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Appeal Decision

Site visit made 24 April 2025

By Ruth Reed BA DipArch MA PGCertEd PPRIBA HonAIA FRIAS

An Independent Scheme of Management Inspector
Appointed by the Heritage Foundation Letchworth Garden City

Decision date 2 May 2025

Appeal Reference RR/2025/020
28 South View, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3JJ

- The appeal is made by against refusal of consent under the Scheme of Management of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation for the application and submitted on 22 April 2024.
- Consent for the scheme was refused by the Heritage Advisory Service on 10 June 2024. It was referred to the Heritage Foundation's Advisory Management Committee on 4 September 2024 who supported the decision to refuse. It was reviewed by the Householder Applications Committee on 18 October 2024 and the decision to refuse was upheld.
- The development proposed is: External wall cladding

Decision

1. The appeal against the refusal of an application for external wall cladding is refused.

Preliminary matters

2. An application to enclose the porch is being determined separately to the application for the external cladding.

3. The role of the Inspector is to determine the appeal in accordance with Design Principles and the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the dwelling and the surroundings. It cannot include a review of the Design Principles but can assess if there are special circumstances that would suggest a departure from them is appropriate in an individual case.

4. The Inspector cannot challenge the designation of a dwelling as a Home of Special Interest.

5. It was agreed that although the Inspector has wider duties as an architect to ensure that there is no harm to the fabric of a building, in this instance the decision would relate only to the external character and appearance and if the appeal was to be upheld, further expert advice would be sought on the potential effects of the external cladding on the fabric of the building before consent was confirmed by the Heritage Foundation.

6. The Inspector has wider duties as an architect to consider the impact of proposal on the environment however insufficient information has been provided on the proposed insulation and any alternatives to external insultation to conclude that this proposal is the only one of merit to improve the thermal performance of the building.

Main Issue

7. The main issue in this case is the impact of the proposal on the appearance of the house and the character and appearance of the area with particular reference to the inclusion of the house as a Home of Special Interest for group value.

Reasons

8. 28 South View is a detached dwelling in a Heritage Character Area. It has unpainted pebbledash walls and a tiled, hipped roof to the north side and a two-storey front gable projection with ground floor bay window, and full gable to the south side.

9. The house is identified as a Home of Special Interest and is one of a group of four dwellings, nos. 24 - 30 South View, designed by Bennett and Bidwell in 1924. Three of these houses, 26 - 30 were designated as Homes of Special Interest in 2013. The Homes of Special Interest listings first appeared in the 2015 Design Principles. No details were provided as to why number 24 was not designated.

10. Number 26 has subsequently been renovated and extended. The works approved were erection of front porch, part two storey, part single storey side/rear extension and erection of single storey side elevation shed.

11. At the time of designation, number 30 had been extended to the south enclosing the chimney stack.

12. The assessment noted of number 28: *This house is largely unaltered and is a marker against which the alterations on the others can be assessed for their impact.* The loft conversion approved in 2013 had resulted in a small increase in the height of the external walls to accommodate the warm roof insulation, but this had minimal impact on the appearance except to increase the eaves overhang.

13. Although the approved changes to numbers 26 and 30 have resulted in a greater bulk and mass of the houses to the sides and rear of the properties there has been little loss of architectural detail and character and they retain the minimal reveals to the windows and doors, the drip mouldings and where still visible on number 26, the brick corbel to the chimney.

14. The Design Principles state: *External Cladding is not acceptable on Homes of Special Interest.* The appellants consider that the changes to the houses scheduled for group value have devalued the architectural merits of the group, undermining the reason for designation, and this provides a special circumstance that would allow the use of external insulation on a Home of Special Interest.

15. The effect of the proposal was discussed at the site visit and details have been provided of a manufacturer's system that could be used for the insulated cladding. Not all areas affected by the changes were detailed and further information would be needed to confirm the effect at the junction of the wall and the bay window and the roof of the bay roof and confirmation of the relocation of the external services.

16. The most significant changes to the external appearance of the house that would result from the application of external insulation include deep inset reveals to windows and external doors with lengthened sills, loss of the brick corbel feature to the chimney, introduction of splays to the bay reveals, reduction in the size of the bay roof and the potential loss of the drip mould feature over the windows, external door and existing porch. These changes would result in loss of original architectural character.

17. The works would replicate the brick corbelling to the eaves in a brick slip detail and would restore the depth of the overhang to one similar to that which existed before the house roof was lifted to incorporate warm roof insultation. The verges to the gable would be extended to match the existing roof. The existing render which has areas of patching would be covered by the insulation and a new unpainted pebbledash finish. These changes and improvements would go part way to offset the impact of the changes listed in the previous paragraph.

18. Overall, the significant changes would be a departure from the existing architectural detailing on the adjacent Homes of Special Interest and would not be compensated for by the proposed improvements. The existing detailing is simple in nature but essential to the Arts and Crafts character of the houses. Its loss would have a significant and harmful impact on the group of houses that previous alterations have not had.

19. The appellants have drawn my attention to homes within Letchworth that feature the deep reveals and the proposed lead flashing to the base of the brickwork chimney where it meets the new cladding. As a building within the Garden City these do form part of the wider context for the house, but I must give greater weight to the house's immediate context as part of a group of houses recognised for their original Arts and Craft detailing much of which would be lost as result of the proposed changes.

20. The location of this Home of Special Interest within a group of similar properties listed for group interest requires sensitivity in the approach to change. The Design Principles state: *The Design Principles generally indicate what will and will not be acceptable. However, each case will be considered on its own merits assessing the impact of your proposals on the character and quality of the subject property and its context.* In this case the proposals would be harmful to the original architectural detailing of the house and consequently to the group.

21. Previous changes to the three scheduled houses have not reduced their architectural merit to the extent that special circumstances exist to justify further changes on the basis that the reason for scheduling as Home of Special Interest has been lost.

Conclusions

22. Having read the submissions and seen the site and its context, I conclude that the proposed external wall cladding would be harmful to the Home of Special Interest and the Townscape of Letchworth Garden City.

Ruth Reed

Independent Scheme of Management Inspector