
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 January 2017

by H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC

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

Decision date: 17 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/U3935/D/16/3160285

Old Methodist Church, Turnball, Chiseldon, Swindon, Wiltshire SN4 0LJ

- 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 Law against the decision of Swindon Borough Council.
 - The application Ref S/16/0982/HC, dated 14 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 21 July 2016.
 - The development proposed is a new vehicle access.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the host building and the Chiseldon Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. The appeal site comprises a former Methodist chapel on the north side of Turnball, a narrow, sunken lane that forms part of the Chiseldon Conservation Area (the Conservation Area). The special interest of the Conservation Area is derived in part from the character of sunken lanes and boundary walls, as well as from the historic interest of pre-1900s buildings¹. After the junction with Slipper Lane, the local landform rises steeply so that properties stand elevated from the highway. Retaining walls and steep banks add emphasis to the strong boundary line on the north side of the street, which contributes positively to the character and sense of enclosure of the route.
4. The appeal site itself occupies a prominent position and is notable for its former use, as well as its architectural form and overall symmetrical proportions. While partially collapsed, the existing front boundary treatment and central stepped entrance correspond to the former chapel's layout and symmetry and help to define the sunken nature of Turnball. Identified as a 'key building of interest'², the appeal building and its boundary add to the townscape richness that underpins the character of the Conservation Area as a whole.
5. The appeal scheme proposes modifications to the front boundary in order to create off-street parking and a ramped driveway. The wall on the western side would be rebuilt and topped with iron railings, the width of the access steps reduced, and the eastern bank cut back to a depth of approximately one metre from the roadside boundary.

¹ Summary of Chiseldon Conservation Area, Chiseldon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, February 2009.

² Conservation Area Plan, 2009

6. Cutting back from the current front boundary line in front of the chapel would contribute to a harmful erosion of definition on the north side of Turnball, to the detriment of its sense of enclosure and sunken lane character. The reduced step width and cut-back proposed would upset the visual balance of the relationship between the front boundary and the chapel, disturbing the overall sense of symmetry. While the new walls, topped with stone copings and iron railings, may re-introduce a material palette akin to the original dwelling, the configuration of the wall and balanced relationship of the central steps to the chapel door and front boundary will be lost. Furthermore, the proposed railings alongside the ramp are shown on the plans as being of a utilitarian design, which would contrast starkly with the more ornate profile of the ironwork proposed for the front walls.
7. Overall the raised ramp and detailed design of the proposed boundary modifications would exacerbate the unbalancing impact of the overall design. Given the level changes, the proposed ramped access, with vehicles parked on it, it would serve to compete with, rather than complement, the chapel building, undermining its setting and diminishing its wider townscape contribution. I recognise that the existing boundary treatment would benefit from repair, and that the appellants have substantially restored the building. However, the appeal scheme would result harm to the host dwelling, and less than substantial yet material harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
8. I note the appellant's desire to create safe off-street parking provision and that there is a potential increase in parking pressure locally. I also recognise there would be some benefit in removing cars parked along the street, and that the scheme has support from a number of neighbours. However, I consider the moderate benefit of removing one or two cars from the street would not justify the harm to the host dwelling and the Conservation Area the appeal scheme would impose. In light of this, the less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, to which I must afford considerable importance and weight, is not outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal.
9. I conclude therefore the appeal scheme would not be in accordance with the requirements of S72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which require that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas. The development would also fail to accord with Policies DE1 and EN10 of the Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026, March 2015 (the Local Plan), which seek to ensure development is of a high standard of design and the Borough's historic environment is sustained and enhanced. In reaching my conclusions I have also taken into account the Chiseldon Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, February 2009. For the same reasons, the proposed development would fail to conform with the policies relating to design set in section 7, and to the historic environment set in section 12, of the Framework; and specifically engaging paragraph 132, which makes clear that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.

Other matters

10. From the appellant's photographs, and from my observations on site, I note there are a number of ramped accesses to properties in the vicinity of the appeal site. However, examples along Turnball tend to be on the southern side of the street, where there is a looser boundary definition, and are associated with more contemporary dwellings. I do not know the details of the

circumstances that led to theses proposal being accepted, nor do I find they provide a useful parallel to the appeal proposal in respect of location or townscape contribution. There may have been an historic permission for disabled access to the host building; I have not seen the details and note this was granted almost 20 years ago, under a very different policy context to that which currently exists. In any event, I have determined the appeal on its own merits. The lack of an objection from the Parish Council and expressions of support from interested parties likewise do not provide sufficient grounds to justify allowing the appeal.

Conclusion

11. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Porter

INSPECTOR