



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 December 2020

by S Edwards MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 February 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/Y/20/3254655

2 Hill Cottages, High Street, Whitchurch on Thames, Berkshire RG8 7HG

- 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 Mrs Clare Ellison against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref P19/S2736/LB, dated 7 July 2019, was refused by notice dated 22 November 2019.
 - The works proposed are installation of three roof lights to the rear elevation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In December 2020, the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035 (LP) has been adopted by the Council. This document replaces policies contained within the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy and saved policies contained within the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011. Accordingly, I shall determine the appeal in accordance with the most up-to-date policies, on which the parties have had the opportunity to comment during the course of the appeal.
3. The works subject to this appeal affect a listed building located in a conservation area, and I shall therefore have special regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
4. The description of the proposed works as detailed on the application form has been amended in subsequent documents. The rooflights have been installed and the appellant seeks to regularise the unauthorised works. I have adopted the description included within the Council's decision notice, which provides a more accurate representation of the works for which listed building consent is sought.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of no 2 Hill Cottages, a Grade II listed building, and the character or appearance of the Whitchurch-on-Thames Conservation Area.

Reasons

6. No 2 Hill Cottages is one of four terraced houses, which probably date from the mid-18th century. They are jointly listed at Grade II for their architectural and historic interest, having regard to their intricate brickwork with flared headers,

plain tile roof, gabled dormers and prominent chimney stacks. Despite a number of alterations over time, especially to the rear of the terrace, the appeal property retains many historic features, including delicate sash and casement windows with Gothic tops, and a part-glazed stable door with flat hood on wrought iron brackets either side. Given the above, I find that the significance of this Grade II listed building resides in both its historic and architectural interest.

7. The listing description refers to the group value of the terrace, notably because of the unified architectural character which they offer in an elevated and prominent position to the High Street. For these reasons, it is clear that the significance of the appellant's property and the terrace as a whole also derives from the important contribution they make to the townscape and the Whitchurch-on-Thames Conservation Area. The special interest of this designated heritage asset mainly lies in its character and appearance as a historic village comprising a rich collection of historic buildings bordering the River Thames and set at the heart of the Chiltern Hills.
8. Having regard to their size and number, the rooflights presently appear as an incongruous addition, thus harmfully contrasting with the unadorned simplicity of the roof plane, which otherwise remains largely uninterrupted. The harm caused by the works is exacerbated by the detailed appearance of the openings with their thick frames, which protrude beyond the roof plane and the regimented position of the three rooflights, which give the roofscape a cluttered and cramped appearance.
9. My attention has been drawn to other examples of rooflights which have been installed within proximity to the appeal site, including listed properties. However, I have not been presented with substantive evidence demonstrating the circumstances of these particular schemes and cannot therefore be certain that they represent a direct parallel to the appeal before me.
10. I appreciate that the works are not visible within the street scene, but listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not public views of the property can be gained. No concerns have been raised by the Council regarding the effect of the works on the character or appearance of the Whitchurch-on-Thames Conservation Area, and there are no reasons for me to reach an alternative view. Despite the harm caused to the listed building, I am satisfied that the works are not detrimental to the Conservation Area, and thus preserve its significance. This is because, unlike listed buildings, the significance of a conservation area is dependent upon how it is experienced.
11. The harm caused by the works to the significance of the listed building is less than substantial, to which I nevertheless ascribe considerable importance and weight. In such circumstances, paragraph 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) indicates that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. However, I have not been presented with any public benefits, which would outweigh the harm caused by the works.
12. There is no doubt that the rooflights provide additional natural daylight within the attic space in particular, which is otherwise only served by a small dormer window to the front elevation, but these are essentially private benefits. The appellant has also explained that the rooflights are required as means of escape and to bring daylight to the staircase leading to the attic for safety

reasons. However, these considerations are not substantiated by detailed evidence demonstrating why the improvements sought by the appellant require the provision of three openings. Any alterations need to be undertaken in a manner which would not prejudice the significance of the listed building.

13. By reason of their number, size and design, the rooflights fail to preserve the architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building. They are therefore in conflict with LP Policies ENV6 and ENV7, but also Section 16 of the Framework which, amongst other things, expect development and works to conserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

14. The appellant has referred to possible alternatives, but these are not matters for me to determine in the context of this appeal. I have also given careful consideration to the personal circumstances of the appellant and her sons, as well as the arguments in favour of the regulation of the unauthorised works. However, if the appeal were to be allowed, the works would become permanent features which, in my view, are harmful to the significance of the listed building. This harm outweighs the weight which can be afforded to the personal circumstances of the appellant. For the reasons detailed above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S Edwards

INSPECTOR