



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 October 2023

by Mr R Walker BA HONS DIPTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 8th December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/W/23/3323621

The Schooner Hotel, 8 Northumberland Street, Alnmouth, Northumberland NE66 2RS

- 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 Maten Rohman (The Schooner Hotel) against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 23/00732/FUL, dated 27 February 2023, was refused by notice dated 9 May 2023.
 - The development proposed was originally described as to construct a full timber decking outdoor seating area with timber frame outbuilding / shed. Decking to service outdoor seating for customers and building to serve as an outdoor store and service area.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The development subject of this appeal is in situ, and I am therefore dealing with the appeal retrospectively. The Council's reason for refusal is focussed on the effect of the development on the listed Schooner Hotel and the main issue reflects this. However, the site is also within the Alnmouth Conservation Area. As such, I have had special regard to both sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
3. Since the appeal was submitted, all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales became "National Landscapes". The legal designation and policy status of AONBs/National Landscapes are unchanged. As such, no party has been prejudiced by the change in name.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the development preserves a Grade II listed building or its setting, known as The Schooner Hotel, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

5. The Schooner Hotel is an early 19th century Inn, with later extensions and alterations. It is three storeys high, with a frontage constructed of whitewashed squared stone with predominantly sash windows. It is positioned prominently within the village immediately abutting the footway. A chamfered segmental-headed carriage arch, with a Percy crescent on the keystone over the opening, gives access from the road to the rear yard.

6. Despite the later additions and alterations, the building remains an attractive example of a 19th century coaching inn and retains much of its historic fabric, simple proportions, traditional features, and openings. The official listing stipulates that the rear wings have been altered and are not of special interest. Nonetheless, listings are primarily for identification purposes and do not provide an exhaustive or complete description of the building's special interest.
7. Given the above, I find the special interest and significance of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to comprise its historic use and distinctive historic architectural design as a coaching inn, along with its historic fabric and architectural features which are commensurate with its functional role and charm as a coaching inn.
8. The listed building is experienced from within the rear yard area by, amongst others, visitors to the hotel and its staff. Even though, the rear wings of the listed building have been altered the evidence before me indicates that the rear yard area historically contained stabling. As such, the yard would have been used by people arriving by horse. In this regard, the rear yard contributes to the understanding and appreciation of the historic use of the building as a coaching inn. Consequently, it positively contributes to the special interest/significance of the listed building.
9. The rear yard, accessed through the arched opening from the road, contributes to the understanding of the historic use of the building as a coaching inn as the yard would have historically been used, amongst other things, by people arriving by horse. In this regard, the rear yard feature forms an important part of the setting and thus makes a positive contribution to the significance of the listed building.

Appeal proposal and effects

10. The development has physically subsumed the rear yard. The sense of space remains legible given the low height of the deck and the other structures. However, the amount of decking and its use seamlessly connecting with the large bi-fold openings on the ground floor into the restaurant of the hotel, along with the other timber elements, have significantly weakened the understanding of the historic use of the yard space.
11. Timber is found elsewhere on the building. However, the large quantity used in the development is overtly dominant within the rear yard space and does not reflect the secondary nature of the use of timber found in the listed building. Overall, the amount, form and use of the decking within the whole of the rear yard of this listed building appears a strikingly modern feature, that is jarringly out of place. The extensive use of timber in the other elements of the development exacerbates this matter. In this regard, the development has harmed the contribution that the yard, as part of the setting of the listed building, makes to its significance and special interest.
12. The absence of harm in respect of other elements that contribute to the special interest and significance of the listed building, such as the public facing front façade, are neutral matters. Moreover, although the development is to the rear and only glimpsed through the arched opening from the public footway, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether public views of the building can be gained.

13. I therefore find that the development does not preserve the Grade II listed building and its setting, known as The Schooner Hotel, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. As a result, the development harms the significance of this designated heritage asset.

Public benefits and heritage balance

14. Paragraph 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Paragraph 200 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting and that this should have clear and convincing justification.
15. Given the localised nature of the development to the rear, and as the development does not result in any loss of historic fabric and could be reversible, I find the harm is 'less than substantial' in this instance but, nevertheless, of great weight. Under such circumstances, paragraph 202 advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, which includes securing the asset's optimum viable use.
16. There would have been some economic and social benefits resulting from the construction works and the general investment into the property. Moreover, there are further economic and social benefits from expanding the business's offering and from providing an accessible large outdoor dining area, which is suitable for a range of customers. This has the potential to contribute to the tourism industry in Alnmouth as well as benefiting any residents of the settlement that may use the facility. However, I am not convinced that the only way of securing these benefits is via the extensive amount of decking in the scheme before me, moderating the weight I afford these matters.
17. Moreover, I have no substantive evidence that the continued viable use of the appeal property is dependent on the development as the building has an ongoing hotel use and there is no firm evidence that this would cease in its absence.
18. Overall, the weight that I ascribe to the public benefits resulting from the development, is not sufficient to outweigh the great weight that I attach to the harm I have identified. As such, the development does not comply with paragraph 202 of the Framework.
19. To conclude, the development fails to preserve the Grade II listed building and its setting known as The Schooner Hotel, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. This is contrary to the requirements of sections 66(1) of the Act. It is also contrary to the requirements of Policy ENV7 of the Northumberland Local Plan. This says, amongst other things, that decisions will be made that ensure the conservation and enhancement of the significance, quality and integrity of Northumberland's heritage assets and their settings.

Other Matters

20. The appeal property lies in the Alnmouth Conservation Area (CA), which covers the historic town. Here, the principal streets are linked by side lanes, predominantly lined by stone buildings, many with historic architectural features. These aspects create a distinctive, historic townscape all scenically

set within a wider coastal landscape. By virtue of its historic and architectural integrity, The Schooner Hotel contributes to the CA's character and appearance as a whole and thereby to its significance as a designated heritage asset.

21. The Council has not specifically objected to the development in relation to the CA in its reason for refusal. As the development is located to the rear, and only glimpsed from the public realm in the CA I am satisfied that, on balance, the development preserves the character and appearance of the CA and thus accords with section 72(1) of the Act.
22. The appeal site is also within the Northumberland Coast National Landscape (National Landscape) (formerly known as the Northumberland Coast AONB), and I am mindful of my duty to have regard to the statutory purpose of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. However, given the modest height of the development and its location within the rear yard of the property, the natural beauty of the National Landscape is unharmed.
23. The absence of harm in relation to the CA, National Landscape, or any other considerations, such as the effects on protected ecological sites, are neutral matters that weigh neither for nor against the development. The appellant has referred to paragraph 10 of the Framework, which sets down the presumption in favour of sustainable development that lies at the heart of the Framework. However, given my findings on the main issue the development does not represent sustainable development as sought by the Framework.

Conclusion

24. The development conflicts with the development plan and there are no material considerations which indicate that the decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Mr R Walker

INSPECTOR