
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 18 February 2014

Site visit made on 18 February 2014

by Jane V Stiles BSc(Hons)Arch DipArch RIBA DipLA CMLI PhD MRTPI

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

Decision date: 20 March 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/E/13/2207654

Park Cottage, East Knoyle, Milton, Salisbury SP3 6BG

- 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 Mrs Noreen Cleal against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref S/2013/0255, dated 20 February 2013, was refused by notice dated 23 April 2013.
 - The works proposed are to re-thatch property replacing wheat reed thatch with water reed.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the re-thatching of the property replacing wheat reed thatch with water reed at Park Cottage, East Knoyle, Milton, Salisbury SP3 6BG in accordance with the terms of the application Ref S/2013/0255 dated 20 February 2013 and the plans submitted with it subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The works hereby authorised shall begin as soon as is practicable but, in any event, not later than one year from the date of this consent unless subsequently otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority;
 - 2) No works shall take place until samples of the water reed from a UK source to be used in the re-thatching hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved materials unless subsequently otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority;
 - 3) No works shall take place until a scheme to ensure (a) the closest practical match of the water reed approved under condition (2) to a combed wheat reed thatch finish and (b) the preservation of the existing under-straw basecoat, including where necessary the restoration of that basecoat to provide a sound and even base for re-thatching has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless subsequently otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority;
 - 4) No works shall take place until thatching details showing the proposed profiles of eaves, verges and ridges to be used in the re-thatching hereby approved have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local

planning authority. The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved materials and details unless subsequently otherwise approved in writing by the local planning authority;

- 5) This consent shall endure only for the life of the water reed thatch hereby approved that is installed above the under-straw basecoat. Any future re-thatching shall be the subject of a fresh application for Listed Building Consent.

Procedural matters

2. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) came into force on 6 March 2014. However, in this case, PPG has no bearing upon my decision.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed re-thatching on the special architectural and historic interest of the Grade II listed building and its setting. In the event that the proposal would cause harm, whether that harm would be substantial; and if so, whether there is clear and convincing justification for it.

Reasons

4. Park Cottage was known as the Old Bell Cottage at the time it was listed in Grade II on 9 September 1987 for its Group Value (GV). However, the Appellant says that it was previously known as Park Cottage and so she reverted to the earlier name. The property dates from the early 18th Century and it is constructed of English bond brick beneath a thatched roof with coped verges and gable end brick stacks.
5. Park Cottage is one of a significant cluster of 11 thatched buildings in Milton, and 39 in the wider Parish of East Knoyle, of which 16 are unlisted. It is one of the densest clusters of thatched buildings in South Wiltshire. Hence Park Cottage is important not only for its Group Value but also to the character and appearance of the East Knoyle and Milton Conservation Area. The Council says that there has been only one previous application to change the existing wheat reed thatch, which was refused. Accordingly, no precedent has been set for such a change.
6. The Appellant says that her wheat reed thatch was last replaced shortly after she bought the property in 1996, some 16 or 17 years ago. Prior to that it was re-thatched some 14 years before she bought it. The property known as Valley Farm House, directly opposite Park Cottage, was also re-thatched around 1996/97 but using water reed. The thatcher who attended the Hearing on behalf of the Appellant, said in his opinion the thatch on Valley Farm House would probably last another 15 years. In other words it would have a total life of about 30 years i.e. about twice the life of the Appellant's current wheat reed thatch.
7. Originally these relatively humble cottages would have been constructed from materials which were to hand and readily available. They would have been listed because they are relatively unaltered examples of a particular building type. There is no water reed tradition in South Wiltshire. I am therefore concerned that the proposed water reed would be likely to come from outside the county. Indeed, given that it is usually imported from mainland Europe, it

could potentially come from outside the country. Nevertheless, the Appellant was willing to accept a condition specifying that the water reed was sourced in the UK.

