



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 November 2019

by Anthony J Wharton BArch RIBA RIASI

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

Decision date: 26th November 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/Q9495/Y/19/3231825

Town Head House, 25 St John Street, Keswick CA12 5AB

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (PLBCAA) against a refusal to grant Listed Building Consent (LBC).
 - The appeal is made by Mr Geoff Routledge, against the decision of The Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA)
 - The application Ref: 7/2019/2005, dated 5 February 2019, was refused by notice dated 1 April 2019.
 - The works proposed as described in the application are:
Vertical extension of existing bay window.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Matters of clarification

2. The application described the proposal as a '*Vertical extension of existing bay window*'. However, the proposal is far more than just a simple addition or extension to the bay windows. It is a tower structure designed to act as an '*observatory*' which would be around 7.5m² in floor area, around 3.5m higher than the ridge height of the house and 3.2m in diameter. The '*observatory*' floor would be accessed from the existing second floor level, resulting in a much higher platform level or floor above the bay windows on the south elevation.
3. The Design and Access Statement (DAS), submitted with the application, refers to the extension being an '*observatory*' and a '*sitting room*' to provide '*spectacular 360° views over the Lakeland Fells*'. The Planning Report also refers to the structure being a '*tower observatory*' over the top of the two-storey bay windows.
4. Having studied the submitted drawings it is evident that the proposed addition to the dwelling house is basically a towered observatory structure (complete with dome and cupola) which, in three-dimensional terms, is much more than a simple vertical extension of the bay windows. The drawings show it as a major additional element, akin to a small neo-classical or ecclesiastical addition to the listed house. From the respective submissions it is clear that the parties are in agreement that the structure is an '*observatory tower*'. It is on this basis that I have dealt with the appeal.

Background information and relevant policy

5. Town Head House was constructed around 1840 of coursed rubble stone, with a slated, hipped roof to its southern elevation. It is of two main storeys with an attic roof space and was listed in Grade II in May 1977. With its centrally positioned pilastered doorcase with rectangular fanlight; its 12-paned sash and case windows and its two-storey canted bay window, it is still recognisable from the list description. Internally it is stated to be predominantly 'as built'.

6. This attractive Georgian house is set back from the roadside on the sloping St John's Street. It lies within its own extensive grounds and is located in the Keswick Conservation Area (KCA). It occupies a prominent position in this central part of the town, being almost at the top of the street and close to St James' Church. It is possible that it was a detached property, prior to the construction of the adjoining cottages to the north. The OS map of 1862 shows that it would originally have had clear views to the north-east before that part of the town was significantly developed. This part of the KCA is characterised by a variety of properties, some of which must date back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Overall the building designs and materials are typical of this earlier part of the town.

7. The most relevant development plan policies are Policy CS27 (The acclaimed historic environment) of the Lake District National Park Core Strategy (LDNPCS) (Local Plan Part One) and saved policy BE13 (Alterations and extensions to listed buildings) of the Lake District National Park Local Plan 1998 (LDNPLP). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a major material consideration and the most relevant sections are in relation to this proposal are; 12 (Achieving good design) and 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment).

8. Because Town Head House is listed in Grade II and is also within the KCA, in reaching my decision, I have had special regard and have paid special attention to sections 16(2) and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Prior to my formal site visit I walked around this part of the conservation area, noting the other nearby historic buildings, as well as the general character and appearance of this part of the KCA.

The main issues

9. The main issues in this case are:

- The effect that the proposed tower/observatory would have on the character and integrity of the listed building; on its setting and on its features of special architectural and historic interest and, secondly,
- The effect that it would have on the character and appearance of the Keswick Conservation Area.

Reasons

The effect on the character and integrity of the listed building, on its setting and on its features of special architectural and historic interest

10. Having studied the application drawings I consider that the design of the domed tower structure, in itself, is satisfactory and competent. I also agree with the statement made on behalf of the appellant that the proposal is perceived as a '*deliberate, bold and idiosyncratic addition to the building*' and that it is slightly eccentric and with little precedent. I can also understand the statement that the classical design and the concept of the scheme is inspired by the Picturesque in an endeavour to capture and experience the rugged landscape. It also is evident that there would be minimal loss of the historic fabric and that the scheme would allow this attic part of the building to be brought into a more regular use.

11. However, I completely disagree with the contention that the proposal '*respects the overriding classical design and proportions of the existing building*'. The listed Town Head House is a distinctly recognisable Georgian residence. Its historic and architectural significance is distinctly noticeable from its Georgian simplicity and the clarity of its overall design. The main aesthetic qualities are derived from its multi-paned sash windows and stone surrounds, which are set symmetrically within its stone

frontage; from the two-storey canted bay windows and from the hipped, slated roof. In my view the proposal would detract markedly from this simple Georgian design.

