
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 11 November 2019

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an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 December 2019

Appeal A Ref: APP/X0360/W/18/3216503

York Cottage, Pearson Road, Sonning, Reading, Berkshire RG4 6UH

- 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 B Guthrie against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 181800, dated 30 May 2018, was refused by notice dated 15 October 2018.
 - The development proposed is a 2-storey rear extension and general repairs.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/X0360/Y/18/3216507

York Cottage, Pearson Road, Sonning, Reading, Berkshire RG4 6UH

- 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 B Guthrie against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 182071, dated 30 May 2018, was refused by notice dated 15 October 2018.
 - The works proposed are a 2-storey rear extension and general repairs.
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Decisions

Appeal A Ref: APP/X0360/W/18/3216503

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal B Ref: APP/X0360/Y/18/3216507

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

3. As the proposal is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issues

4. The main issues are whether the proposal would preserve the grade II listed building, one of three cottages listed for group value, and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses, and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area.
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Reasons

The listed building

5. York Cottage is part of a terrace of three, timber-framed cottages which the listing description describes as dating from the C16 and C17. Though there are no historical plans in the submissions, this cottage appears to have been extended both to the back and from its flank. The rear elevation of the listed building is significant for its generally fine architectural texture, in terms of both the scale of the built forms and the elements of townscape which form them, particularly its roofscape wherein the main pitch of this cottage sweeps down to a low eaves at ground floor. I find that the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to these appeals, to be primarily associated with the surviving historic forms and fabric, alongside the scale and character of its phased alterations.
6. The Council raised no objection to the proposed repairs, and I have no reason to disagree. The focus of its concern is the proposed 2-storey rear extension. Relative to the historic footprint and development above ground floor, this would be a long and broad mass in the rear slope of the main roof. It would disrupt the balance of the roofscape significant for the breadth of its plain, continuous slope to the low eaves. It would change from one where individual elements act in harmony with the gradual, historical evolution of the building, amplifying its architectural interest, to one dominated by a single form above the ground floor eaves, the combined effect of whose depth, breadth and height would be disproportionate to the more modest scale of the historic building.
7. I have taken into account the consented rear extension the outline of which has been included in the appeal. However, this appears to have a substantially lower eaves and ridge. Its effect on the building would be proportionately less than this proposal. The proposal would remove part of a modern flat roof behind the building, but it is a ground floor structure whereas the effect of this proposal on the special interest of the building would be greater. I have noted the rear range to the cottage at the opposite end of this terrace, however, this appears to date from the C17 and is an important part of the historic significance of the building.
8. The consents granted for extensions to neighbouring listed buildings are acknowledged, however, without the details of the circumstances which led to their consent I am unable to draw parallels to this case, which I have, in any event, considered on its own individual circumstances and merits. I appreciate that being confined to the back of the building, the proposal would have only limited prominence in views from the street. However, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent, special architectural and historic interest, irrespective of whether or not public views of them can be gained.
9. The 2-storey, rear extension would not preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed building, contrary to the clear expectations of the Act. While I see less relevance of policy CC02 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (LP) and policy CP9 of the Core Strategy 2010 (CS) to which the Council refers, it would conflict with LP policy TB24 and CS policy CP3 which require works affecting heritage assets to conserve and where possible enhance the important character and the special architectural or historic interest of the building or conservation area.

10. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (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. However, this does not equate to a less than substantial planning objection, particularly so where the statutory test is not met.

The Sonning Conservation Area (CA)

11. I have had regard to my duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA, the architectural character of which the scale of the forms and roofs of the rear elevation of this building reflect the attractive balance across the distinctive roofscape of the CA with its varying ridge lines and exposed flank gables, its rich texture of clay tiling animated by small dormers and tall or decorated chimneys.
12. This building contributes significantly to the sum of architectural and historic interest of the whole CA, particularly the scale and texture of the back and flank elevations of the buildings. In this context, the effect of the first floor of the proposal on the more modest scale of roof development which characterises the CA would be noticeably incompatible. Against the scale of the group of cottages, I acknowledge the degree of harm to the significance of the CA would be limited. Nonetheless, the Act requires that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA, against which test, the effect of this proposal on the appearance of the CA fails, placing it in conflict with LP policy TB24 and CS policy CP3.

Other matters

13. In the context of the definition of setting in the Framework, as the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced, the works would have such limited, direct impact on the setting of neighbouring listed buildings, that they would be preserved in accordance with the expectations of the Act, and the requirements of LP policy TB24. Nor would there be any conflict in this regard with the objectives of the Framework which recognises the potential for harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset from development within its setting.

Planning balance

14. Notwithstanding the lack of harm to the setting of neighbouring listed buildings, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic and architectural interest of the listed building and the appearance of the CA. I give this harm considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of these appeals.
15. Paragraph 196 of the Framework advises that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. I appreciate that the development would provide additional living space, however, this would be of little benefit to the public at large; it is not a public benefit. In the absence of any public benefit to outweigh the harm identified above, I conclude that the works would fail to preserve the special historic and architectural interest of the grade II listed

building and the appearance of the CA. It would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 192 of the Framework and the policies of the development plan.

Conclusion

16. For these reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR