



Appeal Decisions

Site Visit made on 19 April 2021

by J M Tweddle BSc(Hons) MSc(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 May 2021

Appeal A Ref: APP/T2350/W/20/3265341

Alston Hall, Alston Lane, Longridge PR3 3BP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Mr Salim Habib Patel against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- The application Ref 3/2020/0620, dated 28 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 23 September 2020.
- The development proposed is a rear single-storey replacement conservatory.

Appeal B Ref: APP/T2350/Y/20/3265348

Alston Hall, Alston Lane, Longridge PR3 3BP

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
- The appeal is made by Mr Salim Habib Patel against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- The application Ref 3/2020/0621, dated 28 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 22 September 2020.
- The works proposed are a rear single-storey replacement conservatory.

Decisions

Appeal A

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal B

2. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

3. The main issue, in relation to both appeals, is whether the proposal would preserve the Grade II listed building, Alston Hall, or any features of special interest that it possesses.

Reasons

Special interest and significance

4. Dating from 1874, Alston Hall is a Grade II listed country house designed by Alfred Darbyshire, in a Tudor-Gothic style, and is set within extensive gardens, occupying a commanding position within the Lancashire countryside. Its great lofty four-storey tower with porte-cochère at its base dominates the building, forming a visually striking architectural feature. The building's impressive scale, exceptionally fine architectural detailing and the spaciousness of its setting combine to accentuate its historical significance as the former home of successful colliery owners, the Mercer family, and later changing hands to the families of wealthy cotton industrialists.

5. In more recent years, the property was owned and run by Lancashire County Council as a residential training centre. In 2016 planning permission was granted for a change of use to allow the property to revert back to a private residence. It is currently undergoing extensive renovations.
6. The Grade II status of the building is in recognition of its special architectural and historic interest, designed by a prominent theatre architect and with exceptional design quality evident in its highly decorative elevations and interesting plan form, including its grand tower and quaint chapel.
7. The significance of the listed building, in so far as it relates to these appeals is primarily derived from its lively roofscape comprising multiple steep pitched roofs with slate bandings. Its steep sloping roofs, along with its tower, emphasise a strong sense of verticality in its design and appearance, and thereby drawing significant interest from its unique architectural character.

The appeal scheme

8. The appeal scheme would see the erection of a single-storey conservatory to the southwest-facing elevation of the hall and adjoining the chapel. The proposal is to reinstate a conservatory upon the existing footprint of where a conservatory once existed, utilising the original stone plinths of the former structure which are still in situ.
9. The proposal would comprise coursed sandstone with extensive areas of aluminium framed glazing and all under a flat fibreglass roof with roof lantern. Stone steps would provide access from the conservatory to the garden area.

The effect of the appeal scheme

10. Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require me to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest it possesses, and I have therefore considered the appeal scheme in light of this weighty statutory requirement.
11. The evidence indicates that there have been two former conservatories in situ along the southwest-facing elevation and in the same area where the current proposal seeks to erect a replacement. The original conservatory is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1892 and photographic evidence appears to show this as a refined and lightweight structure with a steep pitched roof, typical of the architectural style of the property. Photographs of its 20th century replacement show a lightweight structure of far less sophistication and with a shallow roof pitch that was significantly at odds with the host property. Consequently, it is clear why the list description singles out the 20th century conservatory as having no special architectural or historic interest. Indeed, the removal of this inappropriate structure has only served to enhance and better reveal the architectural and historic interest of the listed building.
12. The proposed conservatory would introduce a flat roofed structure that would be entirely at odds with the steep pitched roofs of the listed building. Contrary to the lightweight appearance of its predecessors, the proposed conservatory would appear as a rather heavy and squat addition to the building, diminishing its strong vertical emphasis and detracting from the character of the adjacent chapel. In this context, the conservatory would dominate the southwest-facing elevation of the property, thereby undermining the architectural integrity of this part of the listed building.

13. Moreover, the proposed flat fibreglass roof would be enclosed by a bulky turret arrangement that would only serve to emphasise its incongruity when viewed alongside the more refined character of the listed building with its traditional palette of materials. In these terms the appeal scheme would constitute a contemporary pastiche that would appear as a discordant contrast to the listed building and a clearly unsympathetic addition. As a consequence, the appeal proposal would result in clear harm to the heritage asset.
14. Taking all these points together, the proposal would fail to preserve the listed building and would harmfully detract from its special architectural and historic interest. In doing so, the proposal would fail to meet the statutory requirements set out above. For the same reasons, the proposal would conflict with Key Statement EN5 and Policies DME4 and DMG1 of the Core Strategy 2008-2028 A Local Plan for Ribble Valley (adopted 2014) and the associated provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Together these policies seek to achieve high standards of design and require proposals to conserve and where appropriate enhance the significance of heritage assets.

Public benefits

15. In accordance with paragraphs 195 and 196 of the Framework, it is for the decision maker, having identified harm to the designated heritage asset, to consider the magnitude of that harm. In this case, under the terms of the Framework, I consider the harm to be less than substantial given the extent of the proposal and its consequent effects.
16. Paragraph 196 of the Framework states that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. No public benefits are advanced in favour of the proposal. From the submitted material it appears to me that the proposal amounts to only private benefit for the appellant and their family.
17. The Framework is clear that great weight is to be given to the heritage asset's conservation. Consequently, in this case, the harm I have identified is not outweighed by any demonstrable public benefit and therefore the proposal clearly conflicts with the Framework's aim to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Conclusion

18. I have found that the appeal proposal would fail to preserve the listed building and its special interest, it would therefore not meet the relevant statutory requirements; fail to accord with the Framework; and, would conflict with the above-cited policies of the development plan. Moreover, with regard to Appeal A, no material considerations have been advanced of a sufficient weight to justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.
19. Consequently, for the reasons given, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that both Appeals A and B should be dismissed.

J M Tweddle

INSPECTOR