



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 August 2020

by A A Phillips BA(Hons) DipTP MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/Y/20/3245847

Hopgrass Open Barn, Strongrove Hill, Bath Road, Hungerford RG17 0SJ

- 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 Vaccaro against the decision of West Berkshire Council.
 - The application Ref: 19/02426/LBC2, dated 26 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 14 November 2019.
 - The works proposed are insertion of two windows to front elevation.
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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 curtilage listed building known as Hopgrass Open Barn, or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

3. The appeal relates to a detached dwelling which is part of a complex of buildings that have been converted to residential use. The buildings are former agricultural and associated buildings that once formed part of Hopgrass Farm and are located in close proximity to Grade II listed Hopgrass Farm House. Due to their physical proximity and former functional relationship to the farm house they are considered as curtilage listed buildings. Hopgrass Farm House was first listed in September 1951 and was built in the seventeenth century with later eighteenth and nineteenth century alterations.
4. The appeal building's significance lies primarily in its simple linear form, the utilitarian character it has retained following its conversion to residential use and its proximity and historical functional relationship to Hopgrass Farm House. When granting planning permission for the original conversion, the Council states that proposals aimed to ensure that the simple utilitarian character of this barn was retained. The Council agreed to the insertion of four rooflights in the north elevation as it was considered to have least impact on the barn and furthermore it is my understanding that at the time of conversion, the roof of the building has recently been re-roofed and many of the rafters were not original historic fabric. Consequently, the Council considered that the insertion of rooflights did not impact on the historic fabric of the barn.

5. The current proposal is to insert two dark brown aluminium frame windows in the front elevation of the appeal dwelling. The appellant has stated that the main living area of the property suffers from a lack of natural light and the occupants rely on electric lighting for much of the year and the north elevation has only on single roof light serving the living area. It is also argued that the proposal would improve the dwelling and provide an enhanced quality of life for occupants.
6. The new windows would be a modern feature on the front elevation of the former barn which at present is relatively uninterrupted by openings other than a door. The proposal would break up the existing linear elevation and detract from the simple, utilitarian character of the barn. In addition, the windows would introduce modern domestic features which would materially change the character of the building from a former agricultural building with a clear functional relationship to the nearby listed farmhouse to a far more domestic character. This would be harmful to the architectural and historic interest of the building. Whilst not particular significant, the principal assessment lying with the impact on the historic building, the new windows would also be highly visible from the approach to the property and from the access which serves a number of other residential properties in the locality.
7. Although the appellants state that the timber and other materials used in the construction of this elevation do not include original materials and are relatively recent, there is insufficient evidence before me that this is the case. The extent of historic fabric that would be affected, with particular reference to historic timbers, is not clear. I understand that the appellants do not intend to harm the historic fabric, but there is insufficient detail before me to show that this would be the case.
8. Accordingly, the proposed openings would constitute indisputably modern features which would relate poorly to its historical setting, being harmful to the distinctive front elevation which retains its largely uninterrupted original linear historic form which has been protected to date. The additional windows 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 Policy CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2016.
9. 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.
10. 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 appellants consider that benefit is derived from improving the dwelling, providing an enhanced quality of life for occupants and also providing work for local tradesmen. In addition, the appellants contend that the windows would improve visual security to the north elevation. Other than some minor local benefit by providing a small amount of work to local tradesmen it seems to me that the provision of the openings would provide a number of private benefits rather than 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.

11. The appellants have drawn my attention to other residential properties in the immediate locality, including Hopgrass Forge, Hopgrass Farm Cottage and Hopgrass Farm Barn, which have openings and glazing on their front elevations. However, I do not have the full details of those schemes and so cannot be certain that the openings in those residential properties are new. In any case I have considered the appeal proposal on its own merits in the context of the listed building to which it relates.
12. 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 significant public benefits that might outweigh the identified harm further goes against the appeal.

Conclusion

13. The proposed windows would fail to preserve the listed building, contrary to the clear expectations of the Act. In addition, there are only very limited 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