



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 5 March 2024

by G Bayliss BA (Hons) MA MA MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11th March 2024

Appeal A Ref: APP/H0520/W/23/3320414

35 Post Street, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire, PE29 2AQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr T Chaplin against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 22/01877/HHFUL.
 - The development proposed is replacement windows to the front and right-hand elevation.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/H0520/Y/23/3320417

35 Post Street, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire, PE29 2AQ

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr T Chaplin against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 22/01878/LBC.
 - The works proposed are replacement windows to the front and right-hand elevation.
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Decision

1. Both appeals are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. There are two appeals on this site. They relate to the planning application and listed building consent for the same scheme. To avoid duplication, I have dealt with them together, except where otherwise indicated.
3. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been published since the Council issued its decision. In this instance, the relevant changes only relate to paragraph numbering and do not fundamentally affect the substance of the matters under appeal.

Main Issue

4. The main issue in both appeals is the effect of the proposal on the special architectural and historic interest of a Grade II listed building, the setting of nearby listed buildings and on the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. 35 Post Street (listed as 35 Post Street, Ref.1128603) is a detached dwelling that dates from the early to mid 19th century. The list description describes the building as having two storeys, is constructed in gault brick with a slate roof

and mentions the sash windows with glazing bars, and panelled door to the building frontage. From the details available to me and my own observations, I consider that the significance and special interest of the listed building is largely derived from its age, form, historic fabric and architectural features.

6. The building is prominently situated within the Godmanchester (Post Street) Conservation Area (CA) located mid-way along Post Street. The streetscene is urban in character, comprising a mix of building scales and ages with a predominantly residential use. Overall, the area exhibits a wealth of historic properties including grand Georgian buildings, smaller scale 17th century timber framed properties and 19th century neo-classical town houses. The CA Character Statement SPD (2002) describes the character and appearance of the area and its wealth of historic buildings. It also notes typical examples of formal architectural detailing, including sash windows. I noted on my visit that many buildings within the immediate area had retained period windows, some of which were single glazed. Based on my observations, I consider that the character and appearance of the CA, and its significance, is mainly drawn from the range of built development within it, and the relationship of the buildings to each other and the spaces around them. A key element of the area is a coherence of traditional architectural detailing, including period joinery.
7. The Character Statement identifies a high concentration of listed buildings within the vicinity of the appeal building, including 22, 34 and 37 Post Street. These listed buildings, described in the Character Statement, are identified by Historic England as having group value and collectively have a shared significance, and all contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area.
8. Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) require special regard to be had to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Section 72(1) of the Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. Paragraph 195 of the Framework advises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
9. Windows are often among the most prominent features and an integral part of the design of a listed building and can be indicators of when a building was constructed. The design, materials and details of the construction of historic windows are all important to the aesthetic, evidential and historic value of a building and they contribute to its significance and special interest.
10. The proposal would involve the replacement of the two sash windows to the front elevation and a sash window to the southern gable. The existing windows are single glazed, traditional sash windows and on site I saw that they had moulded, structural timber glazing bars with the glass putty fixed. The overall timber sections were relatively slim with horns to the sashes and sash boxes. As the windows had internal secondary glazing, which was fixed shut, I was unable to see how the sash windows opened and I saw no evidence of sash cords or pulleys. However, overall, based on my experience, even though the windows themselves may not be original to the build, the overall design and construction appeared reflective of traditional sash window detailing and

correct for the age and architecture of the property. As such they have aesthetic and evidential value.

11. It is suggested that the existing windows are no longer fit for purpose, exhibiting signs of rot and a local heritage joiner has stated that the paintwork is masking the failings of the timber frames and the seals are allowing excessive drafts. However, whilst I noted that the windows were showing localised areas of decay and in need of decoration, I have no adequate evidence that they are not capable of reasonable repair.
12. The proposed windows would be in painted timber, double glazed, and the appellant suggests that they would match the proportions and design of the existing sash windows. The two windows to the front would be vertically sliding sash windows, incorporating 24mm sealed units and the details suggest spacer bars would be inserted into the units to divide the window visually into small panes with externally applied glazing bars. The sash window to the side elevation would incorporate a thicker 28mm sealed unit and be top hung with subsequently much wider horizontal sections to the middle of the window.
13. The appellant suggests that the proposed replacement windows would match those recently installed to the side and rear of the property (Ref.21/02582/LBC). Therefore, considers that they should be acceptable elsewhere on the building and would unify the fenestration. However, I have no adequate details of this permission, or the nature of the windows removed. Also, this permission did not approve the replacement of the sash windows which are now the subject of these appeals. I also note that these newly installed windows appear to relate predominantly to a more recent, rear extension and to several smaller windows to the sides of the building, the latter of which appear to me to be inserted openings without lintels. This leads me to conclude that there is no adequate evidence that period windows have been replaced, also that they are not the reflective of the design of the appeal proposal windows and they are not on the principal, main elevations of the building. They therefore do not, in my view, set a precedent for considering this appeal proposal.
14. Whilst the recently installed windows are of different design, they assisted me in assessing the overall fabrication and visual appearance of the double glazing, especially the appearance of the sealed units, frame and glazing bar arrangement. In this regard, I noted that the applied glazing bars and inserted spacers did not convincingly replicate the nib and putty profile of traditional fixtures, I saw a striking visible depth to the glazing units together with modern catches. Overall, these windows had the appearance of a modern, technical fabrication rather than windows of traditional carpentry construction.
15. In addition to these marked visual differences, based on the limited drawn detail of the existing and proposed sash window sections, it would appear that the proposed internal moulding detail to the glazing bars and frames would not be faithfully replicated. It also seems likely that the window units would become substantially bulkier with no information regarding how this would affect the position of the windows within the openings. Furthermore, the outward-opening sash window to the side gable, together with its modified and significantly thicker sections, would be noticeably different to the existing. Also, there are insufficient details regarding trickle vents, the opening mechanism or ironmongery, and the horn detail has not been replicated.

16. Accordingly, even though the windows would be reproduced in timber, the proposed fenestration would lack both the constructional integrity and important visual subtleties of traditional carpentry and glazing methods. The windows would be clearly identifiable as non-traditional, appear jarringly out of place, and would have a harmfully erosive effect on the special interest and significance of the listed building.
17. Given the intervisibility between the appeal building and the other nearby listed buildings, and the prominence of the building within the CA, the proposed changes to the windows would have the potential to visibly affect the building's appearance from some distance away, especially the change in the opening method to the side window. I therefore cannot be certain that there would be no harm to the setting of the other nearby listed buildings or to the character or appearance of the CA.
18. Considering all the above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest and significance of the listed building, the setting of nearby listed buildings and the character or appearance of the CA. Therefore, the expectations of the Act are not met. Paragraph 205 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of proposals on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 206 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of those assets and any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification. I find the harm in the context of the significance of the heritage assets as a whole, in the language of the Framework, to be less than substantial in this instance. This commands considerable importance and weight and is not to be treated as a less than substantial objection to the proposal.
19. Where a proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, paragraph 208 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing its optimal viable use.
20. I am aware that the appellant has undertaken work to protect and preserve the historic fabric and integrity of the building, and has been tackling issues of damp, poor thermal efficiency, and inadequate ventilation. The appellant is also concerned about future health risks to the building and its occupants and has sought best practice advice from Historic England. There is also a wish to make the building more secure and to reduce heating costs.
21. Even though improvements to thermal efficiency, noise insulation, security and maintaining the fabric of a listed building can reasonably be considered public benefits, it has not been demonstrated that such improvements could not be achieved through alternative means, so avoiding the harm identified to the designated heritage asset as a result of this proposal. As such, I consider that little weight can be given to these benefits.
22. It is suggested that the unified design of the windows would make a positive contribution to the building's appearance. However, I have found that the prominent sash windows subject to this appeal are not comparable to the previous windows approved for the reasons discussed and this cannot be regarded as a public benefit. Allowing easier upkeep and maintenance is essentially a private benefit.

23. The works would support the continued residential use of the property, which is its optimum use. The concerns raised may have some impact on this use but I have been given no indication that its viable use as a single dwelling is seriously threatened.
24. Given the above, I conclude that the public benefits identified would be of insufficient weight to outweigh the great weight to be given to the harm to the designated heritage assets. In addition, there is no clear and convincing justification for the harm to their significance. It therefore follows that the proposal would not comply with paragraph 208 of the Framework.
25. Consequently, the proposal would conflict with Policies LP11, LP12 and LP34 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan (2019) and Policies GMC11 and GMC12 of the Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017). These policies, amongst other things, seek to protect and enhance the significance of designated heritage assets. As a result, the proposal would not be in accordance with the development plan as a whole.

Other Matters

26. Although the appellant mentions that many buildings within the CA have contemporary window replacements, there is no adequate evidence before me that any of these buildings are listed. I do not have the full details of the two properties identified on Post Street with modern windows, but again I have no evidence to suggest that they are listed or to explain how they are comparable to the circumstances before me. In any case, I am required to determine the appeal on its individual merits. The fact that Historic England made no comments on the proposal lends no weight in favour of the appeal proposal.

Conclusion

27. For the above reasons, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

G Bayliss

INSPECTOR