



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 February 2022

by Neil Pope BA(HONS) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/W3330/Y/21/3280627

1 Heathfield Farmhouse, Creech Heathfield Road, Creech Heathfield, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 5ER.

- 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 Jon West against the decision of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
 - The application ref.14/20/0047/LBC, dated 5/11/20, was refused by notice dated 7/6/21.
 - The works proposed are the erection of a front entrance porch.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Background Matters

2. Heathfield Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building that is now in use as two separate dwellings¹. Amongst other things, the list description identifies a 19th century hipped slate roof² porch set on concrete piers. Replacements, repairs and alterations were undertaken to the porch during the early 1990's (ref. 14/91/0029/LB). It would appear that sometime, possibly during the first decade of the 21st century, unauthorised works were undertaken to the porch.
3. In 2015, an appeal against the refusal of consent for a replacement porch³ was dismissed (ref. APP/D3315/Y/15/3005014). This replacement porch remains in situ and is very different to the one shown in the photograph (dated 2009) that forms part of the Council's Statement. The scheme before me is for a porch of a different design⁴ to the one that was considered in 2015.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve Heathfield Farmhouse or its features of special architectural or historic interest.

Reasons

5. The significance of the late 18th century, two storey Heathfield Farmhouse is primarily derived from its special architectural and historic qualities. These include its 'T' shaped plan, roughcast rendered walls, brick stacks, coped verges, string course, sash windows, forecourt walls, gate piers and gate, as well its surviving 18th century fabric and past associations with agricultural activities in this part of Somerset.

¹ No.1 includes the front (south) elevation of the listed building.

² The list description refers to the farmhouse having a slate and tiled roof. The roof on the south elevation is tiled.

³ The replacement porch had already been constructed. The size and design is different to the porch that was in place during the first decade of the 21st century.

⁴ The changes include a single opening door flanked on either side by arched pane windows with glazing bars, matching side windows and a rendered gable end with 'Victorian style' decorative bargeboards.

6. There have been many changes to Heathfield Farmhouse and its setting over the years. These include the construction of the adjacent M5 Motorway. Nevertheless, the building⁵ remains a pleasing example of a late 18th century vernacular farmhouse with an attractive and well-proportioned south elevation.
7. The existing porch is of a very different size and design to the very small, hipped roof porch that was in existence in 2009. I note from the 2015 appeal decision that this replacement porch was found to be harmful to the character, appearance and significance of the listed building. In dismissing that appeal, I also note that the Inspector found that the increase in 'footprint' of the porch was not overly dominant in relationship to the existing building.
8. The 'footprint' of the porch that is the subject of the appeal before me would be the same size as the one that was considered in 2015. The eaves height and ridge height would also be same as in the previous appeal. I have noted above the principal changes to the proposed design. I recognise that these have been proposed in response to the concerns identified by the previous Inspector not least, his finding that *"the porch has a more contemporary and featureless appearance demonstrating little architectural merit and does not compare favourably with the character and appearance of the old porch"*.
9. When compared to the design of the porch that was dismissed on appeal in 2015, the proposal before me includes more architectural detailing. Whilst I share the Council's concerns regarding the width and depth of the replacement porch, given the findings of the previous Inspector in respect of the increase in 'footprint', it would be difficult to justify withholding consent on the basis of these concerns. However, there is greater strength in the Council's argument regarding the design and architectural detailing of the proposed works.
10. The proposal would be a modern-day addition to the house. Contemporary structures (including 'Modern' additions) that are designed to a high quality can be successfully added to historic buildings without detracting from their significance. Unfortunately, this is not the situation in this appeal.
11. The proposal appears to be a reworking of the existing porch, which has been found to be inappropriate, and an attempt to mimic aspects of Victorian architecture. However, unlike the former covered entrance with its hipped roof, narrow windows and ornate upper frieze, the proposal with its somewhat bulky gable roof and double glass panels either side of the door would comprise an awkward and inappropriate design. It also still lacks an appropriate level of architectural detailing to amount to a suitable pastiche of a 19th century porch.
12. I agree with the Council that the proposal would disrupt the appearance of the south elevation of the listed farmhouse and harm the significance of this important building. It would be at odds with the objectives of national⁶ and local⁷ planning policies for protecting the historic environment. There are no compelling reasons to justify setting aside this harm.
13. I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve Heathfield Farmhouse or its features of special architectural or historic interest. The appeal therefore fails.

Neil Pope

Inspector

⁵ Excluding the existing porch on the south elevation.

⁶ The National Planning Policy Framework.

⁷ Policy CP8 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy.