
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 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: 1 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/Y/16/3150721

55 Sopwell Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1RN

- 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 Andrew Hedges against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref: 5/16/0130, dated 15 January 2016, was refused by notice dated 8 March 2016.
 - The works proposed are the demolition of single storey lean-to building on the rear elevation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the demolition of single storey lean-to building on the rear elevation at 55 Sopwell Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1RN in accordance with the terms of the application Ref: 5/16/0130 dated 15 January 2016 subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The works hereby authorised shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this consent.
 - 2) The materials to be used for making good any disturbed internal or external surfaces shall be of matching composition, form and finish to those of the adjoining original fabric.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the works are in a Conservation Area and 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 potential effect of the proposal on the character or appearance of the St Albans Conservation Area is not a matter of contention. Nonetheless, I have had special regard to the statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing its character or appearance. In this respect, and having had regard to the character of the conservation area as a whole I am satisfied that this minor proposal would preserve those interests.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether or not the proposed works would preserve a Grade II listed building, 53 and 55 Sopwell Lane, and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

5. The building was listed in 1971 and was first constructed in the 16th century. Although two separate dwellings have since been created, it was originally constructed as a medieval open hall. An appraisal of the building¹ notes that it comprised a single-bay hall with an over-shot cross entry and jettied, two storey bays at either end. The appeal property spans the former hall and the eastern service bay of the range. The later insertion of a first floor led to the extension of the hall to form what is now a continuously jettied, three bay frontage.
6. Interior remodelling of the ground floor in the late 19th century led to the construction of the lean-to structure immediately to the east of the rear entrance. This was constructed between 1880 and 1898. The structure is accessed via an external door on its western elevation. 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 its medieval features and the historical legibility of its phased development.
7. The Council is of the opinion that the lean-to is a vernacular structure that demonstrates the social history of the building and its evolution. However, this can only be the case if it has architectural features that provide a clear indication of past use. As the Council notes, there is no evidence that the structure was used as an outhouse. By the same token nor is there any evidence that it was used as a coal store, as the Council suggests.
8. I observed that this diminutive structure has no architectural merit or any noteworthy historic features beyond its unremarkable, basic construction materials. As a result, the significance of this indeterminate structure is limited. I also note that it obscures older historic fabric as well as the original plan form of the building. Whilst the easternmost ground floor window of the original building is visible from a narrow viewpoint this is otherwise obscured by the lean-to structure owing to its close proximity. As a consequence it has significantly eroded the ground floor fenestration and led to a cluttered rear elevation. I accept that the proposal would lead to a loss of historic fabric. However, this would reveal an older, more significant phase of the building's development.
9. Given the above, I conclude that the proposal would, on balance, enhance the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building, 53 and 55 Sopwell Lane. This would satisfy the requirements the Act as well as paragraphs 133 and 134 of the Framework. The proposal would also not conflict with Policy 86 of the St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994 that seeks, among other things, to ensure that listed buildings are preserved. Consequently, the proposal would be in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion and Conditions

10. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that, subject to appropriate conditions, the appeal should be allowed.
11. I have considered both the wording and grounds for the conditions suggested by the Council in accordance with the tests set out in paragraph 206 of the Framework.

¹ Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment 2014. Report No. 4725. Archaeological Solutions Ltd.

12. In addition to the standard time limit condition, a condition requiring any disturbance to remaining fabric is necessary in the interests of preserving the listed building.
13. I do not consider a condition for the works to be carried out according to plan to be necessary as the description clearly indicates the extent and nature of the proposed works.

Roger Catchpole

INSPECTOR