



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 22 May 2020

by Thomas Bristow BA MSc MRTPI AssocRICS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3305/Y/20/3244929

Mead House, Wanstrow, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 4TF

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Michael Mounty against the decision of Mendip District Council.
 - The application Ref 2019/1357/LBC, dated 9 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 13 September 2019.
 - The works proposed are described on the application form as 'to replace existing rotten wooden windows with new hardwood D/G windows'.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. The proposal relates to Grade II Listed Mead House, list entry No 1345301. I have therefore approached the appeal in the context of section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended (the '1990 Act').
3. Whilst each proposal must be determined on its merits, there is some noteworthy planning history to Mead House. This scheme follows an earlier withdrawn application for aluminium replacement windows, and also pre-application advice.¹ Of greater significance, however, is that various alterations to Mead House were granted consent in 1991.²
4. Condition 5 attached to the 1991 consent specified that 'before any work commences, joinery details for new doors and windows, including cross-sections, shall be approved by the Local Planning Authority'. Mead House was extensively renovated around that time, including via the installation of new windows. However the Council state how there is no evidence indicating that condition 5 was fulfilled. That is not specifically disputed.
5. Procedurally, over eight weeks elapsed between the date on which application Ref 2019/1357/LBC was made and the Council's decision.³ Nevertheless, the appeal was made on 6 January 2020 following the Council's decision notice of

¹ Ref 2018/2625/LBC and 2019/0605/PREAPP.

² Ref 109473/000, dated 11 March 1991.

³ Eight weeks being the statutory timeframe specified in Regulation 3 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990 as amended.

13 September 2019. The appeal is therefore against the Council's decision, rather than against non-determination.

Main issue

6. Against the background above, the main issue is whether or not the proposed works would preserve Mead House, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

7. Mead House falls at the north-easterly extent of the built form of Wanstrow. A small rural village, Wanstrow does not have a defined development limit set via the Mendip Local Plan (adopted 15 December 2014). Mead House is accessed via Mead Lane, which curves around the plot of the property heading westwards to become the Street, the main route through the village. On account of that arrangement, as the plot is broadly level, and given the absence of substantial boundary features or planting, the principal south-facing elevation of Mead House is readily visible in the street scene.
8. Taken as a whole, there is limited consistency in the age or design of properties comprising Wanstrow. As the village has evolved, Mead House has been much altered over time. It is no longer rendered as the list entry indicates and as is shown by a photograph of the property from around 1984.⁴ Instead the principal elevation is coursed local rubblestone.
9. The overall form of the property has been altered, chiefly by the construction of a rendered blockwork addition on the opposite side of the property to Mead Lane (as shown on a photograph of building works around the time of the 1991 consent). The single storey rear return appears relatively recently constructed or modified, as is similarly the case of a front porch. Windows have been replaced with single-glazed wooden units, which are now in a poor state of repair.
10. The list entry indicates that Mead House originates from around 1750, thereby falling within the broad transitional period of rural vernacular to polite architecture. The list entry describes Mead House as having a symmetrical façade comprising two storeys featuring two and three light mullioned windows in plain stone surrounds with moulded cornices over those at ground floor. Despite alterations to the property, the historic symmetry and window surrounds in the principal elevation remain, attesting to the origins of the building in the present.
11. During my site visit I saw that other historic buildings in Wanstrow are built in similar materials and in a similar manner. That is the case of Grade II Listed Pear Tree Cottage nearby, and Rock Cottage closer to the A359 in particular. Other buildings in the village, such as Bradley House, are in part coursed rubblestone, albeit with more formal facades (the latter being potentially subsequent alterations in line with evolving architectural tastes).

⁴ Drawn from the Somerset Historic Environment Record.

12. Consequently, insofar as it relates to this appeal, I find that the special interest of Mead House is primarily the legibility of historic materials and architectural detailing in respect of its principal elevation. That, in turn, has some significance in representing a building reflecting the evolution of architecture from a local vernacular to one with formal references, intertwined with the history of the village. In my view the cumulative alterations to the property over time mean that it is important to maintain that historic integrity which remains, rather than justifying further dilution thereto.

The proposal

13. Simply, the proposal is to replace existing single-glazed windows with hardwood double-glazed units.⁵ The proposed works appear to relate to all windows, albeit that the plans have several shortcomings (as set out below).⁶ Nevertheless, in line with my reasoning in paragraph 12 above, my assessment focuses on the implications of the works related to the mullioned windows within the principal elevation. The proposed units would have wooden heads, sills, and each a horizontal glazing bar.⁷ They would have a simple square finish without edge detailing, and are intended to be 'rosewood coloured, painted grey'. The outer pane of glass would be set in from the foremost element of the heads and sills fractionally, to allow for a (faux) putty seal.

The effect of the proposed works

14. Windows at Mead House are evidently in need of replacement or renovation. Photographs of the property from around 1984 and 1991, albeit of low resolution, show horizontal glazing bars where none exist at present. I also note that the appellant explains how 'the planning officer states that the joinery details are not satisfactory because they differ from the original, what are the original details?'. In that context I acknowledge that current windows date only from around 1991, and, I understand, were not installed by the appellant.
15. However double glazing is now proposed, which is inherently anachronistic. Compared to single glazing, double glazing has a different and more cluttered visual character on account of reflections from two panes of glass, signifying a modern engineered design.⁸ In this instance, the units proposed would readily appear as such on account of a horizontal glazing bar and putty being affixed or applied to the external pane only, rather than the former subdividing it or the latter being present both internally and externally. Whilst window panes are annotated as being 'heritage glass', there are no further details given in that respect (for example as to the spacing between panes or the reflective qualities of the glazing).
16. The plans, furthermore, do not detail how the proposed units would sit within stone surrounds. Nevertheless it appears that the outer pane would be recessed only slightly from the foremost element of the sill, significantly less than the current set back of window frames into their stone surrounds of around two inches. That would result in a greater prominence of the units proposed. Wooden sills are not common to traditional stone mullioned

⁵ The supporting Design and Access Statement also sets out the intention to replace three existing doors, albeit that is not within the description of proposed works set out in the application form.

⁶ The existing plan being drawing No 111018/1 and proposal No 111018/2.

⁷ Drawing No 111018/3.

⁸ Reasoning similar to, albeit arrived independently of, the Inspector who determined appeal Ref APP/B1225/E/11/2165202 brought to my attention by the Council.

windows; they do not feature, for example, at Pear Tree Cottage or Bradley House referenced above.

17. Moreover the window heads, sills and glazing bars proposed appear bulky, more so than would typify historic joinery (or appears to be shown in the photograph of the property from around 1984). Those characteristics would, in my view, mean that the works proposed would represent a clearly modern and insensitively designed scheme, which pays no meaningful regard to the integrity of Mead House or to historic craftsmanship.
18. Moreover there are no detailed plans before me as to how the windows would appear from the front, as opposed to vertical and plan sections. The proposed plan of the principal elevation is at 1/100 scale, such that the precise design of the proposed windows cannot readily be discerned. Furthermore, there is no substantive consideration of the significance of Mead House, of a level of detail proportionate to the nature of the proposal, in conflict with the expectations of paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') and provisions of Local Plan policy DP3, criterion 1.a).

Consideration

19. For the above reasons, notwithstanding shortcomings in the plans and evidence, the proposed windows would lack the integrity and visual subtleties of traditional glazing and joinery. By consequence the proposed works would fail to preserve the special interest and significance of Mead House, contrary to the expectations of the 1990 Act, those of NPPF paragraph 193 and of Local Plan policy DP3. In summary, and amongst other things, NPPF paragraph 193 and Local Plan policy DP3 set out how great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. NPPF paragraph 194 further sets out how any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, not just that which is substantial, should require 'clear and convincing justification'. I now turn to whether or not that is the case here.

The planning balance

20. It is for the decision taker, having identified harm to a designated heritage asset, to consider the magnitude of that harm. In this case, given that little, if any, original fabric of Mead House would be affected, and considering the significance of the asset as a whole, the level of harm arising may fairly be considered as less than substantial. NPPF paragraph 196 directs that in such circumstances, the extent of such harm should be weighed against any public benefits.
21. In that context, I acknowledge that the proposed works would result in a more 'warm and comfortable residence' as the appellant puts it, which may be considered a modest public benefit by way of reducing energy usage and damp affecting the property (which is evident internally around window reveals). However it has not been demonstrated that the proposal before me is the sole means by which such benefits could be achieved, for example via an alternative which is less harmful, or has a neutral effect on the listed building.
22. The appellant has brought to my attention a successful application for replacement windows at Grade II Listed No 66 Portway, Warminster, within

Wiltshire Council's administrative area.⁹ However there are no substantive details before me of that property, the nature of the scheme proposed, or the circumstances relevant there compared to here. Direct comparisons cannot therefore be drawn. Consequently neither the public benefits of the scheme, nor any other relevant matters, are sufficient to outweigh the harm that would result to the special interest and significance of Mead House.

Conclusion

23. Notwithstanding the history to Mead House as it now stands, the proposed works would not preserve the listed building contrary to the clear expectations of the 1990 Act. There are no public benefits or other considerations of sufficient weight, individually or collectively, that would serve to outweigh that harm. I therefore conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Thomas Bristow

INSPECTOR

⁹ Ref 15/06647/FUL and 15/06763/LBC.