

Cedar Lodge, North Side, Steeple Aston
19/02465/LB
Creation of a jib door and associated stair

Understanding the heritage assets affected

Cedar Lodge is a mid 18th century house of substantial size which is listed grade II. It lies within the Steeple Aston Conservation Area.

Significance

The listed building description is for identification purposes only (as was usual at the date of listing in 1988) and does not give an indication of significance.

The building is of mid 18th century date with some later extensions and alterations.

The initial heritage report for the site provides a basic description of the building 'The north (front elevation to the house) whilst imposing is relatively plain, in comparison to what appears to be a more refined and architectural south (garden elevation). The main range is 'double pile' with a central valley and gable ends, the west service range is single span, hipped and with a slate roof.'

The heritage report suggests there a range of elements of significance including

- Physical evidence of building that has evolved from its early 18th century origins and provides understanding of its development and the gentrification of the village from the 19th century.
- It exhibits evidence of several phases of change, reflecting the needs and aspirations of new occupiers and shows how the demands of contemporary society are reflected in the building's fabric and setting.
- Its history as a large detached house and its ownership by wealthy landowners contributes to understanding of the social and economic structure of the village and the impact of the wealthy middle and upper classes.
- The 'chapters' in the building's history have resulted in a change to the house, adding interest but sometimes losing part of the history and earlier evidence. Changes to the building's setting also contribute to its historical interest with evidence of the amalgamation of the closes to create the extensive garden setting.

The Heritage Report also provides a conjectural summary of the changing role of the service wing. The report indicates that the loft area would not have been used as accommodation with servants instead being housed in the service wing of the building. The report also states that guests and members of the family would also have used this same area. 'Census information indicates that there are usually about 3 or 4 family members and 3 or 4 servants at any one time. Two of the servants (the Groom and the Gardener) very possibly lived in ancillary accommodation to the house, leaving just two servants occupying the service range. This means that there were likely only 2 or 3 servants needing accommodation in the service range and 3 or 4 members of the family plus guests needing 'main' accommodation. As there are only 2 principal bedrooms for the heads of the household and their guests, at least one more 'main' room is required for the children'

Proposals

The proposal is to create a door between one of the principal bedrooms in the main house into a small room within the service wing to create a dressing room and study.

Planning history

There is an extensive planning history on the site in recent years dating back to pre-application advice given in 2018.

The applications of relevance here are

19/00703/LB – jib door – refused

19/01411/LB – application for number of items including ensuite bathroom to other side of bedroom

19/01647/LB - jib door – withdrawn

The planning reason for refusal was

That the proposed breach through between the original farmhouse and the later service wing would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset through the erosion of the distinction between the principal and service accommodation. In the absence of identified public benefit to outweigh the less than substantial harm, the proposal is contrary to Policy ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 and saved Policy C18 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

A subsequent application (19/01647/LB) was submitted with the applicants concerned that the reasons for refusal were wrong as the historical development of the building had been misunderstood (in both the original heritage report and the subsequent Conservation Officer comments).

A new version of the Heritage Impact Statement was produced which stated 'The SAVA Report (2013) concludes that what is now the service wing as a former farmhouse dating from pre1767 and only became absorbed as part of the service wing once 'The Lodge' was constructed around 1767-1780 to become a small Country Residence. It was subsequently extended in the 19th century. The extent of survival of the earlier building is thought to be limited. Physical examination of the fabric tends to confirm the view that there is very little of the earlier building left'. It should be noted that I have not reviewed the SAVA report myself as it is anticipated that all relevant information should be contained within the Heritage Report.

It was recommended that on the basis of this information an alternative form of wording should be used for the refusal of the application and the following was suggested.

'That the proposed breach through between the physically and functionally distinct areas of the building would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset through the erosion of the distinction between the differing functional areas of the building. In the absence of identified public benefit to outweigh the less than substantial harm.....

The application was however withdrawn and no decision notice was issued.

The current application has been submitted with another Heritage Report (dated October 2019) and a revised understanding of the building.

The report provides a very useful phasing plan, but does not fully address the issue of the blocked window which is located on the gable end wall of the principal house which was revealed during opening up works to the ceiling in the 'service wing' of the building. It is unlikely that a window would have been inserted into the wall if there was an existing building in that location. There is mention of a service yard in the new report, but it is unclear if this refers to the area in question.

Assessment of issues

Regardless of the specific phasing and development of the building the following fundamental issues remain.

- The fundamental issue is that the proposed development breaches through two physically and functionally distinct areas of the building which causes harm to an understanding of the evolution of the plan form of the building. Regardless of the precise historic evolution of the building the internal character of the 'service wing' is different to that of the principal property which is reflected in the change of levels, lower ceiling heights, relative size of rooms etc.
- The Heritage Report refers to the room which is the subject of this application as 'A former small box room, typical of a servant's bedroom has been extended when a small lean-to was added over a ground floor bay window'. The proposal to alter the function of this room to an ancillary dressing room by linking these two spaces creates a 'false history' for the building reflecting a property of historically higher status with a series of ancillary rooms more reminiscent of grand country houses rather than the smaller country home of local 'gentleman' status that Cedar Lodge represents.
- It was initially thought that the only historic fabric to be lost was the walling in the gable end, however the return visit to the site revealed that it would also involve the loss of part of the lath and plaster ceiling (which had already been taken down without consent) and ceiling joists in the service wing in order to allow for headroom above the stairs between the two phases of the building.
- It is understood that the listed buildings need to adapt and change and a number of alterations to the building have been permitted in recent listed building and planning consents (19/00531/F and 19/00532/LB; 19/01124/F). In particular listed building consent (19/01411/LB) has been granted for an ensuite leading off the same bedroom in a more

suitable area (which was identified in the Heritage Report as having potentially once formed a shared dressing room).

- The changes proposed in this application are considered to cause harm to the significance of this area of the building. An alternative solution for an ensuite for this bedroom has been agreed upon and granted listed building consent. There are therefore no public benefits and the purely private benefits of the particular preferences of the current owners are not considered to outweigh the harm caused.

- The proposed development is recommended for refusal.

Recommend

Refuse

Jenny Ballinger, 26th November 2019