The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 31 October 2023

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 November 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/N1730/Y/23/3316559
Highfield Lodge, Church Lane, Heckfield, Hook, Hampshire RG27 0LG

- 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 Ian Bowman against the decision of Hart District Council.
- The application Ref 22/02506/LBC, dated 13 October 2022, was refused by notice dated 10 February 2023.
- The works proposed are 'the installation of PV panels to the 1980s extension'.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The appeal relates to a listed building located within the Heckfield Conservation Area ('the CA'). I have therefore had special regard to sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act').

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the special interest of the Grade II listed building, 'Highfield House Lodge' (Ref: 1092245) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Heckfield CA.

Reasons

4. Highfield House Lodge was listed in 1987. It is a mid-19th century single-storey lodge of classical form which was formerly a gatehouse lodge to Highfield House (now known as Highfield Park) which the Heckfield Conservation Area Proposal Statement 2002 notes is an 18th century dower house thought to occupy the site of an original manor house. The historic part of the building has stucco walling and includes a 3-arched entrance porch, white-framed sash windows and bold brackets to the eaves of a hipped slate roof. The roof itself is shallow-pitched and comprises twin hipped sections that run south to north from a slightly higher ridge on a perpendicular orientation towards the south of the building. A pair of end stacks sit between the twin hipped sections, and a further chimney stack projects through the higher ridge. The building has been substantially extended in the past with a 1980s extension to the east ('the 1980s Extension') which is of similar footprint, design and external material finish to the historic lodge, albeit with some differences such as the omission of chimneys and simpler window sills and detailing. A further extension of more modern appearance including a simple hipped roof and large areas of glazing in

contrasting grey frames sits to the south of the 1980s Extension ('the later extension').

5. I find the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the use of traditional materials and design features and the high quality of the detailing to the building along with its relatively simple composition and form which give it an impression of modesty. Further interest lies in its historic use and interest as a former gatehouse lodge to Highfield House.

6. The Heckfield CA encompasses the village of Heckfield as well as historic parkland around Highfield House. The village has a largely linear form and while there is some variety in the scale and detailing of buildings, most are of traditional form and designs and sit within spacious surroundings. Together with the historic parkland, this imbues a distinctly rural character to the area. The appeal building is set outside of the built-up part of the village, on the edge of the CA, but a tree-lined avenue remains discernible. This runs between the listed building and Highfield House evidencing the historic relationship and connection between the house and lodge.

7. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, I consider that the significance of the CA is primarily associated with the distinctive layout of development and the traditional form and detailing of its historic buildings. These buildings include the appeal building which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance and thus the significance of the CA.

8. The proposed photovoltaic panels would be installed on the southern roofslope of the 1980s Extension. The appellant asserts that the panels would be screened from all elevations. However, while the Later Extension would obscure some views from the south, it was clear from my visit that views of the existing roofslope are possible from within parts of the garden set to either side of the Later Extension. Based on my observations, the panels would be appreciable in these views. They would occupy a fairly significant proportion of the width of the roofslope and would have a shiny, reflective finish that would be markedly at odds with the matt finish of the existing slates to the building's roofs. Given these factors, I find that the panels would dominate this part of the roof and that they would stand out as a highly incongruous alien element that would be jarring when viewed against the traditional materials and detailing of the historic building which have been carried through to the 1980s extension.

9. Furthermore, although references in the Council's evidence to two existing sets of panels to the Later Extension and panels to the pool house are inconsistent with my observations on the site, there are existing solar thermal panels to the southern roofslope of the 2011 extension. I acknowledge that these are different to the photovoltaic panels now proposed but they also have a shiny finish in clear contrast to their host roof slope. Despite the appellant's assertion to the contrary, I observed that there would be some viewpoints where both the existing solar thermal panels and proposed photovoltaic panels would be visible, including views from the garden to the south/south west where the historic part of the building would also be visible. In these views, the combined extent of the existing solar thermal and proposed photovoltaic panels and their inherently modern appearance would distract from the traditional materials of the building and cause visual clutter to the roofslopes that would erode the

simplicity of its composition. This would significantly erode the architectural quality of the listed building.

10. Although the proposal would not affect or obscure historic fabric and notwithstanding the errors in the Council's appraisal of existing panels on the site, I find for these reasons that there would be harm to the special interest of the listed building.

11. However, the significance of a CA is dependent upon how it is experienced. Although the panels would contrast with the traditional materials of the building which are in keeping with the CA, views of them would be very limited with any possible views from the B3349 which runs to the east of the site heavily filtered and at some distance. They would not therefore be prominent and I consider that no tangible harm would be caused to the character or appearance of the CA as a whole. Accordingly, the significance of the CA would be preserved.

12. The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 ('the Framework') advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. It goes on to advise that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

13. Bearing in mind the scale of the works relative to the listed building and that no historic fabric would be affected, the harm to the listed building would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight.

14. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.

15. The Council has declared a climate emergency and I note general support within Policy NBE9 of the Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032 ('the HLP') for development that would reduce energy consumption and that would incorporate renewable or low carbon energy technologies where appropriate. In this context, I consider that the reduced carbon footprint of the building that the proposal would support over its life-time is an important public benefit. Nevertheless, the degree of benefit has not been quantified in the evidence before me and is likely to be limited by the scale of the proposal. While I recognise that the Framework advises that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, I consider that the resulting benefit would not outweigh the considerable importance and weight that must be given to the harm that would be caused to the listed building.

16. Furthermore, the appellant comments that the roofs of outbuildings within the site are shaded by tree cover, but it is unclear from the submitted information whether or not ground-mounted panels which the Council highlights are identified as a potential alternative option in Historic England Guidance[1] have been considered. There is also no substantive assessment of the possibility of installing additional panels to the roof of the Later Extension which is further from the historic core of the building and capable of accommodating greater

[1] Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings – Solar Electric (Photovoltaics)

change. I cannot therefore be sure that the harm to the listed building has been minimised.

17. The appellant refers to permission for a solar farm being constructed to the south of the CA, but I do not know the full circumstances that led to this permission and it does not, in any event, obviate the harm that the proposal would cause to the listed building.

18. Given the above, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the Grade II listed building 'Highfield House Lodge', thus failing to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework. Although not determinative, it would also be contrary to Policies NBE8 and NBE9 of the HLP and saved Policy GEN1 of the Hart Local Plan 2009 insofar as they are relevant and together broadly seek sympathetic development and the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets.

Conclusion

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

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR