
DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

LOCATION & SURROUNDINGS

The application site is located on the south side of Bisham Gardens, adjacent to the junction with Swain's Lane and sits within the Highgate Village Conservation Area.

Bisham Gardens runs east west from Highgate High Street to Swain's Lane and is a predominantly residential street lined on both sides with period terraced properties. 34 Bisham Gardens is one half of the last of three pairs of villas at the west end of the road. Directly opposite the application site is a large television mast that serves the local television reception station whilst to the rear the site backs on to Waterlow Park and enjoys dramatic views south towards central London.



SITE DESCRIPTION

34 Bisham Gardens is one half of a pair of five storey semi-detached villas that have both been converted into residential flats. The application site occupies the upper ground and lower ground floors of no. 34. The adjoining 36 Bisham Gardens sits to the west.

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The rectangular plot of 34 Bisham Gardens is approximately 137sqm in area.

The property frontage faces north onto Bisham Gardens and is set back approximately 1.5m from the street. Metal railings set on a low level rendered wall separate a small front yard from the pavement whilst tiled steps lead up to the upper ground floor communal entrance door on the east side of the front elevation. A metal gate at the west end of the street frontage provides access to the front yard and gives access to the area used for bin storage.



To the rear the application site enjoys exclusive use of a paved garden. This runs along the west side of the existing rear addition then opens out to the full width of the plot and extends back approximately 6m to the rear site boundary. This is marked by a run of metal railings set on top of a concrete retaining wall. Beyond the rear site boundary the ground level drops down to the park level below.

A brickwork garden wall runs the full length of the boundary shared with the adjoining no. 36. The rear yard level of the adjoining site is approximately 1.2m lower than that of the application site. A timber fence and trellis forms the east site boundary and separates the application site from the rear garden of no. 32.

EXISTING PROPERTY & PREVIOUS DEVELOPMENT

The lower and upper ground floors of the property have previously been used as office space. A recent planning application (ref: 2021/5434/P) secured change of use consent from Class E to Class C3 for residential use. The proposed alterations associated with that approved application described the conversion of the office space into a three bedroomed dwelling with some minor external alterations to the rear of the property. These alterations have not yet been implemented so the layout of the lower and upper ground floors are still configured for the previous office use.

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The general plan form of the property is a typical L-shaped arrangement with the main body of the property occupying the full width of the site and a narrower rear addition wing extending out to the rear. Internally the floors levels between the main body of the property and the rear wing are stepped with the corresponding floor levels of the rear wing being higher than their connecting levels in the main body of the property.

Access into the property is provided at the upper ground floor level via an entrance door from the communal entrance lobby and this leads into an open plan area that occupies the main body of the property at this level. A short flight of five steps runs up from the rear of this space to give access up to the upper ground floor level of the rear addition and this is configured as a single room with a window to the rear and a bay window along its west side.

A staircase in the north-east corner of the plan descends to the lower ground floor level via a lobby in the rear addition wing. Access to a single room in the rear addition wing and the rear yard is provided from this lobby with the staircase continuing down into the main body of the property where another front to back open plan space is located off of which are accessed a small kitchen area, toilets and a small shower room.

Externally the front of the property retains much of its original period details featuring a three storey front bay, entrance portico and vertical sliding sash windows. The original facing stock brickwork has however been painted. The open gable side is predominantly a blank brick façade that faces the non-adjointing 32 Bisham Gardens. At ground floor level a single storey infill extension has been added to no. 32 and this now physically connects to the two previously unconnected semi-detached pairs.



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At the rear of the property whilst the elevations pertaining to the lower and upper ground floors have retained much of their original appearance various changes associated with the upper floor flats (including a conservatory style extension and roof terrace to the roof of the original rear addition serving the first floor flat and box dormers and roof terraces serving the upper flat) have already significantly altered the style and massing of the rear of the property.

Similar previously levels of development and alterations have been carried out to the rear of the adjoining 36 Bisham Gardens (including rear extensions to the original rear addition that occupy the full depth of the rear of the plot at both lower and upper ground floor levels, a glazed rear addition to the lower ground floor level, roof terraces over the original rear addition and a large box dormer at roof level) which have completely removed any symmetry the rear elevations of the pair would have originally have presented.



CLIENTS BRIEF

Having purchased the property following the granting of the change of use to Class C3 the applicant wanted to review the proposed layout associated with that approval. The brief was to ensure the flat remained a three bedroomed property whilst exploring alternative layouts that would resolve the following issues:

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Poor internal circulation: The proposed layout associated with the change of use approval includes a number of lengthy corridors and a stairwell that occupies a large area of the south-east corner of the main body of the property. Not only are these transitional spaces uninviting and devoid of natural light they also take up valuable floor area which it was felt could be better used for living space if the internal circulation was rationalized and improved.

The disconnection between the main body of the house, the rear addition and the rear garden: Because of the change in level between the main body of the property and the existing rear addition the proposed layout associated with the change of use approval had resulted in these two areas of the property, particularly on the lower ground floor, being completely isolated from each other with access to the rear garden only possible from a separate living room located in the existing rear addition. The client was keen to make the entire lower ground floor area feel more open and interconnected and wanted to ensure the main body of the house had a direct link to the rear garden.

Lack of natural daylight and sunlight: Whilst opportunities to improve the provision of natural light from the front of the property are strictly limited it was felt that at the rear of the property, both as a result of the proposed layout associated with the change of use application and the relatively small windows in the existing rear elevations, the amount of day and sunlight reaching the interior spaces was poor, particularly given the south facing orientation of the rear of the site.

Lack of views to the south: The properties along the south side of Bisham Gardens sit on a raised promontory above Waterlow Park and enjoy wide ranging views south to central London. Previous development of the upper floor flats of no. 34 and the adjoining no. 36 have all exploited this setting, providing larger expanses of glazing and roof terraces that offer panoramic views. Whilst it was acknowledged that long ranging views from the lower ground floor of the application site would be difficult to significantly improve it was felt that the proposed layout associated with the change of use consent did nothing at all to foster any visual connection the flat could have to the park and its wider context to the south.

As is common with terraced and semi-detached properties with this L-shaped plan form the open space along the side of the existing rear addition is often too narrow to be of any practical use other than acting as a corridor to the wider rear garden and allowing natural sunlight into the rear of the main body of the property. The applicant was keen to explore how this space could be better used by either improving its relationship with the lower ground floor of the main body of the flat or by extending across it to form a side infill extension.

RELEVANT POLICY

Due to the nature and location of the work the following adopted documents have been referenced during the development of the proposal:

Camden Local Plan 2017 (with particular reference to policies A1, D1, & D2)
Highgate Neighbourhood Plan 2017 (with particular reference to policies DH2, DH3 & DH4)
Camden Planning Guidance – Housing (January 2021)
Camden Planning Guidance – Home Improvements (January 2021)
Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (October 2007)
London Plan 2021
London Housing SPG 2016

OUTLINE DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks permission to add a lower ground floor side infill extension, an upper ground floor rear extension and a terrace balcony to the rear of the upper ground floor of the existing rear addition.

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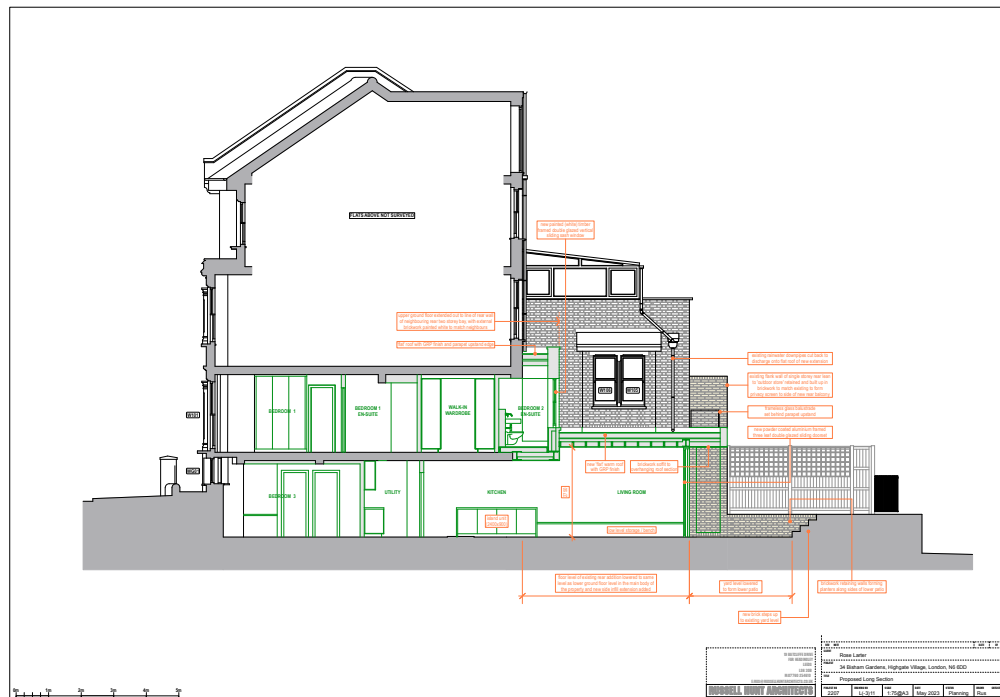
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Size & Scale of Development

The proposed works will add a total of 12sqm of additional internal floor space to the property. The lower ground floor side infill extension adds 10sqm whilst the modest upper ground floor rear extension contributes 2sqm.

The lower ground floor side infill extension will extend back 5.1m from the main rear wall of the property so that its rear wall will line through with the rear wall of the existing rear addition. The new west flank wall of the side infill extension will be built adjacent to the existing garden wall with the existing garden wall retained.

The existing yard level will be lowered by 700mm to allow the finished internal floor level of the new side infill extension to run in flush with the existing finished floor level of the lower ground floor in the main body of the property. The floor in the lower ground floor rear additional will be similarly lowered enabling the entire lower ground floor footprint to be on one level.



Lowering the floor level in the side infill extension allows the extension to sit lower in the site and results in the top of the parapet wall that surrounds the flat roof of the extension to sit up only 650mm above the top of the existing garden wall on the west side of the site.

Lowering the floor of the existing rear addition at lower ground floor level then also allows the existing floor level of the upper ground floor rear addition to be lowered easing the transition into that space from the main body of the property to only two steps from the existing five.

At the rear of the existing rear addition it is proposed that the existing single storey lean-to outhouse (currently used as a boiler room) will be taken down whilst its east wall will be retained. A new shallow balcony is proposed to the rear of the upper ground floor level of the existing rear addition. This will extend out only as far as the rear wall of the existing outhouse and will run the full width of the rear elevation of the existing rear addition. Having lowered the internal floor level of the upper ground floor of the existing rear addition the new balcony level can be set at only 2.1m above the existing rear garden level. The area below the balcony will form a covered

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external space beyond the rear wall of the lower ground floor of the rear addition with the flat roof of the new side infill extension brought out to the line of the new rear balcony to enable the covered external space to continue across the rear elevation of the new lower ground floor side infill extension as well. The retained east wall of the existing outhouse will then be built up 1.1m above the ridge of the existing outhouse pitched roof to form a 1.7m tall privacy screen to the adjoining site.



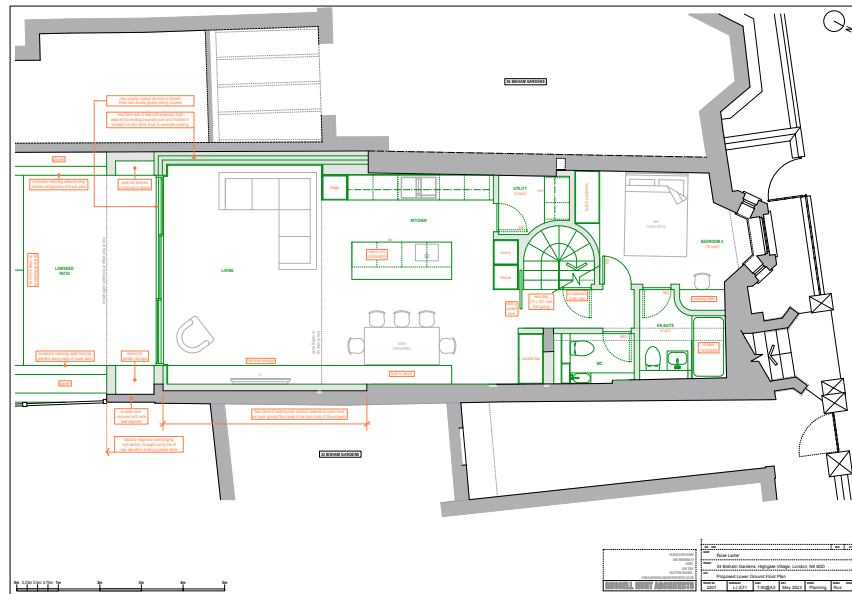
The upper ground floor level of the adjoining 36 Bisham Gardens has been extended out 1.1m beyond the line of the main rear wall the two properties share. It is therefore proposed that the upper ground floor level of the application site be extended out to this point to infill the space between the flank wall of the protruding bay at no. 36 and the west facing flank wall of the existing rear addition at no. 34. The rear wall of this extension will be taken up to match the height of the neighboring bay thereby re-unify the upper ground floor rear elevation of the pairing.

