

56-58 Parliament Hill
London NW3 2TL



Townscape and Heritage Objection
on behalf of Edward Docherty, owner of
61 Parliament Hill

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56-58 PARLIAMENT HILL, NW3
TOWNSCAPE & HERITAGE OBJECTION

1. Introduction

This report sets out considered objections to the proposals for a Site that are now before LB Camden as LPA at 56 and 58 Parliament Hill (ref 2024/2695/P). It amplifies the objectors' legitimate concerns. It has been commissioned by objector Edward Docherty who lives at Second Floor flat, 61 Parliament Hill opposite the Site.

The objection concludes that the proposal would create an out-of-scale and alien intervention that causes “less than substantial” harm to the significance of assets (without public benefits) and fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. As such, it should be refused permission.

This objection report has been prepared by Robert Bevan, director of Authentic Futures, an award-winning heritage regeneration consultancy. Robert has qualifications in architecture, planning and urban design and has worked as a heritage specialist in local government and in private practice. He is the author of numerous articles, academic papers and books on these subjects and a member of the International Council of Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS) – the body that advises UNESCO on World Heritage Sites. He is also an award-winning writer on contemporary architecture and urbanism.

He has worked in many locations but especially in London. His conclusions here, while commissioned by an objector, are based on many years of expertise as heritage consultant, urban designer and town planner and he finds, independently, that the proposals will cause less than substantial harm to heritage significance without providing convincing benefits that outweigh that harm.

The report accords great weight to preserving heritage significance, avoiding harm to the significance of assets and their settings, and to the need to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. These are tests of heritage and townscape suitability contained in legislation, policy and guidance that the submission does not meet.

The proposal is for a pair of roof extensions and associated roof terraces on the east side of Parliament Hill on the semi-detached Nos 56 and 58. At present there are a number of accretions at roof level, some of which were erected without planning permission. The proposal does not seek to simply regularise these unauthorised works but to capitalise upon them with more extensive proposals that alter and raise the front pitches of the houses (and other key historic features such as chimneys and party walls) and introduces extensive alien design elements such as aluminium framed glazing and doors and a standing seam clad element to the roof. All are visible from other properties and from street level within the conservation area.

2. Understanding Parliament Hill and its Significance

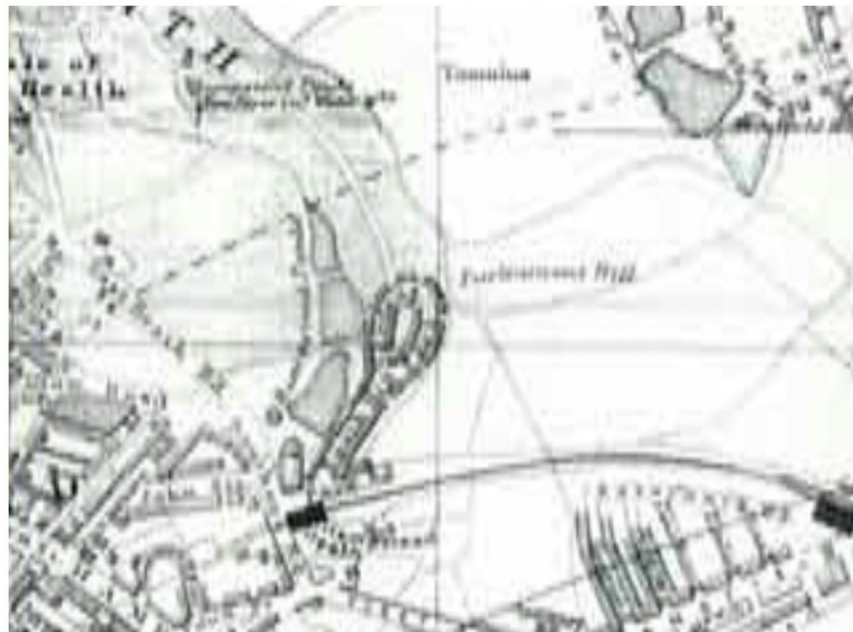
The expansion of this part of Hampstead into the Heath– ie what is now the South Hill Park Conservation Area – occurred in the late 19th century following the purchase of eight acres South End (or Hoylands) Farm by the Hampstead Junction Railway for the construction of its line and station. This had the effect of severing the farm in two without delivering the promised cross-track routes.

Development was already occurring on the South Hill Park land by Thomas Rhodes from 1868 and, later, on nearby land either side of the Fleet owned by Joseph Salter which was subsequently controlled by TE Gibb.

The leaseholder of the South End Farm, Joseph Picket, continued to work the land but there were complicated and lapsed lease arrangements with the owners, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. TE Gibb also took on some South End Farm land with a building agreement in 1881 and construction beginning in 1889

FML Thompson's *Hampstead: Building a Borough 1650-1964* first published 1974) describes how Parliament Hill, Nassington Road and Tanza Road were laid out by

Pickett and Kentish Town builder John Ashwell between 1878 and 1892 with, apart from two plots, the houses completed between 1880 and 1894. Development began first at the northern end of the enclave – the point furthest away from the then still extant smallpox hospital closer to the station. The housing was for the middle-class and largely consisted of paired villas with some detached houses such as those on Parliament Hill. They were mostly in red brick with three storeys over a basement. One purchaser invested in a dozen houses. Among other Victorian builders active in the area were GD Barnes and Robert Thorpe on Nassington Road. Further housebuilding to the north on Lord Mansfield's land was prevented by the addition of Parliament Hill Fields in 1889 to the protected open space.



Above: 1883 OS showing the first phase of development at South Hill. Parliament Hill (the road) is yet to appear.



Above: 1891 OS map showing the conservation area almost fully developed. Below: The area in 1915. The Site is marked in red.



The area was designated the South Hill Park Conservation Area in 1988. The accompanying appraisal divides the area into character sub-areas. The second of these covers Parliament Hill, Tanza Road and Nassington Road. It describes these streets as being characterised by “substantial semi-detached houses overwhelmingly in the Victorian Gothic Revival style” with steeply pitched roofs, Tudor chimneys and rustic porches. Some aspects of the typology reflect the various Building Acts for London including that of 1844.

It continues that, other than Parliament Court: “Parliament Hill is characterised by red brick semi-detached villas with prominent front gables, grey slated steeply pitched roofs and stucco surrounds to doors and windows. The Gothic style roof form on these properties is much steeper and more conspicuous than the Italianate form used in South Hill Park, resulting in a distinctive ‘saw tooth’ roof profile...”

The Site is described specifically as part of the Tanza Road text where the Nos 56-58 stand on the corner. The appraisal states:

“Tanza Road has properties similar to the gable fronted houses in Parliament Hill, with the exception of Nos 29-39 which revert to the Italianate style, albeit in red brick. They form a group with Nos 56-70 Parliament Hill. No 56 and 58 both have prominent corner towers based on the ‘campanile’ of medieval Italian villas (and popularised by Osborne House built by Queen Victoria).”

It continues: “The early suburban semi-detached form of development is the principle features that contributes to the character and appearance of the area. This form provides glimpses of rear garden areas through the gaps between villas and wider vistas at road junctions.”

The Site and all the nearby houses are identified as buildings that make a positive contribution. They are not locally listed.

Interpretation of this Understanding

These appraisal descriptions demand some qualification and elaboration before commenting on significance and impact: While indeed, much of the character sub-area is a loose Gothic Revival, only parts of the area including substantial lengths of Parliament Hill are characterised by a saw-tooth townscape of steep gables where the revival style is carried out with some conviction. There are other styles of houses along the street and variations on the themes. Quite a number of the pairs have main blocks with side wings that step either forwards or back from the main façade. This is true for the houses north and south of the Site and those opposite. The tall slate roofs of these types may sometimes include dormers and gables but often the side wings are instead capped with slate roofs of various types including continuations of the main slope (as at 54 Parliament Hill adjacent, for example) or small pyramidal roofs (as at Nos 49-51 Parliament Hill, for example). Many also have corbelled brick eaves cornicing in addition to their stucco surrounds to the doors and windows. Here, the Gothic Revival style is at its most diluted and quotidian.

