



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 December 2023

by J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 December 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/Y/23/3319213

St. Agnells Farm Lybury Lane, Redbourn, Hertfordshire AL3 7JL

- 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 Nick Colyer against the decision of St Albans City Council.
 - The application Ref 5/22/2040, dated 9 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2023.
 - The works proposed are 'demolition of existing non original back addition and replacement back addition with additional side extension'.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. As the appeal relates to a listed building consent I have had special regard to section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act').
3. The description of works in the banner heading above is taken from the application form. However, the appeal form and the Council's decision notice give the description as 'single storey rear extension following removal of existing single storey rear projection, enlargement of basement lightwell and repair works to existing wall.' This more fully and accurately describes the works that are proposed and as it has been used by both main parties, I am satisfied that no injustice would be caused by basing my assessment on this description.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed works on the special interest of the Grade II listed building 'St Agnells Farmhouse' (Ref: 1347249) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

5. St Agnells Farmhouse dates to the mid 18th century and was first listed in 1984. It sits to one side of a farmyard courtyard and comprises a two-storey plus attic building of red brick, some of which is painted white. There is a 20th century open-fronted lean-to extension with tall parapet walls across part of the north east elevation of the building. This is constructed in unsympathetic materials including a contrasting brick and sections of corrugated plastic roofing and is in visibly poor condition. Nevertheless, it is of modest overall scale and features of the main building including the floor band, moulded brick eaves, a regular arrangement of sash windows with segmental heads to those

at ground floor, and a recessed door set within a reeded frame architrave remain clearly appreciable. The detailing and resulting formal ordered appearance of the elevation point to its historic role and status as the principal elevation of the building.

6. Given the above, I find the special interest of the listed building, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with its historic interest as a former farmhouse and the associated architectural interest of its vernacular domestic detailing including the simple, elegant proportions on display in the historic principal elevation.
7. Noting the poor condition of the existing lean-to extension to the north east elevation of the building and that it is a modern addition of unsympathetic materials, I am satisfied that its removal would not harm the special interest of the listed building. In addition, I see no firm reason to find differently from the Council that works to repair the courtyard wall and to enlarge a basement lightwell would be acceptable.
8. However, the proposed extension would be of significantly greater width than the existing structure to be replaced, spanning nearly the full width of the building's elevation. It would also have a higher roof, the highest point of which would extend to sit just below the first-floor window cills, and lower eaves than the existing extension. While the extension would have lower parapet walls than those currently present, it would therefore sit against a much greater proportion of the elevation than the existing structure and would cover nearly the entire ground floor level.
9. The extension would be partly glazed and I acknowledge that this would allow some views through to the building behind. However, there would be solid timber frames to the glazed sections and the form and considerable scale of the extension would therefore be readily apparent against the building. In addition, the eaves of the roof would be lower than the head of the ground floor sash windows and door. As a result, the tiled section of roof and the frame to the eaves of the section of glazed roof would cut across these features interrupting views of them. The roof of the extension would also meet the building above the floor band, obscuring and disrupting a significant part of this feature and unbalancing the proportions of the host building.
10. For these reasons, the extension would be a visually jarring addition that would not relate well to the host building. This would be exacerbated by the inconsistent design of the extension including timber orangery style glazing to the upper sections of some walls alongside glazed and solid clay tile sections of roof which would provide for a rather confused identity and appearance that would be awkward against the building.
11. Given these factors and the considerable scale of the extension, I find that it would be a discordant and imposing addition that would dominate the proportions and features of the north east elevation of the listed building, detracting from its simple elegance and formality. In doing so, it would diminish the ability to appreciate this as the historic principal elevation and would notably distract from the architectural quality of the building. While I acknowledge the poor condition and unsympathetic nature of the existing extension, I find that the larger proposal would cause greater harm to the architectural integrity and legibility of the listed building. The proposal would

fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building and would consequently cause it harm.

12. The National Planning Policy Framework ('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 should require clear and convincing justification.
13. Given the extent of the works and effects on historic fabric, I find that the degree of harm to the listed building would be less than substantial. Nevertheless, the harm carries 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. I saw that the paintwork, rainwater goods and many of the windows to the north east elevation of the listed building are in somewhat poor condition and would benefit from maintenance. I also saw that the existing extension has in some places begun to detach from the building and has partially collapsed. However, apart from the brickwork at the eastern corner of the elevation where the existing extension attaches, repairs to the listed building do not form part of the current proposal, and there is no firm evidence before me to demonstrate that such works or indeed the removal or repair of the existing extension could not be carried out in the absence of the appeal scheme. Nor is it clear from the information before me 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. As a consequence, it is far from clear that the proposal is necessary to secure the future conservation of the listed building or that the dismissal of the appeal would prevent the making good of the asset. In this context, the condition of the north east elevation and existing extension do not offer a clear and convincing justification for the harm that I have identified.
16. The proposal does include repair works to the courtyard wall. However, the wall is of uncertain date and of fairly short length and I consider that the benefit associated with its repair would be far outweighed by the adverse effect of the extension on the special interest of the listed building.
17. I appreciate that the appellant has sought to work with the Council and has made changes to the design. Nevertheless, I find that the very limited public benefits of the proposal would not outweigh the considerable importance and weight that must be given to the harm that I have identified would be caused to the listed building.
18. I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the Grade II listed building 'St Agnells Farmhouse', thus failing to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the Framework. Although not determinative, it would also be contrary to saved Policy 86 of the District Local Plan Review 1994 insofar as it is relevant and broadly seeks to preserve listed buildings.

Conclusion

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

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR