

Heritage Response to Consultee Comments, 28 Albert Street, Camden

APPN 2023/1541/L & APPN 2023/0849/P

This note has been prepared in response to the consultation comments raised by the Conservation Officer and by the 20th Century Society and Camden Town Conservation Area Advisory Group, which relate specifically to the proposed works to the rear extension at 28 Albert Street.

We wish to make a number of points in response to these comments.

1. Significance of the rear extension in relation to the listed building

When assessing potential harm to listed buildings, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, paragraphs 195-200) directs us to assess the *significance* of the heritage asset. Harm to a grade II listed building requires more justification than to non-designated assets (and less than for grade II* and I listed buildings). However, the harm should be judged on how the proposals affect the *significance* of each heritage asset.

It is therefore important to first establish that the rear extension, whether or not it may have some heritage significance in itself, does not contribute to the significance of the listed building and the reasons for it being listed.

The terrace was listed in 1974 (listed entry number 1378629), and the rear extension was built in 1981. Number 28 was not specifically listed, the listing being for the complete terrace for its group value, described as “Numbers 22-46 and attached railings”. The listing description does not refer to the rear extension. The terrace was built c.1845 and is clearly listed for its group value as an early Victorian townhouse terrace. All of the features described in the listing are found at the street frontage of the terrace. There is no reference to the rear of the houses, not least to any modern extension. This is not surprising given that it was typical for buildings of this period to be designed with a high degree of attention to their principal frontage, with relatively plain rear elevations.

Listing description:

“Terrace of 13 houses. c1845. Yellow stock brick and rusticated stucco ground floors. Nos 22-40, slate mansard roofs with dormers. Symmetrical terrace with slightly projecting end bays (Nos 22 & 24 and No.46 with Nos 68/9 Mornington Street (qv) and central bay (Nos 34 & 36). 3 storeys and basements, Nos 22-40 with attics. 2 windows each. Doorways console-brackets (some enriched), carrying enriched cornice-heads; fanlights and panelled doors. Architraved recessed sashes; 1st floor with console-bracketed cornices and cast-iron balconies, 2nd floor with bracketed sills. Nos 22-32 & 42, stucco cornice and blocking course; Nos 34 & 36, stucco screen to dormers, pierced at windows; Nos 38 & 40, crenellated brick parapet; No.44, stucco cornice and balustraded parapet, No.46 stuccoed parapet. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings to flanking entrance steps and geometrical railings to areas.2

Therefore the rear extension does not contribute to the significance to the listed building and so harm to it does not represent harm to the significance of the listed building.

2. Impact on the significance of the Conservation Area

The principal importance of the terrace being its group value and its contribution to the streetscene, is confirmed by the Camden Town Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan:

Extracts from Camden Town Conservation Area Appraisal (p7):

“Albert Street has a high quality streetscape. Lined on both sides almost without interruption by uniform historic terraces, it is wider than nearby streets, creating a sense of space... The terrace on the east side, south of Mornington Street, Nos 22-46, is of a symmetrical composition with a raised

parapet forming a central feature spanning Nos 34-38. It is the only terrace in the street with an historic mansard attic storey... Although the architectural integrity of the terraces has been retained at the front, glimpses from side streets reveal an array of oversized and out-of-scale rear extensions"

The only reference to rear extensions in the Management Plan is to protect the importance of the original historic extensions:

"Within the Camden Town Conservation Area there are many interesting examples of historic rear elevations. The original historic pattern of rear elevations within a street or group of buildings is an integral part of the character of the area and as such rear extensions will not be acceptable where they would compromise the special character" [CTCAAMP, p20].

There is no positive mention in the document to rear extensions generally, and no specific reference to High Tech architecture of the rear extension at no.28 specifically, or to High Tech architecture being significant in any way to the character and significance of the conservation area.

It is therefore logical from this review to conclude that the rear extension at no.28 does not contribute towards the significance of the conservation area either. It is surprising therefore to see that the comments from CTAAC do not reflect the Conservation Area Assessment.

3. Significance of the rear extension in itself

The applicant, who is resident at the address, has undertaken significant research into the history and significance of the modern rear extension; including contacting the original architect's previous employer, Grimshaw, in order to inform the proposed design approach.

The extension was designed by Brian Taggart, who owned the house and worked for Grimshaw architects at the time. Grimshaw take no credit for the design of the rear extension. Instead, it was a personal project by Taggart and can be regarded as an experiment in pre-fabricated design.

This does not therefore, in our view, represent a significant architectural project, and not a significant example of the High Tech style. The scheme is small in scale and visible only from within private property at the rear of the house.

Brian Taggart is not widely regarded as a significant architect, nor is this rear extension regarded as a significant example of this style. We have found no record of either being cited, or awarded, in this manner. Whilst such views are to some degree subjective, we have yet to see any evidence from consultees that would support such an opinion.

Any value that the rear extension may have once had has been vastly reduced by its current condition. The experimental nature of the cladding has contributed to the fact that it has been subjected to significant water ingress and rust damage. The existing panels are simply no longer fit for purpose and need to be replaced. There is also a need to improve energy efficiency for the property, in order to increase its sustainability and futureproof the building, and it is not possible to add the enhanced insulation behind the existing panels.

The degradation of the original cladding compromised the claddings effectiveness as a weather proof barrier and enabled the ingress of moisture which has resulted in the corrosion of primary structural elements. Most notably the corrosion to the circular steel column shown in the figure below



Photographs showing current condition of cladding

There is therefore a need to replace the panels. Attempts were investigated to match the existing panels, however these are a non-standard design and it is not possible to source a comparable product. Even if it were, this would result in a loss of the original design and a replacement would not have the same heritage value.

With the need to provide a new elevation treatment for the rear elevation, therefore, it was considered that the most appropriate approach, in terms of heritage conservation, would be to respond positively to the significance of the listed building and its original character. The listed building, and its significance as an early Victorian townhouse terrace, is clearly the more important heritage consideration here.

SPIRAL STAIR: On review of the consultee comments, the applicant does agree that the spiral stair does have some architectural value and this can be retained alongside the current proposals. We have therefore amended the application drawings in order to retain this stair.

4. Summary Assessment

Therefore, whatever heritage significance the rear extension has, it must be remembered that it is not contributing to the significance of the listed building, or the Conservation Area, and it is important that the assessment of harm is considered within this content.

The modern extension is only deemed listed by virtue of being physically attached to the rest of the terrace. It is clearly built in a much later period, and designed in a different architectural style (High-Tech modernist) and therefore bears no conceptual linkage to architectural character of the listed terrace and should therefore not be considered to contribute positively to the significance of the listed building.

We consider that the rear extension does not hold high value as an example of the High Tech style. In any case, if it does, then the harm can be justified by the poor condition of the existing cladding panels, the inability to insulate these, and the inability to retain or replace the panels in a compatible style.

Indeed, we would argue that the introduction of a very different style of architecture here resulted in a negative impact to the character of the listed terrace, though ameliorated by the fact that it is not visible from the street frontage. By replacing the modern metal cladding panels with a white-rendered finish and replacing the fenestration with one a more vertical-proportioned arrangement more consistent with the original historic elements of the building the significant historic character is better able to be appreciated, bringing the building back into a consistent style, without the jarring use of a clashing modernist style.

When considering the impact purely upon the significance of the listed building, the result is therefore in our view a positive change and does not represent harm. Whilst there may be considered to be harm to the modern extension itself, this must be regarded as secondary to the significance of the listed building, following the approach set out in the NPPF. The modern extension is in effect a non-designated heritage asset, which is only deemed listed by being physically attached and does not contribute to the significance of the listed terrace. Harm to the rear extension can be justified for the reasons described in (3) above.

In assessing the consultee comments from the 20th Century Society it must also be borne in mind that this group has a specific interest in promoting a particular architectural style (as suggested by their name). Their comments therefore are likely to favour the preservation of the modern rear extension above the original Victorian terrace, which does not reflect the historic significance of these elements and the legal status that they have been granted via listing. The conservation officer should therefore compensate for this expected bias in assessing the heritage impact.

Therefore, although there may be some degree of harm to the rear extension *in itself* that requires justification, this does not represent harm to the significance of the listed building or the Conservation Area and therefore, in accordance with the NPPF, should be regarded as much more minor harm, requiring a lower bar of justification. This harm can be justified by the poor condition of the cladding and the inability to repair or replace them. This must also be balanced against the *positive* benefits to the conservation and appreciation of the significance of the listed building that the proposals will bring,

5. Assessment of other proposed changes

As you are aware, a number of other internal changes are proposed to the listed building. These can generally be classed as 'repair' and make like-for-like replacements, remove insensitive modern additions, and restore historic features. Falling under the category of repair, these would not in our view require Listed Building Consent.

As requested, we have ceased work and set out a full schedule of these repair works in an accompanying **Schedule of Repair Works** document (see attached). We have also attached a series of additional technical drawings describing the works, which have not previously been submitted.

It is also worth noting that on 15/06/2023 an enforcement officer visited the site and confirmed that works to the roof and attic ceiling could be regarded as 'emergency repairs'.

