



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 5 November 2024

by K Stephens BSc (Hons) MTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 January 2025

Appeal A Ref: APP/H0520/W/24/3340910

The Forge High Street, Hemingford Abbots, Cambridgeshire PE28 9AA

- 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 Mr Tom Laws against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/01821/HHFUL.
 - The development proposed is Single storey rear extension and associated minor internal alterations, together with minor alterations to boundary treatment between private drive and rear garden.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/H0520/Y/24/3340906

The Forge High Street, Hemingford Abbots, Cambridgeshire PE28 9AA

- 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 Tom Laws against the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/01822/LBC.
 - The works proposed are Single storey rear extension and associated minor internal alterations, together with minor alterations to boundary treatment between private drive and rear garden.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

3. On my site visit I learned that the appellant no longer lived at the premises and I met the new owners, who were aware of the appeal. The appellant has confirmed the appeal is continuing in their name. However, in the interests of fairness and natural justice the new owners of the appeal property have had the opportunity to comment on the appeal.
4. As the proposal relates to a listed building within a conservation area, I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 66(1) and paid special attention to section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
5. As the two appeals concern the same scheme but under different complementary legislation, I have dealt with both appeals together to avoid unnecessary duplication.

6. During the course of the appeal a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published in December 2024 and replaces the previous version published in December 2023. However, as any policies in the Framework that are material to this decision have not fundamentally changed, I am satisfied that neither party would be prejudiced by my consideration of the revised Framework in reaching my decision.

Main Issues

7. The main issues are whether the proposal would: i) preserve the Grade II listed building known as The Forge¹, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; and ii) preserve or enhance the character or appearance of The Hemingfords Conservation Area (the HCA).

Reasons

Special interest and significance of the heritage assets

8. According to the official listing The Forge is a two storey house that dates from around the 17th century. It is timber-framed, with rough cast render, with an old plain tile roof with a central stack, and sash windows, including horizontal sliding sashes. At the time of listing in 1982, there was a two storey colour-washed brick and pantiled extension to the west, originally a store for the blacksmith.
9. From the plans and my site visit observations, I saw that the internal timber framing is exposed and the property largely retains its historic internal floor plan. The special interest and significance of the listed building, insofar as it relates to these appeals, are largely derived from a combination of its historic and architectural interests as an example of a late 17th century vernacular domestic dwelling within a village, with associations to the forge. The building's age, surviving historic fabric and features, legibility of its historic floorplan, and use of traditional construction and materials make important contributions in these regards. There is also a water pump (now disused) at the rear of the building and a side garden wall attached to the listed building. The building also has group value with other dwellings in the row as part of the street scene of the High Street, which is the principal road through the village.
10. The special interest and significance of the asset are also derived in part from the surroundings in which it is experienced. The Forge fronts the main street through the village, which allows the building to be seen and experienced as part of the street scene and wider rural village setting. The listed building is also experienced, and its heritage merit appreciated, from the rear garden that provides an immediate setting and which positively contributes to the special interest and significance of the listed building.
11. The appeal site is located within the village of Hemingford Abbots close to the village of Hemingford Grey. These two villages extend roughly parallel to the Great River Ouse and form an extensive joint conservation area. They are old farming villages with a planned settlement pattern, which is explained in more detail in the HCA Character Appraisal². Both villages in the HCA contain a

¹ National Heritage List for England: list entry number 1128465

² The Hemingfords Conservation Area Character Appraisal - June 2008

significant number of listed buildings. From the evidence before me and what I saw during my site visit, I consider the character and appearance of the HCA, and thus its special interest and significance, are in part derived from the architectural richness and variety of its surviving historic buildings and street patterns and the relationship of its buildings and spaces that reflect the economic and social development of the villages.

12. The Forge is an important component of the townscape within the HCA and an integral part of the history of the village. Indeed the building is located within a 'significant or important view or vista' identified in the HCA Character Appraisal and also features in a photograph of a street scene as a representative image of the 'visual quality' of the HCA. With its heritage merit and aesthetic charm, the listed building positively contributes to the character and appearance of the HCA as a whole and thereby to its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Appeal proposal and effects

13. In the late 1980s the property was extensively refurbished after it fell into a dilapidated state and was sold at auction. The "two storey colour-washed brick and pantiled extension to west" was rebuilt and is now exposed brickwork. The single storey lean-to (the existing kitchen) was rebuilt and French doors were installed from the sitting room. It appears that other windows were replaced, including the three very small first floor rear windows that are now slightly larger.

Extension

14. The proposed single storey rear extension would accommodate a new kitchen and boot room. The existing kitchen and understairs cupboards and downstairs toilet that had been largely refurbished in the 1980s, would be configured to create a utility/larder and shower room/WC. This would not involve loss of historic fabric.
15. The French doors in the existing sitting room would be made a window that would look into the new boot room. There would be no loss of historic fabric, but a condition could be imposed requiring details of bricks and mortar mix. Looking at submitted drawings of the building before the 1980 works, this opening was once a window, so the proposal would be reinstating a more authentic opening.
16. An existing window in the external wall of the dining room would be made into a double-width door, opening into what would be the new kitchen. This would involve some loss of brickwork beneath the window, but the appellant's Heritage Statement (the HS) states there will be no impact on the 17th century timber framing or any original or historic fabric, and the Council raises no concerns to the contrary. The main spaces within the historic internal floorplan would remain legible.
17. The proposed single storey extension would be built off the rear historic wall of the property. It would extend across almost the entire width of the rear elevation from the existing single storey extension and would be set a small distance in from the east end of the building. This would effectively 'square off' the footprint of the property, almost doubling its depth. However, the extension is designed as a subservient lean-to and would accommodate

secondary spaces – the kitchen and boot room – and the main spaces within the core of the building would remain legible.

18. That said, the extension would make the existing historic external rear wall of the building become an internal wall. With the lateral extent of the extension across the building and the proposed roof rising to just beneath the cills of the first floor windows, the historic rear wall of the building would be almost entirely hidden, reducing the legibility and authenticity of the heritage asset.
19. Whilst windows have been altered as part of earlier refurbishments, the replacement windows have generally reflected the previous windows in location and form. As a result, the limited number of rear elevation openings and the very small nature of the first floor windows gives the existing rear elevation a high solid-to-void ratio. This is made more pronounced by the expanse of rendered walls and the steeply pitched clay tiled roof that combine to create a striking rear elevation that is fully visible and appreciated from the rear garden.
20. The proposed extensive wall of glazing, in the form of concertina folding full-height glazed doors, plus a separate fully glazed door that would serve the boot room would disrupt the solid-to-void ratio of this historic elevation. Furthermore, as the mono-pitch zinc roof would reach to just below the first floor window cills, the small first floor windows would appear almost as a clearstory above the roof of the extension, reducing their prominence and interest. The extent and height of the extension would also mean it would become the visually dominant element and almost entirely subsume the rear historic external wall of the property, even if it has some subserviency features. As a result, the extension would considerably alter the composition of the historic rear elevation, would fail to preserve its special interest and would harm its significance. Furthermore, there are insufficient details to demonstrate how the extension would connect to the rear of the listed building, some of which would be timber framed.

Pump

21. To make room for the extension, the water pump would be relocated towards the east end of the extension. Submitted Ordnance Survey maps from the 1880s show the presence of the pump in the same position as it is now. Hence its historical association with the property is strong, although I am informed it has now been disconnected from the below-ground water supply and no longer works. Whilst the pump has been encased in a more modern timber box, its wholesale relocation away from its historical position would reduce its authenticity.

Boundary wall and gates

22. The boundary wall to the rear garden along the driveway and east elevation of the garden forms a strong means of enclosure within the immediate setting of the listed building. From the evidence it appears that the current wall has been built on a slightly different alignment to the previous wall. Its rebuilding on a yet another slightly different alignment would not involve a loss of historic fabric and would retain the sense of enclosure to the rear garden and separate it from the driveway. However, the existing decorative arched metal gate is a somewhat urban feature rather than a rural one. The introduction of more open metal panels in the widened gap to match the gate would exacerbate the unsympathetic urban features and detract from the simple boundary wall, thus

weakening the positive contribution the listed building's setting makes to its significance.

23. Drawing all the above points together, the proposal would fail to preserve the listed building, its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. In doing so, it would harm the significance of this designated heritage asset. Whilst the rear elevation and extension would not be visible from the street, the rear garden contributes to the special interest and significance of the listed building. Furthermore, listed buildings are safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not close public views of the building can be gained.
24. In terms of the effect of the proposal on the HCA, there would be no significant noticeable change to the street scene and the building's visual setting on the High Street. The changes to the boundary wall would only be seen when the timber gates to the road are open. That said, The Forge is an integral and important element of the character and appearance of the HCA. It follows that the harmful effects I have identified to the heritage interests of the listed building, whether publicly visible or not, would diminish the contribution it makes to the HCA. As a result the proposal would also fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the HCA as a whole and would result in some residual harm to its significance.
25. I have considered whether imposing conditions for attaching the extension and floor levels could mitigate my concerns. However, the omitted information goes to the heart of understanding the proposed development and works and any effects they may have on the special interest and significance of the listed building. Therefore, in my view it would not be acceptable to leave such fundamental matters to condition.

Public benefits and heritage balance

26. Paragraph 212 of 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. In finding harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, Framework paragraphs 214 and 215 set out that the magnitude of that harm should be assessed.
27. Given the nature and extent of the proposal I find the harm to the significance of the listed building and the HCA would be 'less than substantial'. In such circumstances, paragraph 215 of the Framework requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use. A finding of less than substantial harm still carries considerable importance and weight.
28. Public benefits, as described in the national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), can be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives. Benefits do not have to be visible or publicly accessible and can include works to a listed private dwelling, for example, which secure its future as a designated heritage asset.
29. There would be some economic benefits to the wider local economy from jobs and the supply chain during the construction phase, but this would be limited when considering the modest extent of the proposal. Reinstating a window in the sitting room would be a public betterment. However, the alterations and

any improvements to the overall layout of accommodation and access to the garden would be for the preference of the appellant and family and hence a private, not public, benefit.

30. There is no substantive evidence before me that demonstrates that the proposal is necessary to secure the continued use of the building as a dwelling or that the use of the building would be at risk, or cease, if the appeals were to fail. I therefore find that clear and convincing justification for the harm to the asset's significance has not been provided.
31. The limited public benefits identified above weigh in favour of the appeals. However, the weight I ascribe to them is not sufficient to outweigh the considerable importance and weight I attach to the harm that would occur to the significance of the listed building and the HCA as designated heritage assets. Accordingly, the proposal would fail to preserve the Grade II listed building known as The Forge, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and would not preserve or enhance the character of the HCA. As a result the proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the relevant provisions of the Framework.
32. The proposal would also conflict with Huntingdonshire's Local Plan³ Policies LP2, LP11, LP12 and LP34. Collectively these seek, amongst other things, to ensure development conserves and enhances the historic environment and positively responds to its context and surrounding area and local distinctiveness.

Other Matters

33. I am mindful of the duty under section 66(1) of the Act to also have special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of a listed building, which includes other listed buildings, not just the appeal property. The Council refers to three other nearby Grade II listed buildings and has included their listing descriptions.
34. The closest is Abbots End⁴ which adjoins The Forge and which is of a similar age. The 'Outbuilding to east of the Forge' ⁵ was a 19th century brick forge building, but the building is no longer there. The thatched Corner Cottage⁶ is located much further to the east around the bend in the road.
35. From the evidence before me and what I saw on site, the significance of these buildings is largely derived from their architectural and historic interest. Abbots End has group value with The Forge as part of the same street scene and same 'significant view' identified in the HCA Appraisal. Corner Cottage is not seen in the same linear street scene view due to the intervening bend in the road and alignment of the cottage side-on the road and set back from it. The significance of both listed buildings also stems from their well-defined immediate settings within a rural village, separate from The Forge. Given the nature and extent of the proposal, I consider that the settings of these other designated heritage assets would be preserved and their significance would not be harmed. The Council has raised no concerns in this regard either.

³ Adopted May 2019

⁴ National Heritage List for England: list entry number 1125464

⁵ National Heritage List for England: list entry number 1330769

⁶ National Heritage List for England: list entry number 1128481

36. My attention has been drawn to extensions that have been recently allowed⁷ at Jennifer Cottage, a thatched cottage a short distance to the west of the appeal site. The appellant raises issues of inconsistency with regards the Council's handling of that application and for allowing the extensions and imposing conditions, instead of requesting details during determination of the application as with The Forge. From the submitted evidence the extensions were sizeable. However Jennifer Cottage already had a single storey extension that ran along the rear of the property and this was to be replaced by a shorter flat roof extension, to which a pitched zinc roof extension was added. This is a different scenario to that at The Forge. Whilst the example serves to illustrate that alterations and changes, even contemporary designs, can be managed to heritage assets in appropriate circumstances, it does not indicate the Council has been inconsistent in its approach. I too have found the appeal proposal would cause harm, there is a lack of detail and conditions would be inappropriate. Therefore, the Jennifer Cottage example is not directly comparable to the proposal before me, which in any event I must consider on its own merits.

Conclusion

37. Appeal A: The proposal would conflict with the development plan when taken as a whole and there are no material considerations that outweigh this conflict. Therefore, for the reasons above the appeal should be dismissed.

38. Appeal B: For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

K Stephens
INSPECTOR

⁷ LPA Refs: 22/01817/HHFUL and 22/01818/LBC