

Objection to Darwin Court roof extensions, application no. 2024/1039/p, Gloucester Avenue NW1

In the late 1960s, the building of Darwin Court was ferociously fought and lost by campaigners. Splendid Victorian villas were torn down to build these dreary blocks. A few years later the scheme would never have received planning permission, the 1970s modernist design being antithetical to the aesthetic of the Primrose Hill neighbourhood and the aims of the Conservation Area.

As part of the permission, strict future limits in bulk and height were placed on the blocks.

With that history in mind, it cannot be justified to make the blocks even higher and even more out of keeping with the Conservation Area than they are now. In other words – this roof extension would compound the historical sin of the original construction of Darwin Court.

Design

The building of an extra storey will break up the unitary look of Darwin Court and create a muddled melange of mid-twentieth century design and mid-twenty-first century design. A visual mess in other words.

The existing Darwin Court buildings are too bulky and high and not of architectural merit. They stick out like a sore thumb in the Conservation Area. But at least the blocks are uniform in design and somewhat complement the red brick of the Cecil Sharp House opposite and a few of the early 20th century blocks on Gloucester Avenue, and the Goldfinger and James Stirling blocks. And in the summer, they are screened by mature trees.

Height

The Darwin Court blocks are far and away the tallest buildings in the Primrose Hill Conservation Area which were given permission before the Conservation Area legislation came into force in the late 1960s. (Hillview is just outside the PHCAAC.) The existing buildings are already unpleasantly higher than the surrounding houses. With the added floor they will be visible from a much wider area and look terrible from street level – like temporary sheds plopped on top of the permanent structure.

As someone else in the comments has pointed out, there will be plant on the roof of the extra storey making the addition, in effect, 2-stories.

And what is to stop developers adding another storey in 30-40 years?

Light and overlooking

There is also the important issue that the east-facing properties opposite the blocks get the morning sun to some extent. This will be completely blocked by the extra storey throwing the front of the houses into continuous shade twelve months a year. They will inevitably experience more light pollution at night, and they will be very overlooked by the extensive terraces shown in the drawings.

Urban greenways and trees

The green space along the railway tracks provides an urban greenway for wildlife. That will be lost. Isn't there a London-wide policy about preserving urban greenways along places like railway tracks? (In any case, do the developers have permission from Network rail, who owns the land, to take over use of it?)

There is the danger of losing the mature trees in the grounds. We have been losing a lot of mature trees in Primrose Hill lately. We cannot lose any more or even face the threat of doing so.

Structure

I leave comments about the structural integrity of the blocks to others who know the buildings better. But my experience of Camden Building Control Department and Camden Planning Department is that they never communicate with one another until it is too late...

One wonders if this is an attempt to get in the application before the Council has to implement new mandatory Design Codes for the whole of the borough. Presumably such construction would never be contemplated once the Design Codes are in place.

Laura Rivkin

