



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 September 2017

by **H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC**

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

Decision date: 25 October 2017

Appeal Ref: **APP/J9497/Y/17/3177128** **'Dymonds', Dunsford, Devon EX6 7DA**

- 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 Amanda Drake against the decision of Dartmoor National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref 0547/16, dated 22 May 2016, was refused by notice dated 5 December 2016.
 - The works proposed are to change the thatching material from wheat reed to water reed. To add a decorative ridge on the property such as illustration No. 2.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is whether the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building known as Dymonds (listed as 'Cottage adjoining Dymond Cottage at east including adjoining wall to the south', List entry Number: 1214827) or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses; and whether the proposed works would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Dunsford Settlement Conservation Area.

Reasons

3. Dymonds is situated in the heart of the historic and picturesque settlement of Dunsford, within the Dartmoor National Park. The building is a thatched cottage, attached to Dymond Cottage, with its frontage addressing Bridge Street, the main thoroughfare through the village. The style and materials used at Dymonds are common to many historic cottages in Dunsford, with modest proportions, local materials and simply detailed thatched roofs.
4. The list description for Dymonds includes the section of thatched wall that extends along the boundary with Briton Street Lane. It also specifically identifies the group value of the cottages fronting the south side of Bridge Street as being of special architectural interest as an entity. Some of the key attributes of the building's special interest and significance therefore lie in its age, consistency and authenticity of material treatment, which contribute to a strong local vernacular appearance. Due to its location at the centre of the village, the appeal site also makes a valuable contribution to the historic character and thus the heritage significance of the Dunsford Settlement Conservation Area (the Conservation Area).

5. The works proposed include replacement of the main body of the existing combed wheat reed (CWR) thatched roof at Dymonds with a water reed alternative. The appellant accepts that the use of water reed thatch is not traditional to the area, and there is no dispute that, since the time of its listing at least, Dymonds has had a CWR thatched roof.
6. It is obvious that the thatch at Dymonds is in poor condition and requires replacement. It may well be the case that numerous properties in the vicinity have water reed thatch, although the listed status of these is unclear. Irrespective of other cases where water reed has been used, the use of water reed at Dymonds would introduce a non-traditional material, which would undermine the consistency of materials that are intrinsic to the history of the building itself. The appellant indicates that eventually all of the thatch at Dymonds would be water reed, excepting the attached listed wall, which could never have a water reed covering owing to the reed's inflexibility. If the appeal were allowed then there would be two types of thatch product on the one listed building, which would introduce a material inconsistency that would not be an appropriate contribution to the building's evolution.
7. Moreover, while to the untrained eye, water reed may not look obviously different to CWR, it is evident from the Statement of Significance that to the eye of a professional thatcher it is possible to differentiate between the two. It is also clear that the appeal site is one of the few remaining properties in Dunsford that still have CWR. Allowing the increased proliferation of water reed would therefore harmfully contribute to the decline in a traditional, authentic material. Beyond the apparent impression that the proposed material offers an imitation of the appearance of traditional CWR, its use in this case would be no more than a superficial replica of the authentic product. This would be harmful to both the special interest and significance of the listed building, as well as to the historic integrity of Dunsford and thereby to the character of the Conservation Area. It follows therefore that the use of water reed at the appeal property would fail to preserve either the special interest and significance of the listed building, and the character of the Conservation Area.
8. Dymonds currently has a wrap-over ridge detail, decorated with a simple pattern, which sits close to the main coat work of the thatch. This detail matches that of the attached wall and is consistent with the majority of thatched properties in Dunsford. The proposed works would introduce a decorative ridge, with a depth of 7cm and either a straight or scalloped edge with a pattern of intermittent peaks. The proposed ridge detail would stand out as atypical in the context of the simpler, flush ridges, of other properties, including the attached neighbour, Dymonds Cottage. There would also be an obvious disparity between the ridge of the attached thatched wall and the main body of the cottage. The proposed changes to the ridge would therefore add further to a material inconsistency at Dymonds, causing additional harm to the building and wider Conservation Area.
9. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires great weight to be given to the conservation of a heritage asset when considering the impact of a proposal. It confirms that, as I have found in this case, significance can be harmed by alterations to a heritage asset. Given the scope of the proposed works I would qualify that the degree of harm to the special interest and significance of the listed building and the Conservation Area would be less than substantial. In these circumstances, the less than substantial harm should be

weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing the optimum viable use of the building.

10. The proposal would represent an investment into the building's fabric, mitigation of water ingress, and a positive contribution to its preservation in the longer-term. However, while the appellant attests to the greater weather resistance and longevity of water reed, there is no demonstrable evidence that this would be the case. It seems to me therefore that the sensitive replacement of the thatched roof and the benefits of fabric and water resistance would be achievable without deviation from the use of CWR and a simple ridge detail. Even if water reed did last longer than CWR, and would be a cheaper alternative, a reduction in material upkeep and cost for the appellant would not justify the harm that would occur.
11. The appellant has provided photographs that appear to show some variation in the ridge detail at Dymonds and nearby cottages. Irrespective of the extent of decoration there might have been in the past, the photographs show that the majority of thatched buildings in Dunsford use the simpler wrap-over ridge with minimal decoration. That successive owners of Dymonds have sought to preserve the material integrity of the building, that styles evolve, and a simpler ridge detail could be reintroduced in the future, do not justify making changes to the building that would fail to preserve its significance and special interest, and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. I therefore do not find there are wider public benefits sufficient to outweigh the harm to the designated heritage assets.

Conclusion

12. The works would fail to preserve the listed building, and its features of special architectural interest, contrary to the clear expectations in Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). I have also found that the character and appearance of the Conservation Area would not be preserved. The appeal proposal therefore also conflicts with the provisions made under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). There would also be a conflict with Policies COR1, COR3, COR4 and COR5 of the Dartmoor National Park Authority Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan document 2006 – 2026, June 2008 and with Policies DMD1b, DMD7 and DMD8 of the Dartmoor National Park Authority Development Management and Delivery Development Plan Document, July 2013. Amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure development conserves or enhances important historic features, has regard to vernacular and other historic buildings, uses external materials appropriate to the local environment and maintains the character, appearance, integrity and local distinctiveness that contribute to the special qualities and settings of the historic built environment are conserved and enhanced.
13. Though the overall harm to the designated heritage assets would be less than substantial, public benefits do not outweigh the considerable importance and weight I must afford it. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

H Porter

INSPECTOR