

WALSHAM HALL – MENDHAM - SUFFOLK

Conservation Statement in support of the planning and Listed building application relating to the erection of a single story rear extension and lobby entrance.

Application numbers DC/18/02014 and DC/18/02015

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I am a retired member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).
- 1.2 I have been asked by the applicant Steven Hadingham and his architect “Peter Codling Architects” to examine and comment upon the statements made by the District Council’s Heritage and Design Officer as part of the Local Authority’s Consultation Response.
- 1.3 I have had extensive experience both as a planning officer and conservation officer for several local authorities over a period of 55 years. My last post before retiring in 2010 was as the Heritage and Landscape Manager for Norfolk County Council managing a specialist team of ten officers dealing with both historic landscapes and listed buildings.
- 1.4 Also I was the Regional Chairman of the East Anglian branch of the IHBC for 6 years and the national treasurer for 10 years.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 Three generations of the applicant’s family have lived at Walsham Hall farming the land close by and they are acutely aware of this family connection with the Hall which they love and appreciate. The main farmhouse, which is listed Grade II, appears originally to have been a C16th timber framed manor house but has seen many accretions over the centuries as circumstances have

changed and the needs of the families living there have also changed. This is not surprising in an historic building approximately 450 years old.

- 2.2 These changes are all part of the history of the property and are where a lot of the interest lies when examining and studying historic buildings such as Walsham Hall.
- 2.3 Unfortunately some of those changes; particularly the C20th alterations which included the re-facing of the front of the house with modern brickwork, the extensive application of hard cement renders and the insertion of some modern windows and doors are not necessarily in keeping. These works however, were largely carried out before the house was listed in 1955.
- 2.4 Today the Hall still retains much of its original historic fabric including a superb Jacobean staircase and plenty of the original oak frame and floor beams are still retained and visible internally.
- 2.5 As this is very much a working family home, whose owners appreciate its important historic qualities, they are keen that any new work should be sympathetic to that character.
- 2.6 So when they decided they needed a decent sized lobby entrance and toilet at the rear of the property (its working side) they commissioned an architectural practice who are very experienced dealing with historic buildings and designing new work in sympathy with the character of such buildings.
- 2.7 Currently the rear elevation is very plain with a painted render finish to the main house walls and a small modern timber door which gives access directly into the house from the farmyard. There is also a small lean to extension built in the 1940's adjacent to the large chimney stack with a small window above.
- 2.8 The design that is now the subject of this planning application has been designed to encompass that small extension with a new toilet and sink unit and link it to a new larger entrance lobby which will have a roof of sufficient pitch to accommodate plain clay tiles.
- 2.9 Next to the new extension is a random brick and flint wall, probably C18th, which screens the side elevation of the extension although the pitched tiled roof is visible when viewed from the farmyard to the north and east.
- 2.10 The architects have designed the extension very carefully and its height and scale do not compete with the main house and nor will it be visible when viewed from the front entrance drive or the road which runs parallel with the frontage.

3.0 Arguments against the proposal

- 3.1 The Heritage Team's main concerns seem to revolve around two main issues firstly *scale* and secondly the *visual impact* the extension might have on the heritage significance of the Hall itself and also to a group of farm buildings some distance away to the northwest. Although situated within the curtilage of Walsham Hall they are not listed buildings and the current proposal does not compromise them in any way.
- 3.2 Scale is an often misunderstood concept. It is a term that is commonly used about the height or size of a design. Whereas scale should be about the relative proportions between one thing and another. Often we talk about a design being of human scale as opposed to something designed on a grand or monumental scale. The importance here being that the former relates directly to human beings. True the monumental scale may be large, even very large, but if it fits into its surroundings then it may well be in scale with that setting.
- 3.3 There are several definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). The one I think is relevant in this case is "*represented in measurements that are in proportion to the size of the original*".
- 3.4 In this case I think that the proposed extension is definitely in scale, not only with those who will use it, but also with the main hall itself. The fact that the roof is visible above the adjacent wall is nothing to do with scale and to my view the notion that it would be unduly dominant when seen against the rear elevations of Walsham Hall is ludicrous.
- 3.5 The other factor, which I find baffling, is the idea that such a small extension at the rear of this large grand hall could possibly compete architecturally with the front elevation? The Heritage Team say that it "*would negatively impact the significance of the listed building by disordering (a word not in the OED) the hierarchy of the asset*".
- 3.6 Not only is this expression clumsy and meaningless but it is made even more difficult to understand by further commentary viz "*.....the front elevation of Walsham Hall was designed to be the most important façade, so a dominant porch on the rear elevation would disrupt the hierarchy and therefore the significance of the listed building*".
- 3.7 Whilst I agree with the notion that the front façade of a building is often its most visually significant feature and is most likely to be designed to a higher standard than other parts of the building, whether it be architectural detailing, better facing or roofing materials and such like; the idea that a small extension at the rear would "disorder the hierarchy" is a most unlikely scenario.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The legislation relating to planning and listed buildings is still mainly contained within the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act. Sections 16 and 66 are specifically referred to by the Heritage Team in their response. These sections are there to help a Local Planning Authority (LPA) come to the right decision on an application that affects a listed building and outlines the general duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of their planning function.
- 4.2 There is also further guidance and advice available in Historic England Publications as well as the National Planning Policy Framework. In essence all this advice urges local planning authorities to have regard to the safeguarding of the historic environment and historic assets within that environment.
- 4.3 None of the above is in conflict with what the applicants want, which is to continue the process of modernisation of an historic building which as I point out in the par 2.1 above has been ongoing since the original Hall was built. If it hadn't, then I doubt many people would be happy to live in such rudimentary conditions? No running water, no lavatories, ineffective heating and cooking facilities etc.
- 4.4 All this family want is to modernise their living accommodation in accordance with their working life as farmers which involves continually accessing and exiting the farmhouse in all weathers without upsetting or impinging on the special historic character of the interior.
- 4.5 I cannot see how such a small and necessary extension is at odds with the LPA's duty of care towards such a listed building. In fact by allowing this well designed extension the heritage asset described above will benefit by becoming more sustainable following on with its historic function as a working family farmhouse.

PHOTOS



WALSHAM HALL Front elevation above. Rear elevation below.

