
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 27 November 2019

by Mr JP Sargent BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 December 2019

Appeal Ref: APP/H1840/Y/19/3228305

Home Farm, Twynning Road, Strensham, Worcestershire WR8 9LH

- 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 Andrew Davenport against the decision of Wychavon District Council.
 - The application Ref 19/00557/LB, dated 6 March 2019, was refused by notice dated 29 April 2019.
 - The works proposed are to install suspended block and beam floor, internal skin of brickwork, studwork and insulation to prevent damp penetration. Replace front elevation rotten window with bespoke sw window to match existing.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue with this case is whether the works would preserve the special architectural or historic interest of this Grade II listed building, and their effect on its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Reasons

3. Home Farm dates from the early 17th Century but has been extended often since then. Its special architectural and historic interest lies partly in the way its alterations show changing building styles over time and illustrate the evolution of the building, and these factors contribute to its significance as a designated heritage asset.
4. The proposed works are to the cellar under the oldest part of the dwelling. Its floor is predominantly of stone with drainage channels, while the walling generally comprises timber framing on brick plinths. Although the front wall has been rebuilt in a blockwork, the west wall renovated and the ceiling re-plastered, the age and the historic detailing that remains in this room adds to the building's architectural interest. Moreover, the arrangement of the floor can assist in informing how the space may have been used in the past. Therefore, I find the cellar makes a positive contribution to the significance of the building.
5. The works would enclose the walls and floor so as to prevent damp spores and the smell of damp from filtering through into the rest of the house. However, the works would not be tackling the damp problem itself.

6. It is said that what is proposed would allow easy access to the fabric behind if necessary. However, even if this is so, it is unreasonable to expect it to be removed regularly. Therefore, when in situ the works would prevent the casual monitoring that would enable any damage the damp may be causing to the building to be noticed as early as possible and then tackled. As a result, they could well conceal a growing problem, thereby increasing the amount of maintenance eventually required. I acknowledge that such damage is not certain, but to my mind it is a real possibility arising from what is before me. The appellant has said there would be ventilation of the cavities to ensure the dampness caused no further deterioration of the building. Whilst reference is made to this in the notes on the submitted plans, I have insufficient evidence to show how it would be achieved, its effectiveness or the implications it would have on the historic fabric. The appellant also contended the works would prevent damp entering into the rest of the structure, but in my view any such benefit could be offset by harm caused by the damp being contained behind the walling and floor.
7. Moreover, enclosing the walls and floor in this way would also prevent an easy appreciation of the historic detailing that is present, so diminishing an understanding of the building.
8. The appellant said that other walls in the building had been enclosed in the past with plasterboard. However, I have no details of the circumstances surrounding those decisions, and in particular whether damp was an issue, and so they do not lead me to a different view in this case.
9. Accordingly, I conclude this aspect of the works would fail to preserve the building's special architectural or historic interest, and would cause harm, albeit less than substantial, to its significance.
10. It is also proposed to replace the window in the front elevation with a new one. I consider this aspect of the works to be acceptable if suitable conditions control the detailing.
11. The *National Planning Policy Framework* says that any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, and great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. It adds that where less than substantial harm would be caused this harm should be weighed against the public benefits.
12. The stated public benefit from the works to the walling and floor is to protect the residents and regular visitors from health issues arising from damp spores. I do not doubt that the cellar has issues of damp. I also accept that damp can be a health problem, especially for the elderly, the very young, and those with breathing conditions. This, though, does not 'trump' the concerns of conservation as suggested by the appellant, but rather has to be balanced against them.
13. However, the cellar is used only for storage and not as an area of primary living space, and it is under a relatively small part of the house. I also have nothing before me to show that, having regard to the special architectural or historic interest of the building, this is the most appropriate way to tackle the damp. Taking these factors together, although I give significant weight to the health concerns, they do not outweigh the great weight I have attached to the harm I have identified.

14. It was also said that the works would reduce the building's carbon footprint, but again there was no evidence to show this would be achieved or that it was the most suitable way to secure such a benefit.
15. Accordingly, I conclude that the works to the cellar walls and floor would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the building and would cause less than substantial harm to its significance. Even if the stated public benefits were taken together, they would not outweigh this harm, and so I conclude the proposal would conflict with guidance in the *National Planning Policy Framework*. Moreover, insofar as the *South Worcestershire Development Plan* is a material consideration to this case, the works would also conflict with its Policies SWDP6 and SWDP24, which broadly seek high quality design that respects the historic context. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

J P Sargent

INSPECTOR