



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 November 2023

by Nick Davies BSc(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th November 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/D/22/3312722

Blue Waters, Wodehouse Terrace, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 3EW

- 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 Mr John Ross against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA22/05646, dated 17 June 2022, was refused by notice dated 21 September 2022.
 - The development proposed is the addition of an extra storey to an existing bungalow.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposal preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Falmouth Conservation Area and the settings of nearby listed buildings.

Reasons

3. The appeal site lies in the Falmouth Conservation Area (the CA), which is an extensive area covering most of the eastern side of the settlement, and nearly all of its coastal frontage. The Falmouth Conservation Area Appraisal identifies that the significance of the heritage asset lies in the architectural diversity of its historic core, along with the planned terraces on the slopes that rise away from the waterfront. Views out of the CA to its spectacular coastal setting, and the relationship of the terraces that step up the hill with the waterfront are recognised as key elements of its character. It is noted that the terraces are generally oriented to benefit from the spectacular views, rather than facing each other across a street.
4. The building itself is a rather mundane bungalow with little historic or architectural significance. It lies on the lower side of Wodehouse Terrace, and its ground floor level is well below the road. Consequently, it is not a dominant feature in the street scene. The broken line of buildings to the northwest are, similarly, below road level, with ridge lines lower than Blue Waters. As a result, it is the terrace of two-storey buildings on the opposite side of the road, and at a higher level, that assumes visual dominance. These dwellings display fine period architectural detailing, giving the street a historic character. The low profile of the buildings on the lower side of the road allows views over, and between them, to and from the maritime scenery beyond. Thus, although the appeal building does not make a positive contribution, it is an unobtrusive feature, and does not distract from the characterful appearance of the historic terrace opposite, or interrupt important views in and out of the CA. It therefore makes a neutral contribution to the significance of the heritage asset.

5. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
6. Although two storey buildings are predominant in the locality, and the wider CA, Blue Waters is one of a line of unassuming dwellings that have a subservient relationship with the terrace opposite. The addition of a full storey to the bungalow would result in a significant increase in its height and prominence, reducing the visual primacy of the historic terrace, and thereby harming the character of the street scene.
7. The proposal would result in a ridge much higher than that of the adjacent dwelling to the northwest, disrupting the current rhythm of the roofs, which step gently down the slope of the road. The intrusive height and form of the building would be emphasised by its location on the corner with Thetis Place, which runs steeply down to Gylling Street to the northeast. In approaches from the south, along Wodehouse Terrace, the two-storey side elevation would be a strident feature in the street scene, and, although hipped, the roof would stand starkly above those of the buildings beyond. From Thetis Place, the void below the ground floor would result in the dwelling having a three-storey appearance, towering above pedestrians passing at a lower level on the adjacent footpath. The height and mass of the building on this constrained corner plot would, therefore, be out of keeping with the general pattern of development along this section of the road.
8. The uncomfortable scale, and intrusive presence of the building would be emphasised by its uncharacteristic design. Although the materials would be appropriate, and it would incorporate some vernacular design features, its overall form would not harmonise with its surroundings. The asymmetric roof would be at odds with the traditional ridged and hipped roofs of the historic buildings in the CA. Furthermore, the horizontal emphasis of the building and the window openings in its rear elevation would be discordant with the generally vertical proportions of the terraced houses. The proposed render detailing would do little to disguise this conflict, so the resultant dwelling would not be a harmonious addition to the CA.
9. The increased height of the roof would also have a harmful impact on views out of the CA. From the junction of Wodehouse Terrace and Marlborough Road there is an expansive view of the water in the harbour and across to the hills on the opposite side of the estuary. The additional storey would sever this panorama, and thereby significantly diminish the relationship between the historic terrace and the maritime setting of the CA, which is recognised as a key element of its character.
10. Although not specifically referred to in the reason for refusal, the Council has highlighted that King Charles Nursing Home, which lies directly opposite the appeal site, is a non-designated heritage asset. It is a two-storey stone building occupying a prominent corner location with views over the appeal site to the coast. The increased scale of Blue Waters would challenge its primacy in the street scene, and diminish its visual connection with the coast, which would be harmful to its setting. This adds weight to my conclusion that the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.

11. I am mindful that there is an existing planning permission¹ to extend and divide the dwelling to the northwest into two houses, and to replace its garage with an additional dwelling. However, that proposal does not include such a significant increase in the height of the existing buildings, which would remain essentially single storey in appearance from Wodehouse Road, and views through the site into and out of the CA would be largely maintained. Consequently, the same harmful impacts would not be caused. Furthermore, even if this permission were to be implemented, there would still be a dramatic step up to the proposed ridge level of Blue Waters. This permission does not, therefore, alter my conclusion that, for the above reasons, the proposal before me would be harmful to the character and appearance of the CA.
12. There are two listed buildings within the vicinity of the site, at 34 Wodehouse Terrace and 9/10 Gylling Street. Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving these listed buildings, or their settings, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.
13. 34 Wodehouse Terrace is a two-storey mid-terraced dwelling with a central bay window extending across both floors. It lies diagonally across the road from the appeal site, and about 25 metres away. The elements of its setting that make a positive contribution to its significance are the rest of the terrace to either side, and the open views to its maritime situation in front. It is seen in juxtaposition with Blue Waters in views down Wodehouse Terrace from either direction. The proposed enlargement of the appeal building would not affect the visual relationship of No 34 with the remainder of the terrace, and would not affect views of the listed building to or from the coast. Consequently, its setting would be preserved.
14. 9/10 Gylling Street is a pair of mid-19th Century houses set at a much lower level than Blue Waters. They are set right on the street frontage overlooking the docks. The intimacy of the street scene and the maritime outlook are the key elements of its setting that contribute to its significance. Viewed from Wodehouse Terrace, Blue Waters is seen in front of the listed buildings, but due to the steep topography, only their rear roof slope is visible. From Gylling Street, Blue Waters is seen behind and above the listed buildings, and the additional storey would increase its presence. However, this juxtaposition would only be apparent from the northwest, where Barbary House intervenes between the two buildings. There would be no harm to the intimacy of the street frontage or to the maritime outlook, so the setting of the listed building would be preserved.
15. Although I have found that the settings of the listed buildings would be preserved, that does not change my conclusion on the impact on the character and appearance of the CA. The harm that I have identified would be limited to a relatively small part of this heritage asset, so it would be less than substantial for the purposes of paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Nevertheless, paragraphs 199 and 200 state that great weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and that any harm to, or loss of, their significance should require clear and convincing justification.

¹ LPA reference: PA20/11489

16. Paragraph 202 requires that, where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the development. In this regard, there would be some environmental benefit arising from the development as, through the use of modern construction techniques, the energy efficiency of the remodelled dwelling would be improved. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is the only means of achieving this benefit. Consequently, although I give some weight to this benefit, it does not outweigh the great weight that the Framework gives to the conservation of heritage assets.
17. In summary, the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the CA, which is not outweighed by public benefits. The development would, therefore, be contrary to Policies 1, 2, 12 and 24 of the Cornwall Local Plan Strategic Policies 2010 – 2030, and Policies DG 2, DG 3, DG 6, and DG 7 of the Falmouth Neighbourhood Development Plan 2021-2030 which, taken together, seek to ensure that new development is appropriately designed to protect heritage assets. The proposal would also conflict with the Framework's aim of conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Conclusion

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

Nick Davies

INSPECTOR