



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 March 2022

by F Cullen BA(Hons) MSc DipTP MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 04 May 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/Y/22/3291060

The Manor House, 55 Northumberland Street, Alnmouth, NE66 2RJ

- 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 Ms Penelope Askew against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref: 20/03160/LBC, dated 23 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 July 2021.
 - The works proposed are described as 'The sash windows have not been changed since at least 1999 when the property was purchased. The windows do not open and therefore cannot provide ventilation to mitigate against any dampness. The proposal is to replace the 3 existing sash windows and associated secondary glazing at the front of the property in the original style with grade 1 Redwood sashes and duplicating the original pattern. The work will include slim line double glazed units.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Northumberland County Council adopted the Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036 (the NLP) on 31 March 2022. This replaces the Alnmouth District, Core Strategy Development Plan Document, 2007. In determining the appeal I have had regard to the relevant policies in the NLP. Both parties have had the opportunity to comment on this change and I have taken any responses received into account. I am satisfied that no party's interests have been prejudiced by this approach.
3. The Council's reason for refusal refers to the requirements of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 (the Act). However, section 66(1) of the Act concerns 'whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting.' As the application and appeal concern 'whether to grant listed building consent for any works', the proposal requires to be assessed against section 16(2) of the Act. I have therefore determined the appeal on this basis. Both sections of the Act require 'special regard to be had to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' As both parties have addressed this matter within their respective evidence, I consider that their interests have not been prejudiced by my approach.
4. The appeal building is located within the Alnmouth Conservation Area (the ACA). I have therefore also had regard to the statutory duty set out in section 72(1) of the Act.

5. No concerns were raised by the Council regarding the removal of the existing secondary glazing. From my observations on site, I consider that this element of the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building and would preserve the character and appearance of the ACA. Consequently, I have focused my considerations of the appeal on the proposed works to the existing three sliding-sash windows in Flat 1.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are whether the proposed works would: i) preserve the Grade II listed building known as Seabank, 55 Northumberland Street, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Alnmouth Conservation Area.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

7. The appeal property, Flat 1, forms part of a Grade II listed building referenced in the National Heritage List for England as Seabank, 55 Northumberland Street (formerly listed as The Manor House)¹, which occupies a prominent position on the main street through Alnmouth and in the ACA. The building dates from the 18th century, with some remodelling at the rear and internally in the 20th century, and is now subdivided into two flats. It is two-storey, constructed of tooled squared stone with cut dressings, rusticated quoins, a chamfered plinth, sill bands and a Welsh slate roof.
8. Pertinent to the appeal, the building's fenestration on the front elevation mostly comprises 4 over 4, painted timber, vertical sliding-sash windows. These are single-glazed units within Flat 1 and double-glazed units within Flat 2. Also present is a single-glazed painted timber, fixed window which has been inserted in the central blocked doorway.
9. From the evidence before me, I find that the building's special interest and significance to be mainly derived from its historic and architectural interests, as a notable 18th century domestic property within Alnmouth. Important contributors to the building's heritage interests are its age; traditional construction; surviving historic fabric; and architectural form and design, including key features and detailing. The building's special interest and significance also stems, in part, from its group value.
10. In relation to the subject of the appeal, neither party has provided any substantive evidence as to the age of the existing windows and their relative significance as surviving historic fabric. Notwithstanding this, they are of classic sliding-sash form and proportions and are constructed of traditional materials. In these respects, they are important components of the building which contribute in a positive way to its heritage merit.
11. The ACA encapsulates the historic core of Alnmouth. The special interest and significance of the ACA are largely derived from the preservation of the village's historic street pattern along with the variety and architectural richness of its historic buildings, which denote its evolution, all scenically set within a wider coastal landscape. By virtue of its historic and architectural integrity,

¹ National Heritage List for England, List Entry Number 1041805.

