
Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 24 April 2014

Site visit made on 24 April 2014

by Joanna Reid BA(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA

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

Decision date: 5 June 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/J0405/E/14/2213476

Mulberry Cottage, 25 Spring Lane, Great Horwood, Buckinghamshire MK17 0QP

- 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 Philip Morris against the decision of Aylesbury Vale District Council.
 - The application Ref 13/02570/ALB, dated 16 September 2013, was refused by notice dated 12 December 2013.
 - The works proposed are "complete re-thatch (see attached letter from Neil Painting, master thatcher and re-submission document) raising LH chimney to necessary height."
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. At the Hearing an application for costs was made by Mr Philip Morris against Aylesbury Vale District Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Main issue

3. From my inspection of the site and its surroundings, and from the representations made at the hearing and in writing, I consider that the main issue in this appeal is whether the proposed works would preserve the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building or any features of special interest which it possesses.

Reasons

4. The listed building, Mulberry Cottage, was listed in Grade II as 25 Spring Lane on 29 May 1984. The traditional form and materials of the long straw thatched roofed and timber-framed 1½-storey mainly C17 and C18 dwelling are important to the special architectural interest of the listed building, and to its significance as a heritage asset. It is located within the village of Great Horwood which has mediaeval origins, but following fires that destroyed buildings in the late C18, the centre of the village is mainly characterised by brick buildings dating from then. Even so, scattered around the village core are a number of thatched timber-framed buildings which date from the earlier period. The appeal building is one of 3 such listed buildings which are loosely grouped in Spring Lane.

5. Due to its scale, form, materials, alignment and detailing, the long straw thatched roof of the listed building is one of its most important features, which it is desirable to preserve. It contributes positively to the significance of the heritage asset as a historic building which was built using traditional local materials and traditional methods.
6. The list description refers to the thatched roof, but its purpose is principally to aid identification, so the lack of a reference to the type of thatch does not imply that it is not of significance. There are other thatched buildings in the village, but the listed building is the only one still thatched in long straw. So it is rare in the village, as well as in the wider District and in the county. This makes its long straw thatched roof all the more important to preserve.
7. The appellant's adviser's view is that the entire roof was re-timbered and replaced in the 1980s when a 2-storey extension was said to have been added, that the existing roof is only about 40 years old, and that it has little significance. However, from the Council's representations, and from what I saw at my visit, there was little evidence of a late C20 2-storey extension. The oldest part of the listed building may well include historic fabric including pole rafters and thatch layers from about the C17 which are significant because of their age and materials. Even if the thatch is later, due to its evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal values, great weight should be attached to the conservation of the existing long straw thatched roof.
8. Although the listed building is described as being 'at risk', and some thatch has slipped, the view that the walls would be put out of balance was not supported by structural engineering evidence. Moreover, the listed building is in use as a dwelling, and there were no tarpaulins which might indicate leaks in the roof. Some gulleys were pointed out in the roughly south-facing roof slope, but the appellant's thatching adviser considered that the roughly north-facing slope, which has already lasted about 18 years with a minor repair at the north-west end, could last another 3 to 5 years. This would give about 21 to 23 years life to that roof slope, despite what was described as not very good labour, which reflects quite well on the longevity of the present long straw thatch.
9. The works are described as a complete re-thatch, but the design and access statement says that the works include the replacement of a spar coat of the mixed and jumbled long straw style of thatch with a mixed heads and butts cereal straw spar coat in the long straw style. The reasons given for the change in the method of thatching were to reduce the amount of straw required and to increase the longevity of the thatch.
10. *PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* says that following the type and form of thatch traditional to the region will sustain the building's significance. Thus, justification will be needed for changes from one type of thatch to another. The English Heritage publication *Thatch and thatching: a guidance note* describes 3 main types of thatch; water reed, combed wheat reed, and long straw. It says that local authorities should control the loss of thatch, when a change of material or style is suggested, by listed building consent. The onus should be on the applicant to explain the need for change. The *Aylesbury Vale District Council Advisory Guide Thatching* (SPG) explains that listed building consent will normally be required for a change of material between combed wheat reed and long straw, and for a change of thatching method between any of the identified styles.

