
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 August 2024

By David Spencer BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20th September 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/G2625/W/23/3334451

Carrow Bridge House, Carrow Road, Norwich NR1 2BT

- 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 Adil Iftakhar of Wexham Homes Ltd against the decision of Norwich City Council.
 - The application Ref 22/01440/F, dated 9 November 2022, was refused by notice dated 15 September 2023.
 - The development proposed is demolition of existing building and the erection of a replacement dwelling.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary matters

2. Since the Local Planning Authority (LPA) made its decision, the City Council has adopted the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) in 2024. Section 3 of the LPAs appeal statement of case says that the Joint Core Strategy policies referred to in the LPAs decision notice have now been superseded by the adopted GNLP. The appellant has had an opportunity to comment on this. From all that I have read, the separate Norwich Development Management Policies Local Plan document 2016 (the NDMP) remains an extant part of the development plan.
3. A Heritage Impact Assessment (Border Archaeology, June 2023) was submitted by the appellant during the planning application process. I have had regard to its contents during the determination of this appeal.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are as follows:
 - (i) Whether the loss of a non-designated heritage asset would be justified, in terms of its heritage value, together with the loss of an existing residential building;
 - (ii) The effect of the proposal on the significance of designated heritage assets at the appeal location, in particular the character or appearance of the host City Centre Conservation Area and the adjacent locally listed Carrow Bridge; and
 - (iii) The effect of the proposal on trees within the site, by reference to its location within the City Centre Conservation Area.

Loss of a non-designated heritage asset and existing residential building

5. The heritage significance of Carrow Bridge House is its contemporaneous association with the adjacent Carrow Bridge which opened in 1923. This is a bascule bridge, designed to enable marine traffic to pass through on the River Wensum, reflecting the history of Norwich as a long standing riverine trading centre. The dwelling on the appeal site was conceived and constructed to provide accommodation for the bridge master. Whilst the building may not have been occupied for some time, this association is still evident today in terms of the parallelogram orientation of the dwelling to front onto the river adjacent to the bridge and the access at first floor level onto Carrow Road close to the operating booth for the bridge.
6. Whilst taller marine traffic navigating the River Wensum as far as the city has now largely ceased and the bridge no longer requires an adjacent masters house, the building remains to be experienced as part of the history of river-based trade in Norwich. This is particularly evident from the opposite bank of the River Wensum where the dwelling is seen together with the south Boom Tower on the medieval city walls and liftable Carrow Bridge. The existing house therefore forms part of an interesting assemblage reflecting the importance of river trade over the centuries. From all that I have read and seen I am satisfied that the building is a heritage asset of local significance.
7. The appeal proposal would result in the demolition of the existing dwelling and its replacement with a residential building of comparable scale, orientation to the river, materials and appearance. Whilst the appeal proposal would represent a reasonably faithful facsimile of the original dwelling it would be inevitable that some of the character and tone of the original building, linking it to the adjacent 100-year-old bridge, could not be directly replicated by a new building. Not only would the original fabric and materials be lost but the replacement dwelling would for some appreciable time appear as a relatively fresh building devoid of the character, authenticity and architectural integrity of the existing dwelling. Consequently, the visual and contemporaneous functional association of the original dwelling with the bridge, would be irrevocably lost despite the proposed replication.
8. Policy DM9 of the NDMP states that all development must have regard to the historic environment and take account of the contribution heritage assets make to the character of an area and its sense of place. It goes on to say the following. "Development shall maximise opportunities to preserve, enhance or better reveal the significance of designated heritage assets and that of any other heritage assets subsequently identified through the development process." Policy DM9 then goes on to address "other heritage assets", stating that consideration will be given to the protection of heritage assets which have not been previously identified or designated but are subsequently identified through the process of decision-making. The policy goes on to say that where heritage assets are demonstrated to have local significance, development proposals affecting them will be determined in accordance with the criteria for existing locally identified heritage assets as set out in this policy.
9. The approach in Policy DM9 to locally identified heritage assets is to limit any harm or loss of significance to circumstances where there are demonstrable and overriding benefits associated with the development and it can be demonstrated that there would be no reasonably practicable or viable means of

retaining the asset within a development. It should be borne in mind, that all heritage assets, including those of local historic value, are an irreplaceable resource, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 195. However, the NPPF also clearly applies a graduated approach to balancing the heritage harm or loss against public benefits depending on the significance of the asset. Accordingly, paragraph 209 of the NPPF confirms that for non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

10. To apply the tests in Policy DM9, it is necessary to consider paragraph 209 of the NPPF. The building on the appeal site is a relatively modest, quaint cottage of limited individual architectural value or quality. However, the appeal proposal would result in the total loss, both physically in terms of the fabric of the building but also its cultural, functional and aesthetic association with the adjacent bridge and the linked historic significance of river trade to the city. Various references are made to the building being the last bridge masters house remaining in Norwich, although I have little evidence that such dwellings were a particular feature of the city. Overall, the significance of the heritage asset is of no more than modest local value when undertaking the tests at parts a) and b) of Policy DM9 and the balance in NPPF paragraph 209.
11. The appellant asserts that the appeal proposal would provide a much needed 3 bedroom family dwelling built to modern energy efficiency standards, bringing social, economic (construction jobs) and environmental benefits. However, very similar could be achieved by renovating the existing dwelling. As the LPA point out, in terms of housing numbers and meeting the housing requirement, a replacement dwelling would not be counted as a net addition to the housing stock in the city. Additionally, there is little before me that the proposed replacement dwelling would secure or achieve an energy efficiency above and beyond the latest building standards required of all modern housing. As such I give limited weight to these benefits.
12. I observed that the appeal site is in a relatively untidy condition, reflecting that it has been vacant for some time. At the time of my site visit, whilst most of the building is boarded up it has nonetheless been broken into, with clear evidence of trespass and a degree of vandalism. Some vegetation on the appeal site has been allowed to grow to an unkempt condition. This is inhibiting the ability to better appreciate the adjoining City Walls from the river and from within Carrow Road.
13. The appeal site occupies a high profile position on the busy inner ring road such that its current condition does not make a particularly positive contribution to the appearance of this part of the City Centre Conservation Area. However, the NPPF at paragraph 202 states that where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of a heritage asset, this should not be taken into account in any decision. Whilst there have been some efforts to secure the building, it is evident that the appeal site has been in a moribund condition for some time and efforts to keep the site in a reasonable state appear to have been limited. Accordingly, I give the environmental and heritage benefits of a better maintained site, potentially revealing more of the city walls, only limited weight. Overall, there are not demonstrable and overriding benefits arising from the appeal proposal to justify the loss of the heritage significance.

14. A structural survey of the building has been undertaken. As set out above, as a consequence of the lengthy period that the building has not been inhabited and the various intrusions into the building, the survey identifies a need for a significant amount of work reflective of the issues reported in the survey. There is, however, little before me on the cost of this work, much of which relates to remedying internal matters and preventing further deterioration. The appellant submits that the building is now beyond repair, but, again, there is little evidence to substantiate this. I observed that the exterior of the building, including the roof and chimney stacks, appears to be in reasonable condition. The structural survey also states that the superstructure of the building is sound. Overall, it has not been demonstrated that there would be no reasonably practicable or viable means of retaining the asset.
15. As well as being a non-designated heritage asset, the appeal building has an established residential use. For wider environmental and climate change reasons, consistent with the encouragement at NPPF paragraph 157, policies in the NDMP seek to make best use of existing buildings. In particular, Policy DM12 expects development proposals to maximise opportunities for the reuse of existing residential buildings for housing. This echoes the broader objectives in Policies DM1 and DM3(j) to make the most efficient practicable use of resources, including through the re-use and conversion of existing buildings. As set out above, the appeal building appears to be structurally sound and capable of renovation, albeit with a significant degree of work. As such the failure to adequately demonstrate why the building could not be practicably renovated and re-used would represent a moderate environmental harm arising from the proposed loss of this building of local historic value.
16. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would result in the unjustified loss of a non-designated heritage asset and existing residential building. The proposal would be contrary to Policy 3 of the GNLP and Policy DM1 of NDMP which require avoiding harm to non-designated heritage assets, having regard to their level of significance, and otherwise protecting heritage assets as part of achieving and delivering sustainable development in the city. For the reasons set out above the proposal would be contrary to Policy DM9 of the NDMP as it relates to non-designated heritage assets. The failure to re-use a structurally sound dwelling for residential purposes would conflict with the environmental objectives in Policies DM1, DM3 and DM12 of the NDMP in terms of helping to combat the effects of climate change and achieve national and local carbon reduction targets by making the most efficient practicable use of resources.
17. As set out above, the NPPF identifies that heritage assets of local historic value are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so they can be enjoyed by existing and future generations. Whilst the heritage significance of the former bridge masters house is of relatively modest local historic value, in accordance with paragraph 209 of the NPPF its total loss, and a suggested recording prior to demolition, would not be justified by the very limited public benefits that would arise.

Impact on other Heritage Assets

18. The appeal site is at the edge of the City Centre Conservation Area (CCCA) at the river gateway into the historic core of the city. This is exemplified by the southern boundary of the site comprising the remains of the city wall, including the south Boom Tower on the bank of the River Wensum. The wall and tower

are a scheduled ancient monument (SAM). Immediately to the north of the appeal building is the locally listed Carrow Bridge which further articulates the historic significance of river trade in this part of the CCCA. As set out above the ability to experience the city wall and Boom Tower, the appeal building and Carrow Bridge forms part of an appealing tableau of the historic river gateway into Norwich at this edge of the CCCA. This can be experienced both within the CCCA as well as in views into the CCCA from across the River Wensum opposite. In these perspectives the original bridge masters building makes a positive attribute to the character and appearance of this part of the CCCA.

19. As set out above, the proposed replication of the building through new materials would fail to effectively mitigate the loss of the character, aesthetic authenticity and architectural integrity of the existing building. The replacement dwelling would appear as a brash replica without the quaint charm, tone and functional association of the original. In various perspectives within Carrow Road, King Street and from across the River Wensum it would appear as an underwhelming pastiche, that would not enhance the area. I recognise that this part of the CCCA has undergone significant change, including substantial residential conversions and new build schemes, including those directly opposite on Carrow Road, and that Carrow Road is a busy highway environment. I also accept that the appeal proposal would not diminish existing views within the CCCA of the city walls. Nonetheless, the appeal site still retains a strong sense of being a point at which river trade used to enter the city, to which the existing building on the appeal site was an integral part of. I therefore find that the appeal proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of this historically interesting gateway area in the CCCA. The harm identified would be less than substantial to the heritage significance of the CCCA as a widely drawn area which encapsulates the historic core of the city (within the City Walls), including its early Saxon and Norman heritage and subsequent expansion as an important trading centre, in large part due to its location on the River Wensum.
20. The city wall demarcates the boundary between the CCCA and the Bracondale Conservation Area (BCA) to the south of the appeal location. Due to the intervening city wall public perspectives where the replacement building would be seen from within the BCA closest to the appeal site are limited and generally restricted to the roofscape of the building. There is not the sense within the BCA or its immediate setting of the river gateway importance or heritage value of the appeal site in combination with the Boom Tower and Carrow Bridge. The heritage significance of the BCA appears to cover later growth outside of and downstream of the historic core of the city. Overall, I find there would be no harm to the character or appearance of the BCA in terms of its setting and so its heritage significance would remain unaffected.
21. The adjacent city wall and boom tower is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM). Despite the proximity of the appeal building to this heritage asset, there is no evidence of physical risk to this asset from the proposed demolition and re-build. In terms of the setting, there would be some harm in terms of the disturbance to the grouping described above where the walls, tower, bridge masters house and Carrow Bridge can be collectively experienced. On the other hand, as Historic England advise, there would be opportunities through the appeal proposal to better reveal the city walls and Boom Tower through vegetation management on the appeal site, which could be secured by condition. The appeal proposal would not obstruct current views of the city

walls from within the CCCA. On balance, the appeal proposal would have a neutral effect on the heritage significance of the city walls as a SAM.

22. The adjacent Carrow Bridge is locally listed, and its heritage significance stems from its age and function from a time when the volume and importance of marine traffic into the city required a lifting bridge. The bridge masters house is intrinsically linked to the history and function of this heritage asset from the early 1920s. The relationship of the house to the bridge is readily experienced within Carrow Road and from the opposite bank of the River Wensum and to a lesser extent from King Street to the west. For the various reasons set out above, the loss of the original dwelling and its replacement with an uninspiring replica, would be significantly harmful to the heritage significance of this asset.
23. Whilst I have found no harm to the heritage significance of the BCA and the city walls SAM, I conclude that the appeal proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the CCCA. It would also result in appreciable harm to the heritage significance of the adjacent locally listed Carrow Bridge. I recognise my findings in relation to the CCCA do not accord with the view of Historic England, but they are based on my full reading of the evidence and from observations on site, leading to the reasons given above. In my consideration of the appeal location within the CCCA I have had regard to Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). This requires me to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This is a stern test and as such it is incumbent that I attach considerable importance and weight to the harm that has been identified.
24. The NPPF at paragraph 205 states that when considering the impact of a proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of the harm identified. The identified harm to these heritage assets would be less than substantial. The NPPF at paragraph 208 states in such circumstances that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. I have separately identified and considered these benefits above under the first main issue. Again, they attract no more than limited weight here, insufficient to outweigh the harm to the heritage assets identified, which the NPPF identifies are an irreplaceable resource.
25. Consequently, in terms of the impact on the CCCA and the locally listed Carrow Bridge the appeal proposal would be contrary to GNLP Policy 3 and NDMP Policy DM9. It would also be contrary to the provisions of the NPPF at chapter 16 on conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Trees

26. It is proposed to remove an existing silver birch tree close to the rear elevation of the building. The tree has been assessed in a 2018 arboricultural report as a Category B specimen under the evaluation method in British Standard 5837:2012. This means the tree is of a moderate quality, in good condition, and with a reasonable remaining life expectancy. The tree is highly visible from within Carrow Road and King Street as well as from the footpaths on the opposite bank of the River Wensum and alongside the City Wall to the south. The combined height and quality of this tree make a positive contribution to the streetscene in this part of the CCCA and from views within the adjacent

BCA, providing a moderate degree of verdant relief between two denser blocks of modern residential development and conversions to the north and south.

27. The appellant submits that the tree is required to be removed to facilitate access to enable the proposed demolition works. There is little before me that alternative access options have been explored within the wider appeal site that could avoid the tree. As such it is difficult to conclude that the removal of the tree should be regarded as unavoidable to facilitate the proposed demolition and that the tree could not be retained and integrated within a redevelopment of the site.
28. The appellant is willing to provide replacement tree planting and has proposed a single new heavy standard tree. I accept the LPAs submission that any replacement tree planting must be of equivalent or greater visual quality as well as sufficiently compensating for the loss of biomass. Consequently, a single heavy standard may not be sufficient in this regard given the height and quality of the specimen proposed for removal. The LPA suggests a minimum of four heavy standards, which could be secured by condition. However, there is little before me to demonstrate that this could be appropriately achieved on the site given the need to physically protect the adjacent city wall SAM and to preserve existing views of this feature within the CCCA. Overall, I am not satisfied on the evidence before me, that there would be an appropriate scheme to replace the existing tree in terms of achieving similar levels of visual quality in the short to medium term.
29. I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would result in the unjustified loss of a good quality tree within the CCCA. The proposal would be contrary to Policy DM7 of the NDMP which seeks to retain trees as an integral part of the development unless there are reasons relating to the health of the tree or other exceptional reasons. The proposal would not satisfy either part a) or b) of Policy DM7 in relation to potential justifications for the loss of a category B tree. Even if the loss was justified, the proposal would fail to provide at least equivalent replacement as required by Policy DM7. The proposal would also be contrary to Policy DM3(i) of the NDMP which expects development to make appropriate provision for the protection of existing green infrastructure in the design of the development.

Conclusion

30. I have had regard to all other matters raised but there are not the material considerations in this case that outweigh the identified conflict with the development plan and national planning policy in relation to the historic environment. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

David Spencer

Inspector.