The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 23 February 2021

by A Blicq BSc(Hons) MA CMLI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 02 March 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/B3438/D/20/3264744
Former Lask Edge Methodist Church, Cowallmoor Lane, Leek ST13 8QL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Down to Earth Design Ltd against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- The application Ref SMD/2020/0143, dated 12 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 29 September 2020.
- The development proposed is Upper floor extension to the existing single storey rear extension, a ground floor single storey extension is proposed and insertion of window to the master bedroom.

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for Upper floor extension to the existing single storey rear extension, a ground floor single storey extension is proposed and insertion of window to the master bedroom. at Former Lask Edge Methodist Church, Cowallmoor Lane, Leek ST13 8QL in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SMD/2020/0143, dated 12 March 2020, subject to the following conditions:

    1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.

    2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings: Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)01; Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)02; Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)03; Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)04; Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)06A; Dwg. No. 20-019_AS(0)07A.

    3) The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match those used on the existing building.

    4) Prior to the building of the northern extension or works to the roof, details of rooflights and any other glazing and replacement windows shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council has referred to the former church as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). Planning Practice Guidance states that NDHAs can be identified through a number of processes *including local and neighbourhood plan making processes and conservation area appraisals and reviews.* It goes on to state that *clear and up to date information should be made accessible to the public by plan-making bodies to provide greater clarity and certainty for developers*

and decision-makers. There is nothing before me to indicate that the former church has been so designated through a plan-making process. Although I appreciate that the church might have the attributes to make it a candidate for such designation, I conclude that it has not been designated as such to date.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Character and appearance

4. The 19th century former Methodist church is situated in a rural location, on elevated and open ground and at a road junction. It is a modest squat structure with a dual pitched tiled roof, a single storey pitched roof extension on its northern elevation and a small pitched roof porch above the entrance door on the southern elevation. The walls are rock-faced coursed gritstone.

5. Extant permission allows a change of use and conversion to a three-bedroomed dwelling with an open plan living and kitchen area, together with an additional study and utility room. There would be an outdoor amenity area that includes a parking area and a small grassed graveyard.

6. The proposals would raise the existing the eaves and the ridge of the northern extension by around 2 metres and add a further northern extension with a full-height glazed panel on the gable. The extensions would be sympathetic to the underlying typology and use of facing stonework, and the basic structure and form of the original church would be retained. Original window openings would also be retained and the only additional fenestration would be the glazed wall and rooflights. I appreciate that the church's overall scale would be altered but I am satisfied that it would retain its rather austere distinctiveness, and its visual and historic contribution to the locality.

7. I conclude that the development would not have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, it would not conflict with Policy DC1 of the Local Plan (LP) which requires development to be well-designed and reinforce local distinctiveness, amongst other considerations. It would also accord with section 5 of the SPD which requires extensions to harmonise with the parent building and which states that conversions should respect and retain the original building and its setting.

8. LP Policy DC2 is concerned with heritage assets. As set out above there is nothing before me to indicate that the church has been locally listed and consequently this policy weighs neither for nor against the appeal.

9. The Council has cited the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in its decision. This is broadly supportive of the other policies cited.

Other matters

10. I appreciate that the conversion was permitted on the grounds that the church's original external envelope would not be altered[1]. However, retaining only the original openings would lead to a dwelling that was remote from its

[1] Officer's report SMD/2018/0316

outdoor amenity area and had poor internal light conditions. Whilst I am satisfied that alterations could have been made to address these concerns without further extensions, it is also the case that I am satisfied that what is proposed would not be harmful to the character or appearance of the area.

11. The officer's report states that the development would over-dominate the original building. However, this seems at odds with the conclusion with regard to its Green Belt location, that the extensions would not be a disproportionate addition as set out in Paragraph 145 of the Framework. As the Council has not found harm in relation to the Green Belt arising from the scale of the proposals, there seems to be some inconsistency in the report. Although a disproportionate extension might not necessarily dominate a building, using the normal meaning of the words I would expect an extension that dominated a building to be disproportionate. In any case, although the development constitutes a significant addition, I am satisfied that in this context it is not disproportionate.

12. The conversion will benefit the area through retaining and upgrading a building with local distinction and association, as well as providing the benefit of an additional dwelling. Even if I had concluded that there would be some adverse effect arising from the development the harm would be localised and would be outweighed by the aforementioned benefits.

Conditions

13. I have imposed the standard conditions regarding the commencement of development and the listing of approved drawings for the avoidance of doubt. Although some materials are listed on the drawings I have also imposed a condition regarding the use of materials on external surfaces to ensure continuity, and to safeguard the character and appearance of the area.

14. The information regarding glazing is limited. The three arched windows on the eastern elevation appear to be leaded with coloured glass. This elevation is very visible from the road and is integral to the church's former use. As such I have imposed a condition to ensure the Council retains control over the details of rooflights and other windows or glazing, also in order to safeguard the character and appearance of the area.

Conclusion

15. In the light of the above I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

A Blicq

INSPECTOR