I would like to draw attention to the following items in particular:

Ceiling in attic roof space – our intention was to remove the plasterboard ceiling to reveal the roofspace and historic trusses. We note the request to reinstall a plasterboard ceiling to reflect the original room proportions. In reality, we do not know whether the original building had ceilings on this upper floor or not. We have researched this but found no evidence. We would request further evidence that this is the original arrangement before we reinstall a new ceiling. In my view, this attic level is likely to have been originally used as servants quarters. As such, it would be typical to have an open roofspace in order to make best use of the limited space.

However, in this instance, the applicant is happy to re-install a plasterboard ceiling similar to that which existed prior to these works, as we do wish to work collaboratively with you. This will therefore not be shown as a change within these proposals.

Stud wall in 2nd floor bathroom— the proposal is to install a stud wall in the bathroom in order to create a dressing room. We appreciate that this was incorrectly shown on the existing floorplans and we have amended these to make clear that this is a proposed change to be included within the application. Whilst we appreciate that this is not an historic feature the intention is to use a stud wall partition design that does not impact upon the historic fabric and can be easily removable. On this basis, we consider that this type of intervention is typically permitted within listed buildings and we would expect this to be appropriate in this case. As you know, this has in fact already been constructed, and so we request further consideration on whether it could now be retained, given that it could be removed at any time to restore the original proportions of the building if required. This is a private room that will only be visible to the residents and other bedrooms and bathrooms in the house retain the original proportions, providing good examples of the historic arrangement. Again, we would welcome your further consideration and advice on this.

Walls

The previous owners replaced the original walls in the stairwell and corridors with plasterboard; which the applicant discovered when we were repairing water damage that occurred from heavy rains last year. We removed the plasterboard in order to replace with new plasterboard. We kept areas of the plasterboard to demonstrate to the council that we were not causing harm to any historical fabric in the walls and that it we are performing a like for like repair.

In the front rooms of the house, the walls are original lathe and plaster and have not been touched. They will be spot repaired with lime plaster where damaged from damp.

DAMAGE TO HISTORICAL FABRIC: The party wall in the stairwell suffered similarly from heavy water-damage. The recently added wallpaper of the previous owner was peeling, bubbling and extensively discoloured. When the wallpaper was removed, the plaster crumbled down to the original brickwork. This is a result of damp and it is worth noting that 30 Albert St., the neighbouring property's party wall in the basement has been stripped down to the brickwork and is currently being treated for damp. This property is being managed by Camden Council and the Council is overseeing all work that is being performed. We however did not intend for the brick work in 28 Albert St to be exposed and we will refinish it in a lime plaster in order to restore it.

Ceilings

Emergency repairs recommended by a structural engineer were taken to a plaster ceiling in the basement and the plaster ceilings in the loft. No historical fabric was harmed.



Condition of attic roofspace prior to works (also see Schedule of Repair Works)

BASEMENT: Structural reinforcements to the joists were required for the basement ceiling following rain damage and bowing in the central area of the ceiling. This is to be replaced with a like for like plaster ceiling. There were no cornices in the basement as evidenced from photographs of the room prior to the ceiling's removal and no historical fabric was removed - which can be corroborated by the plasterboard edges of where the ceiling was removed.

With regards to the basement ceiling, the photographs below show how this had signs of water damage. From a visual inspection the ceiling appeared significantly bowed. Given the signs of water damage and the degree of bowing it was decided to remove the ceiling to inspect the condition of the joists.

Photographs showing damage to basement ceiling



LOFT: The plasterboard ceiling in these rooms had suffered significant damage from a roof that was no longer fit for purpose. They were removed as an emergency measure.

Roof

Significant water damage to the house from the poor condition of the roof required an emergency repair. The roof could not be repaired without replacing the membrane which was no longer fit for purpose. Tiles are 18in x 9in welsh slate and have been retained to be refitted with a new membrane. The supporting wood frame for the roof has been left untouched.

Flooring

The flooring in the house has been lifted to repair the electric cables that were underneath and ensure the joists were in good condition. No historical fabric has been harmed and all original floorboards have been retained.

The entire house had been carpeted by the previous owner's except for the kitchen, which had been covered in engineered wood. In the ground floor rooms, 2nd floor bathroom and loft bedrooms, the previous owner's had removed the historical floorboards and replaced them with MDF subfloors and either engineered wood or carpet on top (see photographs below).



Condition of flooring remaining from previous owners showing mdf sub-floors (left image) and engineered wood on top (right).

The only rooms with original floorboards are the drawing room and main bedroom. We are retaining these and sourcing reclaimed floorboards that match them to restore the flooring in the rest of the house where previous owner's had removed the original floorboards.

Radiators

The only original radiators in the house were two cast iron radiators in the main bedroom. We have left these untouched. We have removed the recently added panel radiators that were used in the rest of the house and are replacing them in the same locations with traditional cast iron radiators in order to be in keeping with the original aesthetic of the house.