

UNDERCOVER

ARCHITECTURE LTD

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

For proposed

“BASEMENT EXCAVATION, INSTALLATION OF EXTERNAL PLATFORM LIFT, RECONFIGURATION OF EXTERNAL STAIRCASE, REINSTATEMENT OF STAIR BALUSTRADE AND FRONT BOUNDARY TREATMENT TO MATCH ORIGINAL, REPLACEMENT WINDOWS, INSTALLATION OF BI FOLDING DOORS, HARD AND SOFT LANDSCAPING AND ASSOCIATED WORKS. ”

13 BELSIZE CRESCENT, LONDON, NW3 5QU

16th February 2023

Contents

1. Introduction – Design Objectives
2. Assessment of Existing Conditions
3. Design Proposals
4. Use
5. Access

1. Introduction – Design objectives

The objective of the proposed works is to improve the existing family home by attending to particular elements of the property and its use.

- Enhance the property and its contribution to the character of the street and conservation area
- Improve accessibility throughout the home
- Focus on the energy efficiency of the house
- Sympathetic design of basement and vaults
- Increase light penetration into the property
- To keep disruption to neighbours to a minimum
- Improve the connection between the living spaces and garden

2. Assessment of existing conditions

The property is located in Belsize Conservation Area. The existing building is a mid-terrace, 5-storey, single family dwelling located on the South-West side of Belsize Crescent.

It is located in Flood Zone 1 and is at low risk from surface water flooding.

The property was constructed in the mid 19th Century as part of the London stock brick and stucco-fronted terraces which form Belsize Crescent. The houses on the terrace have a uniform design with a homogeneous material palette giving visual consistency. However, while some properties retain original historic detailing this has been lost from others. The front gardens with trees and vegetation soften the views on the street.

The houses originally had barrel topped dormers with white painted timber sash windows. Many of the roofs have been extended to replace the original barrel topped dormers with a tiled mansard storey. This property has previously been extended, with planning permission, with a mansard roof and rear roof terrace at third floor level.

Each house has two vertical lines of white painted timber sash windows on the front façade from the lower ground floor to second floor with an additional barrel shaped sash at third floor, while no.13's mansard has metal framed top-hinged windows.

There is ornamentation in the form of entablatures at eaves level, columned porticoes with balustrading above (this has been replaced with a less classical balustrade on no.13), canted three light bays with balustrading above (missing on no.13), steps to the upper ground floor entrance door with classically detailed balustrades retained to the sides (missing on no.13), balustrading on frontage walls (missing on no.13), and classically detailed window surrounds. Ornamentation creates a horizontal aspect of uniformity along the terrace.

At no.13 ground floor steps lead up to the front door, and down to the lower ground floor level. the steps to no.13 upper ground floor have an asphalt finish. The stair has timber railings with an additional metal handrail to one side supported on metal posts. These finishes and handrails/railings are not in-keeping with the classical finishes and detailing on the terrace.

Each property has a front garden and an original light-well providing natural light and secondary access to the lower ground floor. In most cases the light-well is not visible from the street due to the balustrading and planting to the street frontage.

The steps down to lower ground floor level are fairly steep and narrow, they land in a narrow passage in front of the secondary lower ground floor entrance with stepped access in. There are various level changes throughout the lower ground floor and each level within the property, there is no current disabled access to the house and the level changes make it less accessible internally.

To the rear there is a connection to the garden. The rear elevation has two vertical lines of windows at ground floor these windows are white painted timber sash windows while the windows to first and second floor are PVC windows with a bottom hinged opening panel. The mansard also has metal framed top-hinged windows to the front and rear.

3. Design Proposals

The main purpose behind the proposal is to improve the accessibility throughout the house, whilst contributing positively to the house's appearance on the street by reinstating historical details in line with neighbouring properties on Belsize Crescent. In addition, the connection between the living spaces and the garden will be enhanced, and internal natural light levels increased. There is also an intention to provide a w/c or bathroom on each floor, and to enhance the energy performance of the house.

The following design proposals have been made, each considering the initial design objectives, and carefully considering the existing, surrounding context of Belsize Crescent, the Belsize Conservation Area, and local Belsize Village.

Enhance the property and its contribution to the character of the street and conservation area:

Balustrading copying the historical style as originally constructed is proposed to be reinstated to the frontage wall to match other properties on Belsize Crescent, which would make a positive contribution to the character of the surrounding neighbourhood. Historic balustrades would also be restored to the stairs leading up to the raised ground floor entry. A more traditional finish in keeping with neighbouring properties would be applied to the stair.

The ornamental detailing would also be restored around the bay windows at the front of the property, reinstating the original character of the building and bringing it back into line with the other historical buildings on the street.

Landscaping will be retained to the front, behind reinstated historical style balustrading, to enable the property to continue to contribute to the softening of views along the street mentioned in the Belsize Conservation Area Statement and to preserve privacy in the lower ground floor.

Improve accessibility throughout the home:

Various measures are taken to increase accessibility, in line with Camden's Planning Guidance - Access for All, and in particular to meet the accessibility needs of close family members of the property owners.

The stairs to both entrances to the house render it inaccessible to anyone with an ambulatory disability. To overcome this impediment, an external platform lift is proposed in the front garden to facilitate disabled access via the existing light-well through the lower ground floor entrance. This will be of modest appearance and will not be visible from the street due to planting and vegetation to the frontage wall.

The steep external front steps leading to the lower ground floor are proposed to be replaced and reconfigured to be parallel along the wall of the light-well. This will make room for an accessible passage for a wheelchair with level access in to the property via the lower ground floor entrance.

Traditional vertical black painted railings will be installed to the light-well to provide protection from falling. This is a discreet and conventional solution to reconfigure access in this location, and will have little affect on the appearance of the house, being screened by the boundary treatments.

Consistent with the installation of the platform lift to enable disabled access to the house, once inside, there will be an internal passenger elevator providing disabled access to all floors as well as provision made for accessible bathrooms, and accommodation in key points throughout the house to allow sufficient turning radius for a standard sized wheelchair, for instance in hallways and at the entrance to bedrooms and bathrooms.

It is proposed to improve level access within the lower ground floor by taking the existing level from the back of the house through to the entrance hall and light-well. This will improve accessibility and provide an open plan living space directly connected to the rear garden.

Focus on Energy Efficiency of the House:

The house is currently heated with gas, with single glazed windows and poor insulation, resulting in significant heat loss to the outside. A surveyor's report concluded that "in its existing state, the house is very poor in terms of thermal retention".

The intention with this renovation is to minimise the carbon footprint of the property by moving to a mixture of electric underfloor heating and air heating derived from heat pumps, complemented by modern insulation and updated, more energy efficient fenestration (still in the style in keeping with the local conservation area). Solar panels are planned for the roof to further contribute to the production of clean energy. The new fabric will be insulated to meet current building regulation requirements.

On the receipt of planning permission, the owners intend to employ the services of environmental consultants, to determine whether further reductions in the carbon footprint of the property can reasonably be made. This analysis will include for example exploring the possibility of ground source heating (given potential synergies with the contemplated excavations), and also an investigation of whether and how electricity consumption can be further reduced.

Sympathetic design of Basement and vaults:

The proposed basement has been designed in line with Camden's planning guidance on basements. The extents of the basement allow for satisfactory landscaping and soil depth within the front and back gardens. Light tubes in the back garden and a small light-well in the front lower ground light-well area will provide the basement with natural light, while also minimising the amount of light which might escape into the

environment. Once complete, the basement and associated works will not be visible from the street and will not have an impact on the visual character of the area.

It is proposed to lower the existing front vaults to allow for a w/c and the provision of a plant room under the front garden. This will have no visible impact to the external appearance of the house but will add utility to the building.

Increase light penetration in the property:

The rear of the lower ground floor will be glazed across the back to bring more natural light into the space. The lower ground floor glazing has been confirmed as permitted development via a lawful development certificate.

The basement will benefit from a glazed lightwell at the front, located at lower ground floor level and so not visible from the street. At the rear, natural light will arrive in the basement via light tubes, designed to minimise light pollution from the basement to the outside.

Keep disruption to neighbours to a minimum:

The owners recognise that any building project of this nature will result in disruption, and have met with the residents of neighbouring properties to proactively understand their particular concerns to try to minimise the disruption that they might suffer. The owners intend to continue this engagement throughout the project in order to facilitate minimising disruption and to quickly understand unanticipated points of concern which may arise.

A construction management plan and impact assessment has been undertaken specifically regarding the basement works. The owners are keen that for instance noise and vibration reduction measures (e.g. sound curtains) are properly implemented and that particularly noisy works undertaken only when necessary, and are managed such that they are interspersed and relief is provided. More information about these measures can be found in the construction management plan.

The basement element of the project should be seen in the context of the remediation required for the rest of the house. A significant remediation is required in order to return the house to a safe and fully habitable condition in conformity with modern building standards and regulations. Such work will unfortunately create disruption, but is unavoidable given the current condition of the house. Disruption caused by the basement will be incremental, and the construction plan envisages doing the basement works at the same time as other activities such that disruption is minimised overall and construction timelines are minimised (for instance excavation is planned to be done at the same time as stripping out the rest of the house).

For specific context, a report from an experienced surveyor revealed the overall condition of the house, including for instance that the lower floors are not inhabitable and that the lower ground floor is particularly ruined, and was described as "comprehensively damp". The current electrics and gas services are described as "patently dangerous". Further, the surveyor recommended that "existing heating systems are not used, not even temporarily". The surveyor also noted "progressive signs of deformation up through the building to the point where the upper two floors dish so significantly that the current condition is such that they will present substantial problems relating to furniture and general use". Soil surveys showed levels of lead contamination in the back garden more than eight times in excess of recommended levels, requiring excavation of several meters of soil to be properly

remediated. There is also asbestos fibre in tiles on the back terrace, as well as asbestos cement in the ceilings, which must be carefully removed.

Improve the connection between the living spaces and the garden:

A “bring the outside in” philosophy is being followed to blur the transition between the garden and the building, and add greenery, particularly in the lower ground floor. As well as opening up the back of the house to take better advantage of outside space, the intention is to plant green walls within the house at the back of the lower ground floor to effectively extend the garden into the house, creating a “winter garden” for the propagation of citrus plants and herbs.

This outside in philosophy in the lower ground floor will be complimented by adding greenery in several other areas to soften the outside spaces while maintaining a consistent feel with the rest of the street. For example, a green wall will be added outside the bay window of the lower ground floor, and a green roof will be planted on the flat roof at the front.

4. Use

The house will remain as a single residential dwelling with increased accessibility throughout and greater amenity in the areas of family rooms and ancillary spaces.

Scale:

The internal area of the house will increase by 112m² at basement level and 4.4m² at lower ground floor level. The increase in useful space at lower ground floor level is the result of hollowing out the area under the front garden for use as plant room and storage. Therefore, the increase in space does not involve extending the visible footprint of the house as the additional area will be under the existing house footprint and under the front and back gardens, and therefore would not be readily visible from public vantage points.

Appearance:

The Belsize Conservation area has been respected throughout the design process and in fact the considerate restoration of many of the original features of the house, which will be visible from the street, should significantly improve the impact of the building on the surrounding conservation area, in particular the reinstatement of balustrading at the front of the property.

5. Access

Camden’s guidance on accessibility, including “Access for All” has been used to guide decisions in the design of the property. The proposed changes are intended to strike a balance between being inclusively designed whilst conserving and enhancing the local character of the street.

The main means of access to the property is proposed to remain the same; steps leading up to the main front door while the steps to the lower ground floor entrance are proposed to be reconfigured as described above.

The external platform lift proposed in the front garden provides accessible entry via the light-well at lower ground floor level, and compliments the modifications which

are being made inside the building, described above. Conversely, without the ability for a disabled person to enter the house without using stairs, any internal modifications to improve accessibility would be rendered pointless. As described above, the platform lift will be of modest appearance and will not be readily visible from the street due to landscaping and the frontage wall.