



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 July 2020

by A A Phillips BA(Hons) DipTP MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 August 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/Z2830/Y/20/3245232

1 Wicken Manor, Church Lane, Wicken MK19 6BU

- 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 and Mrs Henry Syrett against the decision of South Northamptonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref: S/2019/1965/LBC, dated 30 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 18 November 2019.
 - The works proposed are new rooflight on inner slope of west facing butterfly roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building known as Wicken Manor (listed as Manor House and Manor Cottage) or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

3. Wicken Manor was originally built in the early seventeenth century as a gate house. It is now occupied as a house with eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century alterations. It is constructed in coursed squared limestone with a plain tile roof, bridge ridge stack and stone end stacks with brick flues. It incorporates two storeys plus an attic. The former entrance front faces the garden and has a central twentieth century 4 light stone mullion window with hood mould. The hood mould of the former carriage arch survives at a higher level and a panel with the arms of the Spencers of Wormleighton in rectangular stone sits above the higher hood mould. The manor house belonging to the Spencers of Wormleighton, to which the gatehouse led, was demolished around 1703 and its materials were subsequently used to build the nearby Rectory. Wicken Manor is the one building remaining from the rebuilding of the original Manor House complex that was rebuilt in 1620.
4. Wicken Manor sits close to St John's Church and both are located separate from other buildings in the village. This is part of the historic layout to keep the higher status buildings separate from the main village. The proximity of the manor house to the church suggests a close relationship between the two and this is indeed specifically identified in the list description by the initials 'GV' (Group Value).

5. The building's significance lies primarily in its age (particularly the earliest seventeenth century gate house element), its former uses as a gatehouse and then a farmhouse, its vernacular construction and form and the survival of much of its historic fabric, form and features. The butterfly roof is a particularly distinctive feature of the building and the part of the roof to which this appeal relates is the oldest part of the building. The attic floor contains visible evidence of early construction such as exposed beams and retains much of its original character. However, at my site inspection I noted that there are three existing small rooflights on the roof slope to which the current proposal relates.
6. The proposal is to install a rooflight on the inner slope of the west facing butterfly roof. In July 2019 under reference S/2019/0969/LBC listed building consent was approved to lower the kitchen floor, install a staircase in the ancillary accommodation, replace the partition on stairs with a balustrade, reconfigure partitions on the first floor, install a bathroom in the attic and reconfigure the utility room/cloakroom. The proposed rooflight would serve the attic bathroom which is to be formed in an existing attic storage space.
7. The approved scheme includes sub-dividing the central storage room within the attic with a stud partition to create separate bathroom and store room. Ventilation will be provided by an extractor fan connected to a tile vent which will be on the rear elevation and therefore not visible from the public realm or other surrounding properties. With respect to the proposed rooflight there are few details submitted other than a floor plan at a scale of 1:50 and a site plan at 1:200 which show the location of the proposed rooflight on the roof.
8. The appellant states that natural daylight and an opening conservation rooflight would be advantageous. It is also argued that the rooflight would not be visible from any aspect, would be within the roof valley and that there is no damage intended to the historic roof timbers. It is also acknowledged by the appellant that the harm caused would be minimal.
9. Rooflights are a modern feature and the existing openings in the roof show how their insertion can break up an historic roof form, result in the loss of historic fabric and harm the historical significance of a building. In my mind this is particularly so when there is a proliferation of overtly modern features. The proposed rooflight would be within the earliest part of the historic building where there is evidence of early construction and much of the traditional character remains, albeit somewhat compromised by existing modern features within the roof plane in question. The position of the proposed rooflight within the inner facing valley of the double pitched roof would be discreet when viewed from the public realm and elsewhere from ground level. The appellant also argues that there is no intended harm to the roof timbers, but there is insufficient detail before me to show that this would be the case. Its position within the roof does not justify the harm caused by another modern feature in this historic roof within the main historic core of the building.
10. Accordingly, the proposed rooflight would constitute an undisputably modern feature which would relate poorly to its historical setting, being harmful to the distinctive roof which contains evidence of early construction

and retains its original historic form which has already been compromised. The additional opening would erode the historical significance of this important part of the building. Consequently, it would cause material harm to the special interest of the listed building, so failing to preserve it, the desirability of which (as required by the Act) has been affirmed by the Courts as a matter of considerable importance and weight. Moreover, it would fail to accord with the expectations of paragraph 193 of the National Planning Framework (the Framework) which anticipates great weight being given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. For the same reasons the proposal would also conflict with local development plan policies, particularly Policies EV12 and EV13 of the South Northamptonshire Local Plan Adopted October 1997.

11. Paragraph 194 of the Framework states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification. I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance, but it should be remembered however that less than substantial harm does not equate to less than substantial planning objection, especially when the statutory tests have not been met.
12. Under such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes the securing of optimal viable use of listed buildings. The appellant considers that public benefit is derived from natural ventilation being provided for the bathroom space. However, the evidence before me shows that the approved works include an extractor fan connected to a tile vent. Consequently, the benefit has been provided by alternative means. It also seems to me that the provision of ventilation to serve the residential property is a private benefit rather than a public benefit which is the test set out in the Framework. This significantly limits the weight to be afforded to this consideration in support of the appeal.
13. Whilst the Council makes no reference in their reason to refusal to the effect of the works on the character and appearance of the Wicken Conservation Area, as a statutory consideration, I am required to have regard to this matter when determining this appeal. In my view it follows that if the special interest of a listed building within a conservation area is diminished, the character and appearance of that conservation area is also harmed. In this particular case, although the harm would not be visible from the public realm, by causing material harm to the special interest of the listed building, it would fail to preserve the conservation area. Whilst the magnitude of that harm is also less than substantial in the context of the Wicken Conservation Area as a whole, it would nevertheless fail to preserve it, and so be in conflict with the requirements of section 72 of the Act.
14. Moreover, whilst the harm may be considered to be less than substantial, this does not equate with less than substantial planning objection, particularly having regard to the statutory duties to preserve the listed building. In addition, the absence of any meaningful public benefits that might outweigh the identified harm further goes against the appeal.

Conclusion

15. The proposed rooflight would fail to preserve the listed building, contrary to the clear expectations of the Act. In addition, there are no public benefits or other considerations which would outweigh the harm identified. For these reasons and having taken all matters raised into account, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

A A Phillips

INSPECTOR