



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 November 2024

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/C1435/D/24/3344519

Westering, Church Street, Hartfield, East Sussex, TN7 4AQ

- 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 Colin Thomas against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application Ref is WD/2024/0308/F.
 - The development proposed is replacement windows and French door.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for replacement windows and French door at Westering, Church street, Hartfield, East Sussex TN7 4AQ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref WD/2024/0308/F, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following details:
 - Site Plan
 - Replacement window details, measurements and specifications
 - Section Drawings and Pictures of Proposed Windows
 - Photos – Cill and window depths
 - Photos detailing which windows are to be replaced

Preliminary Matters

2. The description of development given on the application form is extensive in detail. I have had regard to this detail in my assessment. However, for the purposes of my banner heading, I have shortened this description, largely coinciding with that used in the Council's decision notice.
3. The appeal site lies within the Hartfield Conservation Area. I have therefore paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area, in accordance with s72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). The appeal site is also adjacent to a Grade II listed building. I have therefore had regard to section (66)1 of the Act, which requires special regard be paid to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings.
4. Whilst I have not been provided with physical samples of the proposed materials, I am satisfied that the additional details submitted provide sufficient clarification for me to make an assessment of the finished building and when viewed in the context of the surrounding area.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the building and the wider area, having particular regard to the effect on the character or appearance of the Hartfield Conservation Area (HCA), the setting of the adjacent listed building and the High Weald National Landscape.

Reasons

6. The appeal property is a part single, part two storey brick-built building. From the evidence submitted by the appellant, it appears that the building was originally constructed as a British Legion Club House, with single glazed crittal windows and doors being an integral part of the building's overall design.
7. From my site visit it was evident that many of the original window units remain but need replacing. Some have previously been replaced with wooden ones. At a distance these replacements offer a similar glazing pattern to the original crittal windows. However, on closer inspection they are double glazed units and do not have the detailing of the original frames and windows such as the distinctive butt hinges and rain cills.
8. It is evident from the substantive information submitted by the appellant, that to exactly replicate the original crittal windows would be prohibitively expensive. Various alternatives have been considered and the chosen details would, whilst not being an exact facsimile, be sympathetic to the original design and appearance of the building. The double-glazed nature of the units would differ from the original single glazed windows but they would replicate some of the original detailing that would be absent from uPVC or wooden framed versions. Overall, the profiles of the frames and glazing bars are reasonably slim-line and well proportioned. I do not consider that the changes would be sufficiently harmful to the building to warrant refusal of the scheme.
9. The special interest and significance of the HCA, insofar as it relates to this appeal is that of a village within a rural setting that has evolved over time but retains many of its older, more traditional buildings whilst limiting any adverse effect from newer built form. The quality of the historic buildings and their relationship to one another and the open areas around them are the defining features of the HCA and make the greatest contribution to its significance.
10. Dating from the first half of the 20th century, the appeal building is clearly a much more recent addition to the HCA and this distinguishes it from most of the other buildings around it. However, despite this and its elevated position above Church Street it is not prominent when viewed from either Church Street or the High Street. This latter point appears to also be recognised in the Council's Draft Hartfield Conservation Area Appraisal. As such, the building has only a limited effect on the HCA, with most of its features, including the fenestration detailing largely hidden from wider view.
11. The proposed replacement windows would, from the public realm, only be seen in fleeting views. Given the utilisation of a similar appearance of window to the existing, the modest changes would be difficult to discern at a distance. I consider that, given that the building is already something of an outlier compared to the appearance of other nearby buildings, this impact would not cause harm to the significance of the Conservation Area as a whole.

12. The closest building to the appeal site is Nos. 1 and 2 Pope's Cottages, which is Grade II listed. A timber framed cottage believed to be from the 17th century, the building's primary special interest is expressed in its architecture and use of materials, but it also includes the evidential, aesthetic and historic value as an example of a vernacular domestic building.
13. The building also derives intrinsic historic and evidential value from being experienced in a semi-rural setting with the buildings opposite similarly positioned directly adjacent to the road, creating a narrow and enclosed setting. The space around the building, to the rear and particularly to the west, reinforces its status as the earliest building on the southern side of the street. The building's setting therefore contributes positively to its significance.
14. Westering is set to the rear of Popes Cottage and can be seen in the background of wider views of the listed building. However, its position, size and height ensure that it is relatively unobtrusive, and it does not compete visually with the listed building. Given the limited effect the proposed changes would have on both the building and on the wider area, they would similarly not distract attention away from Popes Cottage or diminish how it would be experienced. The listed building would retain its primacy within the street, its setting would be preserved, and its significance would not be harmed.
15. Hartfield lies within the High Weald National Landscape. The decision notice refers to harm to the National Landscape, albeit the officer report provides no indication as to how such harm would arise. Given my findings above, and the limited change that would result to the appearance of the building and the limited extent to which the changes would be seen or experienced, I similarly do not find that harm would arise to the wider landscape setting.
16. The proposal would therefore accord with saved policies GD2, DC19, EN6, EN19 and EN27 of the adopted Wealden Local Plan 1998; Spatial Planning Objectives SPO1, SPO2 and SPO13, and Policy WCS14, of the adopted Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan. These, amongst other things, seek to ensure that proposals do not harm the character of the existing building, neighbouring properties or the wider area, and in particular have regard to the High Weald landscape and Conservation Areas.

Conditions

17. In addition to the standard time condition for commencement of development, in order to provide certainty, a condition is needed to ensure that the development takes place in accordance with the approved details.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons given above the proposal accords with the relevant policies of the development plan. There are no other material considerations that would indicate that a decision should be taken other than in accordance with the development plan and it follows that I shall allow the appeal and grant planning permission for the development, subject to the specified conditions.

Stewart Glassar

INSPECTOR