No 55 Northumberland Street adds considerably to Alnmouth's historic and aesthetic charm. In doing so it positively contributes to the character and appearance of the ACA as a whole and thereby to its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Proposed works and their effects

12. The proposed works relate to three single-glazed, painted timber, vertical sliding-sash windows within Flat 1. The windows are positioned on the ground floor of the front elevation of the listed building and serve a bedroom and living room. The existing painted timber box frames of the windows would be retained and refurbished; and the existing top and bottom sashes would be replaced by grade 1 redwood sashes with 4mm-4mm-4mm clear sealed Low E Krypton gas filled, slim line heritage, double-glazed units, that would duplicate the original pattern.
13. I have had regard to the appellant's assertions concerning the poor condition of the existing windows, particularly that they cannot be opened, giving rise to issues of poor ventilation and fire safety risks. However, no detailed and robust assessment has been submitted which supports these claims. Consequently, I cannot be certain that the condition of the existing sashes is so poor that they could not be retained and sensitively refurbished by an experienced tradesperson.
14. Even if I accept the appellant's contentions that the existing sashes are beyond repair and need to be totally replaced, the information provided in relation to the detail of the proposed windows/sashes is wholly deficient². This severely limits the ability to make a valid and meaningful assessment of the proposed works.
15. I acknowledge that the proposed sashes would reproduce the existing 4 over 4 pattern and be of a matching material and finish. Nevertheless, the absence of any drawings at appropriate scales, which illustrate the existing units in section and elevation as well as the proposed units in elevation, results in uncertainty about whether the proposed works would accurately replicate the detailed dimensions, profile and appearance of the existing units. The omission of these details also gives rise to concerns about whether the existing box frames would, realistically, be compatible with the installation of the proposed new sashes.
16. As such, I find that it is not possible to confidently determine whether the works would meet the requirements of the Act's statutory duties; and comply with the pertinent section of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the relevant policies of the NLP.
17. In coming to my decision, I have considered whether conditions controlling the detail of the proposed windows/sashes could adequately mitigate these issues and concerns were the appeal to be allowed. Given the prominence of the building and the contribution of the fenestration to its heritage value, I consider that it would be unacceptable to leave such matters to be dealt with by conditions, as I cannot be sure that they would be effective and capable of implementation.

² Proposed Unit in Section and 1:100 Proposed South Elevation.

18. I note the appellant's pressing desire to carry out the proposed works, which they contend would reduce ongoing issues with damp, as well as generate improvements in the energy efficiency, carbon footprint and fire safety of Flat 1 and thus the listed building as a whole. Furthermore, that the proposed works would provide a consistency in form and appearance of the windows across the front elevation of the building which would preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the ACA.
19. Subject to the matters outlined above being addressed, there is the potential for an acceptable scheme to be devised which would secure the appropriate replacement of the windows/sashes. However, in giving great weight to the conservation of the designated heritage assets, I conclude that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building known as Seabank, 55 Northumberland Street, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; or that it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the ACA.
20. Thus, I cannot be certain that the proposed works would meet the requirements of sections 16(2) or 72(1) of the Act; comply with the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment; or accord with Policies QOP 1, ENV 7 and ENV 9 of the NLP. Together and amongst other things, these policies seek development proposals to respect and enhance the historic environment; conserve and enhance the significance, quality and integrity of Northumberland's heritage assets and their settings; and enhance and reinforce the local distinctiveness of conservation areas.
21. I note that the Council highlighted the lack of information about the condition of the windows and justification for the proposed works but, from the evidence before me, it did not appear to have requested additional information regarding detailed drawings. Nevertheless, I have reached my own conclusion on the evidence before me and, therefore, this does not detract from my findings in this regard, which is due to a lack of information and uncertainty over the detail of what is proposed.

Other Matters

22. My attention has been drawn to the grant of listed building consent for the installation of double-glazed units in Flat 2, No 55 Northumberland Street³ and in No 8 Northumberland Street⁴. Whilst I acknowledge the appellant's comments on their relevance to the appeal before me, I do not have all the details of the applications and/or the full circumstances that led to those works being accepted. As such, I am unable to draw any reasonable comparisons. Moreover, my conclusion on the main issue results from a lack of information and uncertainty about the detail of what is proposed.
23. The appellant highlights the Council's 'inequitable response' in relation to the determination of the application for No 8 Northumberland Street, referred to above. However, of itself, this is not a matter for my consideration in the context of an appeal under section 20 of the Act.
24. I note the support of the Parish Council for the proposed works. Nonetheless, this is a neutral consideration in the balance and does not alter my conclusion.

³ Application Ref: 12/02137/LBC.

⁴ Application Refs: 20/00029/FUL and 20/00030/LBC, The Schooner Hotel, No 8 Northumberland Street.

Conclusion

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

F Cullen

INSPECTOR