



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 January 2024

by K Lancaster BA (hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 February 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/D/23/3328863

The Old Post Office, Newton, Northumberland, NE43 7UL

- 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 Timothy Taylor against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref 23/00673/FUL, dated 22 February 2023, was refused by notice dated 3 July 2023.
 - The development proposed is described as construction of single storey garden room and steps to rear of The Old Post Office.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the determination of this application, the Government published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) on 19 December 2023 and updated on 20 December 2023. Those parts of the Framework most relevant to this appeal have not been amended. As a result, I have not sought further submissions on the revised Framework, and I am satisfied that no party's interests have been prejudiced by taking this approach.
3. From my site visit and based on the evidence before me, the single storey garden room has been erected and therefore the development is retrospective. I have considered the appeal on this basis.
4. The site lies within the Green Belt. There is no dispute between the parties that the proposed extension would fall within the exception of Paragraph 154(C) of the Framework and is therefore not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Having regard to the evidence before me and my own observations at the site visit, I see no reason to take an alternative view.

Main Issue

5. The main issue of the appeal is the effect of the development in the character and appearance of the area, including whether it would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of Newton Conservation Area.

Reasons

6. The appeal site is a detached, two-storey building constructed of random rubble stone and under a slate roof. It has a stepped roof reflecting the slope of the village street and is prominently located on the corner of the junction into the village from the A69. Originally two separate buildings and the former

village post office, the appeal site now forms a single detached dwelling. The site is located within the Newton Conservation Area (NCA).

7. The significance of the NCA as a whole lies in the linear pattern of the village, where stone and slate dominate throughout the village providing a sturdy and robust character that connects buildings and structures to the ground in a way that gives a feeling of permanence and longevity. The mellow patina of the stonework adds to the sensation of age, and the use of locally quarried materials reinforces the harmonious link between buildings and their natural surroundings.
8. The significance of the NCA in so far as it relates to the appeal site lies in its simple, linear design built of irregular coursed rubble with substantial dressed stone quoins, stone sills and lintels. Its lack of general ornamentation and minimal fenestration is typical of a building of this type and period in the village and as such consolidates its overall character. The appeal site is identified in the Newton Conservation Area Appraisal (NCAA) as a building that exemplifies the local distinctiveness of Newton.
9. There is a statutory duty imposed by Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requiring decision makers to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Paragraph 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) makes it clear that when considering the impact of a development on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.
10. The appeal is seeking consent for a garden room, which has been constructed to the rear of the appeal property. Whilst the development has not yet been completed, the external structure has been built, with only external finishes remaining. The garden room has been constructed on a stone plinth, with stepped access to the garden, uPVC windows and a large roof lantern. Once completed the external walls of the garden room would also have white painted timber fluted columns, cornice and mouldings.
11. The rear elevation of the appeal site is highly visible on the approach to the village from the A69, situated behind a low boundary wall. The original building retains much of its original, simple character and in particular a high solid to void ratio that is typical of 18th Century vernacular cottages. It is also has a narrow, rectangular form which has been retained. The extension to the rear alters the linear appearance of the host property.
12. Policy HOU9 of the Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2023, adopted March 2022 (NLP) states that proposals for extension or external adaption of existing dwellings will be supported where the development is well-related and subordinate in size and massing to the existing dwelling. The NCAA highlights the harmful impact of unsympathetic additions to rear elevations, situated at the southern edge of the village to the significance of the NCA.
13. The submitted plans are annotated to show that the garden room extends approximately 4.2 metres, at its furthestmost point, from the rear wall of the original dwelling and extends approximately 6 metres in width, which is roughly equivalent to a third of the width of the original building. Although the extension is set in from the side wall of original building, it is nonetheless by

virtue of its depth, and prominent position, viewed as a harmful and unsympathetic addition to the host building.

14. The topography of the site, in particular the steeply sloping rear garden, necessitates provision of a large stone plinth so that the floor level of the garden room is level with the floor level of the ground floor of the original building. The overall height of the extension, together with the use of white UPVC and white painted timber results in an unduly prominent addition to the rear elevation, that fails to reflect the layout and appearance of neighbouring development.
15. The design of the garden room includes a high ratio of glazing to solid wall, which is at odds with the character of the host building. Furthermore, the windows have a greater vertical emphasis than those found within the host building. Whilst I recognise that it is intended to be a modern addition, the garden room does not relate well to traditional character of the host building and is therefore a harmful addition.
16. Furthermore, the use of ornamental white timber decorated fluted columns, cornices and mouldings would introduce architectural detailing that would be at odds with simple, vernacular character of the host building.
17. Policy QOP1 of the NLP requires development to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness and contribute to a positive relationship between built and natural features. This policy also requires development to have particular regard to the form, scale and massing prevailing around the site and distinctive local architectural styles, detailing and materials.
18. I have had regard to the examples of other development within the village which have been brought to my attention, including, Nos. 2 and 3 The Forge, South Farm Cottage, The Granary and Town Farm. I have also had regard extension approved to the adjacent property Hillcrest. However, in this particular case, the development involves the extension of a previously unaltered property which has a simple form and appearance that contributes positively to the significance of the NCA and which sits in a prominent position at an important entrance into the village. Whilst the example properties appear to have been extended and include elements of design which are similar to the appeal proposal in terms of the amount of glazing to solid wall ratio, to the appeal site, they all differ in terms of their scale, layout and position and are not therefore directly comparable. I attribute these examples limited weight.
19. Whilst I recognise that the extension forms part of a comprehensive programme of refurbishment to the property, which has greatly improved the external appearance of the building, and that the extension has not resulted in the loss of an important open space. Nevertheless, for the reasons given above, I have found that the extension would cause harm to the character and appearance of the host building and therefore would fail to preserve or enhance the character of the NCA.
20. For the above reasons, I conclude that the development be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and therefore fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the NCA. It conflicts with Policies HOU 9, QOP 1, QOP 2, ENV 1, ENV 7 and ENV 9 of the NLP. Amongst other things, these policies require development to contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness and be well-related and subordinate in size and

massing to the existing dwelling. The development also conflicts with Paragraphs 135 and 139 of the Framework which seek to promote high quality design.

21. In failing to preserve the character and appearance of the NCA, I find that the development, in the words of the Framework, results in less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. Although I find that the harm in this particular case is minor. Nevertheless, in such circumstances, the Framework requires that the less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits. In this instance, there are limited public benefits which have been put to me, including the provision of a larger house. Therefore, there are no public benefits of sufficient weight that would outweigh the less than substantial harm to the significance of the NCA.

Other Matters

22. Whilst I have had regard to the two letters of support submitted which state amongst other things, that the property, prior to undergoing renovation was in a poor state of repair and that the works undertaken has resulted in a positive impact on the village. They also consider that the proposed extension would have minimal visual impact and cannot be viewed from the main village street. However, whilst their support for the scheme is noted, it does not alter my findings in relation to the harm I have identified above.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given, the development does not accord with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no material considerations, including the Framework that indicate the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

K Lancaster

INSPECTOR