

11/12/0005

MR J BOULTON

REPLACEMENT OF ENTRANCE GATES, ERECTION OF RAILINGS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF STONE WALL AT THE OLD MANOR HOUSE, COMBE FLOREY (RETENTION OF WORKS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN)

Grid Reference: 315347.131224

Full Planning Permission

RECOMMENDATION AND REASON(S)

Recommended Decision: Refusal

- 1 The metal railings and gates, by reason of their design, are considered to be at odds with the character of the listed building and are therefore detrimental to its setting and detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area, contrary to Policy S1 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan, DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, the duties outlined at Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and advice contained in Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Statement.

RECOMMENDED CONDITION(S) (if applicable)

Notes for compliance

PROPOSAL

This application retrospectively seeks full planning permission for the erection of a new wall, railings and gates at the entrance of the Old Manor House, Combe Florey. The stone wall is approximately 1.2m high with curved top metal railings on top, between posts approximately 2.2m high. The double gates, 5.4m wide have a timber panel lower half, to the height of the wall, and metal railings on top.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The site is situated adjacent to the main road running through the village of Combe Florey. The property is a Grade II* Listed Building and comprises two storeys in red sandstone random rubble with roughcast facade and a slate roof. The entrance to the property is via a wide entrance leading to an enclosed courtyard.

Prior to the construction of the new boundary wall and entrance gates, the road boundary was formed by a mix of a wall and hedge. To the east of the entrance

gates was a hedge, to the west, the hedge above a stone wall. It can be seen that this original part of the wall is still in existence below new stone work that has raised the height. The previous entrance gates were a pair of 5 bar entrance gates.

Planning and listed building consent applications were submitted earlier in the year for these works and subsequently withdrawn. There have been no other applications at this site. On 23rd February 2012, planning and listed building Enforcement Notices were served requiring the unauthorised wall, railings and gates to be removed. An appeal has subsequently been lodged against the notices and a decision is pending.

CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION RESPONSES

Consultees

COMBE FLOREY PARISH COUNCIL – The existing wall had become unstable and has been rebuilt to a high standard enhancing the appearance of the village.

SCC - TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT GROUP – The works represent no increase in vehicle movements and the occupancy of the site will remain the same. It is noted that the access gates lack the required specification to which the Highway Authority seek (a minimum of 5.0m set back from the public highway). However, given that the proposal is a like for like replacement, it would be unreasonable for the Highway Authority to raise an objection.

HERITAGE - The exterior of the building is simple vernacular, with a wealth of historic internal fixtures and fittings, including panelling, plasterwork, plank and muntin screens etc. In other words the richness of the interior is belied by the relatively plain exterior.

Prior to the new wall, gates and railings being constructed, there was a low stone wall, with a hedge on the top, which were fitting/ suitable features, reinforcing the rural character of the village and street scene. The ornate design of the railings and gates, are more characteristic of an urban environment than a rural location and provides a very different setting to the house, than previously existed. As such the works are considered to be detrimental to the setting of this important building

ENGLISH HERITAGE – Whilst we understand the owner's need to secure his boundary, we do not consider that the design of the railings and gate with which he has done so to be appropriate to the setting of a rural vernacular building. We see no reason why either the wall could not have been built up further or the pre-existing hedge retained to fulfil that function.

Representations

29 letters of SUPPORT or stating NO OBJECTION (9 from outside Combe Florey) have been received, raising the following issues:

- A wonderful job has been done erecting the new wall, gates and railings. They look superb and the craftsmanship is beautiful.

- Previously there was a dead/dying hedge and crumbling wall. The new wall and railings are a significant improvement.
- It is in keeping with that age of the house and the vista of the beautiful Somerset village.
- The previous gates were manual and cars had to wait on the highway whilst they were opened, which was dangerous and held up the traffic. There have been a number of near misses from cars speeding down the hill. The new gates are electronic.
- The previous wall was unsafe and could have collapsed into the highway. The application is, therefore, supported on safety grounds.
- The previous wall did not provide good security for the dogs.
- The gates, wall and railings add gravitas to the house and the start of the village.

1 letter of OBJECTION has been received raising the following issues:

- The railings have replaced a hedge. They are curved with too many finials and out of keeping adornments.
- It is too high, and rather fortress like.
- It is more suitable in the Home Counties, but not a country village.

PLANNING POLICIES

EN14 - TDBCLP - Conservation Areas,
 EN12 - TDBCLP - Landscape Character Areas,
 S5 - TDBCLP - North Curry Settlement Limits,
 S1 - TDBCLP - General Requirements,
 S2 - TDBCLP - Design,
 DM1 - TD CORE STRATEGY - GENERAL REQUIREMENTS,
 NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework,

DETERMINING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The main consideration in determination of this application is the impact of the wall on the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that the Local Planning Authority ensures that the listed building, its setting and any features of historic or architectural interest that it possesses are preserved when deciding whether to grant planning permission. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special regard is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.

As noted above, The Old Manor House is listed Grade II*. It is, therefore, a highly significant and important heritage asset. The conservation officer has clearly articulated how the exterior of the building is relatively simple and of typical local vernacular, whilst the interior contains a wealth of historic internal fixtures and fittings. This relationship between the exterior and interior is part of what makes the building so special.

Prior to the new wall, gates and railings being constructed, there was a low stone wall, with a hedge on top, which were fitting/suitable features, reinforcing the rural

character of the village and street scene. The ornate design of the railings and gates, are more characteristic of an urban environment than a rural location and provide a very different setting to the house, than previously existed.

Given the relatively plain and simple exterior, the previous rural boundary treatment was entirely fitting to the character of the building. To use the words in one of the representations, the new gates and wall give the building and entrance to the village more gravitas – a status not deserved by the relatively modest simple facade. The advice of English Heritage is also clear in this matter and as ultimate custodians of the historic environment, their comments should be attributed substantial weight.

Paragraph 137 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably. The applicant has suggested that this is complied with as the removal of the hedge and replacement with a wall and railings makes it more visible. However, it is considered that the previous boundary treatment (which has not been preserved) made a positive contribution to the setting whereas the new frontage is at odds with the character of the house.

The applicant has also suggested that the new enclosure delivers better security and better enclosure for their dogs, which would allow the heritage asset to be maintained in a viable use for the long term. It is true, that the security may be improved, but it is not considered that this should be at the expense of the setting of the listed building and other security measures may be available. Similarly, the alleged instability of the old wall does not give reason to replace it with something else. There may also be gains to highway safety from an automated access gate in this location, but it is not accepted that a more sympathetic automated gate could not be provided.

For the reasons given above, the new wall, railings and gates are considered to be inappropriate and unjustified. Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework suggests that proposals that cause harm to a listed building or its setting should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. There are no public benefits apparent in this instance. As such the works are considered to be detrimental to the setting of this important building and by extension the character and appearance of the conservation area. They are, therefore, contrary to Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policy 9 of the Somerset and Exmoor national park Joint Structure Plan Review.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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