Layout

At lower ground floor level new structural openings will allow the removal of the main rear wall of the property together with the existing west flank wall and side bay window of the rear addition and the rear wall of the rear addition creating a large open plan room that will occupy the rear half of the lower ground floor plan and will have direct access to the rear garden. This space will become the main living space for the flat with a full width living area opening onto the garden and linking back to an open plan kitchen dining space deeper into the plan.

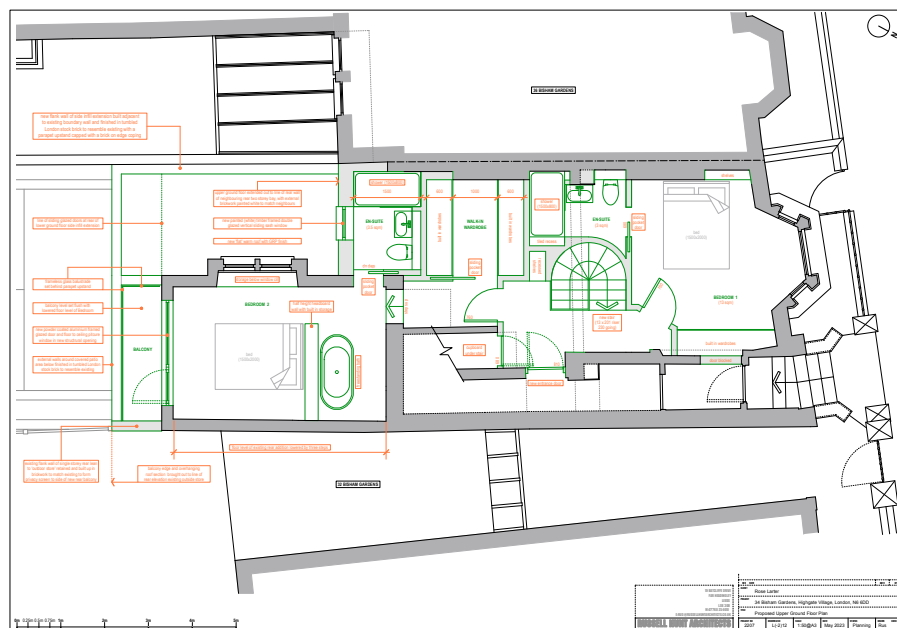
The existing staircase will be removed and a new staircase linking the upper and lower ground floors will be inserted in the center of the main body of the house.

The main entrance to the flat from the communal entrance corridor will be re-located deeper into the plan to give direct access to a new central upper ground floor entrance lobby. The new entrance lobby gives access to a new double bedroom with an en-suite bathroom at the front of the flat and to a master bedroom suite with a walk-in wardrobe and en-suite at the rear of the upper ground floor.



From the entrance lobby the new staircase winds down to a small lower ground floor hallway. This hallway gives access to a third double bedroom with an en-suite bathroom that is located in the front half of the plan, a separate wc and the large open plan living/kitchen/dining space to the rear.

The upper ground floor master bedroom suite occupies the rear half of the main body of the property, the upper ground floor rear extension and the newly lowered existing rear addition. On entering the master bedroom suite a short corridor passes a new walk-in wardrobe before rising two steps to the main bedroom area. A new en-suite shower room, partially set within the new upper ground floor rear extension, is accessed directly off the main bedroom space through a new door opening in the flank wall of the rear addition. A new floor to ceiling picture window with glazed side door is proposed in the rear elevation of the existing rear addition. This will allow expansive views to the south and provide access to the new rear balcony from the master bedroom.



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Appearance

Externally all the visible external walls of the lower ground floor side infill extension and the interconnecting walls forming the upper ground floor balcony edges and the soffit of the overhanging roof section will be finished in facing stock brickwork to match the existing original brickwork used throughout the rear elevation of the property. These walls will be capped with a simple brick on edge parapet up-stand. This understated detail whilst both traditional and echoing other brickwork detailing in the building will visually differentiate the volume of the new lower ground floor elements from the retained L-shaped form of the original properties massing.

