

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 7th September 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/2529/04/LB and S/2530/04/F - Comberton
Alterations to Existing Walls, Erection of New Walls and Installation of Gates with Piers at Church Farmhouse, The Causeway, Comberton for Dr R and Mrs C Dickinson

Recommendation: Approval of Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission
Date For Determination: 8th February 2005

Site Visit 5th September 2005

Site and Proposal

1. Church Farmhouse is a Grade II Listed building dating from the early 18th century. It is within the conservation area which focuses on the Parish church. The house is outside of the village framework and is located within the Green Belt.
2. The farmhouse is a substantial property built in a grand classically influenced style for a gentleman farmer. The building has a symmetry to the main façade fronting onto the Causeway centred on the main front door which has an ornate hood canopy feature.
3. The Causeway is a public right of way leading to the church – the main vehicular traffic follows Royston Lane to the west of the property. The applicants own land on both sides of the Causeway and have applied to enclose their land fronting onto this on the western side.
4. The owners have a long-term garden plan for the site. To the Causeway frontage an axis focused on the front door has been started to be implemented. A pathway and planting have been set out. Planning permission was granted for the erection of a store /stable on this axis in 2000. As this consent which included a change of use of the land to garden land has been part implemented this is still a valid consent. The approved structure has a central square tower element measuring 11.6 metres in height which has the form of a traditional dovecote. This element needs to be considered in the context of any means of enclosure.
5. The current applications have been revised since their original submission following extensive discussions with the Georgian Group, the Garden History Society and the owner's own research.
6. The proposals now presented for consideration are to erect a brick wall along the eastern boundary to the Causeway.
7. The garden is currently enclosed by a wall on the southern side. It is proposed to insert a new pedestrian gate in this wall at a point where it has been repaired in the past. The gate would be a solid timber one. The wall is also to be raised by 65cm using soft red bricks for a length of 2.24 metres where it abuts the Farmhouse.

8. The proposed eastern wall to the Causeway will be between 11 and 17 courses (approximately 1.2 metres) high with brick piers at either end and two piers located either side of the central footpath to the front door. The height of the wall would rise in a curved detail adjacent to the gate piers to 2.0 metres. The wall would be constructed in a Flemish bond in a soft red brick with a coping to match that of the existing section of wall. Between these it is proposed to hang a wrought iron gate with a York stone threshold. The gate is a reclaimed one of an ornamental design.
9. To the south western corner a new pair of solid timber gates have already been hung across an access leading to the barns formerly associated with the farm – some of which have been converted into separate residential use. The pattern used for this follows photographic evidence of gates which previously existed in the farmyard. The gates have a painted grey finish. By way of justification the applicant has said that they are seeking solid gates to protect the privacy of the residential occupants of the barn unit. Evidence from a previous occupier of Church Farm (John Baker) confirms that there were a similar pair of boarded gates with a small hand gate in this location and a similar pair of gates between the barns during the 100 years or so his family owned the site. He also confirmed that there was formerly a red brick wall fronting the Causeway which collapsed in the 1930's and was replaced by an open trellis fence.
10. By way of comparison the applicant has submitted photos of a house in Hilton which is of a similar period to the farmhouse and in a rural location. This property is enclosed by an old red brick wall and has a pair of wrought iron gates dated 1945 but of a similar form between two gate piers with a rising section of wall adjacent to the piers. Visually the gates and wall form a very similar format to that proposed by this application.

Relevant Planning History

11. **S/0386/00/F** – Planning permission was granted in August 2000 for change of use of land to garden land and erection of store/stable and ancillary works.

Planning Policy

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:

Policy P7/6 Historic Built Environment will be protected and enhanced to ensure the quality and distinctiveness and quality of the historic built environment is secured
Policy P9/2a Green Belt – limits development in the Green Belt the purpose of which is to preserve the character of the area.

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:

Policy GB1 and 2: seek to protect the setting and special character of the Green Belt.
Policy EN28 Development within the Curtilage or setting of a Listed Building seeks to ensure any development is appropriate in its setting, scale and visual relationship.
Policy EN30 Development within a Conservation Area - - expects any new development to protect or enhance the character of the Conservation Area.
Policy EN31 Expects a high standard of materials and landscaping within a Conservation Area.

Consultations

12. **Comberton Parish Council:** Consider the eastern wall and gateway to be too imposing forbidding and too high given it will front onto the ancient Causeway and is within a rural location.

13. They strongly object to the solid gate to the former access to the farmyard which is considered to be out of keeping with the farmhouse location. They consider that a five bar gate is more appropriate. They consider that the issue of privacy to the adjacent barn conversion can be addressed by measures such as shutters to this dwelling unit.
14. **Cambridgeshire County Council:** A public footpath runs along the eastern side of the site known as the Causeway. There are no objections raised in principle to the works. They have requested that in the event of consent being granted that an informative is placed on the consent to ensure the works do not adversely affect this public right of way.
15. **The Georgian Group:** They agree that the most likely location for the original 'polite' or formal entrance to the property would have been from the Causeway which focuses on the front elevation of the house and that this entrance would or should have a more elaborate or architecturally distinctive treatment than afforded elsewhere. They acknowledge it is a difficult task to design a new entrance which is appropriate to the simple restrained simplicity of the farmhouse and yet is discernibly grander than that already created to the rear.
16. They welcome the efforts made by the applicants to simplify their design and the deletion of the previously proposed railings which would have sat on a lower plinth wall.
17. They remain of the opinion that a relatively simple painted wooden gate would be historically more appropriate than the iron gate.
18. The Georgian Group therefore conclude that if Members are minded to approve the application, the metal gate should be painted in an appropriate historic paint colour – not black or gold but a mid grey, cobalt blue or Prussian blue which were the commonly used colours of the 18th Century.
19. **The Garden History Society:** concur with the Georgian Group in that the introduction of decorative iron gates and railings in the context of an eighteenth century farmhouse would be inappropriate. They also support the deletion of the railings and suggest the use of timber rather than iron gates.
20. **The Conservation Manager:** This application has been registered for nine months now and there is difficulty in achieving a solution which satisfies all parties. The key issue must be whether the proposed eastern wall and gate would detract from the character and appearance of the Listed farmhouse or its setting.
21. The historical evidence of footings and oral accounts suggests that there was previously an old red brick wall enclosing the house frontage facing The Causeway. The use of such a means of enclosure is not objected to by The Georgian Group or The Garden History Society as being historically inappropriate. The proposed new eastern wall would tie into the existing wall running along the southern side boundary. The applicant has considered in great detail the height of the wall to ensure it accords with the sill height of the ground floor windows so that the views from the house are not thus impaired. Similarly the property would still be viewed over the wall from the Causeway and in particular through the central metal gate.
22. The design of the gates is the issue which causes most concern. The gates to the yard, which are in situ cause concern to the Parish Council as they are solid boarded. However there is evidence that this form of gates was used in the farmyard in the twentieth century. Photographic evidence from the post-war period shows a metal bar gate in place.

In considering the form of enclosure the changing use of the site has to be considered – the site is no longer a working farm and the barns and brew house have been converted to residential use. The form of the gates is considered to be appropriate for the farmyard and is not considered to adversely affect the setting of the Listed Building.

23. With regard to the use of the proposed salvaged iron gate, there is no evidence of what existed on the site in the 18th century. The gate is not contemporary with the earliest date of the house but as the Hilton property referred to above, shows a gate of a later period can successfully work in such a context. This elevation to the farmhouse exhibits the restrained grandeur of a Georgian property purposefully designed to impose itself upon its rural location. The applicant has undertaken extensive research to show there is a huge variety of gates and means of enclosure of properties of this date, as one might expect in an age before mass production. Without clear evidence of what originally existed any form of gate is a modern introduction. The applicants clearly feel very strongly that this is the correct solution for the overall plan for the context of the house.
24. On balance it is considered that the style and form of the gate and its supporting piers will not harm the setting and appearance of the building. It will also serve to emphasise the axial relationship of the front door to the new dovecote building proposed on the opposite side of the Causeway and referred to above. It is considered important that the appearance of the gate is historically appropriate as possible by painting in an appropriate historic colour as suggested by the Georgian Group. It would thus blend with the paintwork to the house and the other new gate to the yard.
25. The form of eastern enclosure will serve to emphasise this as the principle frontage of the building and retain the hierarchy of gates and walling around the former farmhouse and yard.
26. Consequently it is considered historically appropriate to both enclose and focus viewpoints on the main elevation to a house of this stature. The design and form of the enclosure has been subject to considerable expert analysis and is not considered to detract from either the character or appearance of the Listed Building or its setting. The proposal is therefore recommended for approval

Planning Consideration

27. The material planning considerations are the impact of the works on the setting and appearance of the Listed Building and the countryside location in which it is set. As set out above the proposals are not considered to harm either of these important issues and the proposal is therefore supported.

Recommendation

28. To grant planning permission and Listed Building Consent, as amended by plans dated 18th July 2005, subject to conditions

Conditions

1. Standard five year
2. The iron gates to be installed between the two gate pillars to the new boundary wall to the Causeway frontage shall be finished to a traditional 18th century paint colour the details of which shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the LPA. The gate shall be finished in the agreed colour before it is hung in place.
Reason: To secure an acceptable form of development.
3. A sample panel of brickwork shall be constructed on site to enable the Local Planning Authority to agree the type of brick, the bond, the joint detail, the coping detail and the mortar mix.
Reason: To ensure detailing and materials appropriate to this Listed Building.

Reasons for approval

1. The development is in accordance with the development plan and particularly the following policies:
 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:
P7/6 (Historic Built Environment)
Policy P9/2a (Green Belt)
 - South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:
GB1 and 2 (Green Belt)
EN28 (Development within the curtilage of a Listed Building)
EN30 and EN31 (Development with a Conservation Area)
2. The implemented and proposed works are not considered to materially harm the historic setting, appearance of this Listed Building or its associated curtilage buildings. They are not considered to harm the quality of space around the grouping of structures or the relationship of these to the open Countryside. The works are considered to complement the design and layout of the grounds to main building.
3. The proposal is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation of the proposals:
 - Impact on the countryside setting of the property
 - Impact on the setting of the Listed Buildings and curtilage buildings in this locality
 - Impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area
 - Impact on the setting of the Causeway

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- History file (S/0386/00/F) and current application files

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