



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 4 May 2021

by Zoe Raygen Dip URP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th May 2021

Appeal A: APP/H0520/W/20/3264060

The Old School House, 16 Church Street, Alwalton, Cambridgeshire PE7 3UU

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr John Foster against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application Ref 20/00299/HHFUL, dated 10 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 November 2020.
- The development proposed is a double storey side extension.

Appeal B: APP/H0520/Y/20/3264061

The Old School House, 16 Church Street, Alwalton, Cambridgeshire PE7 3UU

- 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 John Foster against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
- The application Ref 20/00300/LBC, dated 10 February 2020, was refused by notice dated 17 November 2020.
- The development proposed is a double storey side extension.

Decision

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

3. The two appeals concern the same scheme under different, complementary legislation. I have dealt with both appeals together in my reasoning.
4. As the appeal site is in a conservation area and concerns a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
5. I have used the address of the property from the Council's decision notices as that more accurately reflects the appeal property than the description on the appellant's application forms.

Main Issues

6. The main issues for both appeals are:

- the effect of the development and works on the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and the setting of nearby listed buildings; and
- whether or not the development preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Alwalton Conservation Area.

Reasons

Significance

7. The Old School House forms a two storey, listed building Grade II constructed from yellow Gault brick with red brick dressings and a slate roof with large chimney. It has a simple plan form, with vertical emphasis and a small side extension linking it to the Old School, also a Grade II listed building which is constructed from similar materials. The Old School has inserted gabled dormer windows as opposed to a hipped façade dormer window on the Old School House.
8. The appellant states that the entire front elevation and roof section of the property was taken down and rebuilt forward of the property by four metres. New steel windows were used in the side elevations. I saw this to be the case at my site visit. There are a number of extensions which connect the two buildings allowing them to function as one house and reduce the distinction between the two buildings at the rear ground floor.
9. In that context there is little of the remaining original fabric of the Old School House. However, the high standard of the front extension with regard to the replication of the original design together with use of sympathetic materials means that the building retains its essential historic character. Furthermore, from the front the siting, size and massing of the two historic buildings is still distinct. Moreover, even though it has later additions, the whole of the Old School House is still listed.
10. Notwithstanding these later alterations, the two buildings, as well as having architectural significance, both separately and together have historical value in their previous use as the village school and separate accommodation for the school employee providing a social history of the education facilities within the village. At least from the front elevation, the subservience of the Old School House to the Old School, even though of similar design, reflects their individual historical purposes.
11. The Rectory, to the north west of the appeal site, is a Grade II, two storey listed building constructed from ashlar and coursed limestone rubble with ashlar and freestone dressings and hipped slate roofs. It has an imposing front elevation and is set well back from the road behind a dense hedge with a number of trees in its large grounds. Now used as a house it was originally the Rectory in the village and appeared from my observations at my site visit to be largely unaltered. Although set within open spacious grounds, it has an enclosed character due to the dense boundary treatment.
12. The entrance from Church Street is marked by two gate piers constructed from ashlar limestone with plain chamfered bases and caps and inscribed I.H and 1848 and are Grade II listed structures. Although there is no explanation of the inscriptions, the gate piers mark the only visible entrance to the Rectory from Church Street, through which the building can be clearly seen.

13. Therefore, the significance of these four listed structures in so far as it relates to these appeals is derived from their architectural and historic interest connected to their role and association within the village to which their location, form and historic fabric all contribute.
14. Lynch Lodge to the north of the appeal site is a Grade II* listed building (listed as Alwalton Lodge). Originally a cottage dating from 1645, it incorporates a rebuilt porch from Dryden's House in Chesterton and was erected as a lodge to Milton Hall Park being located adjacent to the former entrance and driveway to Milton Park Hall. Set behind a large green space it has an open setting with the front façade being particularly prominent in the street scene. The significance of this building in so far as it relates to these appeals is therefore largely derived from its architectural and historic interest. In addition, although now used for residential purposes, the former use and location of the building contributes to its significance as it aids understanding of the Milton Hall Park estate and its relationship to the village and its social history.
15. The previous use of the appeal building signifies the former presence of the village school and associated accommodation. Therefore, as well as having significance in its own right it contributes positively to the special interest of The Old School through its historical and functional association and its presence within its setting.
16. The appeal building is sited some distance from The Rectory and the boundary treatment means that there is limited if any intervisibility between the two buildings. The gate piers are opposite the appeal site so they can be seen together from some vantage points. The Old School House does though sit close to Lynch Lodge and from Church Street the two can be viewed together. The Council also advises that the Fitzwilliam family owned Milton Hall Park, the Lodge, the advowson of the Church and were patrons of the School creating some historical association between the listed buildings. The appeal building therefore contributes in a small way to the significance of the gate piers and Lynch Lodge through its limited historical association and presence within their settings.
17. Alwalton Conservation Area (CA) mainly covers the historic core of the village together with land within the valley of the River Nene as the boundary extends to the middle of the River. The built form is predominantly constructed from local stone giving a consistent material palette within the CA, with a mixture of Collyweston stone slate, Welsh slate and thatched roofs. The standard of the architecture is high, particularly along Church Street, where the buildings are mostly set within their own large plots with many of them being listed. There are abundant trees and landscaping and, in some places, large grass verges and open green spaces giving a spacious, verdant character and appearance to the area. Stone walls also form a strong local characteristic. Given the above, I find that the significance of the CA, for the purposes of these appeals, to be primarily related to the appearance of historic buildings with the use of traditional materials and the relationship of buildings to open space.
18. Although one of the few examples of historic buildings constructed from brick within the village the appeal building nevertheless, due to the retention of original design features, albeit some reconstructed, forms a good example of a traditional building which contributes positively to the significance of the CA. The low boundary wall allows good visibility of the listed building within the CA.

Effect on the significance of the listed buildings and CA

19. The proposed large side extension would disrupt the small simple form of the historic Old School House to a significant degree. Even though the appeal building and The Old School are attached, the large bulk and mass of the extension would considerably erode the remaining evidence of the subservience and historic relationship between the two. As a result, the buildings would, from Church Street, be more readily viewed as one overly large building which would be harmful to the significance of both buildings.
20. Although the front extension is a later addition, it is not a modern anomaly as it exhibits a high standard in replicating the original front elevation of the building. The materials may match the host dwelling, as suggested on the planning application form and the dormer windows reflect the location of the existing dormer in the Old School House in being partly in the elevation and partly in the roof. However, the proportion and detailing does not match as the proposed windows have a horizontal rather than the strong vertical emphasis in the existing dormer.
21. Whether or not some of the chimney is a later addition, and there is no substantive evidence before me suggest either way, it is a prominent feature of the listed building that would be mostly obscured by the extension. In addition, there is very little information provided as to how it would be treated and incorporated into the proposal. I am unable to rule out therefore that this prominent design feature of the listed building would not be unacceptably harmed.
22. Internally there would be a door inserted into the rear ground floor room of the Old School House to allow access to the extension. This is a plain plastered wall. I saw at my site visit a doorway could be readily inserted without causing material harm to the fabric of the building at this point, or the adjacent chamfered fireplace.
23. Nevertheless, the fundamental alterations to the simple plan form of the building with a strong vertical emphasis, the loss of subservience, the covering of the chimney detail and the poorly proportioned fenestration details would lead to an awkward, discordant extension that would harm the significance of the Old School House and the Old School. In addition, as a result, views of the building from within the CA would be harmed and the contribution the historic building makes to the character and appearance of the CA would also be reduced.
24. Through harm to the significance of the Old School House there would be some harm to the significance of the gate piers, but only in as much as the appeal building is within their setting and contributes to its significance in a minor way through historical association and intervisibility. Therefore, any harm would be very limited in this respect. I accept that the proposal is set further back than the previous extension to the front of the property which was considered to be acceptable with regard to its relationship to the gate piers. However, that extension replicated the design of the original building. That is not the case here.
25. I saw that intervisibility with Lynch Lodge is more obvious, particularly from Church Street and the current separation between the buildings contributes to the open setting of Lynch Lodge as it stood as the lodge to Milton Hall Park.

- The erosion of that open setting through the introduction of the large side extension would harm the significance of Lynch Lodge, particularly given that the extension would fail to integrate satisfactorily with The Old School House.
26. Given the above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the significance of the Old School House, the Old School, the gate piers and Lynch Lodge and the CA. Paragraph 193 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Paragraph 194 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or from development within their setting and that this should have a clear and convincing justification. In this instance I find the harm to be less than substantial, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.
27. 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 is of the opinion that the proposal would be beneficial because it would provide support to the northern elevation of the building securing its future. A structural appraisal provided by the appellant dated May 2017 found cracks in the side elevation are due to residual foundation movement caused by a nearby Elm tree since removed. It recommends repair and some form of buttress to be the most effective way of securing the side elevation along with additional foundations. While it may be the case that the proposed extension would form a buttress for this purpose, there is little substantive evidence before me to suggest that a less harmful and intrusive solution could not achieve the same aim. I therefore give this suggestion minor weight.
28. In addition, the appellant states that the extension is required to provide care for an elderly relative. I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires me to consider the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. Protected characteristics include a person's age. I do not doubt that the proposal would better accommodate the appellant's family, through the introduction of increased internal living space. However, whilst dismissal of the appeal would deprive the appellant's relative the opportunity to live in a more spacious home, this is set against the serious effect the proposal would have in terms of other planning considerations. Furthermore, it has not been appropriately demonstrated that the required accommodation could not be provided in a less harmful manner.
29. Taking all the above into consideration, I am of the view that taken together, the public benefits do not outweigh the harm I have found to the heritage assets whether balanced on an individual basis or cumulatively.
30. Given the above, I conclude that, on balance, the proposed extension would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building, the setting of nearby listed buildings, and the character or appearance of the Alwalton Conservation Area. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 192 of the Framework and conflict with policies LP11, LP12 and LP34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 adopted 2019, part 12 and paragraphs 189, 194, 195(a) and 196 of the National Planning Policy

Framework, the guidance of parts 3.7 and 3.8 of the Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2017) and parts C1, I1, I2 and B2 of the National Design Guide (2019). These require that development should be well designed to protect and not harm or detract from the significance of a heritage asset and its setting and respond positively to context and an areas character and identity.

Other Matters

31. Although the appellant states that there have been no objections to the proposal from interested parties, including Historic England, I have received objection both from the Parish Council and an interested party to the proposal. In any case I have found harm based on the evidence before me and my observations at my site visit.

Conclusion

32. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that, on balance, both of the appeals should be dismissed.

Zoe Raygen

INSPECTOR