



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 September 2021

by John Dowsett MA DipURP DipUD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21st March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/M4510/Y/19/3236542

Pendower Hall, 175 West Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE15 6PP

- 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 Pendower Hall Limited against the decision of Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council.
 - The application Ref: 2019/0603/01/LBC, dated 3 May 2019, was refused by notice dated 28 June 2019.
 - The works proposed are described as: Introduction of new lowered ceiling detail to the centre of room 01.19.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The address of the building given on the Listed Building Consent application form and the Decision Notice issued by the Council is 'Pendower Hall, 175 West Road'. Although this is likely to be the current postal address for the building, the entry on the List gives the Statutory Address as 'Pendower Teachers Centre, West Road' because that was the use and address of the building at the time of its listing. As the application was made for the address Pendower Hall, 175 West Road, I have used that address for the purposes of the heading of the appeal decision.
3. The Newcastle-upon-Tyne Development and Allocations Plan (the DAP) was adopted in June 2020, after the application was determined. This supersedes provisions of Saved Policy C2 of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Unitary Development Plan cited on the decision notice. Saved Policy C2 is effectively replaced by Policy DM15 of the DAP.
4. On 20 July 2021 the Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The provisions of the Framework in respect of considering the potential impacts on heritage assets are unchanged from the previous version. I have determined the appeal with regard to the current version of the Framework.
5. As the appeal relates to a listed building consent, I have had special regard to section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).

Main Issue

6. The main issue in this appeal is whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, Pendower Teachers Centre [List entry: 1024762], and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

7. The building was listed in 1987 and dates from approximately 1870. It is built in stone under a slate roof. It is an imposing building over two principal floors with attic accommodation in parts of the roof space. The roof features multiple gables giving the building a complex form. There is a large open portico at the principal entrance and a large two storey semi-circular bay window is present on the south elevation. To the north of the principal building is an attached stable block with a wall enclosing a courtyard between the principal building and the stable block. The stable block is separately listed at Grade II in its own right [List entry: 1024763].
8. The Archaeological Building Recording Report (ABRR) submitted with the application suggests that the house may have been built in the late 1860's and was extended and altered in the period between 1872 and 1894. It was originally built for a local banker and businessman and was occupied by him and his family, and later, his son until the early part of the twentieth century. From the floorplans included in the ABRR and the information contained therein, the house originally had a generally rectangular plan. Subsequently a large extension was added to the east elevation, forming a new entrance hall and incorporating a billiards room and dining room/library at ground floor level, with other rooms, most likely bedrooms, on the first floor. During the First World War the building was used as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. In 1919 it was sold to Newcastle City Council and used as a school from 1925 before later becoming the Pendower Hall Education Development Centre and teacher training facility in the 1970's until it closed in 2002.
9. The ABRR notes that much of the original 1867 plan still exists within the building although many of the fixtures and fittings have been stripped out and/or replaced over the course of the twentieth century, other than in the formal rooms where the features have for the most part been preserved.
10. At the time of my site visit, work had been underway to implement previously approved works to convert the building into an office, wedding, exhibition, and conferencing venue, although this had been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. I observed that the points noted by the ABRR are largely accurate, although it was apparent that some works had been undertaken since that time in the rooms in question to strip out later insertions such as partition walls, suspended ceilings, and cabling ducts. The rooms had been also largely stripped of plaster and no ceilings were present. Some parts of the historic cornice and skirting boards remained and there were some elements of architrave and panelling present around window openings. In much of the upper parts of the building, no ceilings were present in other rooms. The appellant's statement sets out that these works were undertaken as an emergency measure to address severe water ingress to the upper parts of the building.

11. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the listed building, in so far as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the evidential value that it has as a house built for a wealthy businessman, the form and layout of the interior of such a house, and the architectural style and taste of the time. It also has historic value derived from the changing uses over time and aesthetic value derived primarily from its architecture and setting.
12. The proposed works involve the installation of a dropped section of ceiling into each of the three spaces that would comprise a new bridal suite within the building. The dropped ceiling would be built around a timber frame with a 200mm drop and a width of 300mm. Within the central section of the frame, a lower section of suspended ceiling 60mm in depth would be installed. The outer frame of two of the sections would contain integral lighting units and would have a timber cornice on the outer face. Light emitting diode (LED) tape lighting would be installed behind the cornice feature. The centre section of each would contain a plaster ceiling rose around an electrical fitting for a chandelier.
13. The appellant's statement of case sets out that the space is intended to exude grandness and be similar to how a drawing room of the nineteenth century was viewed. It notes that at that time high ceilings were embellished with mouldings as a sign of wealth.
14. The rooms that comprise the space are within the oldest part of the house. The appellant posits, and I would agree, that based on the available evidence it is likely the original function of the space would have been a bedroom. It is clear from the submitted evidence that the previously approved works would alter the historic proportions of the rooms that make up the space through the insertion of the new bathroom and w.c. and also alter the relationship that the space has with the lightwell that forms part of the stair core of the building. The proposed dropped ceilings would further distort the proportions of the space by lowering the perceived ceiling height. Although incorporating a cornice detail on its outer faces, as this cornice would not link to the ceiling, the top of the cornice would appear to float below it, and this would be exacerbated by the proposed LED lighting behind it.
15. There is no evidence before me of similar ceilings within the building and whilst decorative ceilings in plasterwork were common in Victorian houses, there is no evidence that would suggest that a ceiling as elaborate as that proposed would be present in a private part of the house. Of the principal public rooms in the house, the timber, coffered, ceiling in the dining room/library is one of the most elaborate ceilings extant in the building. However, this design is not similar to the works proposed by the appeal scheme. The proposed works would consequently appear historically inauthentic in their context and would introduce further confusion to the layout of this part of the building.
16. Although I accept the appellant's point that other features such as cornices, skirtings, and architraves are being re-instated in the rooms, the evidence indicates that these are historically accurate replacements for lost features. Whilst not a restoration of historic building fabric, accurate reproductions would, nonetheless, assist in better revealing the significance of the building.
17. The Planning and Heritage Statement submitted with the application assesses the area as of low significance. However, it is not clear from either this document or the ABRR how this conclusion has been reached. Whilst the area

has clearly been modified in the past and the historic floor layout is less legible in this part of the building it is, nevertheless, part of the earlier house prior to its extension. Although the previously consented scheme would result in this floor layout being further altered, the current proposal would exacerbate this by adding a feature that would be inconsistent with the historic functions of this part of the house. The proposed works would further distort the historic proportions of the rooms and further reduce the legibility and understanding of the house plan. The Planning and Heritage Statement submitted with the application accepts that the proposed works would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the listed building.

18. Whilst I have noted the appellant's point that the proposed works would be reversible, there is no indication that it is clearly intended to remove the works in the future. The harm that would result is, therefore, of an unspecified duration with no certainty that it would subsequently be undone. I have also noted the point that the design of the dropped ceiling would allow cables to be installed within the void space to avoid further intervention into the original structure. As the previous ceiling has been removed and an entire new ceiling is to be installed, this point is not persuasive, and there is nothing to suggest that any new electrical wiring for ceiling lights could not be installed and routed with minimal disruption to the remaining structure above before the new ceiling is created.
19. Given the above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building. Consequently, I give this harm considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of these appeals.
20. Paragraph 199 of 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 200 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. Because the proposed works would be limited to a relatively small section of the interior of the building, I find that the harm would be less than substantial in this instance but, nevertheless, of considerable importance and weight.
21. Under such circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes the securing of the optimal viable use of listed buildings. The appellant is of the opinion that the proposal would be beneficial because the wider re-use of the hall and its ancillary buildings would provide the building with a viable use and would also provide training opportunities for plasterers and tradesmen to work in a historic building.
22. Whilst in broader terms this may well be the case, I have noted that the Council has set out that there has been a previous listed building consent granted for works to facilitate the re-use of the building as an office, wedding, exhibition, and conferencing venue. From the evidence, this scheme is in the process of being implemented.
23. The Council state that this earlier scheme involved works that would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the building but that this harm was balanced by the public benefits of the scheme. The proposed works would result in additional less than substantial harm but, notwithstanding the

appellants points above, there is nothing that would demonstrate that the proposal would result in additional public benefits over and above those already secured by the original proposals, or that the public benefits already secured were substantial enough to justify additional harm to the significance of the building. There is no evidence before me that would indicate that the wider scheme would not go ahead, or that it would not result in a viable future use of the building, or not provide training opportunities for local tradesmen if consent is not given for the proposed works .

24. In the absence of any substantiated additional public benefits, I therefore conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 197 of the Framework and conflict with Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2015 and Policy DM15 of the DAP which seek, among other things, to ensure that proposals are of a high standard of design which will sustain, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the significance of heritage assets. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan.

Conclusion

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

John Dowsett

INSPECTOR