
Penderfyniad ar yr Apêl

Ymweliad â safle a wnaed ar 15/08/16

gan Aidan McCooey BA MSc MRTPI

Arolygydd a benodir gan Weinidogion Cymru

Dyddiad: 26.09.16

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15/08/16

by Aidan McCooey BA MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Welsh Ministers

Date: 26.09.16

Appeal Ref: APP/H6955/E/16/3149423 (Appeal A)

Site address: Former Baptist Chapel, Holt, Wrexham, LL13 9DJ

The Welsh Ministers have transferred the authority to decide this appeal to me as the appointed Inspector.

- 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 Bellis Brothers Country Market against the decision of Wrexham County Borough Council.
 - The application Ref P/2015/0749, dated 10 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The works proposed are conversion of former Baptist church into one residential unit.
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Appeal Ref: APP/H6955/A/16/3149339 (Appeal B)

Site address: Former Baptist Chapel, Holt, Wrexham, LL13 9DJ

The Welsh Ministers have transferred the authority to decide this appeal to me as the appointed Inspector.

- 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 Bellis Brothers Country Market against the decision of Wrexham County Borough Council.
 - The application Ref P/2015/0750, dated 9 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 3 March 2016.
 - The development proposed is conversion of former Baptist church into one self-contained residential unit. Part of the works is to remove the existing internal balcony, form one new window opening in the rear wall and re-roofing the rear extension in welsh blue slate.
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Decisions

1. The appeals are dismissed and listed building consent and planning permission are refused.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed alterations on the character and historic interest of the listed building and the potential for the proposed development to affect protected species.
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Reasons

3. The former chapel is situated in the centre of Holt in a predominantly residential area. The curtilage is quite small with a courtyard to the rear. It is surrounded by dwellings. The building has a rectangular form with a small single storey projection to the rear into the courtyard.
4. Sections 16 (2) and 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. The most relevant planning policy is Policy EC9 of the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan (UDP).
5. The principle of conversion of the chapel returning it to beneficial use was welcomed by the Council, Cadw and neighbouring residents. The building presents a poor appearance, being empty and boarded up, and is on the Council's list of buildings at risk. It is the detailed design of the scheme in terms of the internal layout and features that causes concern.
6. The chapel dates from 1827 and has a very simple rectangular form with the central main entrance leading to chapel as the focus. It is described in the listing as a simple classical 2 storey, red brick in Flemish bond with a slate roof. The doorway has an open pedimented hood and there are stone plaques under the gable apexes. The interior is quite plain with the following features of interest remaining: a balcony over the main door supported by iron pillars, a fireplace in a single storey part of the building to the rear, some decorative plasterwork and original paintwork (with inscriptions).
7. The proposal involves removal of the balcony and the insertion of a much larger mezzanine floor to both ends of the building to create three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The existing balcony and the iron pillars would be lost. A new stairs would be created in the middle of the building leading to a landing area. There would be a substantial void over the proposed lounge. This would shift the focus of the building from the centre to the left hand side. This whole scale alteration of the building and loss of the traditional focus is the Council's and Cadw's main concern. This would be an alien arrangement and severely damaging to the character of the listed building.
8. I do not consider that the claimed new focus on the fireplace compensates for the detrimental effects identified. Similarly, the benefits of the extra accommodation created by the large mezzanine floorspace do not outweigh the harm caused to the interior of the listed building by its introduction.
9. The use of dry lining to the walls would be detrimental to the internal features and the building's ability to breathe. I appreciate the design and materials used would prevent water getting to the inside of the wall and the fact that the exterior has been repaired and re-pointed. However, whilst the use of dry-lining may be accepted on its own in certain instances, Cadw expresses concern that in combination with the other historic fabric issues, it would be unacceptable. I agree with this conclusion.
10. The agent indicated that the integrity of the windows could not be assessed until the boarding is removed. If the window frames are in a reasonable condition then they will be re-used. I consider that this is fair comment and that an acceptable solution could have been required by conditions so as to address the concerns raised.

11. The scale of the proposed mezzanine floor, the loss of the original balcony and the loss of detailing as a result of the proposed dry-lining means that the remaining special features of the listed building would be lost. This would be contrary to the statutory and policy tests as outlined above. The proposals are therefore unacceptable in terms of the first main issue.

Potential Effect on Protected Species

12. No survey of the building has been undertaken to check for the presence of protected species. A particular concern would be if bats were roosting in the building. Any potential effect on protected species must be investigated before planning permission or other consents are granted. The agent was not informed of this requirement at the application stage, which is regrettable. However, he is aware of the requirement now and has not commissioned a species survey. Whilst I note that Natural Resources Wales had no objection to the proposal, the absence of this survey means that the proposal would be contrary to Planning Policy Wales and TAN 5.

Other Matters

13. Residents to the rear raised the issue of overlooking of their kitchen and rear garden from the proposed bedroom and bathroom on the proposed upper floor. The Council's case officer report considered that the degree of overlooking would not be significant because of the nature of the rooms and the high sill level of the windows. I agree with this assessment for the reasons given. The impact of on-street parking was assessed and considered to be acceptable. The external alterations to the listed buildings would be minimal and so the character and appearance of Holt Conservation Area would be preserved and the statutory and policy tests would be satisfied in regard to the impact of the proposal on the Conservation Area.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above and having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that the proposed development does not comply with the statutory tests in Sections 16 (2) and 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy EC9 of the UDP. I have taken into account the benefits of the proposal and the other evidence in support of the proposal. These considerations do not outweigh the harm that has been identified and I therefore dismiss the appeals.

A L McCooey

Inspector