



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 31 October 2023

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 November 2023

Appeal A: APP/N1730/W/23/3322578

Fern Cottage, Hunts Common, Hartley Wintney, Hook, Hampshire RG27 8AA

- 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 Mrs Lauren Robbins against the decision of Hart District Council.
 - The application Ref 23/00355/HOU, dated 9 February 2023, was refused by notice dated 28 March 2023.
 - The development proposed is single storey rear extension following removal of existing single storey lean to lobby.
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Appeal B: APP/N1730/Y/23/3322579

Fern Cottage, Hunts Common, Hartley Wintney, Hook, Hampshire RG27 8AA

- 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 Mrs Lauren Robbins against the decision of Hart District Council.
 - The application Ref 23/00356/LBC, dated 9 February 2023, was refused by notice dated 28 March 2023.
 - The works proposed are single storey rear extension following removal of existing single storey lean to lobby.
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Decisions

Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal B

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

3. As the proposal is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building I have had special regard to sections 16(2), 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act').

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on the special interest of the Grade II listed building, 'Fern Cottage' (Ref: 1116630) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses as well as whether or not the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Hartley Wintney Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. Fern Cottage has an asymmetric form with a red brick exterior and plain clay tile roofs and was listed in 1987 as a range of two cottages. The historic core of the building dates to circa the 17th century and has exposed timber framing

with brick infill to the front at first-floor level and a tall axial stack. A lower range with a gable to the front extends to the southern side and is continued by an 18th or 19th century addition constructed in brick. The listing description indicates that the 2-bay range to the northern side of the historic core is not of special interest. This range is part of the adjoining semi-detached dwelling at Harebell Cottage which includes substantial rear projections. Other modifications to the rear of the appeal dwelling include the addition of dormer windows, a rooflight and a lean-to lobby adjacent to the projecting stairwell. The attached garage to the side of the dwelling is also a modern addition. Despite these interventions though, much of the form and detailing of the rear of the historic building remains legible.

6. Given the above, I find the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to these appeals, to be primarily associated with its modest vernacular form, traditional materials and construction techniques. The rear elevation has been subject to a greater extent of modern interventions than the front elevation, but it still adds to the special interest of the building through the continued legibility of traditional materials and the footprint of the historic core.
7. The Hartley Wintney Conservation Area ('the CA') encompasses a sizeable part of the village which grew up from the 18th Century onwards around a former main route to London. It includes the village centre which is focused around the High Street and dispersed groups of varied buildings, many historic, which are arranged around 5 commons and greens. The appeal site is within Character Area 1 - Hunts Common and London Road as identified by the Hartley Wintney Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals 2008. This area has a strong rural character and includes attractive woodlands associated with Hunts Common, a golf course and groups of cottages and smaller houses.
8. 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 the many historic buildings which exhibit variations according to their status. These buildings include modest vernacular cottages, such as the appeal building, which make an important contribution to the character and appearance and thus the significance of the CA.
9. The proposal includes the removal of the lean-to lobby to the rear of the appeal dwelling but this feature makes no meaningful contribution to the special interest of the listed building and therefore the removal would not be harmful. However, the removal of sections of brickwork to accommodate a doorway and a relocated window in the rear wall of the building would lead to some loss of historic fabric. Although the appellant indicates that the window could be reconditioned or constructed on a like for like basis, it would still be moved from its existing position. The fabric that would be affected is within the later brick part of the building rather than the 17th century core. Even so, the loss and displacement of historic fabric which is part of the building's evolution would inevitably erode the special interest of the building.
10. In addition, the extension would be of significantly greater width, depth and height than the existing lobby. It would obscure a greater area of the rear of the building, including a considerable proportion of the ground-floor. The parapet around the flat roof would also be taller than the main roof eaves. I appreciate that there would be a lower glazed link connecting the extension to the building so that it would not directly interfere with the roof, but it would

still sit notably above the eaves. This would create an awkward and visually jarring relationship and the extension would compete visually with the building. Moreover, the flat roof design and boxy form would cause the extension to appear bulky. The significant scale and bulk of the extension when viewed against the rear of the building in combination with its height above the eaves would dominate and overwhelm the building and disrupt its simple, vernacular form.

11. The appellant asserts that the extension would be unapologetically of a style that creates a contrast with the traditional architecture of the existing dwelling. However, I consider that the more polite architecture of the orangery style extension would be unsympathetically at odds with the modest vernacular character of the building. The felted flat roof would also fail to employ the use of high quality traditional materials. While I accept that it would be read as a later addition, I find having regard to these factors that the extension would not respect the listed building and that it would instead be a highly incongruous addition that would harm the architectural character and quality of the building.
12. I note pre application advice provided by the Council in response to a two-storey proposal indicating that a single-storey extension may be more likely to achieve an acceptable design. However, that was general advice. I have considered the proposal on its own merits and I find for the above reasons that the extension would be a poorly integrated and unduly dominant addition. Irrespective of the previous alterations that have been carried out to the building and the presence of substantial extensions to the neighbouring Harebell Cottage, the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest that the listed building still possesses, thus causing it harm.
13. The extension would not be publicly visible but listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of any public views. However, the significance of a CA is dependent upon how it is experienced. Some views of the extension would be possible from nearby properties, but these would be limited to no more than a few properties closest to the site. In these views, the extension would furthermore be seen together with the adjacent larger extensions to Harebell Cottage which would remain more prominent. Despite the harm that would be caused to the listed building, I find given these factors that there would be no tangible detriment to the character or appearance of the CA as a whole and the significance of the CA would thus be preserved.
14. 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.
15. Bearing in mind the scale of the proposal relative to the listed building and that there would not be a significant loss of historic fabric, the harm to the listed building would be less than substantial in the terms of the Framework. Nevertheless, this harm carries considerable importance and weight.
16. 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.

17. The proposal would offer improved living accommodation for occupiers of the dwelling but this is essentially a private rather than a public benefit. The appellant asserts that updating the dwelling would make it suitable for modern day living and more desirable to live in for years to come preventing it falling into disrepair. However, there is no firm evidence to demonstrate that the continued viable use of the appeal property as a dwelling is dependent on the proposal as the building has an ongoing residential use that would not cease in its absence. The appellant has also referred to improvements to the energy rating of the property through investment in upgrading of the heating system which they advise the occupiers would be unwilling to make if the building does not meet their needs. However, these improvements are not detailed as forming part of the proposal and would in any case be likely to be limited in scale. Economic benefits associated with the construction of the extension would also be limited in scale and temporary. Even taken together, I find that the limited public benefits of the proposal would be insufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified to the listed building.
18. I acknowledge that there have been fairly significant alterations and extensions to the adjoining semi-detached dwelling but I do not know the full circumstances around these modifications. I also note that the listing description indicates that the 2-bay range to the north end of the listed building known as Harebell Cottage is not of special interest. The alterations to Harebell Cottage are not therefore a compelling justification for the harm that the proposal would cause.
19. Given the above, and in the absence of any significant public benefit, I conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the Grade II listed building, Fern Cottage. The proposal would accordingly fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework. There would also be conflict with Policies NBE8 and NBE9 of the Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032 and Policy 2 of the Hartley Wintney Neighbourhood Plan 2019 insofar as they together broadly seek sympathetic development and the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets including listed buildings. As a result, the Appeal A proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan when it is read as a whole, and material considerations do not indicate that a decision contrary to the development plan should be reached.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR