



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 March 2024

by A Tucker BA (Hons) IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 7 May 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/D3125/Y/23/3321911

Old Manor, Broadwell, Oxfordshire GL7 3QS

- 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 James Gray against the decision of West Oxfordshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 22/03467/LBC.
 - The works proposed are internal alterations including the removal of a staircase.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. An updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) was published on 19 December 2023. Its content is largely unchanged in relation to the main issue of this appeal, so I have not sought the views of the main parties on this matter.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the proposal on the significance of the grade II listed building known as The Old Manor¹.

Reasons

4. Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA) requires the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
5. Old Manor dates from the 17th century; the shorter rear wing is likely to be the oldest part of the building. The front range is reported to be late 18th or early 19th century in date, and the rear wing that extends from the north end of the front range is referred to as 19th century. It has an overall vernacular form and appearance, although the main front range is a well-executed classical arrangement with sash windows evenly spaced either side of a central entrance that presents a pleasant elevation towards the street. The classical format is reflected in the interior, with a simple arrangement of formal rooms either side of an entrance hall and stair.
6. Rear ranges have a more informal appearance, with openings that appear less planned and access that connects to other rooms, rather than directly from the

¹ List Entry Number: 1199071

hallway as per the front range. This creates polite front of house areas that contrast with those that are less formal and likely to have served as service rooms or had ancillary functions. The building's historic appearance, its survival of historic fabric that includes external stone details, and its historic plan form including the hierarchy of its internal spaces, are elements of the building that contribute to its special interest.

7. The north range includes a secondary staircase. Its fabric is referred to as mid to late 20th century, although the curved plaster finish to its underside is suggestive of lathe and plaster, which would be an unlikely finish in the late 20th century. Either way the parties agree that it is a later insertion. It does however sit well with the scale of the building. As a sizeable farmhouse, whilst I accept that it is not always the case, it is likely that it would have had two staircases to support the separate functional areas of the building or its social hierarchy.
8. I note the suggestion that this rear range may not have always housed a kitchen but may have been used as a bakehouse or other agricultural use. Such accommodation would have been even more likely to have had a separate stair.
9. Moreover, by the mid-20th century, using a single flight of stairs was the norm as most houses of this size were without household staff. It is therefore unlikely that the stair was added then as a new insertion, without replacing a pre-existing stair.
10. Furthermore, the justification for removing the stair is further weakened by paragraphs 3.31, 5.6 and 5.7 of the Heritage Assessment by Robinson Wild Consulting. These recommend additional investigation of the partition between the stair and the kitchen to help with dating and understanding of the stair location. In light of the disagreement about the significance of the stair, and in particular the position set out in the earlier heritage statement, it is not clear why this further investigative work was not carried out.
11. It is suggested that the historic floor plan of the north rear range is not legible. Whilst this could be said of the area between the rear stair and the front range, the kitchen and lounge are well proportioned historic spaces that are both served by chimney breasts and have not been subject to the same level of intervention. They therefore contribute to the legibility of the building's historic plan form and in particular its cellular room arrangement. As such, the significance of the layout of this wing should not be discounted altogether.
12. Historic England guidance² states that evidential value, historical values and some aesthetic values, especially artistic ones, are dependent upon a place retaining (to varying degrees) the actual fabric that has been handed down from the past. Although the stair may be 20th century in date, it is within an older wing that retains some sense of an historic layout and includes historic fabric in its primary construction material. Therefore, taking into account its context, attributing a level of significance to the current stair would not be contrary to this advice.
13. Drawing these points together, whilst I am content to agree that the stair is a later insertion, without evidence to the contrary I am of the view that it is

² Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance 2008

highly likely to have replaced a previous stair in the rear wing. It therefore retains a degree of evidential value as an indicator of how the building functioned historically, and is an element that reinforces the distinction between the front and back of house areas. I am satisfied that it is reasonable to reach this conclusion based on the evidence and an understanding of typical layouts of such buildings, and that this is more than just conjectural.

14. The stair also has some practical merit in terms of improving the circulation routes around the house and providing flexibility as to how the building is occupied. Without it the distance between the lounge at the end of the north rear range and the bedroom above for example would be considerable. This may make the building more difficult to occupy in the future.
15. The level of harm caused by its removal would be modest, given that the fabric is not considered to possess any significance. In terms of the Framework, the harm would be less than substantial but would nevertheless be of considerable importance and weight. Framework Paragraph 208 establishes that any harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
16. It is suggested that the current kitchen is inadequate for a dwelling of this size. At my visit I observed that the kitchen is well proportioned, sizeable, and positioned adjacent to a large room that could serve as a dining room. I could not agree that it is undersized, and certainly not to the extent that increasing its size would be necessary to sustain the use of the building as a dwelling. Therefore, I find that this is solely a private benefit.
17. There are no other public benefits that would arise from the proposal that would outweigh the identified harm.
18. In summary, the proposal would fail to meet the requirements of the LBCA as it would harm the special interest of the listed building.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

A Tucker

INSPECTOR