

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 July 2019

by Martin Andrews MA(Planning) BSc(Econ) DipTP & DipTP(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 August 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/D/19/3228021

22 Pound Lane, Sonning RG4 6XE

- 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 Dinesh Attada against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application, Ref. 183075, dated 06 November 2018, was refused by notice dated 11 April 2019.
 - The development proposed is the replacement of the thatched roof with slate tiles* and a loft conversion (*see paragraph 3 below).
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) the effect of the proposal on the character or appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area, and (ii) the potential impact of the proposal on bats, a protected species.

Reasons

3. The Council objects to the principle of the proposal because the loss of the thatched roof and the proposed changes to the form of the roof would have an unacceptable effect on the existing building and the character and appearance of the conservation area. In considering the appeal I have noted that it is the appellant's intention to use handmade clay tiles rather than slates for the new roof.
 4. I saw at my visit that the existing thatch is in poor condition and in urgent need of replacement. However, I also formed the view that because of the thatch and the overall design, the building makes an important positive contribution to the conservation area. This is despite the fact that the building is not easily seen in public views or read with other buildings.
 5. The officer's report sets out the likely origins of the building as being built in the latter part of the Arts and Craft Movement and argues that together with its particular characteristics this justifies it being regarded as a 'non-designated heritage asset'. In my view this is a reasonable approach and I consider that the loss of the thatch and the eyebrow windows in particular would cause harm to the building's architectural and historic interest.
-

6. The altered appearance of the building would appear somewhat contrived, particularly with the loss of the curvature of elements of the roof that is an integral part of the original styling of the house.
7. The effect of this would be also to cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area and an unacceptable conflict with Policies CP1 & CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy 2010 and Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014. Although the harm to the significance of the conservation area as a designated heritage asset would be 'less than substantial' (as referred to in paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019), the modernisation of a single building in the Borough's stock of housing is not a public benefit of sufficient weight to override the harm that I have identified.
8. The grounds of appeal refer to the potential fire hazard of the thatched roof and the insurance implications thereof. However, this is a matter that the appellant will no doubt have considered on the original purchase of the property and whilst I understand the points made, they do not outweigh my conclusion on the first issue.
9. On the second issue, a bat survey has been undertaken with findings and conclusions that indicate it might well have been feasible to attach conditions to a permission that would avoid this reason for refusal precluding the proposed development. However, this is not now relevant in the light of my conclusions on the first issue that the principle of the alterations and additions proposed is not commensurate with the Council's policies.
10. I have taken all other matters raised by the appellant into account, but nothing I have seen or read outweighs my overall conclusion that the appeal should be dismissed.

Martin Andrews

INSPECTOR