



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 June 2024

by I A Dyer BSc (Eng) FCIHT

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 July 2024

Appeal B: APP/F3545/Y/24/3336670

Wheel Cottage, 66 The Street, Great Wratting, Suffolk CB9 7HQ

- 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 Tim Hayes against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application reference is DC/23/0512/LB.
 - The works proposed are the replacement of existing single glazed storm proofed timber windows to front elevation with new slimline double glazed storm proofed timber windows to match but excluding fanlights.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Whilst the Council, in their decision notice, refer to Section 66(1) of the Act, this is inappropriate as it relates to planning permission, rather than listed building consent. As the appeal is in a conservation area and relates to a listed building consent I have had special regard to section 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Sections 16(2) and 66(1) each impose on me a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
3. There is no dispute between the parties that the site lies within the Great Wratting Conservation Area (the CA). Harm to the Conservation Area was not cited in the decision letter as a reason for refusal. Nonetheless, I have a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. I have contacted the parties, seeking their comments on the effect of the proposal on the CA and taken account of any received in my decision. Thus, no injustice will result by my consideration of the effect of the proposal on that heritage asset.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building known as "Wheel Cottage" (Ref: 1182034) (the LB), and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses and the extent to which it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Great Wratting Conservation Area (the CA).

Reasons

5. The CA, within which the LB lies, reflects its origins as a rural community. It is an intimate collection of vernacular buildings, varying in scale and design, in a verdant setting centred upon the junctions of the roads passing through the village. The design and materials used in these buildings reflects locally available, traditional materials such as thatch and timber framing with the addition of brick and slate over time.
6. During my site visit I observed that many of the windows on local buildings had, at some time, been replaced. In some cases the replacements were with stormproof and/or top hung casement windows. Nonetheless, many of the buildings retain historic side-hung casement windows which represents a traditional design.
7. Given the above, I find that the significance of the CA, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with the traditional design and materials of the buildings and the contribution that fenestration makes to the appearance of the street scene.
8. The LB dates from the 17th-18th centuries and is a timber framed and plastered house roofed in thatch. The LB was renovated in the 20th century and refenestrated with top-hung timber casement windows. These have since been replaced with modern side-hung timber framed storm casements fitted with slimline double-glazed panes.
9. Nonetheless, externally, the cottage retains a significant proportion of its historic features and is a good example of a modest rural dwelling of local vernacular design, built using traditional materials and workmanship. It contributes, together with Malting Farmhouse, No 51 (The Cottage) and Thatch End (now known as Southern Cross) to a cluster of timber-framed dwellings of local vernacular design with value as a group. Given the above, I find that the special interest of the LB, insofar as it relates to this appeal, to be primarily associated with its historic fenestration and use of traditional materials.
10. The installed windows are side hung casements, but of a stormproof design. Such features are an incongruous addition that would be inappropriate to the period during which the LB was constructed. The windows draw the eye as the white casements and highly reflective panes are set in black frames, which, together with the stormproofing sitting forward of the frame, emphasises the incongruity of their design and undermines the visual primacy of the traditional materials and detailing of the front façade of the LB. This is harmful to the special interest of the building.
11. The Council has previously granted listed building consent¹ (the consented works) for replacement of the windows in the front façade of the LB with simple side-hung mullion and transom casement windows. The appellant has suggested that the proposal would not harm the listed building because it would be inconspicuous in the street scene and because the difference in window design between that which was approved and that which has been installed are minor and would, in any case, only be recognised by a trained eye.

¹ Council Ref: DC/20/2256/LB

12. Simple side-hung casements would be in-keeping with the period of construction and reflective of other windows of traditional design to be found on the LB and on nearby LBs within the group. Whilst the consented works would still draw the eye by virtue of their higher reflective qualities and their setting within black frames, the perception of incongruity would be lessened by the lack of protrusion of the casements as, once the attention is caught, the storm casement itself becomes a noticeable feature.
13. Whilst it may be possible to change the colour of the windows or frames, the effect of the increased reflectivity of the double-glazing in catching the eye would remain, and thus the harm that I have identified above would persist.
14. The LB is a prominent building in the street scene, close to the carriageway and the windows can be clearly observed from the street in passing, thus contributing to the street scene and, thereby, the appearance of the CA. I have identified, above, that the traditional features of the buildings make an important contribution to the appearance of the CA and that fenestration of traditional design is retained on some of the buildings within the CA. I have further identified that the replacement stormproof casements would harm the features of special interest of the LB.
15. When compared against the original, single glazed, storm casement windows, the windows installed are double glazed. The use of double glazing, even slimline units, is not a traditional design response and leads to windows of a more limited lifespan that cause greater visual disruption from the higher reflectivity of the glass that is used. This harms both the building and the CA.
16. Whilst the visual difference between the window designs would be small, they would nonetheless be visible in the street scene and the windows are a prominent feature on the front façade of the LB. They would, thus, be capable of harming both the wider character and appearance of the CA and thereby harm its significance.
17. The retention of the stormproof casements would fail to take the opportunity to enhance the CA by installing windows of a more authentic traditional design. As I have noted above, some windows on nearby buildings have already been replaced with non-traditional designs. The retention of the storm casements on the LB would, by virtue of the introduction of double-glazing on a prominent façade in the CA, exacerbate the undermining of the appearance of the CA.
18. Given the above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building and the significance of the CA. Consequently, I give this harm considerable importance and weight in the planning balance of this appeal.
19. Paragraph 205 of 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. Paragraph 206 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets and that any such harm should have a clear and convincing justification.
20. Given the scope of the works, I find the harm to be less than substantial in this instance. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of designated heritage assets, 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. The continued use of the building is not dependent on this proposal as the present residential use would not cease in its absence.

21. The appellant is of the opinion that the proposal would be beneficial because the replacement of the windows would result in unnecessary waste and use of additional resources. The Framework seeks to encourage sustainable development. However, any public benefit resulting from avoidance of waste by the retention of the current windows would be small and so I allocate it limited weight in my deliberations.
22. Policy DM15 of the West Suffolk Council's Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015) seeks, among other things, to ensure that proposals affecting a listed building are not detrimental to the building's character or any architectural or historic features that contribute towards its special interest and are of an appropriate design which respects the existing building. The proposal would not be consistent with this policy insofar as it applies.
23. Given the above and in the absence of any public benefits that have been brought to my attention that would outweigh the harm that would be caused, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special historic interest of the Grade II listed building and the appearance of the Great Wratting Conservation Area would be neither conserved nor enhanced. Thus, the proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, paragraph 206 of the Framework and development plan policies insofar as is relevant.

Conclusion

24. Given the above and considering all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

I A Dyer

INSPECTOR