



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 October 2024

by A Dawe BSc (Hons), MSc, MPhil, MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 05 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/P0119/Y/24/3346694

79 High Street, Marshfield, South Gloucestershire SN14 8LT

- 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 Gary Arnold against the decision of South Gloucestershire Council.
 - The application Ref is P24/00425/LB.
 - The works proposed are Alterations to front boundary to create an off street car parking space.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the significance of the Grade II* listed building known as Former Unitarian Chapel (Ref: 1157006) (the LB), and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

3. The LB derives its significance from it being a relatively rare and intact example of a mid-18th century Unitarian meeting house and its historical association with the important figure of William Hazlitt Senior. This includes its confident Classical design, constructed with ashlar limestone and ashlar dressings; and three bay façade including a central double door with rusticated surround and keystone, with large arched multi-paned timber sash windows either side, each with a stone architrave and keystone. Such features provide a strong degree of symmetry to that façade, albeit weakened to some extent by a more recent single storey extension projecting from its western end. The use changed to that of a reading room in the late 19th, early 20th century and then later was under the care of the Royal British Legion, and was used by a variety of community groups in the early 21st century until becoming a private dwelling since 2020. The historic burial ground to the rear of the LB is now a garden area serving the existing dwelling.
4. The LB has historically also included a front rubble stone boundary wall with stone coping within which is a gateway comprising stone piers with carved capstones either side. I understand that this was probably realigned as part of the building's conversion to a reading room referred to above, which despite therefore not relating to the original use nevertheless has historic interest. Importantly, the wall continues to provide clear definition to the LB's forecourt area. That wall thereby contributes to the LB's retained strong and distinct

visual presence, by creating physical segregation from the shared driveway and the other properties and structures in the vicinity.

5. The pedestrian gateway and associated pathway provide a tightly defined link between the adjacent shared driveway area and the LB's front door. That immediate line of approach also corresponds to a line of sight of the LB's front door from the High Street at the entrance to the driveway approach. This provides a sequential experience on the approach and a strong sense of arrival on foot centred on the front door. These factors, despite the LB's front façade being partially obscured to varying extents on the approach along the drive by existing foreground buildings and structures, thereby contribute to the appreciation of the building's significance and special interest. I acknowledge that the principal reasons for the LB's listing in the official list entry do not refer to its broader setting, its forecourt area or associated front wall. However, consideration of the significance and special interest of the LB is not confined to those principal reasons or to the listing description.
6. I note the Appellant's claims relating to the evolving nature of the LB's use and the associated needs, now relating to the intended provision of a residential car parking space. I also note the Appellant's reference to the changes that have occurred with the neighbouring properties comprising 77 and 81A High Street. The proposed works would also include the reinstatement of the removed existing gateway pier and the retention of the gravel surface treatment of the forecourt area. However, the proposals would see the removal of a significant section of the existing historic wall to create a gap sufficient to allow car access to that immediate forecourt area of the LB.
7. The short length of walls intended to be retained either side of that access would therefore no longer provide that strong historical definition to the front courtyard area. This is regardless of it having previously been realigned and the intention to include a row of stone setts to mark the boundary line between the private forecourt and shared driveway, in a similar way to the definition of existing adjacent parking spaces. It would also remove that important tight alignment of the gateway with the front door, thereby weakening the sequential approach and strong sense of arrival on foot.
8. Furthermore, in opening up that forecourt area for parking, the presence of a car parked there, in close proximity to the LB, and likely to be across the front door, would further weaken the visual appreciation of the building's façade and that important central feature. It is likely that a car would be below the cill height of the façade's arched windows. However, a car positioned in that close proximity would be likely to significantly draw the eye away, and therefore also detract from the special interest of those windows. I acknowledge that views of the building may have been obscured to varying degrees in the past, prior to its residential use, by now removed trees and vehicles associated with previous uses. However, this would still have been in the context of the wall concerned being retained with just its pedestrian width access. It is therefore likely to have restricted parking, particularly by cars or larger vehicles, on the LB's forecourt area in that closer proximity to the building's façade as is now proposed. As such, it is unlikely that the same degree of obstruction was previously possible.
9. I acknowledge the presence of vehicles parked adjacent to the site in spaces immediately to the north of the LB's forecourt. I saw that the nearest of those

spaces to the LB was occupied by a van that was not wholly contained within that space and was projecting partially in front of the LB's pedestrian gateway. Nevertheless, I have no basis to consider that the space concerned is not sufficient to normally contain a vehicle without such projection. In any case, those spaces are set away from the LB's façade. The same would be the case with other cars parked, and visible from High Street, on the shared driveway area, either set away from or to the side of that facade. Furthermore, in terms of context, whilst those other cars can be parked close to their associated dwellings, the design and layout of those properties is not the same as for the LB.

10. I saw the parking arrangement relating to another listed building nearby, referred to by the Appellant as the former school in St Martin's Lane. I do not have the full details of any applications relating to the works concerned. However, I saw that the design of the host building and associated layout of the site, including the direct pedestrian approach to the front door from the street being unimpeded by the parking spaces, is different to the circumstances relating to this appeal. In any case, I have determined this appeal on its own merits.
11. I acknowledge that domestic paraphernalia could currently be put in the forecourt area that would potentially detract from the views of the LB's frontage. However, I saw little evidence of that, noting that it is currently hard landscaped with gravel surface treatment with mainly just planters and discretely positioned refuse bin storage. I also noted that what is now laid out as a rear garden area on the opposite side of the LB, provides a significant and more private area. It is therefore unlikely for there to be a reliance on the front forecourt area to accommodate significant amounts of domestic paraphernalia.
12. The harm that I have found would be caused to the LB is not dependant on whether the proposed works would be visible from public vantage points. Nevertheless, some degree of visibility would be likely from High Street at the point of access to the shared driveway, albeit limited to that point and across that intervening distance.
13. For the above reasons, the proposed works would fail to preserve the special interest of the LB. For the purposes of the planning balance, which I shall come on to, this harm carries considerable importance and weight.
14. Paragraph 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 206 goes on to state, amongst other things, that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.
15. Given the relatively small-scale nature of the proposed works in the context of the LB as a whole, the harm caused to the LB would be less than substantial in this case. Having regard to paragraph 208 of the Framework, as I have found there would be less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
16. I acknowledge that the current use as a residential property is likely to generate the demand for a car, having regard to modern living. Currently, it is

likely that would mean having to park in the street. Whilst generally I saw there to be some available on-street parking and not any significant amount of inappropriate parking, I appreciate that this was a snapshot observation and not necessarily reflective of times of day and periods of the year of higher demand. In this respect, I note the submissions indicating the problems associated with such parking in Marshfield. The proposal would therefore have the likely benefit of one less car having to be parked in the street, having regard to those existing problems. Nevertheless, the proposal would only remove one vehicle from that current demand for on-street parking, and as such be unlikely to have a significant effect on those existing problems or in improving the aesthetic of High Street. I therefore afford limited weight to such a benefit.

17. The proposed electric vehicle charging point adjacent to the proposed parking space would allow convenient charging of an electric vehicle and would in turn be likely to encourage use of such a vehicle, with the associated reduction in carbon dioxide production. The works concerned would therefore have that public benefit of contributing towards environmental sustainability objectives. In this respect I note the Appellant's references to climate emergency declarations and to the proposal assisting in local, Council wide, and national goals relating to adapting to climate change and reducing carbon emissions, including through sustainable transportation.
18. It is also intended to list the electric vehicle charging point with a provider that facilitates the renting of such points to others in the local community. However, it is unclear as to the extent of such a proposed operation and how it would be managed in the case of the appeal site, particularly given the relatively confined shared driveway and proposed single parking space.
19. Paragraph 163 of the Framework sets out in relation to renewable and low carbon development, amongst other things, that it should be recognised that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to significantly cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, I have had regard to paragraph 164 of the Framework and afford significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency. However, it is likely that the extent of the contribution to environmental sustainability objectives in this case would be at a relatively small scale, particularly for private use. There is also that lack of clarity highlighted above in respect of use by the wider community. As such, whilst acknowledging the value of even a single electric vehicle charging point, in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary, the public benefits associated with the proposed electric vehicle charging point would be limited.
20. I also note the claim that the proposed parking space would reduce disruption to neighbours during regular maintenance works to the LB, in terms of currently there not being anywhere for trades people to park. However, I have no substantive evidence as to the extent of any such disruption to date, and whether it amounts to significant harm to the amenities of neighbouring occupiers or would do so in the future. I therefore afford little weight to this factor.
21. In terms of securing the optimal viable use of the LB, I acknowledge that having a private parking space and associated electric vehicle charging facility could add to the desirability of the property for future prospective residents. However, I have no substantive evidence to indicate that the lack of such

provision would cause the property to be unviable as a residential use and thereby threaten the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the LB.

22. The proposed works would represent an adaptation to modern requirements and to climate change. However, for the above reasons, the public benefits would be insufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm that would be caused to the LB.
23. In light of the above, the proposed works would fail to preserve the significance of the LB and features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses. The proposed works would therefore fail to satisfy the requirements of section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Furthermore, for the same reasons in respect of this issue, they would be contrary to policy CS9 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-2027 and policy PSP17 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places Plan Development Plan Document (adopted November 2017) which together, amongst other things, state that new development will be expected to ensure that heritage assets are conserved, respected and enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance; that alterations, extensions or changes of use to listed buildings, or development within their setting, will be expected to preserve and, where appropriate, enhance those elements which contribute to their special architectural or historic interest, including their settings; and that where development would result in harm to the significance of a heritage asset or its setting, planning permission may only be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that, amongst other things, the proposal results in public benefits that outweigh the harm.
24. The works would also be contrary to paragraph 203 of the Framework which highlights, amongst other things, the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.

Conclusion

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

A Dawe

INSPECTOR