



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2022

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 February 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/Y/21/3276433

40 High Street, Frant TN3 9DU

- 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 Palmer against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application Ref WD/2020/2143/LB, dated 20 October 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 April 2021.
 - The works proposed are the removal of internal load bearing partition, replaced by new steel beam downstand. Existing ground floor window on rear elevation to be replaced by 'French doors'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and listed building consent is granted for the removal of internal load bearing wall and replacement with steel beam over; blocking-up of existing door opening between kitchen & lounge, at 40 High Street, Frant TN3 9DU in accordance with the terms of the application Ref WD/2020/2143/LB, dated 20 October 2020 and the plans submitted with it subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The works authorised by this consent shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this consent.
 - 2) Notwithstanding the proposed wall arrangement shown on drawing No 1F, Existing & Proposed Ground Floor Plans, a floor to ceiling nib not less than 150mm deep, and as thick as the larder wall, shall be retained on each side of the larder wall where it butts up to the kitchen walls, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
 - 3) All new works, finishes, and works of making good shall match existing adjacent work in respect of materials, execution, and finished appearance.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the proposed works relate to a listed building, I have had special regard to section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
 3. While the description of development included the replacement of a window by a door, this is not shown on any of the drawings or accompanying statements. It has not therefore been part of my considerations. The description in the formal decision above has been adjusted to reflect this, and the descriptions in the decision notice and in the appeal form. Its accuracy has been confirmed by the appellants.
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Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the grade II listed building, whose statutory address is Priory Cottages, 38, 40, 42 and 44 High Street, and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Significance of the listed building

5. This early C19 range of cottages is striking in the street for its romantic form and arrangement, and its splayed siting, which widens the view to the imposing but refined, village church of St Alban, standing opposite.
6. This early C19 non-secular, neo-Gothic allusion does not stand in isolation though. The delicately balanced, discreet and familial architectural dialogue between the church and the cottages adds more to the distinctiveness of this place than the sum of their individual contributions. For instance, the height and solidity of the coursed stone walls of the cottages, the splayed openings within them, the articulated form of ascending bays, leading the eye heavenwards to the dramatic skyline of extended finials soaring above crowstep gables and castellated parapets are features which reflect the mediaeval fantasy opposite, but distinguish the cottages from it.
7. The special historic interest of this building is not limited to its romantic form or its relationship to the church and the historic, architectural ambition it suggests of the village which lies close to Tunbridge Wells. Nor is its architectural interest solely in its outward appearance. Internally, No 40 has the modest scale of a cottage in the size of its rooms and its floor to ceiling heights, yet its footprint is relatively large, and it is arranged over three floors. The ground floor, where the works are proposed, has two principal rooms, each with a fireplace. The front room, entered directly off the front garden, leads into a larger back room which has the stair to one side and a small kitchen leading off it which includes a larder. Though the historic plan form is critical to the significance of the building, it comes more here from the scale of the rooms, their use and their general arrangement, and how they receive light and heat than whether the kitchen is accessed from one room or from the other.

Effect of the proposed works

8. Spatially, the switch of the access into the kitchen from the back room to the front room would not undermine the significance of the historic plan form. A single point of access to the kitchen would be retained, albeit from a different room. Opening-up the kitchen access from its present door width to the full width of the kitchen would not harm the legibility of the rooms as distinct spaces despite the opening being unenclosed, as it is today. To make the door between the principal rooms sliding rather than swing would not detract from the significance of the historic plan form. While there is no substantive evidence of the age or status of the present door, taking into account the condition of its timber and its ironmongery, I can see no harm to its replacement by the proposed door, which would reflect the boarded door in the same room.
9. I appreciate that the switched access would change to a small degree the historic plan form of No 40. However, in the absence of any evidence of a physical, visual or historic link to a similar plan form in the same building on which its historic significance is dependent, I can see no harm from this plan

alteration to the significance or to the special historic or architectural interest of the building, which is listed for group value. The switch would recognise the historic significance of the building while accommodating the change the occupiers desire to make the kitchen more efficient, allowing them to continue to use and enjoy the house which is a significant factor in the prospect of its long-term conservation.

10. Notwithstanding this, the larder is a plan layout feature of the building's historic significance which shows us how food was stored before modern fridges became commonplace, and how this was accommodated in the plan arrangement. Its provision also reveals something of the status of the intended occupiers.
11. While I appreciate that a larder may no longer be necessary, some reference to its present position should be retained, such as keeping nibs to its returns. This could be secured by condition. I appreciate that retaining nibs may conflict with modern kitchen unit planning. However, without a condition to secure some trace of this important aspect of the historic plan form, part of the building's historic significance would be lost, and the proposal would be unacceptable.
12. In terms of historic fabric and its loss, while the section of wall in the front room and the larder walls contain historic masonry, these do not appear to me to have singular, archaeological significance, nor sufficient interest to distinguish them from their surrounding material, either architecturally or historically. In view of the limited amount and low significance of the fabric to be removed, and the remaining fabric of similar age, the lost masonry would not harm the special architectural or historic interest of the building. It is not a determinative factor in this proposal.

Conclusion and Conditions

13. Given the above, I conclude that the proposed works would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed building, thus satisfying the requirements of the Act, paragraph 197 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the development plan policies insofar as relevant.
14. As discussed above, I have applied a notwithstanding condition [2] to retain nibs in the larder wall. This is necessary to minimise the loss of historic plan form on the significance of the building. The Council has suggested a condition for details of the piecing-in of a new floor finish, which I have covered by a 'works to match adjacent' condition [3]. This will also apply to inevitable joinery and ceiling disturbance, which as historic fabric, must be protected from insensitive new work, as well as to the sensitivity of the ironmongery on the replacement door. I appreciate the Council's concern to protect historic fabric from downlighters; however, condition 3 would secure effective control over disturbance in a domestic installation in rooms of this scale. A further condition is unnecessary, even if they did form part of the works.
15. For the reasons above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR