
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 March 2017

by Susan Ashworth BA (Hons) BPL MRTPI

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

Decision date: 12th April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/Y/16/3162105

Harsondale Farm, Langley, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 5NT

- 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 Morshead against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 16/02875/LBC, dated 15 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 11 October 2016.
 - The works proposed are new window to west gable and internal alterations.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the effect of the development on the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building.

Reasons

3. Harsondale Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building dating from the early C19. It is a modest stone-built two-storey house located adjacent to and associated with a range of farm buildings to the north. The south elevation, which faces an enclosed garden, has a formal appearance with a centrally positioned entrance door and symmetrically placed windows. The north elevation is less formal, with asymmetrical windows to the ground and first floor, an off-centre doorway and a round-headed stair window. The west and east side elevations have no window openings. The property lies in an isolated countryside location surrounded by grazing land.
4. The proposal seeks various works to the building associated with the proposed alterations to the internal layout on both floors. Those works include: the removal of a wall between the hall and living room; the repositioning of a wall in the rear hallway; the repositioning of walls to provide a bathroom and en-suite on the first floor; the insertion of a doorway opening between the bedroom and the proposed new en-suite; the formation of a window in the western elevation.
5. The starting point for the consideration of the proposals is Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) which requires that special regard is had to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses.

6. National policy guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) confirms that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset. The particular significance of any element of the historic environment likely to be affected by a proposal should be identified and assessed. Any harm should require clear and convincing justification.
7. Section 128 of the Framework requires an application to be accompanied by a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. The Heritage Statement accompanying the application noted that there are no internal elements of the property mentioned in the listing and makes no further assessment of the significance of the interior of the building. However, the list entry itself should not be regarded as a comprehensive statement of all the components of the listed building which are of interest nor does it constitute a statement of significance.
8. The building represents a typical Northumberland farmhouse and its significance lies in both its historic and architectural interest. Whilst the house has been altered inside and out, it retains much of its historic character. Internally, and through the fenestration pattern, the original room layout can clearly be seen, providing evidence of the way the house was originally used and thereby contributing to the special interest of the building.
9. The two ground floor rooms at the front of the house, with a central hallway, were modest formal living spaces located away from the farmyard. The formal, symmetrical south elevation with a central doorway is an expression of the internal layout. The rooms are modest in size and are regularly proportioned. Both have a wide chimney breast. The removal of one of the walls to the hallway, understood to be brick built, would alter the proportions of the space and would result in the loss of a formal hallway. As such the works would adversely affect the plan form of the building and the way in which the building is read. The retention of small sections of the wall, whilst hinting at the original plan form, would not successfully mitigate against the loss of the hallway or the change to the room's proportions.
10. The proposal would introduce a window into the west elevation of the building, which I note has been rendered possibly due to prevailing weather conditions. The side elevations were designed to have no openings and are therefore sensitive to change. The installation of a window into the elevation, particularly one that matches the proportions and detailing of those on the principal elevations, would confuse the legibility of the building and undermine the original design intent.
11. These elements of the proposal, the loss of the wall to the hall and the insertion of a window to the west elevation, would thereby cause harm to the special historic and architectural interest of the building.
12. At the rear, the layout and proportion of the rooms is less formal. Repositioning the partition walls at ground floor level, whilst having an effect on the plan form, would not harm the special interest of the building. Upstairs there is no significance in the layout of the bathroom and large fitted cupboard. The proposed realignment of walls would provide two somewhat awkwardly shaped rooms but nevertheless the installation of partitions would be reversible. The bathroom window and its architrave would be retained.

13. The insertion of the new door opening in the bedroom wall would result in a loss of a limited amount of historic fabric. However it would be a narrow opening and as such the plan form would remain legible. Any harm from this element of the proposal would be limited.
14. I acknowledge that many of the features of interest within the building would be retained and as such the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset. The guidance in the Framework is that in that case such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.
15. The restoration of the inglenook fireplaces is a benefit in terms of the special interest of the building and I acknowledge that the works may provide an opportunity to reveal currently hidden features. I also acknowledge that the re-ordering of the building to provide a larger kitchen/dining room and second bathroom would reflect a more modern way of living. Investment in the fabric of the listed building that would secure its long term future can be seen as a public as well as private benefit. However, in this case I am unconvinced on the evidence before me that the future of the house would be unviable without the proposed harmful alterations.
16. Therefore the benefits of the scheme before me are not sufficient to outweigh the harm it would cause; harm that must attract considerable importance and weight on the negative side of the balance given the weighty statutory requirements of the Act.
17. The appellants have provided a significant amount of documentation about other similar cases with the aim of demonstrating inconsistencies in the approach Councils take to applications for alterations and extensions to listed buildings. Whilst frustrating, such inconsistencies may not easily be avoided, particularly as the architectural and special interest of a building and the impacts of a particular development on its significance require assessment on a case by case basis. Moreover, whilst some of the cases outlined have some similarities with the appeal proposal, they are not all entirely comparable.
18. I acknowledge that there are similarities in the cases of Woodhead and Crow Hall in terms of alterations to the layout but the significance of the internal walls is unclear. In the case of Slate House it appears that the Council did not object to the internal alterations and the Inspector at the subsequent appeal found nothing of significance inside the building. I note from the plans that there was, in fact, very little alteration to the plan form. Hexham House is a substantial building that had been empty for some time and the Council had, as required by the Framework, weighed the loss of historic fabric against the substantial benefits of the scheme. Carrawbrough related to the renovation of vacant property. The wall into which the proposed window would be inserted was not considered to be any more sensitive to change than the other parts of the listed building. Although I have taken them into account, these cases do not justify the harm I have identified to the significance of the appeal property.
19. For these reasons, and taking into account all other matters raised, the appeal is therefore dismissed.

Susan Ashworth

INSPECTOR