

Application Name: Howitt Close, Howitt Road, London NW3 4LX

Number: 1478490

Type: New

Heritage Category: Listing

Address:

Howitt Close, Howitt Road, London, NW3 4LX

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Camden	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

Recommendation: Reject

Assessment

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Historic England has been asked to consider Howitt Close, Howitt Road, London Borough of Camden for listing. A planning application for a roof extension to create seven self-contained flats is being considered by the local authority (2022/3635/P). An earlier application in 2021 (2021/3839/P) was refused in August 2022.

Howitt Close is included in the Belsize Park Conservation Area as a building which makes a positive contribution to its special character and appearance. It is not locally listed.

HISTORY AND DETAILS

Howitt Close was built in 1932-1934 for the Glenloch Investment Company to designs by the architectural practice of Henry F Webb and Ash and built by Rowley Brothers of Tottenham. An article in The Builder in December 1933, with a plan of the ground and lower-ground floors, described the block of flats as a mix of bedsitting room flats with a bed alcove and two-bedroom flats. All flats were fitted with electric or gas cookers, refrigerators, modern baths with a shower attachment and wirelesses. A restaurant was included on the lower ground floor and there were 46 flats in total.

Designed as affordable, compact and modern accommodation for a middle-class clientele, Howitt Close was one of a large number of commercial inter-war flats constructed in London, and particularly in its suburbs, increasing in number through the 1930s. The inclusion of bedsits, referred to at the

time as 'minimum flats', in some of these developments was a new feature relating to demographic, economic and social changes after the First World War. They were especially characteristic of Moderne blocks such as Lawn Road (Isokon), Belsize Park and Highpoint, Highgate, with their emphasis on a rational approach to design influenced by continental designs.

Henry Frederick Webb (1879-1953) was a London architect who opened his first practice in 1920. From 1930 to 1934 he was in partnership with Arthur Stanley Ash (1885-1966). The practice designed several blocks of flats in north-west London including: Hillside Court, Finchley Road; West Heath Court, Golders Green and Brentwood Lodge, Hendon. Webb later designed Elm Park Court, Pinner (1936) in a hacienda style (Grade II).

Howitt Close occupies a compact corner site at the junction with Glenilla Road at the southern end of Howitt Road. It has three ranges arranged in an irregular Y-plan with each of the arms of differing lengths and is of three storeys with the longer western range having an additional sub-basement. The flats are arranged either side of spine corridors, with two-room flats placed in the short rear range and at the end of the north range. The building is of red-brown brick laid in English bond with a white roughcast upper storey and a flat roof with deep projecting eaves. Fenestration is of multi-pane Crittall casement windows set in red brick surrounds. The elevations are enlivened by full-height square bays, four on the western range, two on the northern range and one on the short south-eastern range. The main entrance, approached by a flight of stone steps, is set in the 45 degree angle of the west and north ranges and has a stone porch supported on paired Egyptian style columns with a fluted frieze topped by an ornamental iron balustrade. The entrance has replacement glazed timber doors with the original transom with decorative ironwork. A large window over the entrance has decorative leaded lights. The end elevation of the western range has an entrance to the sub-basement with a stone hood with brackets.

Internally, the entrance lobby is flanked by cubicles with multi-paned glazed doors, one of which probably housed a telephone. The dog-leg main stairs (and two other secondary stairs) have Art-Deco style curved decorative iron balustrades with mahogany handrails. No photographs were provided of individual flats but it is assumed that layouts remain largely unaltered and the bedsits will retain their bed alcoves. Doors to the individual flats retain their original brass door fittings.

The flats are set back from the road with a curving driveway and low brick boundary walls.

CRITERIA AND DISCUSSION

Based on the information provided and with reference to the Principles of Selection (November 2018) and our Listing Selection Guides (December 2017), Howitt Close is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

Degree of architectural interest:

* as an early-1930s apartment block, Howitt Close would be expected to show a particularly high

degree of architectural or historic interest to justify listing, as large numbers were built in the inter-war period, particularly in London. Although it exhibits a sympathetic and competent design, clearly intended to harmonise with the surrounding Edwardian housing, it is, as a result, rather old-fashioned in style despite some Art-Deco touches, and does not display any innovative design features which would provide special interest in a national context;

- * whilst the building survives largely unaltered externally (and in terms of the visible public areas, internally), this is, in itself, not sufficient reason for designation given the overall lack of architectural special interest;

- * the building does not display any technological innovation in materials or construction;

- * the architects, Henry F Webb and Ash, were proficient commercial architects specialising in apartment blocks in London, but are of regional rather than national interest;

- * the provision of bedsitting-room flats, which provide the majority of the accommodation in Howitt Close, was a feature of commercial apartment blocks in the inter-war period. However, better examples of this new trend have been designated including Highpoint and Isokon flats, albeit at the higher grades. Howitt Close cannot be regarded as a rare or particularly good example of this development in urban accommodation and therefore does not provide special interest.

Degree of historic interest:

- * the building does not have any historical associations with nationally important people or events.

CONCLUSION

Howitt Close is an attractive and well surviving development, typical of the inter-war period, which its status within the conservation area recognises. However, its moderate architectural interest means it does not meet the criteria for listing at a national level.

SOURCES

The Builder, 1 December 1933, Volume 145 - pages 861, 862, 872 ;

Camden Council, Belsize Conservation Area Statement (April 2003).