
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 December 2016

by Elizabeth Hill BSc(Hons), BPhil, MRTPI

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

Decision date: 19 January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/C3430/W/16/3152482

**Blakelands Country Guest House and Restaurant, Six Ashes Road,
Halfpenny Green, Staffs, DY7 5DP**

- 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 Paul Morgan against the decision of South Staffordshire Council.
 - The application Ref 16/0051/FUL, received by the Council on 17 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is to remove the existing timber-framed structures and their subsequent replacement. The existing entrance walkway will be replaced with a tiled, open sided timber frame. The existing timber-framed pergola will be replaced with a timber-framed balcony structure. The window above the existing pergola will be removed and the opening increased in height to accommodate a door to provide access from the first floor room inside.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The planning application form submitted with the appeal was dated 18 January 2015. However, the Council says they received it on 17 December 2015 and so I have relied on this date in determining the appeal.
3. The Council also refused an application for listed building consent on 24 March 2016 for the same development. However, the appellant has not appealed that decision. It should be noted that the proposal would also require listed building consent.

Main Issue

4. Blakelands is a grade II* listed building and designated heritage asset. The Council has said that the site is also in the Green Belt. However, their view is that, although the proposed development would be more bulky, it would not be a disproportionate addition to the already large footprint of the existing building. As such, it would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Based on the information before me, I have no reason to take a different view.
5. Therefore the main issue in this case is whether the proposed development would preserve the grade II* listed building and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

6. S66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets statutory duties in relation to designated heritage assets and in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the decision-maker shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. I have been mindful of these duties in determining the appeal.
7. The listed building is the grade II* listed Blakelands, with the main house, dated as 1722 but with older origins, and associated buildings now used as a guest house, restaurant and function venue. From the evidence available to me, including the listing description, I consider that its significance is largely derived from its historic age, form, fabric and particular architectural features. Its former use as a dwelling within a complex of outbuildings contributes to its heritage significance. The appeal proposal concerns works to a building attached to the former house and is variously described as a former malthouse and oasthouse and a former barn. Due to its age and simple utilitarian character, this building makes a valuable contribution to the overall importance of the listed complex and, in reflecting the historic origins of the building, is also important to its setting and significance. The existing building is a simple rectangular building to which a light, open, wooden entrance canopy and pergola have been attached. The existing wooden attachments are uncharacteristic features on this substantial former agricultural building and do not reflect its otherwise simple character and appearance. However, notwithstanding those additions, I saw that the building still retains much of its robust vernacular character and that whilst the building group is extensive, the simple form of this building is clearly legible and blends well with its attractive rural setting.
8. The proposed entrance would be more substantial than the existing attachments, using heavier, broader wooden beams to create a more substantial structure projecting at right-angles at the front of the building. It would be a much bulkier structure, enclosed with a tiled roof, which would detract from the simple, characteristically linear form of the original building. Whilst it would incorporate a design based on the king post truss in the interior of the main building, this would not mitigate the impact of the heavy design of the proposed new structure. Similarly, the proposed pergola would also be more substantial in order to support the proposed balcony over it and would incorporate a flight of wooden stairs to the side. The balcony in itself is not a traditional feature and would include non-traditional materials like glass panels to its edge, out of keeping with the otherwise rustic materials used in the building and subsequent additions. As with the proposed entrance canopy, the pergola and staircase would be at odds with the simple rural form of the building and, together with the proposed entrance, would obscure much of this elevation of the building when viewed from the car park area.
9. The proposal also incorporates changes to a window to convert it to a door to the balcony, with some works already having taken place when I visited. The Council's Conservation Officer has noted that some of the window head details, which the Design and Access statement says were intended to be retained as a feature, have already been lost. Whilst the appellant says that the upper floor windows were inserted relatively recently and therefore there has not been the

loss of a heritage feature, the proposed enlargement of a window to a door opening, especially if glazed in the manner shown on the plans, would be an obvious and detrimental change to the long wall of the building and would result in the loss of historic fabric. In this case, the appellant has said that there would be little lasting impact on the structure of the barn, since the proposals are essentially "bolt-on" structures. Whilst there might only be limited damage to the fabric of the barn, there would be a change to the openings in it and the addition of the structures would have an adverse effect on the experience of the heritage assets and detract from its significance, even if high quality materials were used.

10. Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss requires clear and convincing justification. I recognise that the proposal would not cause the loss of the listed building and, as a result, I consider the harm that would be caused from the proposal would, in the terms of the Framework, be less than substantial, there would still be real and serious harm. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that where a development would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
11. There would be some benefit to the proposal in improving the viability of the existing uses in the listed building. I am not persuaded, however, that that equates to a public benefit. Rather, it is a benefit to the business. Whilst the development may assist in continuing to support the local economy and jobs, and I note the support of Bobbington Parish Council and the local MP, Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE, in this regard, I am not persuaded that those benefits are sufficient in this case to outweigh the harm to the grade II* listed building that I have identified.
12. As such, the proposed development would not preserve the grade II* listed building and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and would be contrary to policy EQ3 of the South Staffordshire Core Strategy, adopted in December 2012, which seeks to ensure the conservation, preservation and protection of heritage assets, and Section 12 of the NPPF, which has similar aims.

Conclusions

13. Therefore I conclude that, for the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

E A Hill

Inspector