The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 28 February 2017

by Mrs Zoë Hill BA(Hons) Dip Bldg Cons(RICS) MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 27 March 2017

Appeal A Ref: APP/T9501/W/16/3162558
Lowtown, Walltown, Greenhead, Northumberland CA8 7JD

- 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 & Mrs Forwood against the decision of Northumberland National Park Authority.
- The application Ref: 16NP0083, dated 17 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 October 2016.
- The development proposed is described as demolition of modern west extension and construction of new single storey west extension, form new window and door openings and carry out internal and external alterations and creation of visitor accommodation.

Appeal B Ref: APP/T9501/Y/16/3162559
Lowtown[1], Walltown, Greenhead, Northumberland CA8 7JD

- 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 & Mrs Forwood against the decision of Northumberland National Park Authority.
- The application Ref: 16NP0084LBC, dated 17 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 13 October 2016.
- The works proposed are described as demolition of modern west extension and construction of new single storey west extension, form new window and door openings and carry out internal and external alterations and creation of visitor accommodation.

Decisions

1. Both appeal A and B are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The development was screened under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and it was determined that it did not require an Environmental Statement. I have no reason to disagree with that screening.

3. List Descriptions are provided to identify the designated Listed Building. They do not set out exhaustive details about what makes the building architecturally and/or historically of special interest. The whole building is listed, including the interior.

[1] The Listed Building list description uses the name Low Town but I shall use the address as Lowtown as this is how it appears on the application form

Main Issues

4. The main issues in these appeals are as follows:

   (a) For both appeals: the effect of the proposed development/works on Lowtown, a Grade II Listed Building, having particular regard to the proposed extension, internal alterations and layout, and proposed fenestration.

   (b) For Appeal A: the effect of the proposed development on the special qualities of the Northumberland National Park.

Reasons

Listed Building

5. The appeal property, a Grade II Listed Building, is a neglected and vacant house. Above its front door it is dated as 1800. The building is of a robust form with subservient structures at either side. The east side structure is of stone with a corrugated fibre roof, whilst the west side extension is of corrugated metal. The main building is constructed of coursed stone with dressings and tooled quoins. The roof has coped gables and chimneys, including an external brick stack which seems to have served a 'copper'[2] within the corrugated metal addition. It is of two storeys and two bays. The fenestration and door openings are largely limited to the front elevation which faces south. In fact, there is currently only one opening in the opposite elevation. This design provides for protection against the weather in this rugged, northerly, upland location. The building has lost many of its internal structures, for instance the internal walls, floor and staircase, but a cast iron cooking range remains in situ within a fireplace with a fireside cupboard. The building is accessible along a track but appears to have no obvious defined curtilage area.

6. The clear form, relationship to its surroundings, age and quality of materials, and detail all contribute to its special architectural and historic interest forming much of its significance as a heritage asset.

7. The proposed extension to the west side of the dwelling would be of modern materials with a shallow pitched roof. It would almost span the width of this gable elevation. Whilst contemporary design can complement historic properties, I am not satisfied that this would be the case with the design proposed. It would result in a new opening through the external wall of the dwelling to provide internal access. This would have consequences for the simple plan form and so markedly alter its character. Furthermore, externally it would partially mask the quoin stones. This would detract from the simple but elegant detailing of the building. Additionally, the size of this addition has a disproportionate width that would draw attention away from the simple elevations of the host property. Moreover, there appears to be little visual coherence between the juxtaposition of the old and new elements, with little sympathy in rhythm, materials, detailing or proportions. In all I conclude that the proposed extension would have a jarring appearance which would harm the special architectural interest of the building.

[2] A large basin under which there would have been a fire

8. The proposed internal arrangement would provide for a corner staircase, leaving the ground floor largely open with the exception of a corner given over to a utility area and a toilet. The first floor would be sub-divided to create three bedrooms and a bathroom.

9. The evidence for the building's historic plan form is of a simple layout with a central staircase with two rooms partitioned off at ground floor and likely similar form at first floor (photographic evidence from 2016 is contained in the Officer's Delegated Decision Report – the building has significantly deteriorated since that date). Whilst there might be some scope to reconfigure the layout, there is no convincing justification to move away from the simple plan form of this historic building which is part of its intrinsic character. Indeed the appellants appear to be aware of the need to reassess this element of the scheme. In this respect the optimal viable use for the building is not the most financially viable use at all costs to the building; rather, it should represent the best viable use whilst having regard to the significance of the heritage asset.

10. In addition to re-opening a former doorway, the appeal proposal seeks to insert new windows into the external walls, one to each of the front and rear elevations. This would significantly detract from the historical form and functional design of the dwelling. I do not share the appellants' concern that such openings are essential to make this building attractive to visitors. Rather, the historic nature of the building with its own unique architectural interest, and its location, are amongst key aspects that could support its successful re-use as visitor accommodation.

11. Timber, double-glazed, sash windows using 'slim' double glazing are proposed as part of the refurbishment. The precise detailing of windows is often significant to the appearance of a building. In this case, I share the Council's concern that the proposed double-glazed units, even with a 'slim' double-glazing would harm the special interest of the building. Such modern windows would have a different profile to traditional windows so as to accommodate the double-glazing even with the slimmer form. In this respect the Historic England guidance (Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading reissued in February 2017) would not endorse such an approach here. Rather as the windows are not poor replacements being improved it encourages a traditional like for like replacement with an accurate copy. Although double-glazed windows have insulating properties, there are other means by which such benefits can be achieved as set out in the same Historic England guidance.