12. I agree with the LDNPA that the large domed roof shape would jar with the angular hipped roof of the house. In my view it would be perceived as being completely out of character with the Georgian simplicity of the listed building. The classically proportioned dome and cupola would appear as an out-of-scale, neo-classical addition to the roofscape of the listed building. In visual terms it would completely dominate the main elevations of the house in a discordant and damaging manner. I consider that it would be harmful to the Georgian integrity and character of this fine historic listed dwelling house.

13. With regard to the effect on the setting of the listed building, I consider that the sizeable, towered structure would again be perceived as dominating the building and the street-scene in this part of Keswick. When seen from the north-west, along St John Street, it would be seen as a stark and inappropriate addition to the simple skyline of the other traditional buildings in this part of the KCA and particularly to the setting of the adjacent smaller-scale cottages and the dwellings beyond opposite the church. From some viewpoints it would clash with and detract from the setting of the listed church.

14. The same would be the case when approaching from the south-east. In fact, from this angle, the tower structure would be perceived almost as a completely separate structure in front of the listed house, completely overpowering its simple roofscape and again dominating the form and scale of the street scene. When viewed from the north-east, from both near and distant viewpoints, as indicated above, I consider that the tower structure would also affect the setting of St James' Church and the simplicity of the other nearby historic buildings in this part of the town.

15. Due to its overall form and scale I also consider that the proposal would be harmful to some of the architectural and historically interesting features of Town Head House itself. In particular it would appear top-heavy and detract from the two storey bay windows; it would be far too close and would dominate the south chimney; it would appear obtrusive and at odds with the hipped slate roof when seen from St John Street and would also appear completely out of scale with the rest of the architectural details of the house.

The effect on the character and appearance of the Keswick Conservation Area

16. Because of its effect on the listed building, its setting and its features of architectural and historic interest it follows in my view that the proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of this part of the KCA. Again, when seen in the overall context of the conservation area, it would be perceived as an incongruous and out of scale structure attached to the listed building. Because of its height and visual dominance it would detract markedly from the form and scale of the other nearby historic buildings in this part of the town. The fact that it is stated to be a bold and eccentric addition is, in my view an understatement. Its boldness and eccentricity, rather than complementing the appearance of the locality would detract from the quiet but clearly Picturesque and historic nature of this part of Keswick.

Overall Conclusion

17. In attempting to pair the simple Georgian lines of the listed building with a neo-classical dome and cupola of this form and scale, it is my view that the proposal is contrary to the provisions of the development plan and in particular to Policy CS27 of the LDNPCS and saved policy BE13 of the LDNPLP 1998. These policies aim to protect the historic environment generally, as well as ensuring that alterations to listed

buildings are carried out sympathetically and without causing harm to the character setting or features of these historic assets.

18. I also consider that the proposal is contrary to policies within the NPPF which seek to achieve good design and to conserve and enhance the historic environment. I have acknowledged above that the tower, in itself, is well-designed. However, when seen attached, in all its glory, to the host building, the tower would result in a top-heavy, overpowering addition to the listed building. The overall effect would be a scheme of two contrasting parts, being the existing simplicity of the Georgian elements and the new over-sized and inappropriately scaled tower, dome and cupola.

19. I would not go as far as the LDNPA in saying that the harm caused is substantial, since the listed building and its structure would not be demolished or significantly physically altered. However, what would be significantly and detrimentally changed would be its external appearance; its overall integrity and character; its setting in this part of the KCA and its simple features of architectural and historic interest. In the context of the NPPF policies I am of the view that the harm would be less than substantial. Nevertheless there would be no public benefits resulting from the proposal which would overcome the harm which I have identified. The only benefits would be for the appellant in that he would have unrivalled views of the Lakeland from the observatory.

20. This might well be a laudable and understandable personal aim but, in my view, the private benefits resulting from a consent to erect the observatory are completely outweighed by the disbenefits of the scheme in terms of the effect it would have on the public realm. Planning approvals and listed building consents should be made in the public interest having regard to all relevant local and national policies. For the reasons set out above and due to the harm, which would be caused to the listed building and the character and appearance of this part of the KCA, it is my view that consent should be withheld. The appeal, therefore, fails.

Other Matters

21. In reaching my conclusions in this appeal I have taken into account all of the other submissions made on behalf of the appellant, by the Council and by Keswick Town Council. These include the full planning history of the listed building; the initial submissions; the Design and Access Statement; the Heritage Statement; the detailed appeal statements; the drawn and photographic submissions and the final comments. However, none of these carries sufficient weight to alter my conclusions or to change my decision that the appeal should be dismissed.

Anthony J Wharton

Inspector