In the light of this ambiguity I have simply referred to the 'host property' in this decision, being that to which the relevant plans and documentation supporting application Ref 61235 relate.
 4. This appeal relates to similar development as proposed via appeal Ref APP/X1118/D/16/3159340. These appeals are made by the same appellant, the relevant properties are on opposite sides of the carriageway Meridian Place, and both were refused permission for similar reasons.
 5. Notwithstanding these commonalities, however, these appeals are separate proposals and I have determined them with reference to their individual merits. A judgement as to whether each proposal is acceptable is not reliant upon the other.
 6. The Council do not cite within their decision notice or elsewhere that the proposal would conflict with policies within the emerging *North Devon and Torridge Local Plan*. I have approached the appeal on this basis.
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Main Issue

7. The main issue is whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the *Ilfracombe Conservation Area* (the 'Conservation Area').

Reasons

8. The host property is a modest semi-detached property which the Council explains, and the appellant appears not to dispute, dates originally from the nineteenth century. This accounts for the accentuated brick arches around certain doors and windows, some of which appeared to me to be historic in origin, and for the presence of decorative brick corbels under the eaves of the property. These features reflect the detailing present on other properties nearby, and contribute to the historic character and appearance of the property and the Conservation Area.
9. However the architectural integrity of the property has been compromised by the rendering of its walls with a modern textured finish which is not of an historic vernacular, this texture resulting from what the Council describes as '*crude trowel marks*'. In several places this render is blown or cracked. Whilst wooden and of traditional style, neither the windows nor doors of the property are original features, but rather latter additions.
10. There is no information before me related to the planning considerations, if any, that applied to latter modifications to the property. However there is no indication that such works were undertaken without relevant consents, that they represent anything other than ad-hoc incremental alterations to the property over the course of time, or that they amount to deliberate neglect.
11. Although the host property and its adjoining neighbour open directly onto the carriageway Meridian Place, the building line of properties nearby is inconsistent. Some are set-back significantly from the carriageway such as Nos 9, 10 and 11, and there are incremental differences between the foremost elevations of others.
12. The property is accessed via a narrow private carriageway which cuts underneath properties facing the High Street. As a result, and as the property is nestled within a close-knit residential street, there are few public vantage points other than along Meridian Place itself from which the property is readily apparent. Consequently the property is not prominent within the Conservation Area, and on account of its qualified historic integrity contributes only to a limited extent to the historic character and appearance thereof.
13. Properties along Meridian Terrace share a common historic origin and represent a more modest vernacular than the prevailing grander scale and fine detailing of the Victorian properties more commonly found in the surrounding area (such as those along surrounding Oxford Grove, Springfield Road, and Oxford Park).
14. Saved policy DVS1 '*Design*' of the *North Devon Local Plan* adopted originally in 2006 (the 'Local Plan') sets out that development will be permitted where it complies with relevant design principles explained in supporting text. Of particular relevance to this appeal is that development should integrate

appropriately in terms of design with the characteristics of its surroundings. Whilst of some vintage saved policy DVS1 is broadly consistent with the encouragement given within *The National Planning Policy Framework* (the 'Framework') to requiring good design.

15. Saved policy ENV16 sets out that development within a Conservation Area will only be permitted where it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area, which reflects the provisions of Section 72(1) of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*.
16. The proposal is for the installation of external wall insulation and render which would be of fine-grain texture and neutral colour.¹ Unlike in respect of appeal Ref APP/X1118/D/16/3159340 it does not appear that it is proposed to remove the existing render from the property, meaning that the insulation would project approximately 100 millimetres beyond that of existing elevations. The appearance of the proposal is illustrated on photomontages supporting the application,² and associated technical details are contained within the documentation before me.³
17. Such insulation would efface some of the historic detailing of the property, with the photomontages referenced above showing that the decorative corbels would be lost. It also seems to me that, although the photomontages show brick arches as preserved, that this would be unfeasible with a 100 millimetre depth of external wall insulation, or indeed with a lesser depth insulation, given that such features are flush with, or only slightly proud of, the current plane of the property's walls.⁴
18. Although the external wall insulation may not cover these decorative features directly it would nevertheless result in their appearing sunken within the form of the walls which would appear awkward, unconventional and out-of-keeping with an historic vernacular. I understand that the proposal would also involve likely involve the installation of new uPVC window sills and eaves coverings.
19. Whilst there is an inconsistent building line to properties nearby, it is relevant to note that the front elevation of the host property is hard up against Meridian Place. External wall insulation here but not to the neighbouring property would consequently be very noticeable, whereas elsewhere may be acceptable, and would serve to disrupt the symmetry of the property and its adjoining neighbour, notwithstanding the presence of downpipes and an electrical cable which fall between the two.
20. For the above reasons the proposal would be detrimental to the historic appearance of the host property in itself, the symmetry between it and its neighbour, and in turn result in harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. However on account of the moderate contribution made by the host dwelling to the Conservation Area by virtue of its present state and surrounding context, this harm is less than substantial and essentially confined to the immediate area around the host property.

¹ As illustrated on an information sheet supporting the application prepared by E-On Energy Solutions.

² Prepared by Wetherby Building Systems Limited (referenced OL-16-0357-A, OL-16-0357-B, OL-16-0357-C, OL-16-0357-D, and OL-16-0357-E).

³ A document entitled *Context Statement*, prepared by RCA Regeneration, Ref RCA082, dated June 2013, and a further document prepared by Wetherby Building Systems Limited, Ref: S_15-17, dated 7 April 2015.

⁴ The appellant appears not to specifically dispute the reference to a 100 millimetre insulation depth given within the Council's officer report.

21. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (the 'Framework') sets out that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, including Conservation Areas, and that any harm that would result from proposed development should be balanced against the public benefits that would arise. I turn to these benefits now.
22. The overlaying of existing render with that of a fine-grain texture would in some respects be beneficial to the appearance of the property, as this is more consistent with a simpler traditional style of render than is currently present and would rectify defects with the existing render that detract from its appearance. However this would be at the expense of the historic integrity of the host property for the reasons given above, and there is no indication in the information before me that these defects in character and soundness of the existing render are reliant on the proposal before me as opposed to other approaches. As such this benefit carries very little weight.
23. I also acknowledge that the proposal would clearly be of benefit to the occupants of the property in providing a more energy efficient property and indeed by rectifying structural defects with existing render. However these are chiefly personal benefits whereas the harm would be public, and there is no indication before me that the inherent continued domestic use of the property would be compromised by the absence of such development. As such I similarly accord this benefit only very little weight.
24. Although the proposal would result in limited less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area, this is not outweighed by the benefits of the proposal which can only be accorded very little weight. For these reasons I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character appearance of the Conservation Area and that it would conflict with the relevant provisions of saved policies DVS1 and ENV16 of the Local Plan and with relevant elements of the Framework.

Other Matters

25. I understand that No 2 Highfield Road has secured permission from the Council for the installation of external wall insulation, Ref 58780. Although this property falls relatively close-by, it is located in an area hosting more modern and varied architecture at the fringe of the Conservation Area. The railway cottages, a photograph of which has been provided by the appellant, are not within the vicinity of the appeal site. There is furthermore limited information before me in respect of the planning considerations that applied in respect of those cases, and in any event each proposal must be considered on its particular merits.
26. The appellant contends that the external wall insulation proposed, being backed by grant funding, would inevitably result in visible change to properties. However not all properties are similarly sensitive to change as the host property in this case, and the presence of such funding does not obviate the need to secure necessary consents including planning permission.
27. I appreciate that several properties nearby have been variously altered and amended in the course of time. However the presence of modern alterations nearby does not justify development that would be detrimental in the present, and indeed serves to accord some importance to preserving that historic

integrity which remains. I also appreciate that the Town Council have not objected to the proposal, however this does not alter the conflict that I have identified with the development plan and the Framework above or diminish the harm that would arise.

28. I permitted external wall insulation at No 10 Meridian Place via appeal Ref APP/X1118/D/16/3159340. Despite being on opposite sides of the carriageway it is worthwhile explaining here there are clear differences in these cases, notably in relation to the historic integrity of the relevant properties and the visual prominence of the development proposed. As such neither that appeal, nor any other matter, is of sufficient significance to outweigh my finding in respect of the main issue in this case.

Conclusion

29. For the above reasons, and taking all other matters raised into account, I conclude that the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and the approach in the Framework, and therefore dismiss the appeal.

Thomas Bristow

INSPECTOR