
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 January 2015

by Sukie Tamplin Dip TP Pg Dip Arch Cons IHBC MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 16 January 2015

Appeal Ref: APP/Z2260/E/14/2211779
27 Fort Crescent, Margate, Kent CT9 1HX

- 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 R Bahl against the decision of Thanet District Council.
 - The application Ref L/TH/13/0319, dated 21 April 2013, was refused by notice dated 11 July 2013.
 - The works proposed are hotel refurbishment.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matters

2. The works to upgrade the hotel accommodation to include en-suite bathrooms commenced but subsequently halted pending the outcome of this appeal.
3. The works that have been undertaken vary from the plans before me. But no amended plans have been submitted and I must therefore determine the appeal on the basis of the refused plans.
4. I have been supplied with 3 decision notices, variously date stamped but all with a determination date of 11 July 2013. The appellant disputes the date but for the purposes of my decision I consider there is no disadvantage to any party if I take the date at face value.

Main issue

5. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the internal works on the special interest of the listed building.

Significance

6. Margate is a long established seaside resort and much of the central core appears to date from the 19th century. 27 Fort Crescent, is a mid terrace Georgian town house built in about 1825-1830 and is listed at Grade II. The terrace is four storeys in height and also includes a lower ground or basement level. The shallow curved terrace including the appeal site has the elegance and symmetry characteristic of Georgian classical architecture and is prominently located opposite the sunken winter gardens and the sea front beyond. The terrace appears to be partly in use as holiday or hotel accommodation and partly residential.

7. The plan form of the building and general treatment of the interior appears to be typical of a building of this era, with a consistent hierarchy between the front and rear rooms and the main reception rooms on the lower floors at the front. The interior is relatively plain and there has been some loss of architectural features. But the main layout, stairwell, doors, some skirting and fireplaces are retained so that the symmetry and proportions of the rooms remain. Thus the significance of the interior is an example of a relatively unaltered modest town house built during the expansion of Margate as a seaside resort.

The proposals

8. The works propose the installation of en-suite facilities, upgrading fire resistance and general redecoration and refurbishment. There are no works proposed to the exterior.

Reasons

9. The appellant says that the building has fallen into some disrepair and needs to be upgraded so that it has a viable use as an hotel. Moreover there is a lack of toilet and bathroom facilities and this disadvantages ambulant disabled guests.
10. I agree that the building is falling into disrepair and the lack of private toilets is likely to be a disincentive to trade. In such circumstances the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) says that account should be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets and putting them to viable use consistent with their conservation¹. But the Framework also says that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
11. The essence of the original plan form remains, as is shown by the proportions of the bedrooms and the former reception rooms and the chimney breasts. In my view the bulk of the inserted bathrooms would be significantly harmful to those proportions. The en-suites would have an uncomfortable relationship with the chimney breasts, almost all of which survive, and conceal much of the alcoves to the sides of the chimney breasts. Because the en-suites would be disproportionately large they would be overly heavy and dominant leaving little if any of the original symmetry of the bedrooms and former reception rooms.
12. Although I accept the need for additional bathrooms the plans before me propose significant and harmful alterations to the proportions of the rooms so that the remnant of the rooms would be ill proportioned and cramped. In particular up to about 50% of the floor space of the smaller front single bedrooms would be partitioned to provide a private bathroom.
13. Part of the proposed works involves the insertion of fire doors so that there is a lobby between the staircase and the guest bedrooms. Whilst these lobbies may have been required for reasons of public safety, the plans provide scant detail of what is proposed. Moreover the extent of proposed change is unclear because the plans appear to be inaccurate. Whilst the principle of fire doors and lobbies may be acceptable there is inadequate information in order to assess the impact on the plan form.

¹ Paragraph 131: The National Planning Policy Framework

14. In such circumstances it seems to me that the appellant is seeking to accommodate too many guest rooms in this modest town house which would appear cramped and have a serious and harmful impact on its architectural interest. It may be that the as-built works would be less harmful than those shown on the plans but that is outside my jurisdiction.

Other matter

15. The appeal site is within Margate Conservation Area but because all the proposed works are to the interior there would be no impact on the character and appearance of the designated area or to the setting of the listed building.

Conclusions

16. The Council has no objection to the use of the building as a hotel and I see no reason to disagree. I also accept that the building is likely to fall into serious disrepair unless a viable future can be secured. But the extensive works shown on the plans would seriously harm its plan form and integrity and this is not consistent with the conservation of the building.

17. Although I have found harm, this is less than substantial harm² and this should be balanced against public benefits. I accept that an economic use of the building could bring added vitality to the town centre though because there are no external works proposed there would be little, if any, improvement to the public realm and the street scene in particular. Thus I only give the added vitality argument limited value so that it does not outweigh the harm to significance.

18. I have had regard to S16(2) of the PLBCA Act³ and find that the works would fail to preserve the building, and its features of special architectural and historic interest. Accordingly the appeal is dismissed.

Sukie Tamplin

INSPECTOR

² Paragraph 134: The National Planning Policy Framework

³ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990