
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 April 2022

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26th April 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/Y/21/3279659

Corner Cottage, Foords Lane, Hankham, Westham BN24 5AN

- 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 Timothy Churchill against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application Ref WD/2021/0804/LB, dated 27 March 2021, was refused by notice dated 21 July 2021.
 - The works proposed are replacement of external doors, see design and access statement for full details.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the replacement doors would preserve the Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Significance

3. Corner Cottage is a modest, Grade II listed, two-storey dwelling believed to date from the 17th century. It is constructed of bricks which are white painted under a hipped tiled roof and has casement windows. The house was altered and extended in the 1950s. There are now three stable-type doors serving the front elevation which are similar in appearance. Each comprises 3 wide panels, a typical feature of historic doors. Two, which exhibit Arts and Crafts detailing, are thought to date from the early 20th century or possibly earlier. The third serves the extension and is therefore more modern. However, its design replicates many of the features of the other two doors even though their different ages are apparent from the subtle variations in their detailing associated with their braces and hinges.
4. There was limited information provided about the house's history. However, extensive works were approved in 2009 to permit rebuilding of the fire damaged chimney and carry out repairs to fire and water damage ceilings, walls and timbers on the ground and first floors. Further renovations have been undertaken more recently, with approvals given to internal alterations and replacement windows.
5. The dwelling's significance therefore derives from its age and form as a simple vernacular cottage which has been altered, extended and restored following a

serious fire. The front elevation is an attractive feature of the house. The character, colour and design of the two Arts and Crafts doors, and the inclusion of a faithful replication as the third, add to its architectural interest as it has evolved over time. The existing doors, therefore, make a positive contribution to the significance and appearance of the building.

Assessment of replacement doors

6. The existing doors are showing signs of decay and insect damage, particularly at the lower edges which are vulnerable to the combined effects of woodworm and damp. The timbers are quite thin and there was evidence of cracking, but neglect and poor maintenance is not necessarily a justification for undertaking a full replacement. The appellant says that he has been advised by a local joiner that the doors are beyond repair. However, this assertion was not supported by any more substantive evidence explaining why repairs, such as replacement of the bottom rails, could not be undertaken.
7. Even if I was to accept that repairs are impractical, the proposed replacements do not reflect the style of the existing doors. Instead of using wide planks which are a key feature of their design, the replacements would comprise seven narrow boards framed by outer ones of a similar width. The use of oak and having the doors hand-crafted with concealed locks and cast handles would not overcome this fundamental design problem. The doors would have an entirely modern appearance which would not sit comfortably in the historic brickwork that defines the front elevation of the house. While the doors are not original, there would be a loss of historic fabric which would be detrimental to the character of the building as a whole. I therefore find that the replacement doors would be harmful to the Grade II listed building.
8. I appreciate that the appellant was far from happy when the case officer and team leader appeared to overrule the comments of the conservation officer in refusing the scheme. However, significant concerns had been raised about the form and future appearance of the doors, so the officers were entitled to come to an overall planning judgement about their acceptability. Similarly, whilst concerns about the security of the property are understandable, there were no substantive reasons given as to why this matter could not be addressed through a design that shows greater respect to the features of special architectural and historic interest of the building.
9. My attention was drawn to other properties in the area where doors have been replaced. From what I have read it appears that these were replacements of doors that had little or no historic interest. So, whilst those doors may be comparable with the style of door proposed in this scheme, the circumstances and context of those decisions is not. Those decisions are therefore of limited relevance in my assessment of the appeal proposal, which I have determined on its individual merits.

Public benefits

10. 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.

11. The replacement doors would ensure that the house is watertight. However, the responsibility for maintenance of listed buildings resides with their owners. Works required to prevent water penetration are therefore not a public benefit that can be weighed against the identified harm.
12. Consequently, the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of Corner Cottage, a Grade II listed building. 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

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

Sheila Holden

INSPECTOR