The description of 29-39 Tanza Road as red brick Italianate feels somewhat stretched. The form is similar to the houses across the area only with some limited 'Italianate' decoration such as stucco doorcase mouldings.

The description of the corner towers of 56 and 58 Parliament Hill as having 'campanile' akin to Osborne House is also notably ambitious. Yet it is true that these towers are unique in the conservation area and are – at least very loosely – Italianate in inspiration. They are of one storey but appear more prominent because these elements make them taller than other pairs of houses in the area and because of their location at a road junction from which roads slope away in two directions. In this way, they have an important role as landmarks in the immediate area.

Whether these unusual and unique corner towers are original to the design or an early adaption of the original pair is not known but if not as originally built, the addition occurred within the first few decades of completion.



Above: Typical Gothic Revival semis on Parliament Hill near the Site. Their main ranges are capped by gables. Side wings are capped by small pyramidal roofs. There are eclectic details including Italianate influence to door and window designs.



Above: Nos 56 and 58 are unique in the conservation area in having square corner turrets. They mix Italianate features such as these towers and the square porches with Gothic Revival elements such as mouldings and the corbelled brick cornices at eaves level.

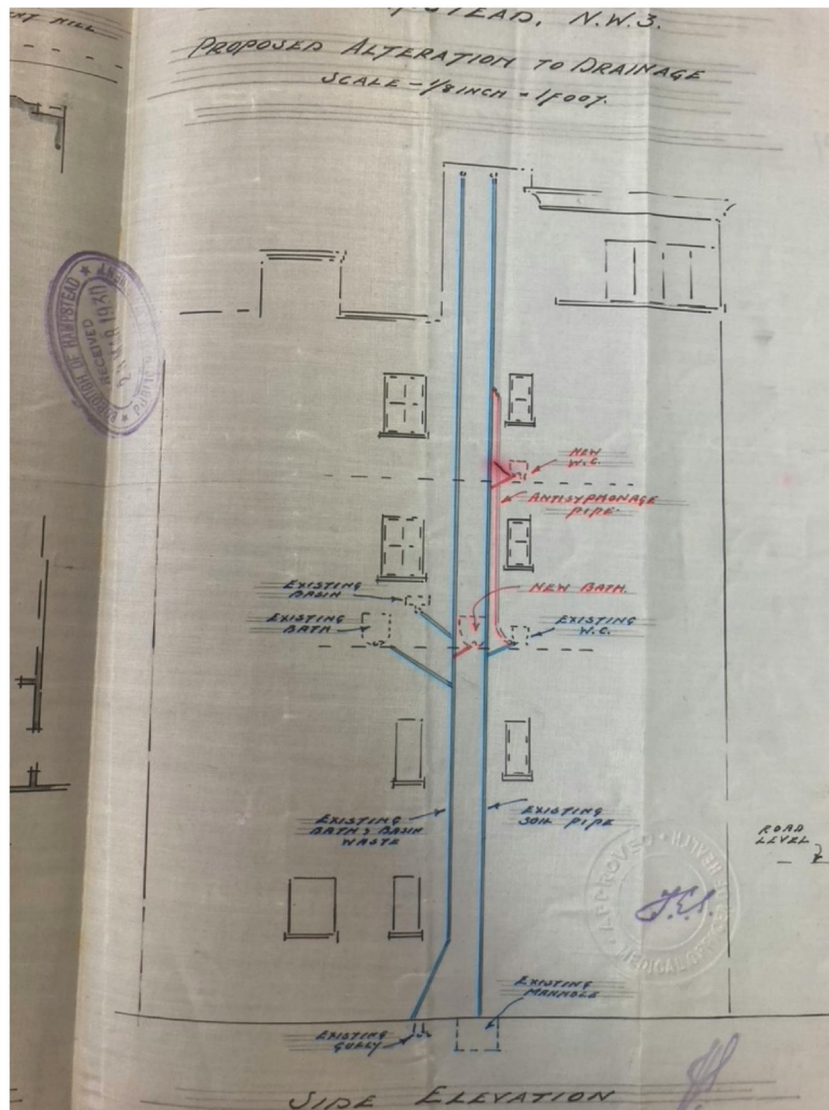


Above: Archival image of 49 Parliament Hill showing a pyramid slate roof with corbelled brick cornice at its eaves on the side wing. It is possible but no means certain that Nos 56 and 58 originally had similar roofs to their side wings with their 'towers' added in the early 20th century.

