



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 January 2018

by Mrs H M Higenbottam BA (Hons) MRTPI

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

Decision date: 30 January 2018

Appeal Ref: APP/J1915/Y/17/3181202

73 High Street, Hunsdon, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 8NJ

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Corina Chatfield against the decision of East Hertfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref 3/17/0662/LBC, dated 15 March 2017, was refused by notice dated 9 May 2017.
 - The works proposed are demolition of single storey extension and replacement part single storey, part two storey rear extension.
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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 Grade II listed building known as 73 High Street Hunsdon (listed as 73 and 75 High Street, Hunsdon Stores and 77 High Street) or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Significance of the heritage asset

3. The appeal property is the southernmost dwelling in a group of what were four houses and is now three dwellings. This group dates from the 17th century with the southern end probably being earlier. The group are timber framed, clad with white weatherboarding over a redbrick plinth. The roof is red clay tile with a gable at the northern end but half hipped at the southern end. The roof is pierced with dormers, one of which is in the rear roof slope of the appeal property.
4. The statutory list description suggests that the building originated as a 3 unit central chimney house with two storey parlour at the south end and a floor inserted in the remainder with 2 dormers to light the upper floor. It retains that general appearance. No 73 has a low flush box sash window of 12/12 small panes under the eaves. To the rear of No 73 is a catslide outshut, weather boarded with a cement tile roof, which abuts the gable projection of No 75.

5. In recognition of its special architectural and historic interest as an entity the cottages are listed as a group. As such, and due to their prominent location, they also make a positive contribution to the special interest and significance of the Hunsdon Conservation Area. This is also recorded in the list description.
6. The appellant's Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment (appellant's Assessment) challenges the interpretation of the buildings origins in the list description. The appellant's Assessment concludes that the building appears to have originated as a barn and not from domestic origin and that *'it might even be suggested that the rear cross-wing of the neighbouring property is in fact the original midstrey, though this could only be confirmed by further investigation'*.
7. The origins of the listed building are not clear and the appellant's conclusions may well be correct, as there are elements that would suggest that it may have been a barn that was then converted to dwellings.
8. The list description makes no mention of the rear outshut, but this of itself is not determinative as the description is intended to be largely for identification purposes. There is a slightly jowled post in the south-west corner of the outshut. A boarded partition divides the space into a kitchen and bathroom. Within the bathroom the timber structure of the wall to the rear projection of No 75 and the back wall of the historic core of No 73 are visible and comprise sole plates and regular but weathered studwork. The former rear wall of No 73 retains wattle grooves. From what I saw, including the weathering, it seems that the outshut is a secondary addition.
9. Whatever the true origins of the building the key attributes of special interest and significance of the building and group in my view, lie in the timber framing, simple form and age of the structure.

The proposal

10. The proposal is to demolish the existing single storey rear outshut and replace it with a part single and part two storey rear extension. In addition it is proposed to insert new partitions and create an additional opening at ground floor level. A second staircase would be created in the new extension to serve the first floor extension. The depth of the single storey element would be greater than the outshut it would replace.

The effect of the proposed works

11. The outshut is a later addition and is somewhat diminished by the use of concrete tiles. The proposal would result in the loss of the jowled post in the outshut and I note in the appellant's Assessment it is stated that this is likely to be re-deployed.
12. The single storey element would be deeper than the existing outshut and would abut the sheds at No 75. As a result, the roof pitch of the single storey element would be shallower than the existing outshut and would appear out of place. The double staggered gable within the catslide would introduce a complex rear roof form.

Considerations

13. I accept that the demolition of the outshut would have a low to moderate impact on the significance of the listed building. However, its replacement with a deeper projection, with a shallower pitch to the catslide would harm the significance of the listed building. Although the appellant indicates on plan and the application form that tiles would match existing roof tiles, it is not clear whether that is the red clay tiles of the main roof or the concrete tiles of the outshut. Moreover, I am not satisfied that the shallow pitch of the catslide would allow appropriate clay tiles to be used. This adds to my concerns about the proposal. Furthermore, the complex roof form of the double staggered gables would be at odds with, and harm, the simplicity of the form of the listed building.
14. In the light of the above, I therefore find that the proposal would cause harm to the significance of No 73 and the group which form the listed building. Although I consider this harm would be less than substantial, it is nonetheless a level of harm to which significant weight should be attached. The proposal would fail to preserve the listed building or its features of special architectural and historic interest contrary to section 16(2) of the Act. Furthermore, it would fail to accord with the expectations of paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset and any harm requires clear and convincing justification.

Planning Balance

15. In accordance with paragraphs 133 and 134 of the Framework it is for the decision maker having identified harm to the designated heritage asset, to consider the magnitude of that harm. In this case I conclude this should be considered as less than substantial when considered in the context of the asset as a whole. In such circumstances the Framework requires that any identified harm is weighed against any public benefits the works might secure.
16. The proposed works would remove the damp outshut and improve substandard kitchen plumbing. This may result in benefits by maintaining the listed building, and thus ultimately be public benefits, but those benefits are modest and do not outweigh the harm I have identified
17. It is my statutory duty to consider the effects of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Hunsdon Conservation Area. The Council did not identify harm to the Conservation Area. However, in my view, it follows that if the special interest of a listed building within a conservation area, prominently located such as in this case, is materially diminished in a manner that is clearly visible then the character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole is similarly incrementally harmed. While this harm is less than substantial in the conservation area as a whole it would nevertheless fail to preserve it and would thus be in conflict with the requirements of section 72 of the Act.
18. Whilst the appellant has not commented on this matter, and I appreciate that my view differs from that of the Council, little would be gained from seeking further views given that the harmful impact on the listed building would, on its own, be determinative for the compelling reasons set out above.

19. A similar scheme was granted planning permission and listed building consent in 2008¹. The permission and consent have now lapsed and cannot be implemented. I have nothing before me to indicate the basis on which the scheme was supported, but the Council record no specialist advice on the scheme was received at that time. I have assessed the proposal as it is today, in the context of the relevant guidance applicable now and on the evidence before me. I do not find the existence of that expired consent justifies the proposal before me which I have found to be harmful.

Conclusions

20. I conclude that the works would fail to preserve the special architectural or historic interest of this Grade II listed building. In the absence of any public benefits to outweigh this harm I conclude the works would also conflict with the Framework. For these reasons, and having considered all matters raised, I conclude the appeal should fail.

Hilda Higenbottam

Inspector

¹ 3/08/0271/FP & 3/08/0270/LB