The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 October 2022

by Andrew Dale BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 November 2022

Appeal Ref. APP/C1625/D/22/3301612
1 Southfield Cottages, Bath Road, Woodchester, Stroud GL5 5NT

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mrs Rebecca Killick against the decision of Stroud District Council.
- The application ref. S.22/0228/HHOLD, dated 1 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 31 March 2022.
- The development proposed is described on the application form as "*Resubmission of S.21/0386/HHOLD Erection of replacement front porch (part retrospective)*".

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for erection of replacement front porch (part retrospective) at 1 Southfield Cottages, Bath Road, Woodchester, Stroud GL5 5NT in accordance with the terms of the application ref. S.22/0228/HHOLD, dated 1 February 2022, subject to the following condition:

   1) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details given on the householder application form and the following approved plans numbered and titled: 21073.01 Location & Block Plan; 21.073.02 Existing Plan and Elevations; and 21073.03 REV:A Proposed Plan and Elevations.

Preliminary matters

2. It will be noted that my description of the proposal in the decision above is slightly different from that given on the application form and, for that matter, on the Council's decision notice. Whilst the subject planning application might be a resubmission of a previously refused one, there is no need to refer to that fact in the description of the proposed development.

3. The appellant is dissatisfied with the advice provided and processes followed by different officers involved in determining both planning applications for the replacement porch. Still, my principal focus in this appeal must be on the planning merits of the proposed development in the subject application.

Main issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed replacement porch upon the character, appearance and heritage significance of the host dwelling and, linked to that, whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Industrial Heritage Conservation Area (IHCA).

Reasons

5. The part of the IHCA, within which the appeal site is located, encompasses a relatively narrow band of land through the valley that follows the Nailsworth Stream and Bath Road (A46). The IHCA's significance lies in the diversity of commercial and residential buildings and historical features which appear along the valley and reflect the industrial heritage and evolution of the settlement.

6. Following the advice in the Planning Practice Guidance, the Council was entitled to identify the appeal building as a non-designated heritage asset as part of the decision-making process on the planning application. No. 1 forms a linked pair of cottages with no. 2. They possibly date from the mid-19th century and are the most noteworthy of the 4 cottages in the same group. Viewed in the round, I find that there is sound evidence to suggest that the appeal property possesses enough heritage significance to merit identification as a non-designated heritage asset. This is chiefly on account of the dominance of its stone frontage, the steeply pitched and overhanging roof with a tall attic gable feature, central chimney protruding from the ridge, stone mullion windows with hood moulds and a circular window high up in the gable end.

7. The vernacular building design therefore remains largely intact. The upper half of the building is quite noticeable in the street scene. This in turn allows the building to positively contribute to the character and appearance of the IHCA. However, it is evident that the significance of this non-designated heritage asset and the IHCA was not materially or detrimentally disturbed by the addition of a double garage to the side or by the former front porch, especially as those elements have or had very limited visibility in the street scene owing to the terrain, the distance back from the road and the planting at the front.

8. The former conservatory-style front porch was of poor construction and included a polycarbonate roof. Its demolition has revealed an off-centre front doorway and some infilling in basic masonry materials around it arising from the building and/or removal of that porch. Sections of the original hood moulds on the adjacent windows may have been removed to accommodate it.

9. There is no commentary before me about whether the building may have included a form of solid, enclosed front porch in its original construction. It is doubtful that one would have been present. Still, that is of limited relevance in this case as I am told that the former porch had been in place for decades and the application was made, registered and validated as a proposal for a replacement porch. The key comparison is therefore with the former porch which had become part of the established character of the host dwelling. There is also a sizeable front porch with a gabled roof design at no. 2. The Council did not raise any objections in principle to a replacement porch. It would occupy the same relatively unobtrusive location as the former porch and have a maximum projection at the front from the main building of about 2.5 m.

10. The Council accepts that the proposed materials (natural stone for the base walls and sills, painted hardwood for the framing, window frames and door and artificial stone tiles for the roof) would represent an improvement over those used in the former porch. Indeed, the natural stone elements have already been completed to a very high standard. There would be no "*overly heavy stone columns*" in the design. Those frames are in wood. Similarly, the Council's reference to "*contrasting flat headed windows*" is not understood. The plans show that the upper frames of the windows in the porch would contain an arched detail to complement the adjacent mullion windows. The canted bay design is not objectionable in itself and arguably allows for a roof with less mass, depth and height than a pitched and gabled roof. The proposed porch would no doubt sit close to the existing mullion windows, but it is apparent that the former porch filled virtually the same space. The proposed porch would be no more dominant than the previous structure. Significantly, the plans show the reinstatement of the hood moulds that have been lost.

11. Noting the careful selection of facing materials and fenestration details, I consider that the proposed replacement porch would represent a visually preferable solution, exhibit a high standard of design and be sufficiently complementary and in keeping with the scale and character of the host building and the site's wider setting and location within the IHCA. The visual harmony and historical integrity of the group of dwellings at Southfield Cottages would also not be seriously disturbed. In dealing with this appeal on its own merits, I have therefore reached the same view as the local residents (4 out of 5 respondents were in favour) who expressed support for the application on the grounds that the appearance and construction materials would be better than what was there previously. Woodchester Parish Council also supported the application.

12. I conclude on the main issue that the proposed replacement porch would preserve the character, appearance and heritage significance of the host dwelling and the IHCA. As such, the scheme would satisfy the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Delivery Policies HC8 (2) and ES10 of the Stroud District Local Plan November 2015 and the National Planning Policy Framework insofar as it relates to achieving well-designed places and conserving the historic environment.

13. The site also lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). No harm has been alleged by the Council to this designation. I see no reason to take a different view. Given the limited scale of the development, the rather secluded location of the porch and the backdrop of the main building, the proposal would conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB. For similar reasons, there would no adverse impact on the setting of the 2 listed buildings I have been made aware of, the closest of which is Grey Gables some distance to the south.

14. The scheme will enhance the quality of life for the occupiers by creating a properly insulated lobby which will serve to exclude draughts from and retain heat within the house and save energy. This is a further factor that weighs in favour of granting planning permission.

15. The Council suggested 3 conditions in the event of the appeal succeeding. The first of those seeks to set a time limit for the commencement of development.

This is not required in this case as the development has already started. A condition requiring that the development is carried out in accordance with the relevant approved drawings is necessary as this provides certainty. That condition should also require the scheme to be carried out in accordance with the details given on the application form as the materials of construction are more comprehensively set out on the application form than on the plans. The foundations and the stone base walls for the porch have already been completed. No undue noise or general disturbance has been reported. Completing the porch would involve minor operational developments so I see no need for control to be exercised over the times that construction-related activity can take place. The Council's third suggested condition has not therefore been imposed.

16. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that this appeal should be allowed.

Andrew Dale

INSPECTOR