



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 August 2023

by Mark Philpott BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 October 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Z1510/Y/22/3310019

Howbridge Hall, Howbridge Road, Witham CM8 1DA

- 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 Clare and Andy Tunningley against the decision of Braintree District Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01301/LBC, dated 12 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 2 September 2022.
 - The works proposed are: Demolition of existing loggia and erection of single-storey extension to create link between main dwelling and existing outbuilding. Upgrading and insulation of existing outbuilding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of the works stated above is taken from the decision notice, as the one specified on the application form includes works that were omitted from the proposed scheme prior to the Council making its decision.
3. The site relates to Howbridge Hall¹, which is a grade II listed building. I have therefore had due regard to section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
4. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) was published on 5 September 2023. However, the changes to national policy arising from it are not relevant to the areas of dispute for this appeal. Accordingly, I have not sought comments from the parties about this matter.
5. Paragraph 194 of the Framework requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets, such as listed buildings, that may be affected by a scheme. It goes on to advise that this should be proportionate to the assets importance and sufficient to understand the potential impact of a scheme on its significance when assessed using appropriate expertise. One of the Council's refusal reasons contends that such work has not been undertaken. However, I am satisfied that I have sufficient information on which to make a reasoned decision on the appeal.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is whether or not the proposed works would preserve the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

¹ List Entry Number: 1306434

Reasons

7. The listed building comprises a large, two storey house linked by a loggia to a sizeable single storey annex identified as a dovecote. The house is set within generous grounds that include a formal front lawn to its front and a driveway that extends from Howbridge Road beyond one of its sides. The listed building is fairly secluded due to a high proportion of vegetation around it. However, it is visible outside the site from Pattison Close and an open green space adjacent to the driveway.
8. According to the statutory list description, the house was built around 1580, is timber framed and plastered, and includes 18th century fenestration including double hung sashes, a doorway with pilasters and a flat cornice hood, detailed chimney stacks and a panelled interior. Timber framing is also visible internally, and its layout is generally defined by discrete rectangular rooms. Both the loggia and the dovecote are plastered and feature timber framing too, with the former partly supported by columns. The house, loggia and dovecote form three sides of a courtyard. The dovecote's attachment to the house is just one of several alterations to the listed building over time. The appellant's research suggests that many changes occurred in the early 20th century, but mostly using materials and designs from around the 18th century.
9. The significance and special interest of the listed building is derived largely from its architectural and historic interest as a traditionally constructed country house with a 16th century core and later alterations. Its form, materials, internal arrangement and surviving historic fabric, including much of its fenestration, contribute to its special interest and significance. Some of the alterations have been undertaken more sensitively than others, but the loggia is an interesting if somewhat unusual feature that is part of the 20th century interventions and adds to its value. Moreover, the loggia's small size and narrow and open-sided form provides legibility to the house and the dovecote as originally separate elements and enables the courtyard facing elevations to be appreciated, including a two storey gabled cross-wing that is next to and prominent from the driveway and the adjacent open space.
10. The proposed works would involve the replacement of the loggia with a comparatively much larger extension between the house and the dovecote. Based on the appellant's measurements it would only represent around a 12 percent increase in the floor area of the house. Nonetheless, it would be considerably wider than the rooms in the core of the house and the aforementioned cross-wing to which it would join. It would also be attached awkwardly close to and project above the corner of an ostensibly traditional first floor window, views of which would be partially obscured by the proposed pitched roof from the driveway. Consequently, the extension would be a disproportionate addition relative to the house, fail to respect its proportions and detract from its fenestration. In addition, the loss of the loggia as a notable intervention would be harmful and, as the extension would be a comparatively far more substantial part of the listed building, it would subsume the dovecote into the house and undermine their legibility as originally separate features.
11. Furthermore, the proposed extension would feature a projecting corner element with a curved wall that would contrast poorly with the prevailing linear form of the listed building. It would also feature an oversized porch relative to the modest entrances to the front and side of the house, and thus undermine

the house as the dominant part of the listed building. While the listed building has arched windows facing the courtyard, its outward facing elevations feature rectangular fenestration, such that the arched roof over and glazing around the doors of the porch would be incongruous. Additionally, the extension's driveway facing elevation would feature an uncomfortable juxtaposition of single paned glazing of a modern design with more traditional render detailing, which appears to be designed to mimic the finish of the house's elevations.

12. The proposed new and altered fenestration to the house and the dovecote would be compatible with the characteristics of the existing openings, subject to further details being provided. Nevertheless, a harmful loss of historic fabric would occur, particularly where a window would be inserted into the cross-wing to serve a new shower room, and existing openings and wall to the rear of the house would be removed to provide doorways to the extension. It also appears that historic fabric would also be lost from the subdivision of the kitchen and turning its fireplace into storage, and from alterations to internal doorways, walls and an original linen cupboard, which would principally provide for a more open plan layout and greater accessibility from the morning room. Firm evidence to indicate otherwise has not been provided. Moreover, the proposed open plan format, including the creation of a single kitchen, dining and living area, would contrast negatively with the comparatively smaller and discrete nature of the rooms in the core of the house.
13. It has been put forward that similar internal alterations to those proposed were undertaken by the occupiers in the early 20th century. In addition, I note that the proposed extension's courtyard elevation would have a distinctly modern and lightweight design, which would be read as a clearly separate feature and would not compete with the rest of the listed building. Furthermore, the proposed installation of insulation in the dovecote could be undertaken sensitively and details in this regard could be secured by conditions. Nevertheless, harm would arise for the reasons identified.
14. Overall, the proposed works would fail to respect the form, proportions, layout, fabric and detailing of the house, and the legibility of the house and the dovecote as originally separate buildings. The scheme would thus fail to preserve the listed building and its features of special architectural and historic interest, in conflict with section 16(2) of the Act, which is a matter of considerable importance and weight.
15. Similarly, the significance of the listed building would be harmed. Having regard to the scale and nature of the proposed works, the harm to the significance of the listed building would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework. Paragraph 202 of the Framework sets out that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme including, where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use.
16. It has been advanced that the works would help meet the needs of a family member who is registered blind, as the extension would provide a large, light-filled, open plan space with easy access to the garden. I do not doubt that the scheme would provide quality of life and accessibility benefits to that family member, particularly as the existing house and dovecote feature a comparatively convoluted layout, smaller rooms and several changes in floor levels. Although those benefits would accrue principally to the occupier, rather than equate to wider public benefits, I have nonetheless given this matter

careful consideration. Additionally, there would be some small economic benefits associated with the construction process, along with investment into the fabric of the listed building in general terms.

17. However, even less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset must carry great weight. Overall, the sum of the public benefits is insufficient to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the significance of the listed building.
18. In conclusion, the works would fail to preserve the listed building and the features of special architectural and historic interest which it possesses, contrary to the Act and the historic environment protection policies within the Framework. Furthermore, insofar as it is relevant as a material consideration, the scheme would conflict with Policy LPP57 of the Braintree District Local Plan 2013-2033, which sets out that alterations to designated heritage assets will be permitted where the tests set out in national policy are met.

Other Matters

19. The appellant purports that equivalent works to those proposed were approved to a similar grade II listed building in Kelvedon, named Brickhouse Farm. Limited details have been provided about that scheme; however, nothing before me indicates that the works and impacts would be, or the special interest and significance of Brickhouse Farm and Howbridge Hall are, directly comparable. Accordingly, this matter does not affect my above assessment.
20. I have had due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty) contained within section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. However, it does not follow from the Duty that the appeal should succeed, as the quality of life and accessibility considerations identified do not outweigh the harm that I have found.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Mark Philpott

INSPECTOR