
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 February 2015

by J J Evans BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 02/04/2015

Appeal Ref: APP/D0840/E/14/2218657

St Austell Railway Station, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 4LA

- 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 Miss Lydia Whitaker of Network Rail against the decision of Cornwall Council.
 - The application Ref PA13/08597, dated 19 September 2013, was refused by notice dated 13 November 2013.
 - The works proposed are the removal of the existing pedestrian footbridge.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The station and footbridge are grade II listed buildings that lie within the St Austell Conservation Area. As required by Sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 I have paid special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
3. The appellant's appeal submission included an assessment report of the footbridge that did not form part of the planning application. As this document was submitted with the appeal, the parties have had an opportunity to consider its content and comment. Thus I do not consider any party would be significantly prejudiced by my consideration of the appeal on this basis.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the removal of the footbridge would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II listed station, and linked to that, the effect on the character and appearance of the St Austell Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. St Austell Railway Station and bus station are positioned together on a hillside within the St Austell Conservation Area. These uses and the activity they generate give a busy and bustling character to the area, and form an historic visual and locational focal point within it. The railway station comprises a single storey building on the northern side of the platform that is linked by a

- roof canopy to the covered footbridge. To the southern side of the railway line is a modern station building that has replaced the listed downside building.
6. The footbridge forms a decorative building within the station complex that is clearly visible within the surrounding area. Its embellished iron columns, roofed lattice braced span and extensive ornamented detailing, including the GWR logo and 1882 date, forms an eye catching feature within the area. The footbridge and the remaining waiting room building are an example of the distinctive GWR company style. These buildings and the contribution of the railway to the town's historic development are important elements of the special interest and significance of the footbridge and the station.
 7. The proposed removal of the footbridge would result in the loss of an attractive and functional element of the station that would leave the remaining waiting room as an isolated building. Although one of the listed waiting rooms has been demolished to make way for a replacement, the footbridge and the remaining building form a distinct and ornate historic contrast to the modern utilitarian appearance of the new buildings. The appellant considers these new buildings have altered the significance of the heritage asset and that the historic station is not from one original era. Whilst there have been alterations over time to the station, there is a distinct demarcation between the new and the old. The loss of the footbridge would devalue and erode the special interest and significance of the station, leaving the remaining waiting room isolated.
 8. The appellant has referred to there being similar footbridges in the country. Be that as it may, I share the concerns of English Heritage that there are few of these bridges remaining both within Cornwall and in the country as a whole. Furthermore, it would remove a focal feature that would neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. Whilst the appellant would store the footbridge until it could be re-erected, its installation elsewhere would not outweigh the harm that would occur through removing the listed building from its functional and locational context.
 9. At the time of my visit the footbridge was gated to prevent public use. I accept it needs to be repaired, and that the new bridge was needed to provide access for all. Nevertheless, the new bridge is some distance from the listed one, and the historic footbridge would provide another means of crossing the railway line. Moreover, the recommendation of the appellant's structural assessment is for repair and maintenance.
 10. Great weight has to be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and the loss of a grade II listed building should be an exceptional circumstance. Where removal is proposed, the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires clear and convincing justification. In this instance, the removal of the footbridge has not been supported with convincing justification. Its loss would substantially harm the listed station, and due to its size relative to that of the conservation area, it would be less than substantial harm to this heritage asset. Whilst the appellant considers that public benefit would accrue from not having to fund the repair and maintenance of the footbridge, this would not be the substantial public benefit that would be required to outweigh the harm to the listed station nor outweigh the less than substantial harm to the conservation area.

11. The Council have drawn my attention to Policy 33 of the Restormel Borough Local Plan (2001). There is no statutory requirement to have regard to the provisions of the development plan in listed building and conservation area cases, but I have taken the Council's policy as a material consideration in this appeal. Although it has not been determinative in my decision, the proposal would conflict with this policy as it seeks, amongst other things, that development protects and enhances heritage assets, reflecting an objective of the Framework.

Conclusion

12. The removal of the footbridge would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed station, and its loss would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The detrimental impacts of the removal of the bridge would not be outweighed by any other considerations. For the reasons given above and having considered all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

J J Evans

INSPECTOR