11. There was no suggestion that water reed would be used. Long straw and combed wheat reed, the other 2 main types of thatch, are prepared from the same raw material, but they are processed in different ways. Long straw and combed wheat reed differ in their preparation, laying, function, and finished appearance. The appellant's statement says that the thatching material would not be combed wheat. If long straw were proposed there would be no need for listed building consent.
12. There was much discussion at the hearing about the precise nature of the proposed thatching material. It transpired that the roof would be recoated using uncombed cereal straw, laid dry, with heads and butts showing on the surface. The material would have some of the characteristics of combed wheat reed because it would retain much of the tubular nature of wheat or other cereal reeds, but it would not be dressed into place with a leggat. Because it would not be threshed material that is shaken into a layered bed, carefully wetted and allowed to steep (which makes the material pliable), and it would not be drawn from the bed and formed into yealms, it would not be long straw. Thus, the thatch would be a hybrid style, but not the hybrid thatch identified in the SPG. In other words, it would be a reed straw thatch made to look like long straw.
13. English Heritage and the Conservation of Traditional Thatch Group say that because most of the waste products of combed wheat reed are discarded before delivery, and most of the waste products of long straw are discarded after delivery, broadly the same sized square of wheat (or other cereal crop) is grown for each type of thatching. Whilst the proposed thatching style would be somewhere between combed wheat reed and long straw, there was little evidence that it would make better use of available thatching straw supplies.
14. The appellant's adviser's view was that because the thatching material would not be crushed, natural decay would occur at a slower rate than in long straw, so the spar coat should last longer. However, little evidence was put to me to support that view, and little weight can be attached to the performance of various thatched roofs in museum conditions where most of the buildings are exhibits that have been removed from their original sites. As the performance of thatch would be affected by the quality of the thatching material, the skill of the thatcher, and the site specific circumstances, it is difficult to draw comparisons between one type of thatch and another. So, there is insufficient evidence to show that the proposed spar coat would outlast long straw.
15. It was argued that as the spar coat of thatch is repaired and replaced relatively frequently compared with other building materials it is not a permanent feature, so there would be no loss of historic fabric. However, the spar coat protects the more historic thatch layers below it, and the repair of the roof in the same way over many years contributes positively to its cultural value and special interest. Because the proposed thatch would not be the genuine article, the authenticity and integrity of the asset, and thus its significance would be unacceptably eroded. Moreover, as the evidence shows that there is no shortage of skills and materials to provide a long straw spar coat, insufficient clear and convincing reasons were put to me to justify the proposed change.
16. The alterations to the eaves, including those of the roughly south-facing roof slope and the half hip, may be necessary, amongst other things, to achieve an appropriate pitch for the spar coat. However, as there is little clarity and detail

