



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 October 2020

by Mike Hayden BSc DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 03 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/Y/20/3245627

5 Lower Dagnall Street, St Albans AL3 4PE

- 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 & Mrs Clinton against the decision of St Albans City & District Council.
 - The application Ref: 5/19/2038LB, dated 5 July 2019, was refused by notice dated 27 September 2019.
 - The works proposed are ground floor single storey side extension, small scale internal removals to facilitate extension, reconfigure ground floor WC, new first floor bathroom.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed works on the special architectural and historic interest of 5 Lower Dagnall Street, a Grade II listed building.

Reasons

3. No. 5 Lower Dagnall Street is a Grade II listed building, located in the St Albans Conservation Area. It forms part of a terrace of five, two-storey, Georgian cottages (nos. 3-11), dating from the early C19, which are listed as a group. The significance of the listed building lies in its architectural and historic value as part of this group. This is principally seen in the neatly proportioned and well-preserved period architecture of the front façade of the building and terrace, as detailed in the statutory list description. Constructed in red brick, with matching timber sash windows, and doorcases comprising pilasters, capitals and projecting hoods enclosing 3-paned overlights, it also makes an important contribution to the character and appearance of the St Albans Conservation Area.
4. Of course, as set out in the advice of Historic England¹, list descriptions are not a comprehensive or exclusive record of the special interest or significance of the building, which is the case here. The Heritage Statement (HS) submitted by the appellant and the Council's evidence describe other elements of the building, which contribute to its heritage significance. On the rear elevation is a two storey, gabled projecting outshot with a centrally positioned external chimney stack and an unusual diamond tile pattern cladding of later period to the first floor. The outshots are repeated along the backs of the terrace and are evidently part of the original plan form of the group.

¹ Heritage Protection Guide, Listed Buildings Identification and Extent, Historic England, 2020

5. Internally, although the appeal property has been modernised, the historic plan form of the listed building survives and remains fully legible. Single rooms to the front and rear at ground and first floor level are subdivided by a large, central chimney stack, with a further room on both floors contained within the rear outshot. The basement remains, denoted externally by a light well at the front of the building and accessed internally via a staircase from the kitchen. In all rooms, the original fire places have been removed and the chimney openings enclosed, except for a modern hearth and fire surround in the ground floor front room. However, the stack structure is still visible within the middle bedroom at first floor level, where built-in cupboards infill the spaces either side of the chimney breast, and in the basement, where the base of the stack is revealed.
6. The interior also displays a few remaining period decorative features, including moulded architraves around the doorways to the basement and kitchen/dining room, and panelled doors with architraves to the ground floor front room and first floor bedrooms. All of these internal elements contribute to the special interest and significance of the listed building, providing an understanding of how it was used and occupied in the past and exemplifying the decorative style of Georgian interior design incorporated even in modest dwellings of this type.
7. The appeal scheme proposes a single storey, glazed infill extension to the side of the rear projection, with a mono-pitched glass roof. This would be set back from the rear wall of the building, preserving the legibility of the original rear outshot and its contribution to the terrace. Subject to details of how the glazed extension would be fixed to the building and of any guttering to discharge water away from the side wall of no. 7, which could be secured by condition, the proposed extension would not cause harm to the fabric and special interest of the listed building.
8. A number of alterations to the internal layout of the property are also proposed, to create an open plan kitchen/dining space at ground floor level, partly within the glazed extension, and an additional bathroom at first floor level. On the ground floor the proposed works involve the demolition of large sections of the rear structural walls of the property. As a result the original plan form of the dwelling at the rear, including the outshot return and the rear wall to the main part of the house, which separates it from the rear projection, would be largely eroded, other than wall nibs left to bear supporting steel beams. The loss of this part of the historic fabric of the listed building would cause harm to the significance of the heritage asset derived from the intactness and legibility of its original plan form and the hierarchy of spaces within the building.
9. The door to the basement would be relocated to make way for a shower room on the ground floor. Whilst the original architrave and doorframe could be relocated to the entrance to the shower room, its loss in situ would cause harm to the existing configuration and understanding of the basement as part of the historic layout. The relocation of the doorway would also necessitate alterations to the basement stairs, with four risers removed and replaced by three winders. There is insufficient information on the submitted plans to understand how this would affect the structural detail of the staircase. However, the basement itself is part of the original plan form of the property and the partial removal of the original staircase to it would result in further harm to the historic fabric and integrity of the listed building.

10. The door between the entrance hall and the kitchen would be removed and the doorway widened on one side, as part of the plan to open up the ground floor. This would further erode the separation between the different rooms of the building which forms part of the historic layout. It would also necessitate the removal of the period architrave and doorframe to the kitchen and an iron security bar feature. The appellant suggests that the architrave and security bar could be retained, but it is difficult to see how this could be achieved without alteration to the joinery, given that the doorway itself would be widened. Due to the rarity of these surviving decorative features and the fact that the doorways are part of the original plan layout, I concur with the assessment in the HS, that the alteration to the doorway and the loss of the door and architrave to the kitchen would have a moderate impact on the historic fabric and integrity of the listed building.
11. At first floor level, the second bedroom would be sub-divided to create a family bathroom. Whilst the insertion of the dividing wall would be reversible, it is unlikely that it would be reversed, given that it would enclose the bathroom. Therefore, it would have an impact on the plan form of the building. Part of the original masonry wall to the landing would also be removed to create an entrance to the bathroom, which would harm the historic fabric of the building. However, these appear to be the minimum interventions necessary to create an upstairs bathroom, which, as Historic England's advice acknowledges, is the norm today, and the plan form would still be readable. In principle, therefore, the addition of the bathroom in this position would be a benefit that could outweigh the limited heritage harm at first floor level.
12. However, the installation of a bathroom would require pipework and ducting for water, drainage and ventilation. The appellant confirms that much of this would need to be routed through floor joist spaces and ventilation through the roof. This has the potential to cause damage to floor and roof timbers forming part of the historic fabric of the building. Whilst I acknowledge it is in the interests of the appellant to ensure such works are undertaken in a manner to avoid harm, the submitted plans do not include sufficient detail to provide this assurance. The same applies to services for the proposed shower room and the cupboard for a washing machine and tumble drier on the ground floor.
13. The plans also show proposals to open up the fireplaces in the ground and first floor rooms, to create storage space in the bathroom and to add a masonry nib for the doorway to the new washing machine/tumble drier cupboard formed within the existing kitchen. The chimney stack is an important part of the historic fabric and plan form of the listed building. Whilst these alterations appear superficial and of limited harm to the chimney breast or openings, there is insufficient detail on the submitted plans to provide certainty that the extent of works to the chimney would not cause heritage harm.
14. Cumulatively, the proposed works would reduce the legibility of the original plan form of the listed building at ground floor level and result in damage to and loss of historic fabric and decorative features, which contribute to its historic and architectural interest. The HS confirms that these alterations would have a moderate impact on the historic fabric and overall integrity of the heritage asset. In terms of the scales of harm identified in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), I consider that the harm caused to the significance of the heritage asset in this case would be less than substantial.

15. Paragraph 196 of the Framework requires that less than substantial harm to a heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In terms of the weight to be attached to the harm, paragraph 193 of the Framework states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether the harm amounts to substantial or less than substantial harm. In light of this and the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, I give considerable weight to the harm the proposal would cause to its heritage significance.
16. The appellant contends that the proposed works would ensure the continued use of the building as a private dwelling and its maintenance and preservation as such for the benefit of future generations. I acknowledge that the creation of an open plan living space on the ground floor and the addition of a bathroom at first floor level would provide private amenities which would enhance the occupation of the dwelling for contemporary living. However, the property is currently in active residential use and there is little evidence that the extent of removal of the historic fabric of the building which is proposed, and the harm that would cause to the heritage significance of the building through the erosion of its plan form and loss of internal features, is necessary to ensure the continued future use of the property as a private dwelling. As such, I find that the benefits arising from the works would be largely private, relating to its occupants, rather than of demonstrable benefit to the public at large.
17. Accordingly, I conclude that there would be insufficient public benefit to outweigh the identified harm or the special regard to be had to the preservation of the listed building under the Act. The proposal would also conflict with Policy 86 of the City of St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994, which states that listed buildings should be preserved and that alterations involving the removal of internal or external features of architectural or historic interest, will not be permitted other than in exceptional circumstances, which have not been demonstrated in this case.

Conclusion

18. Therefore, for the reasons given above, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

M Hayden

INSPECTOR