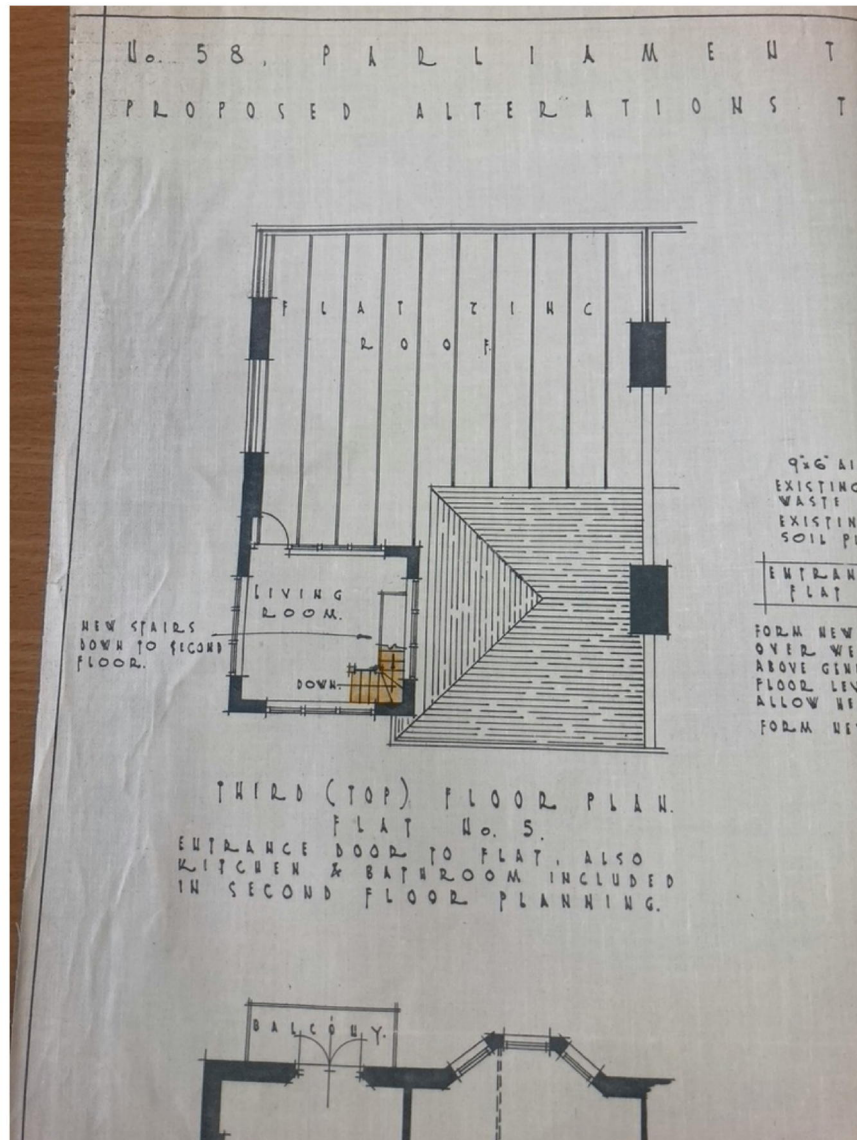
The first documented illustration of these tower structures can be found in Borough of Hampstead approved drainage plans for No 58 in 1929 and for No 56 in 1954. Given that these drainage plans were for alterations to plumbing/drains at existing structures, the towers were clearly present prior to 1929 and almost certainly built as a pair either originally or soon after. The drainage diagrams also indicate that No 58 was converted to five flats in 1936.

The supposition that they might be later alterations arises in part not simply because they are highly unusual for their period and the Gothic Revival character of the area, but they are an unusual design in themselves and feature brickwork that appears repeatedly reconstructed.

