
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 July 2019

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3rd September 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/C1760/Y/19/3223725

Flat 6, Rivermead House, The Meads, Romsey SO51 8HY

- 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 Butler against the decision of Test Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/01754/LBWS, dated 4 July 2018, was refused by notice dated 5 December 2018.
 - The works proposed are the creation of access points in tie beams of converted attic rooms and associated structural works and insertion of a partition wall.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. As the proposed works relate to a listed building, I have had special regard to section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building, listed as Rivermead, 39, The Mead, and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

The listed building

4. This early C19 building stands close to the River Test and was associated with Abbey Mill which stood to its west. Sales evidence suggests it was a house in 1832. Today it appears as a 2-storey building converted to flats, set under a low-pitched roof. The appellant's inspection inside the roof, before the relatively recent conversion, suggests that the roof was altered. He describes 8 fireplaces within the roof. A photograph shows a stout tie-beam running directly in front of one of these openings, at around 1m above the ceiling level. The Council presumes that the roof space was used for drying paper.
 5. I have been able to see only the exposed timbers in flat 6. Nonetheless, the evidence of carpenters' marks and mortice voids in the tie-beams, their likely rotation and the sequence of the ties, as well as their positions around 1m above the ceiling level, and on occasion directly in front of an opening, suggest that the tie-beams were either brought in from another building, or formed part of a quite different roof design. Some of the more modern rafters appear
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charred, and some as replacements, which suggests that the bulk of the present roof structure was in place before a fire in the building, in the 1930s.

6. The roof space of flat 6 has been converted into accommodation which limits the aesthetic and artistic value of its timbers. The special interest of the building insofar as it relates to this appeal therefore, is primarily associated with the design of the roof structure, and its historical and evidential value in relation to the development of the building.

The effect of the removal of timber

7. More definitive conclusions regarding the reasons for the present roof configuration, and its incorporation of the tie-beams, have yet to be drawn. Equally, the information concerning from which building they may have been taken, and why, or the previous roof design of which they formed part, has yet to be revealed. The tie-beams have significant potential to yield more evidence about this phase of the building's development and the factors which influenced these changes.
8. Without measured drawings of the tie-beams at a greater scale to indicate the locations of the marks and the smaller timbers in relation to the works, it is not possible to be completely certain of the effect of the fabric removal on their evidential value. Nonetheless, on the basis that the sections proposed for removal bear no marks, insertions or joints, the loss of superficial evidence would be limited. Notwithstanding this, these beams act as simple ties. The removal of complete sections of their span would deplete their historic integrity and diminish their evidential value as important structural elements of the roof.
9. I appreciate that an alternative structural design to continue the role of the ties has been proposed, including taking new beams through the floor, with minimal disturbance to the fabric of the building. Notwithstanding the sensitivity of the alternative, the historic beams would no longer act as simple ties, but as part of a more convoluted structural system. These are beams of large section and of substantial length, age and interest in their own right, and built in a curious position during a phase of change in this building. Their simple structural role, and their place in the historical development of the building would be lost. This would diminish their significance as features of special historic interest.

The effect of the new partition

10. Given the room layout already in the roof, the formation of a short length of additional stud partition, subject to full details of the location of the existing timbers and the fixing of the new timber, would not harm the special architectural or historic interest of the building. I note the Council did not object to the partition. The finding of no harm from this element of the works does not change the conclusions above.

Other Matters

11. I acknowledge the appellant's analogy to inserting a doorway into a later wall in a building, which may be more commonly accepted. However, these works do not sensitively alter the nature of the simple tie-beams, they transform them to the degree that they are no longer simple tie-beams. Given their physical and historical place in the development of the building, the works would harm its special historic interest.

12. The evidence on the origin and age of the tie-beams is inconclusive. Whether they are from the late C18 or late C19, does not limit their significance to the degree that their partial removal would not harm the special historic interest of this building.
13. I have noted that the works would be confined within the roof of the building and would preserve the character and appearance of the Romsey Conservation Area, to the desirability of which I am required to pay special attention.

Conclusion

14. I conclude that the removal of the historic fabric would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the listed building, contrary to the clear expectations of the Act. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. It goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets. Although the degree of harm here would be less than substantial, this does not equate to a less than substantial planning objection, especially where the statutory test is not met.
15. Under such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes securing the optimal viable use of listed buildings. The works would improve the accessibility of the rooms in the roof and sustain their use. However, the continued use of the building is not dependent on these works as the present residential use would not cease in their absence. They do not amount to a public benefit.
16. In the absence of any public benefit to outweigh the harm identified above, I conclude that the proposed works would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building. They would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 192 of the Framework and development plan policies insofar as relevant. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR