



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 26 January 2022

by S M Holden BSc (Hons) MSc CEng CTPP FCIHT MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 FEBRUARY 2022

Appeal A Ref: APP/D3830/W/21/3273636

The Old House Birchgrove Road, Horsted Keynes RH17 7BT

- 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 and Mrs Alistair and Arabella Cairns against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
 - The application Ref DM/20/3346, dated 4 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 28 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is construction of a single-storey Garden Room extension, and construction of a replacement link extension. Internal alterations to the ground floor layout, including the insertion of new partition walls and formation of new window and door openings, and new internal door openings. Replacement of existing windows within the two-storey portion of the house.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/D3830/Y/21/3273634

The Old House Birchgrove Road, Horsted Keynes RH17 7BT

- 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 Alistair and Arabella Cairns against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council.
 - The application Ref DM/20/3350, dated 31 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 January 2021.
 - The development proposed is construction of a single-storey Garden Room extension, and construction of a replacement link extension. Internal alterations to the ground floor layout, including the insertion of new partition walls and formation of new window and door openings, and new internal door openings. Replacement of existing windows within the two-storey portion of the house.
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Decision – Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Decision – Appeal B

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

3. The two appeals concern the same scheme under different, complimentary legislation. I have dealt with them together in this decision.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed works and development would preserve the Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and whether the scheme would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Birch Grove Conservation Area.

Reasons

Significance

5. The Old House is a Grade II listed building thought to date from the early to mid-17th century. It originally consisted of a two-storey structure with rooms on both floors on either side of a central chimney stack. The house had fireplaces to both of its ground and first floor rooms, indicating that its occupants were of relatively high social standing. A porch/lobby projects from its southern side and would have provided some additional privacy for the early occupants.
6. The property has evolved with the addition of single storey outshuts to its northern and western elevations. No trace of either of their original structures remains, but their footprints have been incorporated into later extensions. In the late 18th or early 19th century the original timber frame was rebuilt in stone at ground floor level. The remainder of the external walling was covered with weatherboarding and tile-hanging. These changes were a response to the unfashionability of timber-framed buildings combined with some decaying of the wood. At some point the house was subdivided into two dwellings, indicative of a period of decline in its fortunes.
7. These changed in 1934/5 when the house was subject to extensive alterations in the Arts and Crafts style and once more became a single dwelling. The side and rear outshuts were remodelled and integrated into the house with the addition of a second storey. The weatherboarding and hung tiles were removed and early timbers were recycled in reconstructed external elevations, thereby reintroducing the appearance of a timber framed building. However, the only original timber framing to survive are the corner posts and part of the east elevation of the former porch. All the windows were replaced with steel casements with a common leaded light fenestration pattern. The separate entrances to the two cottages were removed. The original projection once more became the main entrance to the house with the insertion of an oriel window and the addition of a porch. Further changes in the latter part of the 20th century included linking a detached annexe to the main dwelling via a glazed link with a pitched and tiled roof.
8. Based on the above, the significance of the Grade II listed building is derived from its age as a timber-framed, rural gentry house that has undergone progressive changes over a history spanning more than three centuries. This includes the high-quality restoration work undertaken in the 1930s. The incorporation and enlargement of the outshuts, and the introduction of stone in the lower walls form important parts of the evolution of the house over time. The re-use of some of the original timbers and the Mock Tudor appearance of its upper storey all serve to emphasise its origins as a timber framed building. These features contribute to its special architectural and historic interest and reflect the particular periods in which the changes took place.
9. The house is set in the middle of a spacious and generously proportioned plot at the end of short unmade track. It forms part of a cluster of rural dwellings which have been designated as the Birch Grove Conservation Area (CA). The significance of the CA is derived from the varied ages and designs of the buildings and given its age and presence, The Old House makes a positive contribution to it.

Proposal

10. The proposal seeks to add a single storey extension to the north-eastern elevation, to make alterations to the external walls, to insert a new door, to replace one window with double doors and all the other windows with double glazed ones. The link to the annexe would be rebuilt to provide a new entrance to the house, together with other minor works to the existing porch and oriel window. In addition to enlarging the ground floor accommodation these changes would provide opportunities to improve the thermal efficiency of the building.

a) Single storey extension and sitting/room kitchen alterations

11. The extension would occupy the full width of the north-eastern elevation of the house. Its elevations would primarily be glazed. Its combination of a tiled and pitched roof, juxtaposed to a flat roof with light lanterns, would be an uncomfortable mix of traditional and contemporary features. The overall impression would be of two separate extensions sitting awkwardly alongside each other. There would be a significant loss of historic fabric at lower levels in the north-eastern elevation with the removal of a considerable section of the stone wall and the loss of two ground floor windows. At first floor level another two-panel casement window would be lost, and the timber patination covered. This would profoundly change the appearance of this elevation to the detriment of its historic appearance, notwithstanding the fact that this would not be seen from the street.
12. The existing sitting room/kitchen has already combined the original kitchen with the outshut creating an L-shaped room around the chimney. The addition of the extension would result in significant loss of the original simple rectangular footprint of the house. The layout and legibility would be fundamentally altered, and its historic core overwhelmed. The extension would also disrupt the building's original internal timber-framed structure, as it is not clear from the submitted drawings by what means the three large beams which currently support the first floor would be integrated with the extension.
13. In addition to the extension, it is proposed to remove the window in the south-eastern elevation of the sitting room and replace it with bifold glazed doors. This feature would be out of character with the shape and size of windows in a property of this era. It would also result in further loss of the historic stone wall as well as the oak framed window with its metal casement. Amendments to the fenestration on the north-western elevation of the kitchen are also proposed with the loss of two elements of a casement window and insertion a new door to the garden. No justification for the introduction of a door in this location was provided and its juxtaposition with the remaining window would appear awkward. There would also be further loss of the historic stone walling.
14. The proposed extension combined with the alterations to windows, walls and insertion of a door would result in significant loss of historic fabric with consequential harm to the historic interest and architectural integrity of the house. The overall size of the extension, its proposed roof forms and its extensive glazing would be a poor design that would fail to respect or integrate satisfactorily with the host property. The use of oak and clay tiles to match the existing and the location of the extension away from the street would not diminish any of the harms I have identified.

b) Introduction of weatherboarding on upper levels

15. It is acknowledged that some of the exposed timbers on upper elevations of the house are decorative rather than structural. In places they are also showing evidence of decay and insect damage. There is therefore a demonstrable need to consider what treatment of the upper elevation of the house is required to ensure the long-term preservation of the building as a whole.
16. However, the covering or removal of this timber and render would profoundly affect the appearance of the building. It would obscure its medieval origins and the Mock Tudor elements that were introduced to reinforce the links with that period of the house's history. I acknowledge that there was photographic evidence that its timbers were covered by weatherboarding and tiles in the past. However, that is an insufficient justification for reintroducing such a feature now using entirely new materials, even if they were of a high quality. It would also be contrary to the way in which the 1930s 'modernisation' of the house took place which sought to restore and re-use historic material wherever possible, some of which may still be in-situ. I therefore do not consider that this element of the proposal represents a sympathetic or appropriate means of conserving the building which would respect its architectural features and historic development.

c) Replacement of glazed link to the annexe

17. The existing link between the house and its 1970s annexe is a functional structure, albeit somewhat incongruous. However, its glazed elevations give it a relatively translucent appearance. Consequently, it does not compete with the more solid character of the house or annexe.
18. By contrast the replacement would have a greater depth, more prominent gables and a more enclosed appearance including a solid oak entrance door. The main entrance of the house would be moved from its historic location within the front projection to the secondary feature linking the house and its annexe. This would change the relationship between the original dwelling and its annexe, diminish the understanding of the historic importance of the projection and undermine the integrity of the main house.

d) Replacement windows

19. The existing casement windows throughout the house are steel frames set into oak frames and sills. Although there is evidence of decay of some of the external sills, particularly on the south-western elevation, this does not appear to be a problem throughout the building. From what I saw the internal sills are generally in good condition. The windows are of a uniform height and vary in width from one to three panels. All are leaded lights in a 2 x 3 fenestration pattern, with the exception of those serving the attic and the oriel window that has been inserted into the front projection. The windows show some signs of deterioration, but most appear robust although I appreciate that they are not thermally efficient.
20. In my view the windows are an important element of the 1930s remodelling of the house, even though they do not appear to have fully replicated the variety of shape and size of the earlier ones, all of which have been lost. It is apparent from the limited details provided about the proposal that the leaded lights

would be lost. The replacement windows are described as high-quality timber joinery with an oil finish. However, there were no details of dimensions or materials other than reference to 'Slimlite double-glazed panes'.

21. From what I saw the existing windows would appear to be capable of being repaired and there are means of excluding draughts and reducing heat loss that can be achieved without requiring wholesale replacement. Similarly, the existing oak frames could be repaired to ensure their preservation in view of their underlying quality. I was not satisfied that this element of the scheme has been adequately justified. Moreover, the use of double-glazing would not be appropriate due its different visual and reflective qualities which would be at odds with an historic building of this type.
22. Given the importance of the windows to the overall character and appearance of the property and their architectural value as part of the Arts and Crafts renewal of the house, their loss would have an unacceptable impact on the special interest of the listed building.

e) Removal of porch and amendments to oriel window

23. The existing porch above the historic front door was added during the 20th century and is in keeping with other alterations undertaken at that time. It provides some limited protection to the fabric of the building, most particularly the front door which I note has been somewhat degraded by the insertion of a plastic cat-flap. The removal of the porch was not specifically justified within the evidence and in my view would downgrade the importance of the projection as the original entrance to the house.
24. The oriel window in the projection appears to have been inserted in the 1930s and has a concrete and wood decoration beneath it. Presumably this was an attempt to replicate something of 17th century appearance. However, it also ensures that it integrates with the stone walling to which it is attached. The submitted drawings show it would be removed, but no explanation or reasons for this have been provided.
25. Although the Council did not comment on these minor alterations, in my view they would erode features which contribute to the special interest of the building and its evolution over time.

Overall findings and public benefits

26. Taking all the above factors into consideration I conclude that the proposal, both its individual elements and when considered collectively, would fail to preserve the special architectural interest of the Grade II listed building. In so doing the scheme would also fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA. This would be contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires me to have special regard and pay special attention to these designated heritage assets.
27. Notwithstanding the magnitude of the extension and the cumulative effect of the other works, I am of the view that the harm may be quantified as less than substantial. However, this assessment of harm still amounts to a significant objection. It is therefore necessary for me to weigh this harm against the public benefits of the proposal as required by paragraph 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

28. Amending the house to reflect the changing socio-economic conditions of the current time in the way proposed would be a private benefit for the current occupiers. I accept that some elements of the proposal would make the house more thermally efficient and contribute to reducing the impact of climate change. However, the public benefit from doing so on a single dwelling would be small and can therefore carry only limited weight in the balance. In this case it would not outweigh the less than substantial harm identified. The development and works would also fail to comply with paragraph 199 of the Framework which states that great weight should be given to conserving a designated heritage asset's significance.
29. In addition, the proposal would conflict with Policy DP35 of the Mid Sussex District Plan, 2018, which seeks to protect listed buildings and requires alterations and extensions to respect their form, scale, setting, significance and fabric. There would also be conflict with Policies DP34 and DP26 of the District Plan which seek to conserve or enhance conservation areas and promote well designed development.
30. The appeal site lies in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) an area designated for its landscape and scenic beauty. The site is enclosed and therefore the proposal would not have any harmful effect on the wider landscape. There is, therefore, no conflict with Policy DP16 of the District Plan. However, it does not follow, as contended by the appellant, that compliance with Policy DP16 means that there is no conflict with Policy DP35.

Conclusion

31. For the reasons given above, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR