
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 January 2017

by Jonathan Hockley BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 22 February 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/T3535/Y/16/3157836

84 High Street, Southwold, Suffolk IP18 6DP

- 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 Julie Church against the decision of Waveney District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/16/0963/LBC, dated 3 March 2016, was refused by notice dated 27 April 2016.
 - The works proposed are reinstatement of first floor creating new residential unit.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is whether the proposed works would preserve the special architectural or historic interest of the Grade II listed building.

Reasons

3. 84 High Street is a Grade II listed property, group listed with No 82. The building also encompasses No 86; the listing describes how the units were originally one house, subsequently converted into 3 houses and then to two shops in the early 20th century. The property lies in the heart of the commercial centre of Southwold and presents a single storey unit with wide shop front to the High Street. A pantiled concave catslide roof with two inset dormers is also noticeable in the street scene. No 82 is gable fronted with a more traditional shop front and 2 windows above.
 4. A comprehensive historic assessment report (HAR) was submitted with the application. This details how the building dates from the late 16th century to early 17th century, and would have been a 3 cell cross wing building, with central ground floor hall (with an attic inserted above later) and east and west gabled cross wings. The west wing survives visually as No 82; the HAR contains a 19th century photograph showing the former east wing, which was rebuilt as a 3 storey red brick property, is signed as No 88 High Street and currently has a bakery at ground floor level. The three cell house is a medieval and post medieval plan form, as the HAR notes. The central cell would have housed an open hall and hearth where daytime activities of the occupants would have been based.
 5. The central cell has a fine quality moulded and painted high level ceiling (forming the underside of the attic), considered by the HAR to have possibly been installed during the later 16th and early 17th century. This ceiling has
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been painted in white with the sunken/chamfered elements of the ceiling picked out in red; the HAR considers this could be ruddle, deriving from crushed brick or tile added to white wash, and notes the rarity of such a find. The ceiling is set at a higher level than the attic floor of the west cross wing, providing more space to the central hall below.

6. An internal first floor seems to have been put in place in the mid-19th century (the appellant states from at least 1841). The HAR notes that it is not known when this first floor was removed, or when an internal modern suspended ceiling just below the moulded ceiling was installed. At the time of my visit renovations were ongoing, and this suspended ceiling had been removed, exposing the moulded ceiling to views from ground level. Ghost lines appearing to show a former staircase along the eastern wall of the property were also visible.
7. The significance of the building ascribes from the history of the structure, its setting in the heart of the town and its appearance. The catslide roof and western gable (of No 62) contributes to its significance externally, being of a differing design to much of the rest of the street. Internally the high level ceiling adds substantially to the significance of the building.
8. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses. Policy CS17 of the Core Strategy¹ and Policy DM30 of the DPD² together state that alterations should preserve or enhance the architectural or historic interest and character of listed buildings, and that the re-use of such buildings will be encouraged if compatible with the fabric and interior of the building. New uses which result in harm to their character will not be permitted.
9. The proposal seeks to reinstate the previous first floor to allow a duplex style apartment to be created above the main retail space, with a living room and adjacent kitchen and bedroom in the existing attic space above. A new shop front would be installed, with a separate doorway on the eastern side providing access to a corridor and spiral staircase to access both floors. The bottom section of the catslide roof would be removed to provide a small valley area before the shopfront, where three windows could be installed to provide light to the living space.
10. As mentioned above, at the time of my visit the previous recorded suspended ceiling had been removed, revealing the moulded ceiling in plain sight from the ground floor. The views allow an insight into the original purpose of installing such a fine quality ceiling with high quality craftsmanship and two tone decoration. After the time of installation, and until the fitting of the first floor, this would have allowed full views of the ceiling in the central cell of the house.
11. The appellant is of the view that the proposal merely seeks to reinstate a floor that previously existed for many years – stated in the submitted design and access statement as at least 86 years and possibly around 184 years until alterations in 1984. Whilst there is a lack of evidence of later years in the

¹ The Approach to Future Development in Waveney to 2031, Core Strategy Development Plan Document January 2009

² Policies to Help Make Decisions on Planning Applications, Development Management Policies Development Plan Document January 2011

buildings evolution (the 20th century), a range between 86 and 184 years is a considerable amount of time.

12. The appellant considers that the character and significance of the central cell hall has been lost through subsequent unsympathetic conversions. However, at present, the large space available at ground floor level allows a clear appreciation of the original large central hall that would have been a fundamental part of the medieval and late medieval plan form of the building. To reinsert a floor into the structure, regardless of the fact that such a floor was previously in place, would diminish the quality of this space, reducing the significance of the building.
13. The previous suspended ceiling had been removed at the time of my visit, and this clearly allows greater appreciation of the hall ceiling. I have limited information over whether such a ceiling will be, or is likely to be, reinstalled. However, even if this were to be the case the large space would still remain, and the moulded ceiling would be protected.
14. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes it clear that when considering the impact of a proposal on the significance of a listed building, great weight should be given to its conservation. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration of the heritage asset, and as they are irreplaceable, any harm should require clear and convincing justification. For the reasons given above I consider the proposal would result in harm being caused to the significance of this listed building. The scheme proposes no changes to the moulded ceiling. Due to this, and the fact that a floor existed previously so alterations were previously made to the structure of the building I consider that the harm caused would be less than substantial.
15. In such situations the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of a proposal, including securing the asset's optimum use. The proposal would generate some economic benefits and allow the residential use of the upper areas of the building, which would create benefits in terms of bringing life to the building and helping to ensure the maintenance of the asset. However, plans have been submitted detailing an approved scheme which includes the same doorway and corridor/spiral staircase to access the attic area, which would be converted to a single floor studio flat. There is therefore an extant scheme available which will achieve similar benefits. Whilst I do not doubt the appellant's intentions to carry out the proposed works in a sympathetic manner, I find no convincing justification for the proposal. As a consequence, what public benefits there might be are insufficient to outweigh the harm caused.

Conservation Area

16. As the site lies within Southwold conservation area, I am required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area, in accordance with Section 72(1) of the Act. However, in this case, as the proposed works are largely confined to the interior of the building, I am satisfied that the character and appearance of the Conservation Area would be preserved.

Conclusions

17. Whilst I have found that the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, this does not alter the harm that would be caused to the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building by the proposal. Such harm is not outweighed by public benefits and the scheme would be contrary to the Framework and policies CS17 of the Core Strategy and DM30 of the DPD.
18. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Jon Hockley

INSPECTOR