



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 1 April 2025

by **A James BSc (Hons) MA MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 April 2025

Appeal A: APP/C1435/W/24/3355341

2 Thorndean Farm Cottages, Cowbeech Road, Cowbeech, Herstmonceux, East Sussex BN27 4JH

- 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 Mrs S Watson against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application reference is WD/2023/2776/F.
 - The development is proposed single storey side extension and rear two storey extension.
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Appeal B: APP/C1435/Y/24/3355343

2 Thorndean Farm Cottages, Cowbeech Road, Cowbeech, Herstmonceux, East Sussex BN27 4JH

- 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 Mrs S Watson against the decision of Wealden District Council.
 - The application reference is WD/2023/2777/LB.
 - The works relate to proposed single storey side extension and rear two storey extension.
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Decisions

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

Preliminary Matters

3. As the appeals relate to a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
4. Since the Council issued its decision notices, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) has been revised, with the latest version published on 12 December 2024 and updated on 7 February 2025. Those parts of the Framework most relevant to these appeals remain broadly the same. As a result, I have not sought further submissions on the revised Framework and I am satisfied that no party has been prejudiced by my approach.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the proposal would preserve a Grade II listed building, known as 'Thornden Farm Cottages' (Ref: 1353336) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

6. The listed building comprises of a pair of semi-detached, former rural workers' cottages. The listing description states that the building dates back to the early 19th century. However, it appears from the evidence before me and the features that I observed on my site visit that the historic core of the building is of an earlier origin. The building is two storeys high and is constructed of red brick, with grey headers. It has a tiled roof. The historic core of the building is one room deep and has a rectilinear plan form.
7. The appeal property has a 19th century rear extension with mono-pitch roof. It also has two further single storey rear projections and a small lean-to on the side elevation. The adjoining cottage has a lean-to on the side elevation, which mirrors that on the appeal property. The adjoining cottage also has a modern two storey rear projection and a modern single storey side projection. Historically, the cottages would have been symmetrical in their form and appearance.
8. Based on my site visit and the evidence before me, I find that the listed building's special interest insofar as is relevant to these appeals is derived from its historic and architectural interest as an illustration of a pair of former rural workers' cottages, which are likely to date back to around the 18th or 19th century. The building's simple plan form, modest size, surviving historic fabric and its pleasing architectural design make important contributions in these regards.
9. The proposal seeks to demolish the existing rear projection, which is estimated to date back to the mid to late 19th century. There is a clear join in the masonry and roofing materials between the historic core of the building and the 19th century projection. The 19th century projection contains modern alterations, including a concrete floor, modern staircase and door, fibreboard ceiling and tile hanging over the original brick walls. Although the 19th century projection is a later addition, is in poor condition and contains some modern alterations/fabric, it is still of some date and contributes to the historic evolution of the building. The proposal would result in the loss of some historic fabric, including brickwork, which would harm the special interest of the listed building.
10. To the rear of the 19th century projection is a 20th century extension, which is also proposed to be demolished. The 20th century extension is a more modern addition to the building and is of lower historic and architectural significance. I do not find that the demolition of the 20th century extension would harm the special interest of the listed building.
11. The proposed two storey rear extension would have a pitched roof, which would be sited just below the ridge of the existing building. The eaves height and external materials would match that of the existing building. While the proposed rear extension would be set in slightly from the side elevation of the building, it would protrude some distance rearwards and would be greater in depth than the historic core of the building.
12. Although the two storey extension would be sited to the rear of the listed building and partially screened in some views by the nearby farm buildings, garage and soft landscaping, views of the extension would be available from the public realm. The proposal by reason of its size and design would result in a bulky and visually prominent addition, which would harmfully erode the simple and modest form of this listed building.

