



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 October 2024

by Lewis Condé BSc, MSc, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 October 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/G1630/W/24/3343507

Churchdown Village Infant School, Station Road, Churchdown, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL3 2NB

- 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 Jessica Hutchison against the decision of Tewkesbury Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/00687/FUL.
 - The development proposed is Removal of existing bell tower and make good roof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the host building (including if its considered to be a non-designated heritage asset) and the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The appeal building forms part of Churchdown Village Infant School, which is located in a prominent position on one of the main thorough-fares within Churchdown. The school dates to circa 1874 and comprises several buildings, including more modern additions.
4. The original 19th Century school building is constructed of Cotswold Stone and displays steep pitched roofs and rich detailing, including lancet gabled windows in the Victorian Gothic Style. The Council emphasised these aspects as part of its initial arguments that the appeal site should be deemed a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). It also believed that the appeal building itself to be of Victorian era and identified its cupola/bell turret (i.e. the bell tower proposed to be removed) to be a fine example of a decorative Victorian design feature that should be preserved. However, through the appeal, the appellant has evidenced that the appeal building instead dates from around the 1930s and contests that it should constitute a NDHA.
5. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) defines a NDHA as “buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets”.

6. The appeal site has not been identified as a NDHA either through the Council's Local Plan or a local list. Although there is encouragement within the PPG this is not a necessary requirement to have the status of a NDHA.
7. The appellant further suggests that the appeal building's bell tower is not a unique feature given that a third party has referenced another example that can be found in Gloucester. However, there is extremely limited information before me about the wider prevalence of such structures, or indeed the historic roots of the appeal building. Furthermore, whilst such a feature may not be entirely unique, it nevertheless, appears to be of local historic and architectural interest.
8. Indeed, from the evidence before me, the building clearly holds some affection with local residents, and those that may have previously attended the school, with the appeal building, notably its bell tower, having apparent associations with the area. From my own observations the building and its bell tower appeared to act somewhat as a landmark feature within the local area.
9. Despite the appeal building not forming part of the original school complex, it remains approximately 100 years old and appears to have been built in the local vernacular and with a high level of craftsmanship including its detailing. In fact, its design and appearance, including materiality, proportions and detailing closely assimilate with the original Victorian school building at the site.
10. From the available evidence and my observations on site, I consider that the appeal building, alongside the earlier 19th Century school buildings, displays sufficient heritage significance to warrant status as a NDHA. The significance derives in part from the appeal buildings' age, architectural features, and aesthetic interest, of which the bell tower plays a noteworthy role.
11. Additionally, the appeal building due to its height, and the low profile of several neighbouring buildings, is highly prominent within the surrounding area. The building's design positively contributes to the character of the area, particularly the inclusion and detailing of the bell tower, which is a conspicuous, charming, and visually pleasing element within the streetscene.
12. Given the bell tower's contribution to the appeal site as a NDHA, I find that its loss would meaningfully detract from the character and appearance of the host building and the significance of the NDHA. It would also subsequently cause harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
13. Paragraph 209 of the Framework, in respect of NDHAs, requires the decision maker to make a 'balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
14. The appellant has indicated that the design of the tower results in water ingress into the building and if this is not addressed then a classroom would need to close (as has previously been required). It is argued that this would have significant implications for teaching of children but could also jeopardise the school's future, with potential wider implications for the conservation of a NDHA.
15. Notwithstanding comments received from a local resident highlighting previous maintenance efforts and constraints associated with the on-going preservation

of the bell tower, there is no robust evidence before me to demonstrate that the bell tower is the cause of water ingress into the building.

16. Nor has any detailed evidence been provided to demonstrate that repairs to the building to prevent water ingress, whilst also maintaining the bell tower structure, are either infeasible or unviable, including in the long-term. Based on the evidence before me, I am therefore unconvinced that the loss of the bell tower is the only suitable manner in which to address the building's current defects.
17. The merits of the proposal as set out by the appellant therefore do not provide sufficient justification for the proposed development. Accordingly, the proposal conflicts with Policy SD8 of the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy, and Policy HER 5 of the adopted Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan. Together, amongst other matters, these policies seek to protect the historic environment, including conserving and enhancing undesignated assets. It also does not accord with the aims of the Framework in respect of conserving the historic environment.

Other Matters

18. Reference has been made by a third party regarding the school's willingness to preserve the cupola/bell tower at an alternative location within the school grounds. Notwithstanding, that the bell tower's aesthetic impact is largely derived from its relationship with the host building and views within the wider surrounding area, the appellant has not proposed its relocation or preservation.

Conclusion

19. For the reasons given above, the appeal scheme conflicts with the development plan as a whole and there are no other considerations, including the Framework's provisions, which outweigh this finding. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Lewis Condé

INSPECTOR