The new rear elevation of the extended lower ground floor will be predominantly glazed. This promotes the penetration of natural daylight and sunlight deeper into the plan whilst also enhancing the visual connection of the interior space with the rear garden and the open parkland beyond. The overhanging roof section created by the upper ground floor balcony conversely adds a degree of solar control to the south facing façade as well as some protection from the elements, enabling the elevation to be open even when the weather isn't dry.

Given the relative levels between the rear of the site and the park beyond and the lowered setting of the side infill extension permitted by the lowering of the lower ground floor level at the rear, the proposed additional works at lower ground floor level will be barely visible from outside the application site. As noted above the parapet level of the new flank wall of the side infill extension will only sit up 650mm above the existing boundary wall so the proposed works will have no impact on the amenity, sunlight or daylight enjoyed by any of the flats located on the adjoining no. 36.

The guarding to the south and west edges of the new terrace balcony will be formed in frameless glass panels set back behind the new parapet brickwork upstand. This will minimise the perceived height of the guarding and allow clear views through to the retained walls of the existing rear addition beyond.

The proposed new picture window and side door that replaces the existing small sash window in the rear wall of upper ground floor rear addition echo's the large expanses of fenestration that have been added higher up the building including the recently approved application for flat A above (application reference 2020/4455/P) which was considered acceptable in design and heritage terms and was considered to cause no impact on the amenity of the adjoining residential occupiers.

The small rear extension to the upper ground floor simply mirrors the design of the upper ground floor extension that has been added to no 36 and will unify the massing of the adjoining pair with a new vertical sliding sash window installed to serve the new master bedroom en-suite.

No changes are proposed at all to front elevation so the character and appearance of conservation area is preserved with regard to this aspect.

Landscaping

Having lowered the internal floor level of the existing rear addition and excavated down to bring the internal floor level of the new side infill extension to the same level it is proposed that the site levels of the rear yard will also be lowered to create a lower patio area flush with the finished internal floor area of the lower ground floor. This lowered patio area will extend out 3m from the rear elevation of the rear wall of the existing rear addition with the first 1.1m set below the proposed upper ground floor balcony and overhanging roof section of the proposed side in-fill extension.

Low level brickwork retaining walls backed by planted beds will flank the east and west sides of this new lower patio. Along the south edge of the patio full width steps will transition back up to the existing rear garden level.

All boundary treatments will remain as existing.

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CONCLUSION

The proposed modest additions to the rear of the property have been designed with reference to the above listed policies so as to be in accordance with both neighbourhood and borough policy requirements as well as the wider requirements of the London Plan.

Adding just 12sqm of additional space to the property has allowed the internal layout of the flat to be rationalised, reducing internal circulation areas in order to maximise the available space for habitable rooms. The resulting three bedroomed configuration provides bedrooms and living spaces that comfortably exceed minimum space standards and greatly improve on the room areas proposed as part of the previously approved change of use application. All three bedrooms are now provided with en-suite facilities as well as space being created for an additional stand alone WC.

The simple move of lowering the floor level at the rear of the flat not only allows the entirety of the lower ground floor to now be on one level but also ensures the proposed side infill extension will sit low in the site protecting the amenity of the flats in the adjoining no. 36 and rendering the extension virtually invisible from outside the boundary of the site.

Although the proposed side infill extension does build over a small portion of the rear garden the reconfiguration of the internal layout it allows for significantly improves the relationship between the two, with direct access from the main living space to the exterior being provided to encourage increased use of the garden and fostering a stronger relationship between the internal and external spaces as well as exploiting the site's south facing orientation and the spectacular views to the rear.

The simple form of the extensions together with the use of a restricted material palette that complements the existing building ensures the proposed works allow the original form of the building to remain legible.

The proposed fenestration alterations and provision of a new balcony to the rear of the upper ground floor rear addition provide the flat with additional amenity space whilst again maximising the currently under exploited south orientation of the flat and spectacular views afforded for this level. The privacy screening to side of balcony protects the amenity of the neighbour garden at no. 32 that is already surrounded by a proliferation of roof terraces and balconies already in existence on other adjoining properties.

No changes are proposed to the front of the property so the proposal will not detract from character and appearance of the street scene and the surroundings of the Highgate Village Conservation Area within which the site is set.

June 2023