



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 November 2019

by David Nicholson RIBA IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/D3505/Y/19/3236085

Coconut House, Hall Street, Long Melford, Suffolk CO10 9JQ

- 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 & Mrs C Green against the decision of Babergh District Council.
 - The application Ref. DC/19/02717, dated 4 June 2019, was refused by notice dated 10 July 2019.
 - The works proposed are a single-storey (rear) extension.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Reasons

2. Hall Street is particularly long and wide which may account for the first part of the village's name. Coconut House is a Grade II listed dwelling which stands at the heart of what is an extensive Conservation Area. It is a late 19th Century 3-storey red brick house with some ornament to its window arches and sills. The rear of the house is out of sight from the street. It has a single storey rear kitchen range covering much, but not all, of the width of the plot with a smaller utility area beyond that. There is a conservatory¹ and roof terrace on the first floor above this rear range. I saw that the interior has been modernised and is in attractively good order with a pleasantly spacious kitchen.
3. The Council acknowledged that the date of the existing ground floor rear flat roof element to Coconut House is unclear but advised that the 1886 Ordnance Survey Map shows a rear range on the same footprint as the existing. It noted that this includes a 19th Century sash window. This suggests that the rear range may be from the same date as the main house or rebuilt on a similar footprint, perhaps reusing original material. It is likely that the roof form of the original extension has also been altered given the first-floor conservatory.
4. The proposal is to extend the rear range to take in the full width of the plot. This would enable an open plan kitchen and breakfast room and a slightly larger roof terrace above. The Council considered the proposals unacceptable, regardless of the date of the existing range, arguing that expansive flat roofs are not traditional either for 19th Century dwellings or the Long Melford Conservation Area. It added that it is unlikely that its Heritage Team would have supported the existing flat roof had an application been submitted now.

¹ Consented in 2007 Ref. B/07/01427

5. When considering the impact of a proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset (which includes listed buildings) paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF§193) requires great weight to be given to the asset's conservation irrespective of the amount of harm to its significance. Babergh Local Plan (LP) Policy CN06 requires alterations to listed buildings to preserve historic fabric and respect its original form. NPPF§196 expects any harm to be weighed against public benefits.
6. I accept that there may be some doubt as to the extent of historic fabric within the current range and that the alterations might not result in the extensive loss of original fabric. I note that that the previous consent might not be approved now but this is of limited relevance. Nevertheless, the works would alter the floor plan and detract from the historic interest that survives through this layout. On top of the existing changes, the addition of a further flat roofed extension would lead to cumulative harm to the significance of the listed building, albeit at a fairly low level. I have therefore looked at whether there would be any public benefits that might outweigh this harm.
7. There is nothing before me to suggest that dismissing this appeal would lead to redundancy or neglect of the house, let alone its eventual loss. Indeed, the Appellants argued that, as in their opinion the proposal would not give rise to harm to the listed building, it was not necessary to balance the public benefits (in the terms advocated by NPPF§196).
8. I have noted other appeal decisions but find that, as each case is different, they do not set a precedent. In particular, this appeal does not relate to setting and there was no suggestion that failure to allow the appeal would threaten its usefulness and functionality, or result in redundancy and neglect that could risk its eventual loss. I conclude that the proposed rear extension would not preserve but would harm the special interest and significance of the listed building. It would result in a low to medium level of less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset, contrary to the aims of LP Policy CN06 and NPPF§§193 and 196.
9. Turning to the significance of Long Melford Conservation Area, I found that it contained a wealth of historic buildings around a linear medieval street pattern. While the front elevation of Coconut House makes a positive contribution to its character and appearance, the rear is not readily visible from public views and I accept that there may be many examples of flat-roofed elements to the rear of the buildings in Hall Street. In my assessment the proposed extension would not detract from the Conservation Area or alter its significance. I find that its character and appearance would be preserved and that there would be no conflict with LP Policy CN08.
10. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Nicholson

INSPECTOR