12. In addition to proposing double-glazed timber windows the proposal includes a new aluminium window (in the proposed new opening in the north facing elevation). As with the proposed contemporary extension this approach might be acceptable in some circumstances and, indeed, Historic England do not object to such an approach where it is appropriate. However, and setting aside the lack of justification for the new opening and harm it would cause, the modern materials in this instance, whilst identifying the window as new, would have a visually discordant relationship to the other fenestration. As such, it would appear wholly unsympathetic to the other windows in the property and particularly the only other window in this elevation.

13. I appreciate that the appellants refer to Appeal Decisions[3] where the Inspector allowed similar windows to those proposed in another Listed Building (Slate House). However, on reading those Decisions it is clear that the circumstances were different. In particular, the scheme was improving inappropriate windows which would not be the case here. Furthermore, in that case the Inspector gave weight to the windows not being open to public view which would not be the case for some of the proposed windows here. Moreover, the dwelling in that appeal was not in such a sensitive location in terms of other heritage assets, namely a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), and landscape quality.

14. A further pair of linked Appeal Decisions is referred to at Carrow Brough[4]. However, that appeal had a more complex background and, from the drawings provided, related to a building of a different character, it having more windows of greater variety in design than the simple windows and form of the appeal building.

15. I have also noted the references to other developments/works at other properties. However, the Authority has explained that one (Once Brewed) does not relate to a listed building. The remaining cases (Gandy's Knowe and Threestone Burn) are older decisions predating the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). More significantly, each case must be judged on its own merits. This is particularly important in dealing with Listed Buildings, where the building itself is often unique and individual and so critical to the acceptability of a given scheme. Indeed, having looked at the extensive material provided by the appellants it is apparent that these cases relate to buildings of different condition, age, patterns of fenestration, design and character. Thus, I have judged this scheme on its own merits.

16. I conclude that the proposed development/works would have a harmful effect on the special architectural and historic interest of Lowtown, a Grade II Listed Building. Thus, its significance as a heritage asset would be harmed. Having in mind my statutory duty derived from s.66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the Listed Building, such harm is a matter which attracts considerable weight. The proposal would fail to accord with the requirements of Northumberland National Park Core Strategy (Core Strategy) Policy 1 which, amongst other things, seeks to deliver sustainable development, including in terms of design and protecting the special qualities of the National Park and Policy 18 which seeks to conserve, enhance and promote the quality and integrity of the cultural heritage of the National Park, including Listed Buildings. It would also conflict with the advice of the Framework which sets out that heritage assets are irreplaceable and any harm should require clear and convincing justification.

17. The Framework makes it clear that where less than substantial harm would arise, as would be the case here, the harms should be weighed with the public benefits of the proposal. Those benefits would essentially be bringing the building back into use so as to secure its future. There would also be some economic benefit from the works proposed and from a visitor accommodation use. However, I am not satisfied that these benefits justify the extent of harm identified. Moreover, it seems likely to me that a more appropriate solution could be found to bring this heritage asset back into viable use. Thus, the

[3] Linked decisions relating to one property APP/P2935/Y/15/3130844 and APP/P2935/W/15/3130845
[4] APP/T9501/E/09/2113809 linked with APP/T9501/A/09/2113806 and also referred to as Carrawbrough

public benefit of bringing the building back into use in the form proposed does not outweigh the harm to the heritage asset.

Northumberland National Park

18. The appeal property is located in the Northumberland National Park in a remote and isolated location, and sits atop the Vallum SAM. It is also situated within the setting of Hadrian's Wall, a World Heritage Site (WHS), not far from a public bridleway.

19. The Officer's Delegated Decision Report sets out that Policy 1 of the Core Strategy seeks to ensure that development proposals will conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Park. This Officer Report goes on to identify the special qualities as being landscape character, tranquillity, cultural heritage, geodiversity and biodiversity.

20. The Authority in its letter of 6 May 2008 considers that the building has been abandoned. As such, it has applied Policy 7 which relates to the conversion of buildings outside settlements. Although the proposed development, gains support from this policy in terms of the principle of allowing visitor accommodation use, I find that it conflicts with the policy insofar as it seeks an extension which would detract from the character and appearance of the building and the immediate landscape.

21. On this matter, I conclude that the proposed development would harm one of the special qualities of the Northumberland National Park because of the harm to the Listed Building and, thus, cultural heritage.

Other Matters

22. I am mindful that, because the site sits on the Vallum SAM, the installation of new services would require careful consideration and other regulatory compliance for works. It also seems that there would be some effect on the SAM and WHS. To consider this fully it would require further correspondence with the parties. Given that I shall dismiss the appeal on other matters little would be gained by delaying the Decision to seek further views from the parties.

23. It appears that an acceptable scheme of ecological mitigation could be achieved were the scheme acceptable in all other respects.

24. The appellants indicate dissatisfaction about the attitude of an officer of the Council. However, that is not a matter for my consideration in respect of the merits of these appeals.

Conclusions

25. I conclude that the proposed development/works would harm Lowtown, a Grade II Listed Building, and one of the special qualities of the Northumberland National Park. Thus, the significance of environmental harm and policy conflict is such that, for the reasons set out above, having had regard to all other matters raised including economic benefits and active use of the building, I do not consider the proposal to be sustainable development and so I dismiss the appeals.

Zoë H R Hill Inspector