

APP/17/00863 & 00864 – Southleigh House, Emsworth

Principal Conservation Officer – comments

Background

House & Outbuildings

Southleigh Park House features the remains of an early 19th-century gentleman's estate. The main house, clock tower and lodge are Grade II listed. There is also a coach house, dairy and wall that are curtilage listed.

The estate was sold to the Plessey Company in 1969. A new entrance was cut from the Eastleigh Road, the kitchen gardens became a car park and a modern office block was built in the same area. In 1994 the estate, covering 15 acres, became the property of Snell & Wilcox and was developed into the headquarters of the business.

The site is now occupied by Snell Ltd and the main house overlooks what was the park, which includes several large oak trees, and is now grazing for Southleigh Farm.

Policy Context

Before proceeding to consider the policy context of the NPPF, it is of primary importance that the correct weight should be attributed to the desirability of preserving the setting of the listed building from the outset, in accordance with sections 16 & 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990:

“Section 16 requires local planning authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest when considering whether to grant listed building consent.”

“Section 66 requires local planning authorities when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”

The need for the decision taker to attach considerable or special weight to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings has been reinforced through two recent high court decisions of: Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited vs. East Northamptonshire District Council et al (2014); and North Norfolk District Council vs. DCLG and Mack (2014).

The above statute and its subsequent and consistent interpretation in recent high court decisions emphasises the need for the policies of the NPPF to be implemented whilst always having regard to the need to give special or greater weight to the preservation of the setting of a listed building.

Where the impact on the setting of a listed building has been assessed in accordance with paragraphs 128 to 132 of the Framework, and has been found to fall within the category of 'less than substantial harm' (i.e. paragraph 134), then it is still important that when considering the balance exercise, and therefore the public benefits of any such proposal, that from the outset this is consciously weighed in favour of the need to preserve the setting of the listed building.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets down the policies that the Council must take into account when determining planning applications. This supersedes PPS 5, however, English Heritage (web-site 23 April 2012) advises that the Practice Guide (HEPPG) remains a valid and Government endorsed document pending Government's review of guidance supporting national planning policy as set out in its response to the select Committee".

The NPPF sets out, in paragraph 17, the 12 core planning principles that local planning authorities should consider in making planning decisions. One of these core principles relates directly to conserving heritage assets, as follows

"Planning should conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations;"

Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy 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. It also goes on to state that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 133 provides guidance in relation to development proposals that cause 'substantial harm'. While, paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy states that where a development will lead to 'less than substantial harm' to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Paragraph 64 (Section 7 – Requiring Good Design) is also particularly relevant to this case in that development should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development that:

Protects and where appropriate enhances the borough's statutory and non statutory heritage designations by appropriately managing development in or adjacent to conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, archaeological sites, buildings of local historic or architectural interest.

Policy CP16 (1a) of the Core Strategy states Planning permission will be granted for development that is designed to a high standard, which helps to create places where people want to live, work and relax. All development should demonstrate that its design:

Identifies and responds positively to existing features of natural, historic or local character within or close to the proposed development site.

Policy DM20 of the Allocations Plan states that development proposals must conserve and enhance the historic assets of Havant.

Significance

The areas of particular historic significance are:

- The architectural detail of the house, clock tower, lodge, coach house and dairy
- The remnants of an original boundary wall to the north of the site.
- The southern aspect from the main house is particularly significant as it allows for appreciation and outlook on what would have been the former Parkland. The house was also built on the elevated position for views south towards the sea.
- Surrounding landscape and trees
- The main house's character is defined by its polite architecture, status and the large spacious rooms. In contrast the interior of the western wing has seen a series of changes and is comparatively plain.

In Heritage terms there are two aspects to the scheme.

1. The suitability of the conversion to residential and its resulting impact on the building's special architectural/historic interest.
2. The impact of the proposed development, in particular the new housing within the grounds, on the setting provided for the listed building.

Impact of conversion works

Main House and western wing

The conversion is well conceived. From my recent detailed inspection I am satisfied the main house can fairly readily be split into 13 units. The resulting changes to the exterior are minimal. The internal works are more radical in places – insertion of floors, new stud walls, replacement stairs etc. However, in the main, the proposals have been designed to fit the natural building grain. In general, where a conflict arises I am satisfied any loss of significance is limited, and more than outweighed by the benefit of bringing the building into full use and creating the environment for investment to secure its long term future.

Coach House and Clock House

Again the conversions are well conceived working with the grain of the buildings. Incongruous modern additions are to be removed from the buildings which will enhance their appearance. The extensions proposed to the Clock house in principle are acceptable. It will be down to the detail of the extensions that will determine their success. The re-

instatement of the courtyard appearance will enhance the appearance of the buildings and the main house. This can also provide some car parking which is necessary.

The Lodge and Wall

The Lodge is to be converted back into a single dwelling house. This is the best use for the building as it is what it was originally designed for. A small extension is proposed which will increase the accommodation. Subject to detail this appears to be entirely appropriate for the building. Some minor alterations are also proposed to the eastern elevation to provide more light. Again this is not something that would be contentious. The fine flint work and the proportions of the rooms are all to be maintained which is particularly positive.

Following suggestions it now appears that the original boundary wall to the north of the site is to be substantially retained. This includes the pier which would have formed the original entrance to the site. A small opening is to be formed in the wall but this is considered to be an acceptable compromise to allow entrance to the new apartment blocks.

New Housing Development in Grounds

The area of land where development is likely to have the least impact on the setting of the listed building is that to the north. While I have reservations about the amount of new development, the proposed location is basically correct in terms of limiting harm

The proposed new development is significant and will impact on the setting of Southleigh House. It is inevitable that the scale and number of the new buildings will make them a prominent feature within the site. However, this has to be balanced up with the fact that the current office buildings on site are incongruous features and that a number of dwellings are needed to make the refurbishment of the existing heritage assets viable. The applicant has also worked very hard to ensure the significant views to the south are maintained and a courtyard is re-instated to the north

In this particular instance it is therefore considered that the proposed development would not be detrimental to the architectural significance of the listed buildings or their setting. Although it is acknowledged that the setting of this building contributes to its significance, the new scheme allows for this setting to be substantially maintained.

Section 106

Due to the sensitivity of the site I believe a section 106 agreement should be considered to control the phasing of development. Without an agreement to phase the works (in favour of the listed building) I have concerns that the new residential units could be developed and listed building could be undeveloped and mothballed. As the conversion and refurbishment of the listed building is such an important consideration in terms of the principle of the development I would consider some control is required.

Design Code

Again due to the sensitivity of the site I believe a design code should be sought (either by condition on during this application). This would agree details of the built form of key character areas and hard and soft landscaping, in order to ensure a high quality design within the setting of a number of listed buildings. Please see below an example of a condition that could be used.

Prior to the submission of the reserved matters application, a Design Code document for the development shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The Design Code document shall substantially accord with the principles of the Design and Access Statement (**dated**) and shall include the following details;

- (a) Principles for the built form of key character areas within the Site to be informed by local character, having particular regard to:
 - (i) building form and depth,
 - (ii) roofscape, including ridge lines and pitches,
 - (iii) building heights (not to exceed two storeys in height),
 - (iv) building elements such as chimneys, eaves, openings (windows / doors) and porches,
 - (v) external materials,
 - (vi) boundary treatment, and
 - (vii) Parking principles (including cycle parking / storage).
- (b) Principles for hard and soft landscaping within the site

Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Design Code document.

Reason - To ensure a satisfactory design for the development, in the interests of the character and appearance of the area.