

Planning Advisory Group: report to Walberswick Parish Council

**DC/24/0415/FUL and DC/24/0416/LBC**

**Box Bush, Seven Acres Lane, Walberswick, Suffolk, IP18 6UL**

*“New dormer window, alterations to fenestration and internal layout, general repairs to existing fabric and insulation on external walls and roof”.*

**01.03.24**

---

## **1. Opinion**

In the opinion of the PAG this application proposes significant external and internal change to a designated heritage asset, which would fail to preserve or enhance the significance of the asset, and should be **refused**.

## **2. Description**

Box Bush was designated as Grade II listed during August 2023.

The house is a detached property designed by the acclaimed architect Frank Jennings who worked extensively in Walberswick and left the village with some of its best architectural legacies. Box Bush was built c1938 using a reclaimed timber frame, windows and historic internal joinery.

The submission for planning and listed building consent proposes the following work:

- New large dormer window to the north (entrance) elevation
- Alteration of roof to form an open porch to the north elevation
- Removal of render to all elevations
- Insulation of timber frame (increasing wall thickness by 60mm)
- Re-rendering with lime
- Repair of chimneystacks
- Ridge height raised by approximately 100mm
- Repositioning of all windows and external doors to suit new external wall thickness
- Alteration of bay window to provide French doors to south elevation
- New door in place of a window to the south elevation
- Application of brick slips to existing brick plinth to accommodate off-set of new render
- Removal of modern conservatory to the south elevation
- Changes to the original plan form to the ground floor, first floor and attic, including loss of partition walls and lowering of part of the attic floor to create a bathroom

Prior to listing a similar (but less comprehensive) scheme of alterations was submitted to ESC (DC/23/2257/FUL). This application was withdrawn after the house was listed.

The property is located within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## **3. Comment**

The listing description report prepared by Historic England states: *“It (Box Bush) is particularly well-preserved both internally and externally”*, and it is clear that the preservation of fabric and plan form contributes significantly to the property meeting national listing criteria.

The removal of the modern conservatory to the south elevation is welcomed.

The need for improved thermal performance is understood, but such intervention must be weighed against any harm this could cause to the asset (see p16 *Historic England: Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating Timber-Framed Walls*). Externally applied insulation requires the removal of existing render (and any laths) and results in an increase of the external wall thickness – in this case an increase of approximately 60mm. This means eaves projections are reduced, all doors, windows and door surrounds need to be removed and repositioned (to maintain a flush relationship with the render) and an increased overhang where the render meets the plinth (resolved here by the proposed use of applied brick slips). All downpipes would also need to be refixed.

The effect of re-rendering, combined with re-roofing, raising the ridge height (due to insulating between and on top of the existing rafters), a large new dormer and the extension of the roof (to provide an open porch) is considered to effectively be a rebuilding the external envelope, which is not considered to accord with paragraphs 205-8 of the NPPF where “*great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation*” (para 205).

The application states that the existing render is cementitious, with the inference being this is not original. As lime can be mixed to a whole spectrum of strengths and breathability analysis of the render should be completed to determine its composition. Box Bush is in an exposed location and the use of cementitious render on properties of this date is not uncommon. As the house is 85 years old and has received little repair or maintenance for several decades, the likelihood of lime render having been applied, failing and to have been replaced with cementitious render in a short period of time seems highly unlikely. It is therefore necessary to understand exactly what exists, its originality and significance, before removal can be justified.

The impact of the large dormer and proposed roof extension (to the north elevation) has been commented on in a previous report (DC/23/2257/FUL) and it remains our view that these interventions to the entrance façade are excessive and would erode the character and quality of the original design. The Heritage Impact Statement suggests (p6) that the stair was possibly originally in a different location – if it were (and could be returned without loss of fabric and significance) the need for the dormer is removed. The insertion of a dormer would require a section of purlin (part of the historic re-used timber frame) to be removed.

The extended roof / porch roof would dilute the impact of the original door and surround (obscuring the top of the door surround from view – see proposed north elevation) and would put the door and surround in shadow as well as effecting considerable change to an elevation which exists as originally designed.

French windows are proposed to the south elevation within an existing bay window. This bay (with its current configuration of windows) is shown on the original architect’s drawings (usefully provided within the Heritage Impact Statement). The alteration of this feature, and the associated loss of fabric, has not been justified by the application and therefore is not supported. The room the French doors would serve currently has a side door which, as originally designed, lead to an open Loggia; reinstatement of the loggia (currently enclosed and serving the conservatory) would benefit the property and leave the existing bay window as originally designed.

The Heritage Impact Statement identifies work / fabric dating from 1938 as “insignificant” yet this is first phase construction and comprises part of the original design and plan form by Jennings. The original drawings show that the floor plans exist largely as Jennings designed, and this forms part of the special quality of the property. Therefore, the number of walls proposed to be removed would erode the significance of the accommodation and this work is not supported.

It is not clear from the existing and proposed elevations whether the front door is proposed to be changed (the proposed depiction differs from what is shown on the existing elevation). However, the “*moulded door surround containing a four panel door with applied vertical panelling to the exterior*” is specifically mentioned in the listing description and should be retained.

#### **4. Summary**

The proposal fails to accord with the NPPF 205 to 208. The application also does not satisfy the following sections from the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, policy 11.4 (Listed Buildings), which states:

*Proposals to alter, extend or change the use of a listed building (including curtilage listed structures) or development affecting its setting will be supported where they:*

- a) Demonstrate a clear understanding of the significance of the building and its setting alongside an assessment of the potential impact of the proposal on that significance;*
- b) Do not harm the character of the building or any architectural, artistic, historic, or archaeological features that contribute towards its special interest;*
- c) Are of an appropriate design, scale, form, height, massing and position which complement the existing building;*
- d) Use high quality materials and methods of construction which complement the character of the building;*
- e) Retain the historic internal layout of the building; and*
- f) Remove existing features that detract from the building to enhance or better reveal its significance.*

The accumulative effect of the proposed external and internal work represents significant change to a designated heritage asset, and the lack of clarity regarding the age and significance of some of the fabric to be altered, or removed, means there is a danger of harm being caused to the special interest of the listed building.

Finally, the online application details highlight that ESC have not consulted the National Amenity Societies (NAM), specifically The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and The Twentieth Century Society – this is a requirement where applications propose “relevant works” comprising the demolition or partial demolition of a listed building, including:

*“a) a proposal to retain less than 50 per cent of the surface area of that part of a principal building represented on any elevation (ascertained by external measurement on a vertical plane, including the vertical plane of any roof) is treated as a proposal for the demolition of a principal external wall;*

*(b) a proposal to demolish any principal internal element of the structure including any staircase, load-bearing wall, floor structure or roof structure is treated as a proposal for the demolition of a substantial part of the interior”*

***At the time of writing (01.03.24) the Design & Conservation Officer comments uploaded on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 are dated 27/07/23 and relate the previous withdrawn scheme.***