
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 29 October 2019

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 19th November 2019

Appeal A: APP/Z2830/W/19/3229139

Manor Farmhouse, Longwell, Maidford, Towcester NN12 8HT

- 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 and Mrs Allison against the decision of South Northants District Council.
 - The application Ref S/2019/0029/FUL, dated 12 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 6 March 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as a rear kitchen extension.
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Appeal B: APP/Z2830/W/19/3227556

Manor Farmhouse, Longwell, Maidford, Towcester NN12 8HT

- 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 and Mrs Allison against the decision of South Northants District Council.
 - The application Ref S/2019/0030/LBC, dated 12 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 6 March 2019.
 - The works proposed are described as a rear kitchen extension.
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Decisions

1. Both Appeal A and Appeal B are dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in both appeals is the effect of the proposed extension on the special interest of the listed building and on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Reasons

3. Manor Farmhouse sits at the centre of the small village of Maidford, close to the parish church. The house is separated from the church by a long range of former outbuildings, to which it is connected by a modern glazed link. Much of this range, comprising former stables, has been converted to a separate dwelling named The Tryst House. Most of the land to the north has been given over to The Tryst House, leaving Manor Farmhouse with a relatively confined area to the rear. The plots are separated by a low timber fence and a row of conifers.

4. Manor Farmhouse and the former stables are both listed Grade II and lie within the Maidford Conservation Area. The list entry for Manor Farmhouse records that it dates from the late seventeenth century, with later alterations, but with origins in the fifteenth century. The main body of the house is a wide-fronted two-storey block, with a steeply pitched gabled roof. The eastern wing containing the kitchen is said by the appellants to be of nineteenth century date but by the list entry to date from the eighteenth century. It is lower in height, appearing from the front as single-storey.
5. It is now proposed to add a single-storey rear extension to Manor Farmhouse to provide a dining room. The extension would be built in stone to match the house, with one element flat-roofed and curved in plan and with narrow slit windows, and the other element forming a lean-to against the rear wall of the house, with one gable fully glazed above the junction with the proposed flat roof. Access would be gained by removing two rear-facing kitchen windows and extending their openings down to floor level.
6. In considering a proposal for alteration to a listed building consent, statutory duty¹ requires that special regard must be had to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. A similar duty applies in respect of the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of a conservation area². National policy guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') confirms the great weight in favour of the conservation of 'designated heritage assets' such as listed buildings and conservation areas³. The particular significance of any element of the historic environment likely to be affected by a proposal should be identified and assessed⁴. Any harm should require clear and convincing justification⁵.
7. In this case, the proposal is supported by very limited analysis of the history of the building or of the factors that contribute to its special interest. Having regard to the Council's view, I find that the house's historic interest derives from its very early date, reflected by surviving original fabric, and its subsequent evolution as an important dwelling in the village. Its architectural interest is founded on the incorporation of the arched feature in its western elevation and on its vernacular construction and form, using local materials and techniques. The house's linear arrangement is notable, with a marked contrast between its quite formal front, which contains nearly all the windows, and its functional almost blank rear elevation.
8. The reasons for refusal of the applications refer to the loss of historic fabric. I accept that there would be a minor adverse impact from the downward enlargement of the two window openings, but this section of wall appears to have been previously altered over time and there would be no widening of the openings. The stone could be retained for re-use, while the timber window frames do not appear to be of any great historic interest. If the proposed extension were otherwise satisfactory, the implications for historic fabric would probably be acceptable.

¹ Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, dealing respectively with applications for proposed works and proposed development

² Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

³ NPPF paragraph 193

⁴ NPPF paragraphs 189, 190

⁵ NPPF paragraph 194

9. The issue therefore becomes the siting, scale and design of the extension. I agree with the Council that the existing lean-to rear extension is modest in scale and character and does not greatly detract from the strongly linear arrangement of the main house. The appeal proposal would be larger in footprint than the existing and more prominent in its projection and in its height relative to the main eaves. It would also be more complex in form. Although the proposal would remain subsidiary in scale, the simplicity of the rear elevation and the overall clarity of form of the original house would be adversely affected.
10. This effect would be emphasised by rather contrived nature of the design, with its two distinct components. The existing house has a great strength of character and has successfully accommodated frankly modern interventions in the design of its glazed link and in exposed structure within the kitchen. There should be no objection in principle to the use of a sympathetic modern treatment for an otherwise acceptable extension. But in this case, the curved-end form appears to derive from the constraints of the plot dimensions rather than from the character of the building. The flat-roofed curved form would be more assertive than the examples of traditional slightly curved projections provided by the Design and Access Statement. The contrast with the consistently angular nature of the existing house, and of the glazed link, would not be successfully resolved.
11. The combination of one apparently vernacular element with another overtly contemporary element would appear unduly complicated and contrived in a proposal of this size. I agree with the Council that, due to the lower eaves height of the pitched roof, the junction of the two components would not be satisfactory. The large gable window would also appear out of keeping with the more vernacular treatment of the lean-to section.
12. The appellant places weight on pre-application advice given by the Council in 2017 that a modest extension in this location might be acceptable, subject to design. Whether or not that advice still holds, the appeal decisions can relate only to the proposal currently submitted. I find that the special interest of the listed building would not be preserved. I agree with the Council that the proposal would not alter the listed building's current optimum viable use as a well-appointed dwelling house. There would thus be no public benefit that would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the building's heritage significance.
13. The Council raises no objection to the proposal's effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. However, the character of a conservation area depends on the heritage value of the buildings it contains. Harm to the special interest of a key listed building in the village must inherently have an adverse effect on the conservation area's significance.
14. There would be very limited impact on public views, as the extension would be largely hidden by existing walls and buildings and would be well screened by trees when seen through the gateway of The Tryst House. However, impact on appearance does not rely on public views. Even if well maintained in future, the conifer screen would be unlikely to block all views of the extension from the garden of The Tryst House and from some of its windows, which face towards the site.

15. Moreover, the former stables and Manor Farmhouse are both listed for their group value. Their relationship is critical to this value and to their overall mutual significance. The proposed extension, sited immediately next to the meeting point of the two buildings, would have an adverse impact on that relationship and hence on the setting of the stables range.
16. Therefore, I do not endorse the Council's conclusions on these aspects and find that the proposal would not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area or preserve the setting of the listed former stables. The harm to heritage significance would be very much less than substantial in each case but, for the reason already outlined, would not be outweighed by public benefits.
17. In addition to the conflict with statutory and national policy objectives, the proposal would also be contrary to Policy BN5 of the West Northants Joint Core Strategy 2014, which seeks to protect designated heritage assets, and to saved Policies EV12 and EV13 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan 1997, which respectively set criteria for the alteration and extension of listed buildings.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR