
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 March 2016

by Philip Asquith MA(Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 22 April 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/P2935/Y/15/3139639

Newton Low Hall, Newton on the Moor, Morpeth, NE65 9LD

- 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 Graham Shields against the decision of Northumberland County Council.
 - The application Ref. 15/01098/LBC, dated 13 April 2015, was refused by notice dated 8 June 2015.
 - The works proposed are described as the installation of 16 solar panels to a roof within the curtilage of the listed Newton Low Hall.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. Newton Low Hall is a Grade II listed building. Although the application is as described above, the solar panels to which it relates are those on part of a range of outbuildings which are Grade II listed in their own right adjacent to the Hall. I have determined the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

3. In light of the above, the main issue in this case is whether the works preserve the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building and the setting of Newton Low Hall.

Reasons

4. Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works special regard should be had to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) notes at paragraph 131 that in the determination of applications account should be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.
 5. Newton Low Hall is a substantial stone and slate-roofed house dating from the late 18th century and with a late 19th century service wing. The northern section of the 'L'-shaped outbuildings, to which the solar panels have been installed for over four years, lies to the rear of the house helping to form a small enclosed
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courtyard. The outbuildings are also of the late 18th century and built of squared tooled stone with slated roofs, the northern section being of two storeys and having an attached rear lean-to addition with corrugated roof which the listing description indicates is not of interest. The other leg of the outbuildings is of similar construction but single-storey. I consider the architectural and historic interest of the outbuildings derive from their form, design, contemporary construction with the main house, and ancillary related functioning with it. The house and its outbuildings stand within open countryside set back to the eastern side of the A1.

6. The 16 rectangular solar panels are arranged in a single block on the south-facing roofslope of the outbuilding, set below the ridgeline, above the eaves and slightly inset from the stone watertabling at the gable ends. They occupy just under half of the roofslope. The array is fixed above the slate roof and there has been minimal alteration as a result of the installation to the interior of the outbuilding, which is used for stabling and storage. The natural slate roof remains evident as part of the traditional building and the attachment of the panels does not impinge on its basic form or function. However, although predominantly grey, the panels' lighter coloured framing and smooth and reflective surfacing, set proud of the matt natural slates, make them stand out as modern, incongruous additions which draw the eye, harmful to the historic character of the listed building on which they are sited.
7. I have noted the reference made to the English Heritage document '*Small scale solar electric (photovoltaic) energy and traditional buildings*' and advice that it is not generally considered sympathetic to a building's appearance to have equipment fixed to any of its main elevations i.e. the faces or faces seen from a principal viewpoint towards which it is mainly viewed. There is no doubt that the south-facing elevation of the outbuilding is its principal elevation. That said, because of the positioning of the outbuilding the array is only readily seen when within the rear service courtyard of Low Hall and is all but screened from other possible vantage points in its countryside setting. However, setting of a heritage asset is the surroundings in which the asset is experienced. Notwithstanding the well-screened location of the array, the close physical and functional relationship of the outbuilding to the principal house mean that, in my judgement, the panels also have a somewhat negative impact on the setting of the main house.
8. Overall, I consider the harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets arising from the array is less than substantial. Having regard to paragraph 134 of the Framework, where a proposal leads to less than substantial harm this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.
9. The appellant indicates that the array meets the requirements for heating hot water for the hall, reduces its carbon footprint and also contributes towards its financial stability. Whilst no further details of these benefits have been provided, the Council also acknowledges that the array makes a contribution, albeit small, towards reducing a wider reliance on fossil fuels. I have carefully considered these public and other benefits and I have also borne in mind that the life of the array is likely to be limited and that it is probable that it could be removed without significant damage to the existing fabric of the outbuilding.

10. Having regard to the duty imposed by Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 considerable importance and weight should be given to the preservation of historic assets. With this in mind, I do not consider that in this case the public and other benefits of the works outweigh the harm I have identified and, as a consequence, the appeal is dismissed.

P J Asquith

INSPECTOR