8. In part, the Appellant seeks to replace wheat reed thatch with water reed on the basis that there has been a poor harvest for wheat reed thatch. This has not only made wheat reed thatch more expensive than water reed thatch, but also it has resulted in an inferior grade of wheat reed which would result in poorer performance and in turn affect its longevity. The Appellant also points to the appeal property lying in a more exposed location where she believes that water reed would perform better.
9. There was strong disagreement between the Appellant (and her representatives) and English Heritage as to the current availability of good quality wheat reed. The Appellant believes that due to the current shortage, it is necessary to find a thatcher with their own supplier to obtain good quality wheat reed. English Heritage has checked its known suppliers and it believes there are sufficient supplies of good quality wheat reed available.
10. There is no dispute that visually water reed could be laid in such a way as to be virtually indistinguishable from wheat reed from the ground. Indeed, this was evident at my site visit when the current wheat reed thatching on Park Cottage could be compared to the current water reed thatching on Valley Farm House. Nevertheless, there would be a conflict with the special interest of Park Cottage for which it has been listed i.e. it is a relatively unaltered example of a cottage thatched using local materials.
11. I accept that the roof could be returned to wheat reed at some future date and therefore the change need not be a permanent one. The Appellant has offered to have a condition imposed requiring the roof to be returned to wheat reed the next time it is required to be re-thatched. In this way, she would have an opportunity to find out if water reed would perform better than wheat reed on her particular roof.
12. I am mindful that, if this appeal is allowed, it could set a precedent for other similar properties in the area, which would be hard to resist in the future. In turn, this could lead to a more permanent and widespread change in the material used for thatching in the area. However, first, by imposing a condition along the lines suggested, the change need not be permanent, but might simply reflect the history of the property and the historical availability of thatching materials. Secondly, the Appellant is also willing to retain the wheat reed understraw and replace only the spar coat in water reed. As such, some of the historic fabric could be retained. Thirdly, given that there would be no appreciable difference visually the proposed works would not result in works of an indifferent quality and could not be said to cause substantial harm to the Listed Building itself or to the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings.
13. There are a number of factors which might have affected the difference in performance between the roofs of Park Cottage and Valley Farm House, other than the material used for re-thatching:
 - Park Cottage stands on higher ground than Valley Farm House;
 - Park Cottage sits on a north-east to south-west axis while Valley Farm House stands just off a direct east-west axis;

- Park Cottage is surrounded by a number of tall trees and the lawn to the north-west side gets very mossy, while Valley Farm House stands in a more open location;
 - The quality of the workmanship, and/or the quality of the wheat reed used in the last re-thatching of Park Cottage may have been of an inferior quality. Indeed, there are a series of depressions running down the slope of the roof facing north-west which could point to inferior workmanship.
 - A poorly designed verge detail on Park Cottage may have been the source of water penetration.
14. English Heritage says that if the appeal site is more inclined to be damp than Valley Farm House, then wheat reed should perform better than water reed. Nevertheless, I am in no doubt that Park Cottage is in urgent need of re-thatching. I also consider the Appellant to be a good custodian of the building. Given that the last 2 times the property has been re-thatched, the wheat reed thatching has lasted for only 14-17 years, I can well understand why the Appellant is looking for a longer term solution. Whilst I cannot rule out poor workmanship, poor detiling, or inferior quality wheat reed in the past, or the various factors which might account for a difference in performance between Park Cottage and Valley Farm House, I can understand the reasons for the Appellant wishing to explore a different material which appears to have been successful on a neighbouring property. Furthermore, matters of detailing could be controlled by the imposition of conditions.
15. The Council acknowledged at the Hearing that the proposed change to water reed thatch would not result in substantial harm to the heritage asset; and that it would not harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Indeed, the Council acknowledged that the re-thatching would serve to enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area by virtue of the fact that the current roof is in a poor state of repair.
16. In these circumstances, I do not consider that the proposed re-thatching in water reed would cause substantial harm to the Listed Building or its setting, or to the setting of any other Listed Building within the Group within which it stands. I shall therefore allow the appeal subject to the conditions discussed at the Hearing and referred to in the foregoing.

Jane V Stiles

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Mrs Noreen Cleal	The Appellant
Mr Adam Cleal	The Appellant's husband
Mrs Marjorie Sanders	National Society of Master Thatchers
Mr Roger Angold	Consultant Master Thatcher

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Jocelyn Sage	Conservation Officer, Wiltshire Council
Adam Madge	Wiltshire Council
Alison Henry	Senior Architectural Conservator, English Heritage
Helen Garside	Principal Conservation Officer, Wiltshire Council
Andrew Minting	Conservation Officer, Wiltshire Council

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Rod Miller	Thatcher for 50 years
John Barker & Barbara Gibson	Thatched property owners

DOCUMENTS

- 1 Council's letter of notification of the Hearing
- 2 Advertisement printed from internet re: Scales Farms – growers of premium thatching straw
- 3 Appeal Decision APP/R3325/E/04/1148702
- 4 Appeal Decision APP/R3325/E/05/1180457
- 5 Appeal Decision APP/B9506/E/08/2092965
- 6 Appeal Decision APP/W0530/F/07/2061491
- 7 Appeal Decision APP/B1225/E/12/2187662
- 8 Appeal Decision APP/F1230/E/01/1062523
- 9 Appeal Decision APP/C1760/F/01/1057639
- 10 Listed Building Consent 08/00688/LBC to thatch the cottage in water reed straw at Rectory Cottage 22 Sherrington Wiltshire BA12 0SN
- 11 Extract from PLANNING PERMISSION: PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE
- 12 Appellant's Statement of Case & Appendices
- 13 Council's Statement
- 14 Appellant's notes of final statement.
- 15 E-mail setting out Appellant's suggested conditions.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 Black and white photograph of Milton, East Knoyle

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