



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2023

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

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5TH October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/H2265/Y/22/3313388

17 London Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 3AB

- 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 Miss Connie Owen of Consultus Care and Nursing Ltd against the decision of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01008/LB, dated 4 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 29 June 2022.
 - The works proposed are replacement of two front doors.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The application form described the proposal as: 'we are looking to remove both front doors which you can see on the plan and replace with new ones. They will be wooden'. However, the appeal form gave it as 'to replace the front door and the frame for a like for like that has been designed to keep the same design and using the same materials.' The Council's decision notice gave the more succinct description which is set out in the above banner heading. I have determined the appeal based on this latter description, whilst also having regard to the additional information provided by the applicant set out in their descriptions of the works.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the replacement of the front doors would preserve No 17, a Grade II listed building, and any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses.

Reasons

Significance

4. No 17 is a two-storey detached building of 19th century origin which is Grade II listed. It is a classically proportioned, simple design with white painted and stucco elevations under a slate pitched roof. It has identical sash windows on either side of the front door and three at first floor level. The front door is panelled, above which is a rectangular fanlight comprising 4 small plain glass panes. The original windows and doors contribute towards the building's architectural interest and historic character and are specifically referenced with the listing description. The significance of the building therefore derives from its classical proportions and surviving historic fabric.

Assessment

5. A hand drawn diagram of the existing front door and its surround gave precise details of its dimensions. It is a 6-panel door constructed in softwood and painted in dark grey to match the window frames. The panels are only 18mm thick and have no insulation value. There are gaps between the door and frame, as it is out of alignment. Consequently, there are drafts which are notable in cold weather. The door tends to swell in winter and shrinks in the summer. At the time of my site visit the paint on the lower part of the door was flaking exposing the timber. However, there was no sign of decay or insect damage to the door, or its weather bar.
6. The proposal seeks to replace the door and its frame with one that is 44mm thick. The design would match that of the existing door, ensuring that the external appearance would not be changed. The intention is that it would be made from Accoya, an engineered wood which has been treated to make it resistant to water penetration and insect infestation.
7. However, this would result in the loss of the original, traditionally made, historic door. Replacement of historic features that contribute to the significance of a listed building require clear and convincing justification. Whilst it is accepted that the existing door may cause drafts, there was no evidence that measures to mitigate or minimise these problems have been considered, tried or found to be ineffective. Neither was there any evidence that the door is not capable of being adapted to address the problems of shrinkage and swelling during the year. Replacing it with a modern, treated timber door is therefore not fully justified.
8. The proposal would include the replacement of the door jambs. This would result in the disruption of the fanlight which is an important feature above the door. It is unclear whether the original fanlight would be retained, or if it is proposed to replace it with a modern replica. However, it appears to be in good condition and there is therefore no justification for the loss of this historic feature.

Public benefits

9. I consider the harm I have identified from the loss of the original front door 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.
10. The replacement door would improve the property's thermal performance and reduce fuel bills. However, the primary beneficiary of these improvements would be the occupants of the building. Any public benefit arising from reduced emissions would be very limited. It would not outweigh the harm arising from the loss of the original historic fabric.
11. Consequently, the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of No 17, 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.

Other Matters

12. The second door which the application sought permission to replace provides access to the side of the building and is set back from the road. The Council's conservation officer was satisfied that this door was not original and raised no objection to its replacement. I have no reason to come to a different view and on my site visit I saw that this door has already been replaced. However, I have reached my conclusion on the appeal based on my finding that the loss of the front door would be unacceptable.

Conclusion

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

S M Holden

INSPECTOR