



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 April 2023

by L Fleming BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/Y/22/3306969

Potash Farm, Ashfield Road, Framsdon, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6LR

- 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 A Dye against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
- The application Ref DC/22/02897, dated 31 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 10 August 2022.
- The works proposed are erection of porch to front. Insertion of 2No. roof windows and alteration/replacement of 2No. windows to rear. Removal of partition wall and widening of an opening. Insertion of bi-fold doors following removal of French doors to side.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The effect of the proposed works on the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed Potash Farmhouse.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a large detached two storey dwelling known as the grade II listed Potash Farmhouse.
4. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses. Furthermore, paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of new development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

The significance of Potash Farmhouse

5. Potash Farmhouse is set back from the road alongside other buildings as part of a farmstead. It was built in two phases. The first in the mid to late 16th century and the second in the early 17th century. Although it has a modern single storey extension with a pantile roof the main building is of partly timber frame construction with a thatched roof, undulating bargeboards and fascia soffits. The walls are rendered, and it has a large and attractive red brick chimney stack on its west elevation. It has an oak board entrance door and irregularly arranged small casement windows all of which give the elevation with the entrance door a simple elongated appearance. Internally, timber framing is notable throughout. The listing description also notes, the building's three-cell lobby entrance, stating it was "probably built with a two-cell plan"

and that the upper floor has a three-bay chamber over the hall and service rooms and a two-bay C17 parlour cross wing.

6. Thus, insofar as is relevant to this appeal, I find the significance of the grade II listed Potash Farmhouse derives from its simple traditional architectural detailing, its layout which partly depicts the evolution of the building and its cultural value as part of a historical farmstead.

Effect on the significance of Potash Farmhouse

7. The proposed porch would be positioned in front of the entrance door and a casement window. I accept that the proposed porch design and materials are reflective of many porches in Mid Suffolk District and some of those may have been approved by the Council. I also accept the proposed porch has characteristics which are common with many other historic buildings in the local area.
8. However, the proposed porch would have a steep plain clay tiled pitched roof supported by a heavy oak frame including diamond mullions and posts to each side. It would also have wide barge boards and infill panels finished to match the existing walls of the appeal property. Thus, the proposed porch would add a heavy, complicated, and dominant feature to the otherwise simple elevation which is currently used as the entrance to the building. It would draw attention away from the simple elongated form and traditional architectural details of the listed building and would appear as an incongruous feature of the elevation.
9. The proposed bi-fold doors would be installed into the modern single storey extension. Whilst they would replace modern French doors, the proposed doors would be much larger and through their three panel more modern appearance would conflict with the much smaller simple and traditional character of the windows in this elevation. The proposed doors, through their scale and form would also visually compete with the traditional chimney stack. Even though the modern extension is clearly distinguishable and the installation of the proposed bi-fold doors would not involve harm to the buildings historic fabric this does not justify the conflict I have identified.
10. Turning my attention to the proposed removal of the partition wall and the widening of an opening. Paragraph 194 of the Framework says in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
11. Consistent with the listing description, based on the limited evidence before me, I have identified that the layout of the listed building clearly forms part of its significance. Thus, even if I was satisfied the proposed layout alterations would not involve harm to the historic fabric of the listed building, I would need to be convinced that these works would not result in changes to the layout of the listed building which would harm its significance. However, the floor plans are incomplete, and the written evidence does not deal with the impact of the proposed layout changes sufficiently for me to understand the impact on the significance of the heritage asset.

12. Thus, on the basis of the evidence before me, I cannot be satisfied that the layout would not be altered to the extent that the significance of the listed building would not be harmed. Therefore, in the absence of detailed substantive evidence to the contrary I must take a precautionary approach and find the removal of a partition wall and the widening of an opening would erode the three-cell form of the listed building consequently failing to preserve it and harming its significance.
13. Even though, consistent with the Council, I find no harm associated with the new windows and window alterations proposed to the modern extension, overall, I am led to the conclusion that the porch to front, removal of partition wall and widening of an opening and the insertion of bi-fold doors following removal of the French doors would harm the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed Potash Farmhouse. The proposed works would therefore fail to preserve and harm the significance of the grade II listed building.
14. The harm to the listed building would be less than substantial and towards the lower end of any range. However, it is still of considerable importance and weight. In these circumstances, paragraph 202 of the Framework states that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme, which includes securing the asset's optimum viable use.

Planning and Heritage Balance

15. I acknowledge that the proposals would improve the living conditions for the occupants. However, with the absence of detailed evidence to the contrary I find these are personal benefits and not public. However, any public benefits there may be such as minor economic benefits associated with construction would clearly be insufficient to outweigh the great weight I must attach to the less than substantial harm I have identified to the designated heritage asset.
16. For the reasons given, the appeal scheme harms the special architectural and historic interest and fails to preserve the significance of the grade II listed Potash Farmhouse. Thus, the scheme conflicts with paragraphs 199 and 202 of the Framework. It also fails to accord with Policies HB1 of the Mid Suffolk District Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2008) and saved Policy HB3 of the Mid Suffolk District Local Plan (1998) which taken together and among other things, aim to avoid harm to listed buildings.

Other Matters

17. In reaching these conclusions I have noted the comments with regard to the Council's handling of the proposals. I also note that the appeal property is in good order which in part is due to it being carefully maintained. However, I have had regard only to the planning and heritage merits of the case, and none of these other matters are sufficient to outweigh my earlier findings.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

L Fleming

INSPECTOR