



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 February 2022

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/D3830/Y/21/3280799

Cobwebbs, North Lane, West Hoathly RH19 4QG

- The appeal is made under sections 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant conservation area consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs Westcott against the decision of Mid Sussex District Council. The application Ref DM/21/0536, dated 11 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 20 May 2021.
 - The demolition proposed is a single storey rear addition linked to existing rear addition including removal of the south west external wall to the existing rear addition.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The application sought planning permission and listed building consent for the development and works set out above. However, the appeal before me only relates to the refusal of listed building consent as no appeal against the Council's decision on the planning permission has been lodged.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposed works 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 West Hoathly Conservation Area.

Reasons

Significance

4. Dating from around 1600, Cobwebbs is a two-storey, timber-framed Grade II listed building which originally had a simple rectangular footprint with two rooms on each floor. There is evidence that it was a well-built, but modestly sized house, probably lived in by a tenant farmer. The single central chimney stack in the rear elevation provided heating to two of the four rooms. Service areas to the south and east were added around 1700, wrapping around the original hall and enclosing the original chimney stack. The house was updated during the 18th century being rebuilt in brick at ground level and the timber-framing being obscured by hung tiles to its upper floors.
5. Following this there appears to have been a period of decline in the 19th century when there is evidence of the house being occupied by two families. However, a major refurbishment took place at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries, in the Arts and Crafts style. Alterations were made both internally

and externally including the brick-built extension added to the southern elevation which dates from the period 1897-1910. The northern rear wing extension was added after 1969, but prior to the house being listed in 1983.

6. At present the two extensions project from the rear elevation creating a partially enclosed courtyard at the back of the house. The earlier, smaller one attached to the southern side does not interfere with the catslide roof. However, additional works, probably carried out at the time this extension was constructed, now enclose part of the original rear outshut. The rear wall was reframed using new timber and metal window frames were inserted. The remainder of the outshut was retained as a more open structure using early timbers repurposed from elsewhere in the house. Nevertheless, a long section of timber wall plate at eaves level, and the majority of the stone plinth that runs along the bottom of the outshut, originate from around 1700.
7. The significance of the dwelling is therefore derived from its age as a modest timber-framed farmhouse which was later enlarged to a more comfortable residence. Although the house has changed and evolved over more than 400 years, its original form, layout and early development remain legible. The extent of the rear outshut is still apparent even with the 20th century extensions to this elevation. These extensions are reasonable examples of their type. They are in keeping with the building's character and do not compete, diminish or overwhelm the significance or abundance of historic fabric within the front part of the house. Good examples of early fabric and features, including timber framing, doors and floorboards have been preserved throughout the dwelling. All these factors contribute to the dwelling's special architectural and historic interest.
8. Cobwebbs is named as one of three very attractive listed buildings in North Lane which is at the northern end of the West Hoathly Conservation Area (CA). The CA is a typical Wealden ridge-top settlement with a rich history dating back to medieval times. Its significance derives particularly from its collection of 14th-16th century buildings grouped around St Margaret's Church. From there the CA extends along North Lane and includes an eclectic mix of buildings of various ages and design. These include the school and some classical Victorian properties which contribute positively to the significance of the CA alongside the listed buildings. The street's mix of historic and modern buildings illustrates the village's development and expansion over several centuries.

Assessment of proposal

9. The proposal seeks to broaden the larger, single-storey rear extension that was constructed in the mid-20th century. Its southern wall would be demolished allowing the extension to be widened across the rear elevation, thereby creating a more spacious kitchen/dining room.
10. The extension would incorporate the existing open section of the outshut within the main dwelling. Although most of its historic fabric would not be lost, its function as a link between the house and the outside would completely change. The existing opening from the family room would be blocked up, although it is proposed to retain the historic door as a feature. As a consequence, the outshut would become an enclosed corridor surrounded by the rest of the house.

11. The rear of the house has already been substantially modified, through the combination of extensions, refurbishment and insertion of 20th century windows. Nevertheless, there are significant elements and features of historic fabric and interest which remain, namely the catslide roof, the chimney stack and the remainder of the open outshut.
12. The extension would obscure the surviving historic fabric of the rear outshut. It would disrupt and partially obscure the catslide roof and would diminish the prominence of the chimney stack as the dominant and central feature in the rear elevation. The submitted plans show that the timber framing of the outshut would be retained, ensuring its future preservation. However, there were no sections to show proposed floor levels, or how the roof of the extension would be integrated with the existing. I am therefore unable to fully assess the effect of the scheme on the original wall plate or the stone plinth, which are also important elements of historic fabric in this part of the house.
13. The additional width of the proposal would be out of proportion with the width of the house and its existing courtyard. It would have the effect of overwhelming the rear elevation with extensions, whereas the scale of the existing ones allows them to be read as bookends to the original house, even though they are not identical in size.
14. The crown roof would not be a sympathetic design that would sit comfortably adjacent to the catslide roof and the lanterns within it would be incongruous features. Their positions in relation to the existing dormer windows serving the bedroom and en-suite on the first floor would also appear awkward. Furthermore, the submitted elevations appear to show the eaves of the proposal to be higher than those of the catslide roof. In my view this would be unacceptable and would not replicate the current relationship between the roof and the existing extension.
15. The extension would be somewhat solid in its appearance and would reflect the style and design of the Arts and Crafts refurbishment of the property. However, this would not permit any external views of the historic fabric that would be retained internally; this would diminish appreciation of the rear elevation of the property as a whole. Taking all of the above into consideration, I find the proposal would be harmful to the Grade II listed building.
16. Although Cobwebbs is described as a very attractive listed building within the CA, only its front elevation is visible from any public viewpoint. The works would be confined to the rear of the building and therefore would not adversely affect the appearance of the CA. Although the extension would increase the building's footprint, its overall character would not change. Given the diversity of buildings throughout the CA and the variety of styles, designs and the incorporation of more recent development in North Lane, I am satisfied that the scheme would preserve the character and appearance of the CA.
17. I understand that the appellants were disappointed that the Council rejected the scheme when they had taken time to seek pre-application advice. However, there were clear caveats to that advice, particularly relating to the need to have a fuller understanding of the building's architectural interest and historic development through a heritage statement. The Council's response to the scheme took account of the comprehensive information subsequently provided within the Historic Building Assessment. Whilst the outshut was considered to

be of moderate, rather than high, historic value in that report, it does not follow that a proposal which would reduce its significance would be acceptable.

18. Other matters relating to the manner in which the Council handled the application are not for me to consider in the context of this appeal which is confined to a consideration of the proposal on its merits.

Public benefits

19. I consider the harm I have identified would be less than substantial in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). 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 Framework.
20. I acknowledge that the proposal would provide the house with a more spacious kitchen/dining area, more akin to the arrangements that are currently popular in modern dwellings. However, as this would be a private benefit for existing and future occupants, it is not one which can be weighed against the less than substantial harm identified.
21. Notwithstanding the fact that I have found the scheme would preserve the West Hoathly CA, I have concluded that the works would cause harm to Cobwebbs, a Grade II listed building. This harm would not be outweighed by any public benefit. The proposal would therefore fail to preserve features that are an important part of its special architectural and historic interest. This would be contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The 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.

Conclusion

22. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR