



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 December 2023

by Neil Pope BA(HONS) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3305/Y/23/3318111

The Old Church House, Church Steps, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1PL.

- 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 Freddie Rostand against the decision of Mendip District Council.
 - The application ref. 2022/0611/LBC, dated 23 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 5 October 2022.
 - The works proposed are described as: *1. Installation of special need shower and toilet connected to existing services in undercroft (lower ground floor). 2. Replacement of existing Magnet front entrance door and sidelight with purpose made solid oak glazed panel single leaf door reinstated in original stone framed entrance.*
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the conversion of basement to habitable space including replacement front door, insertion of vents, underpinning and installation of concrete floor and installation of shower and toilet at The Old Church House, Church Steps, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1PL. The consent is granted in accordance with the terms of the application ref. 2022/0611/LBC, dated 23 March 2022, and the amended plans submitted therewith.

Preliminary Matters

2. In April 2023, Mendip District Council was incorporated into Somerset County Council (the LPA).
3. Prior to the LPA's determination of the application amended plans were submitted. Amongst other things, these show the provision of a new (clear) glazed oak framed door and ventilation grilles above and to the left of the arched stone doorway. The works have already been undertaken as per these amended plans. I have determined the appeal accordingly.
4. The LPA's decision notice and the appellant's Statement describe the works as the conversion of basement to habitable space including replacement front door, insertion of vents, underpinning and installation of concrete floor and installation of shower and toilet. I shall also use this description.
5. The Old Church House is a grade II listed building¹ within the Frome Conservation Area².

¹ The provisions of section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 are engaged.

² The provisions of section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 are engaged.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is whether the proposal preserves The Old Church House or its setting or its features of special architectural or historic interest and preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Frome Conservation Area.

Reasons

7. The Old Church House is a three storey building that appears to date from the 17th century. This designated heritage asset has been altered and enlarged over time. Some fire damage occurred in about 1961, as a result of an incident at an adjoining property.
8. The heritage interest (significance) of this listed building is primarily derived from its architectural and historic qualities. These include its stone ground floor, chamfered stone doorway and 4-centre arch to the basement, stuccoed jettied upper floors, stone mullioned and transom window, pantile roof, large fireplace and mid-18th century panelling.
9. The Frome Conservation Area covers a sizeable part of the historic market town of Frome. Its significance is primarily derived from the contribution made by the very many listed buildings, as well as providing a historic record of the settlement's growth (largely due to the wool industry) reflected in the pattern and layout of streets, buildings and spaces.
10. The replacement front door to the basement comprises a purpose-made, glazed oak framed door with toughened glass. This sits behind/beneath a stone entrance arch that has been sympathetically repaired as part of the overall works. The new door replaces a 'catalogue' style door that was installed following the previous fire damage and sits comfortably within the basement elevation. Whilst I agree with the LPA's conservation officer that a more sympathetically designed door could have been used, the new door that has been fitted does not harm the character of the building or its significance.
11. The cast iron air vents/grilles that have been installed to the side of the new door are very modest in size and are flush fitting with the exterior wall. These very minor alterations to the listed building do not detract from its significance.
12. As I saw during my visit, there is great variety in the styles of doors and vents/grilles on buildings within the Frome Conservation Area. The new entrance doorway and external vents to The Old Church House are very discrete and are sympathetic additions to the conservation area. These works preserve the character and appearance of this designated heritage asset.
13. I note from the appellant's Heritage Statement that the floor of the basement is of relatively recent construction and includes irregular flagstones of fine-grained sandstone (not a local stone) with vacuous rubble beneath. I also note that this floor has previously been disrupted by a utilities trench. I concur with the appellant's assessment that the basement floor is not a key feature of the building and does not contribute to its significance.
14. The works undertaken to this basement floor, including the underpinning of all of the walls and the use of a concrete floor slab, appears to be somewhat excessive. Moreover, concrete is not a material that is to be encouraged in the repair/restoration of such historic buildings. However, these works have not resulted in the harmful loss or disturbance of any important historic fabric and

they are integral in securing the re-use of this part of The Old Church House. Furthermore, the absence of a viable re-use of the basement could have posed a risk of decay to this part of the building. The overall impact works on this listed building amount to a public benefit.

15. The infilling of the internal basement steps and the new stud partitions, which are also integral to the habitable accommodation that has been provided, do not harm the significance of this listed building. These works are also reversible and the access to the internal steps could be reinstated at a later date if deemed necessary.
16. I conclude on the main issue that the proposal preserves The Old Church House and its features of special architectural and historic interest. It also preserves the character and appearance of the Frome Conservation Area. There is no conflict with the objectives of policy DP3 of the Mendip District Local Plan (2006-2029) or policy D1 of the Neighbourhood Plan for Frome (2008-2028).

Other Matters

17. The appellant has informed me that his wife is living with multiple sclerosis. The accommodation provided could assist her health and well-being. This in turn, could amount to a very minor public benefit. In particular, allowing a citizen, with a serious illness, to remain in their home (with a family member) for a longer period of time could limit any increase in pressure on public health services attributable to that persons illness.
18. In all likelihood, the works undertaken to the building would have improved its thermal efficiency and, in so doing, make a very small contribution towards meeting the Government's objective of tackling climate change and the reliance on fossil fuels. This would also amount to a very minor public benefit.
19. No planning conditions have been suggested to me. As the works have been undertaken, I consider that, in this instance, it would not be necessary to attach any conditions to an approval.

Overall Conclusion

20. I have not found harm to the significance of The Old Church House or the Frome Conservation Area. Even if the LPA is correct that there would be some less than substantial harm to the significance of the listed building, this would be outweighed by the public benefit of securing the reuse of the basement of The Old Church House and the public benefit identified in the 'other matters'.
21. Given the above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that this appeal should succeed.

Neil Pope

Inspector