
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 3 February 2014

by Frances Mahoney DipTP MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 6 February 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/E/13/2201137

Impington Village College, New Road, Impington, Cambridge CB24 9LX

- 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 Fran Difranco for Impington Village College against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
 - The application Ref S/1344/12/LB, dated 20 June 2012, was refused by notice dated 24 April 2013.
 - The works proposed are alterations to opening in projection gallery inside auditorium.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Reasons

2. The Impington Village College was designed in 1938 by Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus School of Architecture) and Maxwell Fry. It is the only Gropius building in the UK and is a listed building grade I. The school assembly hall is a particularly imposing element of the building with splayed walls, a rising roof, and a wide cantilevered canopy over the main entrance with a broad window above. The simplicity of its lines are enhanced by the gentle curving of the front façade and canopy. From the front it is the focal point of the building, unifying the single storey north wing, characterised by the repetition of the angular full glazed bay windows, with the two storey southern block where full length windows are a feature. The predominance of glazing, framed in fine metal surrounds, gives the school an open and light character and appearance. The school itself has been extended to accommodate modern day educational needs and expanding student numbers. Nonetheless, within the original school buildings many of the contributory design features prevail.
3. Within the assembly hall, the main artistic point of focus is the stage from which the auditorium fans outwards in shape. Sets of double doors and large framed areas of glazing symmetrically balance on each side of the assembly hall. At the back of the hall, at its widest point, is the gallery, cantilevered out above the main entrance. Even in the late 1930s the gallery would have been the technical hub of the auditorium, serving both productions on stage in respect of lighting as well as providing projection capabilities for films.
4. The gentle curves of the school building are reflected in the design of the cantilevered first floor brick wall of the gallery. It is faced with sound absorbing perforated hardboard (pinboard) in distinctly discernible quadrilateral

- cladding panels, painted white to finish. To accommodate lights and projectors, two pairs of differing sized square openings punctuate the gallery wall. Their framed surrounds stand proud of the hardboard cladding and these four openings draw the eye to the gallery alluding to a bygone age of film, whilst emphasising the 1930s origins of the building. There is evidence that there may have been black out infills to the gallery openings¹. Nonetheless, these would have been set back into the wall, maintaining the visual emphasis of the opening when viewed from within the hall.
5. The appeal proposes the removal of a central section of the gallery wall, including the original four square openings. In its place two removable wooden panels would be inserted which would continue the curving line of the gallery wall. These would be faced in the same pinboard as existing, with the square openings simulated on the panels by means of edge framing and black fabric backing. The panels would be removed when the gallery was in use which would expose a much wider functional area for the positioning and operation of lighting as well as sound and other technical equipment.
 6. The significance of this grade I listed building is, in part, its pedigree, and the quality and integrity of what is, in the main, a late 1930s exemplar of the modern movement. However, functionality is also an important part of significance. The building was designed as a school and, no doubt, over the years, thousands of students have benefited from the light airy surroundings the building creates, enhancing the learning environment.
 7. That notwithstanding, technology moves along. The school auditorium is used extensively for stage productions throughout the year. Dance, drama and music are important parts of the school life. The gallery in its present form presents significant limitations for technical support to productions and visibility out across the auditorium to the stage.
 8. The Council suggested the positioning of equipment above the gallery or mounted at floor level as possible options. The auditorium was designed in a traditional layout with the fanned space to accommodate an audience addressing the stage. The mounting of equipment behind the audience would reduce the space for seats as well as creating problems for equipment operators of being able to see the performance contributors. Above the gallery, equipment would interrupt the angular ceiling panel and would present particular problems of accessibility for operation and maintenance.
 9. When in place the division between the proposed panels and the existing facing pinboard would be visually absorbed by the distinct nature of the sectioning of the pinboard. The reflection of the curvature of the gallery wall in the panels' construction would also minimise any disruption in the simplicity and quality of this important integral and functional feature within the auditorium.
 10. However, it is the proposed sham openings, applied to the panels which would seriously diminish the significance of the gallery feature within the auditorium. Applied framing with black fabric backing would be nothing more than a poor pastiche of the original. It would lack the depth of relief of the existing openings and glimpses of the gallery beyond. Without the maintenance of the opening spaces the important linkage to the original design and purpose of the gallery would be lost. In this way, therefore, the appeal proposal would cause

¹ Set back grooved edges within the depth of the wall openings.

unacceptable harm which would not preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building. This would be contrary to Development Control Policies Policy CH/3, which seeks to maintain the intrinsic value of these heritage assets, following the thrust of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in this respect.

11. The public benefit of the appeal proposal would be to enhance the quality and range of performance opportunities for students and the community. However, whilst, the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, the harmful impact of the panels, as applied for, would be sufficient to outweigh the identified public benefit (paragraph 134 of the Framework).

Frances Mahoney

Inspector

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