

Planning Advisory Group: report to Walberswick Parish Council

DC/21/0487/FUL

2 Anchor Cottages, The Street, Walberswick. Suffolk, IP18 6UA

DEMOLITIONS, ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS.

15/02/2021

1. Opinion

In the opinion of the Planning Advisory Group this application would cause harm to the Conservation Area and a non-designated heritage asset and should be **refused**.

2. Description

The property is one of a pair of late 18th century cottages which occupy a highly visible location in the Conservation Area, opposite the Anchor Hotel. The properties project forward of The Terrace (located to the East) and can be seen both at close and long distance and over low garden walls; a feature which characterises this part of The Street.

The Conservation Area Appraisal describes No.1 and No.2 Anchor Cottages as “unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution” to the Conservation Area.

This complex application consists of:

1. partial removal of a side hedge and construction of a 1.8 metre tall Willow fence;
2. re-landscaping the rear garden;
3. demolition of an existing two storey rear extension and construction of an enlarged 2 storey rear extension with side dormer;
4. demolition of an existing single storey rear extension and construction of an enlarged single storey rear extension.
5. alteration of the floor levels in the original cottage and removal of the original staircase.

The two adjoined cottages were originally modest dwellings consistent with the character of the surrounding area. Historically, minor rear extensions were added but these remained secondary to the main form of the cottages.

In 2017 the adjoining property submitted an application to substantially extend the rear of the property (DC/17/0800/FUL) with a 2 storey development and a single storey extension protruding from the side of the original cottage.

The Parish Council cited several conflicts with the Local Plan and requested the application be referred to the Planning Committee of the District Council. The application was subsequently approved.

The resultant extensions have engulfed that cottage, to the point where the original building is no longer visually dominant. The foot print is approximately 6 times the size of the original cottage. This alteration occurred at one of the focal points of the Village and the full impact is visible from views along The Street.

3. Policy background

Four policies from the Local Plan are particularly relevant here; Policy SCLP 11.1 (Design Quality), Policy SCLP 5.7 (Infill and Garden Development) and Policy SCLP 11.5 (Conservation Areas), Policy SCLP 11.6 Non Designated Heritage Assets

SCLP 11.1 Design Quality

Clause b), states that proposals should understand the character of the built, historic, and natural environment and use this understanding to complement local character.

Clause c) i, states that the overall scale and character should clearly demonstrate consideration of its surroundings.

Clause c) iii, states that the height and massing of developments should relate to their surroundings.

Clause c) iv, states that proposals should demonstrate a clear relationship between buildings and spaces and the wider street scene or townscape.

SCLP 5.7 Infill and Garden Development.

Clause a), states that the scale, design and materials should not result in harm to the street scene or character of the area.

Clause b), states that proposals should relate in scale and design to adjacent properties

Policy SCLP 11.5 Conservation Areas

Clause c), states that proposals should be of an appropriate design, scale, form and height, massing and position.

Policy SCLP 11.6 Non Designated Heritage Assets

Clause a) and b), states the need to protect such assets, whilst technically feasible and economical viable and to fully investigate these issues.

The Walberswick Conservation Area Appraisal (2013) states:

“There is also a greater established rhythm to the building stock in this part of the village than anywhere else, due primarily to the groups of terraces and semi-detached cottages, all of which confirm very loosely to the same overall form”.

This overall form would be severely and detrimentally affected by the proposal.

4. Comment

The application seeks to copy the development of 1 Anchor Cottages, obviously relying on the approval previously granted by the Local Authority.

The Applicant states that it is a mirror image of this application. However, variations do exist. The Application under consideration would be substantially more visible and have a greater impact on the street scene. This visibility would be heightened by the partial removal of mature hedges enclosing the side boundary of the property. Furthermore, this proposal would compound the harm already incurred.

No 2 Anchor Cottage is a modest, but important, late 18th century property which makes a positive contribution to the overall appearance The Street. It is located at the very hub of the Village and the proposed alterations would have a significant impact on Walberswick, for residents and visitors alike.

The proposal seeks to engulf the cottage with extensions totalling approximately 6 times the footprint of the original building. Policy demands that alteration should enhance the building, not engulf it to the point where the original form is eroded.

The removal of an 18th century winder staircase, rising from ground floor to the attic is not felt to be acceptable. Historic joinery contributes to the significance and character of a property, and the Heritage Statement makes no attempt to assess its significance nor discusses the impact removal would have, and therefore this has not been justified. The same is true of the ground floor, which is to be excavated to increase headroom. No assessment is made of the floor covering to be removed, and therefore impact and significance is unknown. The inconvenient reality is that winder staircases and relatively low ceilings are characters of modest vernacular structures and contribute to their special quality and importance.

Access to the site is highly restricted and construction traffic could potentially obstruct this part of the village and disturb other users of the shared access track.

Forming part of this application is a drawing showing an existing garden room. It is not clear what this room is currently used for or whether any use change is proposed. However, it is felt that the proposed sizeable two storey and single storey additions to the house, alongside the existing garden room and separate cart lodge to the north of the site represent over-development.

5.0 Conclusion

The proposed works do not satisfy SCLP policy in that they are harmful and unsympathetic to the Conservation Area

Nor do they comply with the Conservation Area Appraisal which specifically describes this area as having an established rhythm of similar building stock.

The proposal would erode the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, and it would degrade the setting of other non-designated heritage assets in close proximity.

The accumulative impact of the proposal, and the additions to the neighbouring property, would have an over-powering effect on what was, until fairly recently, a modest and relatively unaltered pair of vernacular cottages.

References to the adjoining approved application is not conclusive. Differences exist between the two applications and a new local plan has been adopted in the intervening period.