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## Penderfyniad ar yr Apêl

Ymweliad â safle a wnaed ar 23/08/16

**gan Melissa Hall BA (Hons), BTP, MSc,  
MRTPI**

**Arolygydd a benodir gan Weinidogion Cymru**  
**Dyddiad: 04.10.16**

## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23/08/16

**by Melissa Hall BA (Hons), BTP, MSc,  
MRTPI**

**an Inspector appointed by the Welsh Ministers**  
**Date: 04.10.16**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/E6840/E/16/3150956**

**Site address: White House Farm, Llanvair Kilgeddin, Abergavenny NP7 9BB**

**The Welsh Ministers have transferred the authority to decide this appeal to me as the appointed Inspector.**

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
  - The appeal is made by Dr Lucy Allen against the decision of Monmouthshire County Council.
  - The application Ref DC/2015/00808, dated 29 June 2015, was refused by notice dated 24 November 2015.
  - The works proposed are described as 'the retention of French doors to south elevation'.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Background

2. As I understand it, listed building consent was granted for internal and external alterations to White House Farm in July 2014<sup>1</sup>. However, the works carried out which are the subject of this appeal were not included in that consent. As such, a subsequent application was made for the retention of the unauthorised alterations to the ground floor fenestration on the principal, south facing elevation from casement windows to French doors.

### Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the works preserve the listed building, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses<sup>2</sup>.

### Reasons

4. White House Farm is a Grade II Listed substantial 17<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse. Whilst the north and west sides of the house would previously have enclosed the working farmyard, the south and east elevations are more formal with views extending over the gardens and the open countryside beyond. The south elevation is described in the listing description as '*Three bay south front has 2-storey, gabled porch unusually*

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<sup>1</sup> Listed building consent Ref DC/2014/00353 refers.

<sup>2</sup> Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

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*placed on the right hand (east) corner; 2-centred entrance with ornamental cement render surround; roll-moulded and chamfered c17 door case with recessed, original 4-centred arch door and trap work hinges. Cambered headed windows with renewed casement glazing.'*

5. The works that have been carried out involve the removal of the cills and the elongation of the window openings to accommodate French doors at ground floor. The appellant contends that the window openings in the south elevation are not of original form and that the insertion of the doors has caused no damage to the historic fabric or the character of the building.
6. The appellant's historic building survey identifies that the building was constructed in four phases; the part of the building in which the French doors are situated is the main range constructed in the first phase. It states that the gabled entrance porch on the south elevation of the main range is a later addition. It also identifies that the majority of the windows have been replaced with modern casement windows and that the stone construction of the external elevations is covered in 20<sup>th</sup> Century sand cement render.
7. I therefore accept that the building has undergone a number of changes over the years. I do not disagree that the partial removal of cement render, revealing a late brick infill directly below the ground floor casement windows, would appear to suggest that the windows may have been altered previously. It is thus possible that they may also have been of a different style originally.
8. However, much remains of the building's original form and fabric and many of the later additions are, in themselves, features of interest. The design and proportions of the windows on the south elevation of the building contribute to its special historic and architectural interest and its significance as a heritage asset.
9. Annex D of Welsh Office Circular 61/96 '*Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*' advises that alterations should be based on a proper understanding of the structure. The appendix to Annex D of the Circular provides further guidance on detailed alterations. It states that door and window openings should not generally be altered in their proportions or details. It adds that windows form one of the most significant constructional elements of any building, and their style and proportion vitally affect the character and appearance of elevations.
10. The appellant's heritage assessment identifies that the removal of the cement render revealed the fabric of the south elevation, and included evidence of 20<sup>th</sup> Century brick infill below the existing ground floor windows suggesting that they had been inserted into larger stone openings. On this basis, the assessment states that '*at some point it is possible that the openings were indeed doors leading into the parlour and inner room*'.
11. However, whilst the openings may have been larger, there is no substantive evidence of investigation work which confirms the presence of doorways on the south elevation. Thus, the appellant's evidence is not compelling in this regard.
12. Rather, on the basis of that which is before me, I agree with the Council that the introduction of French doors is not characteristic of this building and that the change is therefore a subjective interpretation of what may have been there at a point in time prior to the date of listing.

13. In any event, the Circular also advises that, '*generally, later features of interest should not be removed in order to restore a building to its earlier form*'; whilst the addition of the porch in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century may have re-ordered the entrance and made the openings to the parlour and inner room redundant, these are important changes in the architectural history of the building which may have resulted in the formation of the smaller window openings that are part of the distinctive character of the south elevation.
14. In my view, the alteration to the proportions of the window openings significantly alters the solid to void ratio. Whereas the former arrangement was simple and understated with a degree of uniformity, the French doors dominate to the extent that they contrast greatly with this rhythm. The introduction of design features which are not characteristic of the principal front elevation significantly alters its appearance. Internally, the doors alter the plan form and arrangement of spaces to the detriment of the character of the principal elevation incorporating the main entrance to the building.
15. In this regard, I also note the concerns of Cadw that the French doors fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the building. I am also aware of the views of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Georgian Group that the works detract from the significance of the house and the main entrance.
16. In this context, the alteration of the window openings in both proportion and detail, and the insertion of French doors, do not represent sympathetic conservation of a vernacular building which is a fine example of its type. For these reasons, the works fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building contrary to the requirements of Section 16(2) of the Act. The works also conflict with the advice in Circular 61/96 and with Planning Policy Wales which seeks to protect heritage assets and conserve historic buildings.
17. I do not dispute that the brick infill below the window openings may have been poorly constructed leading to water ingress and subsequent failure of the sand cement render. Even so, this does not justify the insertion of an entirely different size of opening and window design. Neither am I convinced that the problem could not be resolved by a less harmful intervention.
18. I also note the appellant's contention that the visual impact is minimal as the doors are, in part, obscured by the garden wall. However, listed buildings should be safeguarded for their inherent architectural and historic interest irrespective of whether or not wider views of the building can be gained.

## **Conclusion**

19. The works that have taken place have caused significant harm to the historic character and special interest of the listed building. I also conclude that the benefits of the works do not outweigh the harm I have identified. In view of the special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving the listed building, these are conclusions that carry considerable weight against the grant of listed building consent. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

*Melissa Hall*

INSPECTOR

