

18A Frognal Gardens, London NW3 6XA
Planning Reference No: 2024/1850/P

Ref: 4346

Heritage Note

June 2024

Introduction

Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage have been engaged by the applicant of the proposed development at 18A Frognal Gardens, London NW3 6XA ('the Site'), to review the heritage context of the Site considering the submitted proposals.

We understand that the planning application was validated in May 2024 (LPA Ref: 2024/1850/P) and is currently pending consideration. During the determination period the planning officer has met with the client and architect at the Site on 4th June 2024. Following the site visit, the planning officer shared a summary of comments received from the conservation officer expressing concerns regarding the proposed second floor extension, including that:

- *[The] proposed roof extension would not be supportable in principle.*
- *The additional height and bulk of the roof extension will cause noticeable harm to this part of the conservation area.*
- *The northern side of Frognal Gardens, although consisting of a rise in land levels resulting in a generally stepped roofline, has a variety of building types with the host building a later development from the second half of the 20th Century.*
- *The additional floor will imbalance the composition on this side of the street and harm surrounding views as a result of the additional volume.*
- *Unacceptable harm will be caused to the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area.*

This Heritage Note has been prepared to respond to these comments and to provide further information to demonstrate that the proposals preserve the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area and therefore are compliant with national and local policy, and thus are acceptable. Accordingly, set out below is:

- *a brief summary of the existing heritage context of the Site;*
- *followed by brief descriptions of the design proposals included in the submitted scheme;*
- *followed by an impact assessment of the proposed scheme, including a response to the conservation officer's comments.*

Existing Heritage Context

The Site is located on the northern side of Frognal Gardens within the London Borough of Camden. It is within the Hampstead Conservation Area and within the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan area.

According to the Hampstead Conservation Area Appraisal, 2002 (CAA), the area predominantly comprises large, late 19th century and 20th century houses set in spacious, large gardens with trees. The conservation area is divided into eight 'Sub-Areas,' each of which features one or more 'Character Zones.' As such, it is considered that the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area is therefore derived from the wide range of areas within it, each of which makes an important and valuable contribution to the conservation area.

The Site is within Sub-Area 5: Frognal. Within this Sub-Area, properties range from earlier Victorian style to more contemporary Modernist designs, such as the Site itself. The east side of Frognal Gardens was built first in the 1880/90s and features several substantial red brick houses with stone dressings and gables in various designs, while the west side of the road has a very different character with a group of two-storey detached houses set well back from the road, which feature distinctive pan-tiled roofs. The Site is located at a bend in the road which links Frognal to Church Row, gently sloping south and west, and is set back from the road with a front paved brick driveway. The Site, 18A, was built in 1965 by architect John Sutherland-Hawes for himself and forms part of an asymmetric pair of three storey, semi-detached Modernist style houses (18B was built a year later by an unrelated architect). These feature elements typical of Modernist design, such as its asymmetry, ribbon windows with vertical design emphasis, and are composed of brown brick with sections of red painted spandrel panels. The pair, including the Site, is considered to be a neutral contributor to the conservation area (CAA p. 41).

It is considered that Hampstead is an area of considerable quality and variety. The CAA states that "A range of factors and attributes come together to create its special character. These are principally; its topography; the Heath; the range, excellence and mix of buildings; the street pattern and Hampstead's historical association with clean water and fresh air" (p. 3). However, the CAA also notes where there are features or built forms which negatively impact the conservation area, such as the "insensitive roof extensions at Nos. 12 and 14 [Frognal Gardens]" which are disjointed, incongruous, and mis-matched in materials and style matching in style with the original buildings (p. 41). It should be noted that it is the poor quality of design and execution of these roof extensions which represent an insensitive intervention into the conservation area.

The current Site makes no contribution to the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area and therefore does not make a meaningful contribution to its significance, nor does it contribute to the significance of other heritage assets in its vicinity.

It is therefore considered that whilst the Site sits within the conservation area, paragraph 213 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is relevant, i.e.:

"Not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance."

Furthermore, paragraph 212 of the NPPF notes that:

"Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal

their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.”

As such, there is an opportunity for the proposals to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area through the provision of a high-quality and sustainable vertical extension which improve the appearance of a building which currently makes a neutral contribution to its surroundings.

Current Design Proposals

The overarching aim of the proposed development is to renovate and extend the existing house to make it suitable for modern family living and ensure that it is as energy efficient as possible while maintaining the integrity of the existing building, its relationship with the adjoining 18B, and respecting the character and appearance of the surrounding Hampstead Conservation Area. The previously approved application was for a far more ambitious project which would have resulted in the total demolition of the Site and the construction of a much larger replacement house in terms of height, scale, and massing, and in a completely different architectural style than the adjoining house and the wider area. The Applicant does not consider that such intervention is required to meet their needs, including their energy efficiency goals, and as such the current scheme has been immensely scaled down.

Despite having existing planning permission for a more radical intervention, the current owners have decided to proceed with a more pared-back scheme that keeps sustainability and good design at the forefront; as such, the existing building will be conserved, as much as possible, to eliminate the loss of fabric and reduce carbon costs. Moreover, they have taken this opportunity to enhance the appearance of a building which is currently only considered to be neutral in its contribution to the conservation area through the provision of high-quality design. Thus, the building will not only reflect “the diversity of architectural style and consistently high quality in design [which] makes Hampstead special,” but also extend its lifetime as a sustainable, practical modern home (Hampstead Conservation Area Design Guide, p. 3).

The following section sets out the high-level design proposals as part of the submitted scheme, followed by an impact assessment on the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area based on national and local policy.

Adapting for modern family living

Due to the constraints of the Site’s plot, there is limited area where the existing house could be extended to provide additional habitable space for the current residents, and their extended family. While the proposed change of use of the currently under-utilised garage to a habitable space will contribute to this aim, the creation of two bedrooms within an additional storey to the roof, together with an enlargement of the living area, will create a home that is suitable for the Site and location. The additional habitable space provided by the roof extension will also allow the house to be comfortable for its residents for a longer time.

Sustainability measures

Following on from the previously approved scheme’s aim to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability of the property, several improvements relating to the exterior and interior of the Site have been adapted into the current proposals with this goal. For the purposes of this Note only the proposals which relate to the exterior of the building, and thus have the potential to impact the character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area, are considered here. However, it is important that the Council remains

cognisant of the holistic benefits of the scheme in its entirety as this will inform the planning balance, in the event that it is required.

Currently, the large expanses of glazing, which are integral to the Site's Modernist style, have very poor thermal performance and have been fitted with secondary glazing which detracts from the appearance of the Site. Replacing these with appropriately designed fenestration (in terms of arrangement, dimensions, and colours) in the form of double-glazed windows will improve both the energy efficiency and appearance of the house.

The proposals also include the installation of photovoltaic panels onto the flat roof of the proposed roof extension. These would be positioned at 10 degrees, keeping a nearly flat roof, and away from the roof edges so that the panels will not be visible from the street. These measures will be in addition to the installation of an air source heat pump and battery storage system, further reducing energy use and carbon emissions.

Enhancing architectural form

As part of the previously approved scheme, it was concluded that the Site, as part of the pair of semi-detached houses, is of little architectural merit and offers only a neutral contribution to the Hampstead Conservation Area. To enhance the external appearance of the Site, it is proposed to cover the existing spandrel panels, which have become faded by sunlight and weathered over time, with the same type of zinc cladding used on the proposed roof extension and side porch extension. The cladding will be flusher with the existing brickwork and the colour/material will create a more harmonious, aesthetic blend with the proposed window frames and the original brickwork across both houses. Moreover, zinc cladding is not only a high-quality material with an improved aesthetic, it is also 100 percent recyclable and can be endlessly reused, further enhancing the sustainability of the whole Site by extending the lifespan of its materials.

The roof extension will be to the existing flat roof, modest in size and set back from the main walls so that it is subservient in character to the original building, whilst also reinforcing its verticality. A robust design connection with the renovated main house will be maintained by using the same type of zinc cladding and continuing the geometric arrangement of large sections of glazing throughout all levels.

The existing side porch, which currently appears as a lean-to in form, and existing garage frontage and associated ledge are all presently considered to detract from the Site. As such, it is proposed to use the same zinc cladding to the side porch extension and on the garage frontage to create a more unified appearance across the building.

Impact Assessment

It is considered by the Conservation Officer that the proposed roof extension will cause harm to a designated heritage asset, the Hampstead Conservation Area, due to the additional height and bulk resulting in an imbalance of the street composition and harm to surrounding views because of additional volume.

The below assessment will demonstrate that the proposals, in their entirety, are an enhancement to the character and appearance of the conservation area through high-quality design which improves both the visual aesthetics and energy performance of a building which currently makes no meaningful contribution to the conservation area.

Notwithstanding the following assessment, in the event that the Council conclude that the provision of a roof extension does give rise to an element of harm, this would be at the lower end of less than substantial and would be outweighed by the benefits of the scheme, as set out below. It is for the Planning Officer to undertake the planning balance, considering the scheme in its entirety.

Enhancing character and appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area through exemplary design

As stated above, the special character of the Hampstead Conservation Area is primarily derived from the “excellence and mix of buildings” within it (p. 3). It is noted within the CAA that one reason where development has not positively contributed to the area is “lack of ‘good manners’ or respect to historic context”, yet the historic context of the conservation area has been defined as eclectic; reflective of a mixture of architectural periods and styles; and of overall high quality, innovative design (p. 57).

According to the Committee Report associated with the previously approved scheme (dated 11/11/2020), the design was considered to be high quality; the scale and form of the building was considered appropriate for the area; and while the proposed green colour deviated from the contextual colour palette, the “exemplary quality of the architecture and robust contextual materials meant the building would contribute to Hampstead’s tradition of innovative design” (p. 2). Altogether, officers considered the replacement building to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area due to its redesign.

The revised proposals have given due consideration to the previously approved scheme and consider not only how to improve the aesthetics of the Site, but improve its relationship with the adjoining building, as it was designed as a composition rather than individual elements. As such, the proposed windows and cladding have been selected to retain the character of the existing building while creating a simplified composition. Working within the existing brickwork will ensure that the relationship of between the two buildings is retained; and by adjusting the form slightly (by losing the crenelations and bringing the windows and spandrel panels flusher with the brickwork) this will soften the geometry of the contrasting horizontal (18B) and vertical (18A) elements. Moreover, the material composition of brickwork and zinc cladding, in a complementary colour, are together a modern interpretation of the surrounding red brick Victorian, Edwardian and Arts and Crafts style houses, many of which feature red tiled roofs, and decorative moulded brickwork or areas of tile hanging. In this way, the proposed design can also, like the previously approved scheme, be considered high quality; appropriate in scale and form; and to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Roof Extensions

While the Site is located at the highest point of Frognal Gardens, it is notably lower in height than its surrounding context which is dominated by four and five storey villas. Due to the enclosed nature of the street and surrounding area, as well as the intervening buildings, visibility of the Site is limited to its immediate context. Furthermore, it is not visible from the Grade I listed St John’s Church located to the south.

In this case, the design of the proposed roof extension, alongside the upgrading of other elements such as cladding and fenestration, will add visual interest to the existing building and street scene. The proposed extension will not be overbearing to the existing building or the adjoining house as it will be set back and modest in size; the use of vertical elements and large sections of glazing will emphasise and enhance the geometry of its Modernist design.

As such, it is considered that the proposed roof extension is appropriate within the eclectic and varied character of the area, would retain important views, and would preserve the special interest of the conservation area as well as surrounding heritage assets.

It is also considered that the proposed roof extension is supported by the national and local policy. Paragraph 124 of the NPPF states:

“Planning policies and decisions should . . . support opportunities to use the airspace above existing residential and commercial premises for new homes. In particular, they should allow upward extensions where the development would be consistent with the prevailing height and form of neighbouring properties and the overall street scene, is well-designed (including complying with any local design policies and standards), and can maintain safe access and egress for occupiers. They should also allow mansard roof extensions on suitable properties where their external appearance harmonises with the original building, including extensions to terraces where one or more of the terraced houses already has a mansard. [...]”

Although there is no guidance on roof extensions within Camden’s Local Plan or Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan, the CAA refers to the use of mansard roof extensions at different properties – in some instances as part of the building’s character/original design and thus contributing to the character of the conservation area.

In this case, asymmetry is integral to the Modernist design of the pair of semi-detached houses of which the Site forms part, thus a roof extension would not upset the balance of the pair. Likewise, the pair of houses is unique in style within the Sub-Area for their Modernist style and contrasting geometric elements and is therefore not at risk of losing cohesion within the surrounding buildings. As noted within the CAA, there are cases in which “varied heights and roof forms . . . form a picturesque group,” which is the case within this Sub-Area (p. 46).

The design also follows the observation within the CAA appraisal that “[roof extensions] are generally more successful where the angled set back of the mansard is appropriately designed to reduce the impact of the extension” (H32, p.63). The extension will also feature materials and colours appropriate to the design and character of the property; it will not feature any intrusive dormers, nor will it change any important views within the area. Considered altogether, the proposed roof extension complies with both national and local policy and as the Site is surrounded by properties of varying heights and forms, and thus it is consistent with the nature of the conservation area.

Presumption in favour of sustainable development

The principal difference between the previously approved application and the current application is that the proposed design does not involve demolishing the whole building, not only to preserve the relationship between the Site and the adjoining house, but also to reduce carbon costs. In the previously approved scheme, officers concluded that because the Site is only a neutral contributor to the Hampstead Conservation Area, is of modern construction and little architectural merit, its demolition could be justified despite having such high carbon and energy costs. Yet the previous scheme did not consider the context of the adjoining building, nor that ‘the greenest building is one that already exists.’

Accordingly, the current design is in line with what is set out at the heart of the NPPF (2023), “a presumption in favour of sustainable development” (paragraph 11). The current design also complies with paragraph 131 of the NPPF as it would result in the creation of “high quality, beautiful and sustainable” building, which “is

fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.” Conversely, significant weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings. In this sense, the current design for the Site achieves a balance between innovation and sustainability, without losing congruity with its surroundings, which was the main reason for public opposition to the previous scheme.

The current design is also in accordance with Policy CC1: Climate Change Mitigation of Camden’s Local Plan, which requires all development to minimise the effects of climate change and aims to encourage all developments to meet the highest feasible environmental standards that are financially viable during construction and occupation. From the outset, total demolition and rebuild of the Site as part of the previously approved scheme would have resulted in extremely high carbon and energy costs that could be avoided by instead adapting the building through a retrofit design, as proposed by the current scheme. It follows the guidance within paragraph 7.56 of Camden’s Local Plan which states:

“Historic buildings including those in conservation areas can be sensitively adapted to meet the needs of climate change and energy saving while preserving their special interest and ensuring their long-term survival. In assessing applications for retrofitting sustainability measures to historic buildings the Council will take into consideration the public benefits gained from the improved energy efficiency of these buildings, including reduction of fuel poverty. These considerations will be weighed up against the degree to which proposals will change the appearance of the building, taking into consideration the scale of harm to appearance and the significance of the building.”

In this case, the roof extension is example of sustainable development as it is a proposal which has been carefully designed so that it responds to the existing Site and its adjoining building, and the Hampstead Conservation Area with no impact on special interest and significance of these assets. Moreover, this strategically designed retrofit will ensure the Site’s long-term survival by adapting it for future generations and offer both short- and long-term benefits to its residents.

Housing mix

The current scheme attempts to adapt the Site for modern family life by increasing its floorspace and improving its energy efficiency and overall sustainability credentials. As a family seeking space to accommodate their extended family, there are limited options within the Borough to meet their housing needs. The additional habitable space provided by a roof extension will not only allow the house to meet the current needs of the residents but also be comfortable for its residents into the future. In this way, the roof extension is considered sustainable development as set out by the NPPF, as it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Additionally, this design complies with several housing policies set out by the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan (Policy HC1: Housing Mix and Policy H6: Housing Choice), which aim to promote a diverse mixture of high-quality housing types suitable for the Borough’s existing and future households. However, if the LPA prohibits a family from adapting an existing building to fit their changing needs, with the utmost commitment to sustainability and respect for the character of the area, this will negate the Borough’s goal to attract diverse residents. This will especially affect those who want to settle and raise families in the area if they feel do not have the ability to adapt their housing to fit their needs.

Summary & Conclusion

The previous approval of a much more radical scheme, which required a total demolition of the existing Site (resulting in much higher carbon and energy costs) and introduced entirely new showed that a planning balance can be achieved between innovative design and protecting the special interest and significance of heritage assets. In this case, a much more scaled back scheme has been presented. Elements such as the proposed roof extension have been carefully designed to respond not only to the existing Site, but its adjoining building and the wider area, without sacrificing sustainability credentials.

The proposals, in their entirety, are of a high-quality and are considered to be an enhancement to the character and appearance of the conservation area through high-quality design which improves both the visual aesthetics and energy performance of a building which currently makes no meaningful contribution to the conservation area.

In the event that the Council conclude that the provision of a roof extension does give rise to an element of harm, it would be limited and localised and therefore would be at the lower end of less than substantial. On balance, the harm would be outweighed by the wider benefits of the overall proposals.

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