



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 January 2020

by B Davies MSc FGS CGeol

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 March 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/G1630/W/19/3241091

The Old Chapel, Sandfield Road, Churchdown, Gloucestershire, GL3 2HD

- 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 Neil Ritchie of Contract Sign Services against the decision of Tewkesbury Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 18/01294/FUL, dated 4 December 2018, was refused by notice dated 21 May 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'conversion of existing workshop/offices into two residential dwellings'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the host building and the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The Old Chapel is a historic, primitive Methodist chapel dated 1877. It is largely unchanged from its original form and clearly legible as a chapel in the street scene. It therefore makes a positive contribution to the historic interest of the area and as such it is recognised as a non-designated heritage asset. It sits in a prominent location on a quiet road junction, surrounded by residential housing of eclectic style and age, and on account of its architectural and historic interest it makes an important contribution to local character and sense of place.
4. The original building was designed to be symmetrical and this is an essential aspect of its character. The application proposes to add an access door, a bathroom window and to truncate the central arched window, all on the western side elevation. I have noted an earlier addition of a side access door on the same side but consider that as this is in direct line with the window above, it is not sufficiently damaging that the fundamental symmetry of this side of the building has been lost.
5. The current proposals do not, however, reflect this crucial symmetry because the new door would be offset from the window above, and the truncated arched window consequently orphaned, which, as a result, would appear

- incongruous and unbalanced. The bathroom window would be square and would in no way reflect the archetypal window style of the original building.
6. Policy SD8 of the JCS¹ requires that undesignated heritage assets should be conserved and enhanced, and that development should have regard to distinctive elements, and Policy SD4 requires that high quality design should have regard to the historic environment. No justification for an overriding need to design the dwelling in this unsympathetic way or evidence that alternatives have been considered is before me. Through its lack of regard for the character, symmetry and form of prevailing architecture, I therefore find harm to the character and appearance of the host building and consequently conflict with these local policies.
 7. I have taken into consideration that the main alterations would be to the side of the property and not prominent from the main road. However, based on my observations during the site visit, the alterations, particularly to the central window, would be visible above the fence from the public domain along The Piece and would therefore harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
 8. Notwithstanding the above, I do not consider that blocking the main entrance would be harmful to the character or appearance of the host building because the door structure will remain, and a sense of architectural balance preserved. My finding on this point does not, however, diminish the harm I have found above.
 9. I note the appellant's argument that alterations have already been made to the rear elevation through insertion of a new fire escape door. However, rather than setting a precedent I consider this makes protection of the remaining structure more imperative.

Planning Balance

10. The Council have a 4.33-year supply of deliverable housing. The 'tilted balance' outlined in paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) is therefore engaged. The policies referred to in footnote 6 of the Framework for protecting areas or assets of particular importance do not provide a clear reason for refusing permission. I must therefore apply the test in 11 d)(ii) and consider the development proposal against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.
11. As set out above I have found harm to the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the surrounding area. Given the significance of the non-designated heritage asset and the contribution it makes to the historic interest of the area I give this harm substantial weight. The proposals would create new dwellings, which is a positive benefit. However, as this is only two houses, I attribute this benefit limited weight. I therefore find that, having regard to the Council's shortfall of 4.33 years deliverable housing land, the adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

¹ Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (Adopted December 2017)

Other Matters

12. Grade II Listed 'Ye Olde House' is a short distance away along Sandfield Road. No external changes to the Old Chapel would be visible from the listed building and as such the proposal would have no effect on its setting.

Conclusions

13. For these reasons, and having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

B Davies

INSPECTOR