13. The proposal seeks to retain the existing timber lean-to on the side elevation and provide a new single storey side extension. The proposed side extension would be set back from the front building line and by reason of its height and siting would be subservient to the listed building. However, it would extend some distance to the side of the building. In combination with the existing extension on the adjoining cottage, it would create an elongated plan form. Furthermore, the proposal in its totality would create new rooms that would be significantly larger than those in the historic core of the building. Consequently, the proposal would harmfully erode the legibility of the historic plan form of the building.
14. I appreciate that the proposed extensions seek to replicate those on the adjoining cottage. The extensions on the adjoining cottage were consented towards the end of the 20th century and would have been determined against a different policy context. I acknowledge that the proposal would result in a more symmetrical building of balanced proportions and that the front and gable end of the historic core of the building would remain intact. Nevertheless, in combination with the extensions on the adjoining cottage, the proposal would overwhelm the historic core of the building and its simple plan form and would harmfully erode the legibility of the listed building as a pair of modest rural workers' cottages.
15. While the appellant's Heritage Statement advises that the wall separating the lounge and study is no longer proposed to be removed, this wall is denoted with a dashed line on the proposed plans. It is unclear from the proposed plans what is happening to this wall. The loss of this wall would cause further harm to the historic plan form of the listed building and result in the loss of further historic fabric.
16. For the reasons given above, I find that the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building and would harm the significance of this designated heritage asset.
17. Paragraph 212 of the Framework advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 213 advises that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets and that any such harm should have clear and convincing justification. I find the proposal would result in less than substantial harm; however, this should not be equated with a lesser planning objection and is still of considerable importance and weight.
18. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including, where appropriate, securing the asset's optimum viable use.
19. The existing building is derelict and in a poor condition. The proposal would repair the building and ensure that the building can be occupied in its optimal use as a dwelling in perpetuity. I appreciate that the existing bedrooms and kitchen are small and that the proposal would provide an improved standard of living accommodation. The proposal would also provide bathroom facilities upstairs and would replace the modern staircase, which is steep and has limited head room. However, there is no compelling evidence before me why such benefits cannot be achieved by a smaller extension and/or reconfiguration of the building, which does

not result in the harm that I have identified. As a result, I give this argument limited weight in my decision as a public benefit.

20. The proposal seeks to remove the modern fireplace in order to better reveal the original inglenook fireplace. However, there are limited details before me on the extent of works required to the fireplace and I give this matter limited weight in my decision as a public benefit.
21. The proposal would result in investment into the property and provide employment for local craftsmen or women, which would have a small economic benefit, which I give limited weight in my decision as a public benefit.
22. The proposal seeks to replace the existing UPVC, double glazed windows with new single glazed timber windows. The proposed windows would have flush casements and contain a single horizontal glazing bar and would be a betterment when compared to the existing windows. The Council advises that the existing windows are unauthorised and that action could be taken independently of the appeal scheme to rectify this situation. Accordingly, I give the replacement windows very limited weight in my decision.
23. Overall, I give the public benefits limited weight in my decision. Consequently, in attributing great weight to the harm that would be caused to the significance of the designated heritage asset, I find that there would be insufficient public benefits arising from the proposal to outweigh this harm.
24. Given the above, I conclude that, on balance, the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building. The proposal would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and the historic environment policies of the Framework. The proposal would conflict with Saved Policy EN1 of the Wealden Local Plan December 1998, Policy SPO2 of the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan February 2013 and Policy 12 of the Herstmonceux Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2017 – 2027, adopted July 2019 (the Neighbourhood Plan). These policies among other things require that development conserves and enhances the historic asset and the historic environment.
25. Although Policy 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan is quoted within the Council's reasons for refusal, the decision notices make no reference to the setting of the National Landscape. Given that I am dismissing this case on other grounds, I have not considered the impact of the proposal on the National Landscape further.

Other Matters

26. I note the Parish Council's support for the proposal; however, this does not alter my findings set out above.

Conclusion

27. For the above reasons and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that both appeals should be dismissed.

A James

INSPECTOR