- on the plans, and there is potential for the loss of historic fabric, this part of the scheme has not been adequately assessed or properly justified.
17. The increase to the height of the chimney could be acceptable, subject to necessary approvals under other legislation. However, it would be necessary for construction details, and any works to prevent heat transfer into the thatch, to be controlled by conditions, to allow archaeological investigation and recording, and to preserve the special interest of the listed building, if listed building consent were to be granted.
 18. My colleague explained in his appeal decisions ref APP/W0530/F/07/2061491 and APP/W0530/E/07/2058504 that he would only deal with the reasons for refusal which related to the main ridge and the dormer ridges, and relevant national and local policies. He also explained that although the s20 and s39 ground (e) appeals appear to be different that they amounted to the same thing. As the heads and butts long straw style thatch was not a matter before him, his appeal decisions do not provide support for the proposal in this appeal.
 19. Changes in thatching material were allowed in my colleagues' appeal decisions ref APP/B1225/E/12/2187662 and APP/Y3940/E/13/2207654. However, both dealt with changes from wheat reed to water reed on buildings in other parts of the country, in response to their own particular circumstances. So, they are not relevant to the proposal before me which I have dealt with on its merits and in accordance with its site specific circumstances, the statutory duty and relevant national and local policy and guidance.
 20. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. For the reasons given above, the proposed works to the listed building would cause great harm to the significance of the heritage asset, but in the terms of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (Framework) that harm would be less than substantial. The listed building is already in optimum viable use as a dwelling so that does not weigh in favour, and insufficient public benefits were put to me to outweigh that harm. Moreover, whilst the need for the repair and maintenance of the thatch is understood, and the works to the chimney could reduce the risk of fire, insufficient clear and convincing justification has been put to me to explain why the proposed works would be necessary to preserve the heritage asset.
 21. I consider that the proposal would fail to preserve the special architectural interest of the listed building and its long straw thatched roof which is a feature of special interest. It would also be contrary to the Framework which aims for heritage assets to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations, and contrary to the advice in the SPG. This is a compelling objection to the scheme, which is sufficient to dismiss the appeal.

Conservation Area

22. The listed building, along with much of the village, is within the Great Horwood Conservation Area, which is also a designated heritage asset, but it was not a concern of the Council in its reason for refusal. The listed building makes a positive contribution to the attractive semi-rural appearance close by in the Conservation Area. Because it is the only long straw thatched building in the village it is important to the historic character of the Conservation Area, which it is desirable to preserve. As there would be little visible difference between

the proposed works and long straw thatch, the works would, at least initially, preserve the appearance of the Conservation Area. However, as the authenticity and integrity of the long straw thatched roof, which contributes positively to the significance of, and which is important to the special architectural interest of, the listed building would be harmfully diminished, and insufficient public benefits have been put to me to outweigh that harm, the proposal would fail to preserve the character of the Conservation Area. It would be contrary to the Framework, and to the advice in the SPG.

Conclusion

23. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal fails.

Joanna Reid

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Philip Morris	Appellant
Marjorie Sanders MPhil CBIol MSBIol Churchill Fellow	Managing director, Pyxis CSB Ltd
Kit Davis	Master thatcher, chairman of the Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Master Thatchers' Association, and past chairman of the National Society of Master Thatchers Ltd
Neil Painting	Appellant's master thatcher

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Becky Jarratt	Planning officer, Aylesbury Vale District Council
Anne Davies BA MSc DipTP MSc(Hist Cons) RTPI IHBC	Historic buildings officer, Aylesbury Vale District Council
Alison Henry	Senior architectural conservator, Building conservation and research team, English Heritage
Keith Quantrill	Master thatcher for about 40 years, and independent thatching consultant
John Letts BSc MSc FLS	Scientist, botanist, archaeologist, and founding member of the Conservation of Traditional Thatch Group

DOCUMENTS PUT IN AT THE HEARING

- 1 The photographs submitted with the application for listed building consent, put in by the appellant.
- 2 The Council's Appendix AD1, *Great Horwood Conservation Area* conservation area appraisal, put in by the Council.
- 3 Appeal decisions ref APP/W0530/F/07/2061491 and APP/W0530/E/07/2058504, APP/B1225/E/12/2187662 and APP/Y3940/E/13/2207654, put in by the appellant.
- 4 Appeal decision ref APP/B9506/E/08/2092965, put in by Ms Henry.
- 5 Appeal decision ref APP/W0530/E/05/1176368 and associated information, put in by Ms Henry.
- 6 Survey of Thatch Roofs: Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, March/April 2014, preliminary results dated 23 April 2014, put in by the Council.
- 7 Three photographs of thatched roofs, put in by the appellant.
- 8 The Council's suggested conditions.