The current window frames at 56 and 58 are obviously clearly modern, however, they are also set flush to the brickwork rather than set back in a reveal. The brickwork around the tower of No 56 in particular also appears to suggest substantial rebuilding to the front and flank at various stages. Indeed, the type of brick on the flank couple with the lack of reveal could indicate these towers are, perhaps, an interwar addition rather than an aspect of the original design. This is conjecture – no earlier drawings or images have been discovered. The form of the main cornice around each tower also suggests more recent work. Whatever the origins of these towers, though, they remain a distinctive landmark in the street scene.



Above: 1936 drainage plan showing flank elevation of No 58 with a corner turret.



Above: 1936 drainage plan showing a living room in No 58's corner turret and flat roof to the rear.



Above: The turret at No 56 today. It has been considerably altered over time with variations in bricks used on the street façade and flanks. The detailing of the capping cornicing either side of the window appear 19th century but the main capping cornice has somewhat different detailing that might be later – as might that at No 58. However, drainage plans indicate that both towers were in place before 1929.

Significance

Conservation areas are designated heritage assets that are conventionally regarded as having low to medium significance. This is the case at South Hill Park Conservation Area. Overall, the conservation area should be seen as having low significance with its late 19th century housing, the overall layout, being of architectural value. There is also value in its layout and its relationship to trees and open spaces.

This concurs with the relevant appraisal and management guidance that notes: “The early suburban semi-detached form of development is the principle feature that contributes to the character and appearance of the area.” It also notes the “wider vistas at road junctions.”

Nos 56 and 58 as a pair contribute positively and are an element of this overall significance. However, as a unique pair with towers in a landmark location they have increased significance in comparison with most other houses within the conservation area whose value is more group than individual. That said, the opinion that this pair has particular group value with the houses on Tanza Road that have, very broadly, some Italianate decoration is more questionable.

The poor state of the towers, their unsympathetic fenestration and various roof additions detract from significance.

3. The Proposals

The proposal before the LPA is for a roof extension for Nos 56 and 58 that infills between the two towers. The slate pitched roof between will be altered and raised including the ridge height and changing its pitch.

The new 'tiled' slopes are linked to the two towers by two sections of standing seam leaded roof on each house. This also demands increasing the height of the external chimney breast and the party wall.

To the vertical rear of the extension onto the flat roof area, a glazed screen of grey aluminium door and windows frames will be installed. More vertical glazing will appear at roof level on the outer flanks of the pair. The existing four windows at second floor level will also be replaced with grey aluminium frames.

There will be a black metal balustrading to the roof terrace created.

Internally, extensive living/dining areas are created with an additional 49m² GIA. WCs are located in the standing seam element and a kitchen and study are housed in the towers of Nos 56 and 58 respectively.

The above builds on contested previous roof alterations that have resulted in vertical screens being erected at No 58. These are visible on the front and flank of No 58. Their history is disputed but includes the refusal of a lawful development certificate in January 2023 and subsequently the granting of such a certificate in October 2023 (2023/3642/P). In retrospect, these prior changes appear a prelude to the ambitions of the current application.

4. Impact Assessment

The proposal will result in one of the most substantial roof extensions in the South Hill Park Conservation Area of recent years and because of the position of the pair, one of the most visible and prominent in the streetscene.

The replacement of the roof slope, changing its angle and the raising of the ridge, the large box-like form to the rear, extensive terrace elements and the introduction of the alien vertical standing seam link elements creates a bulky new roof of a very different scale and form to the established pattern that makes up the character and appearance of the conservation area. The result is an over-scaled intervention whose bulk, form and detailing, is alien to the established pattern both front and rear and on the flank.

This is all seen not only from the street at some distance along Parliament Hill and from Tanza Road, but also from within the many homes surrounding the Site including No 61 Parliament Hill. Potentially it can also be seen from higher ground towards the Parliament Hill look out on Hampstead Heath and will be particularly prominent when illuminated within at night.

The whole compounds the previous negative interventions stemming from the unauthorised work granted a lawful development certificate in 2023.

The intervention and the infilling of the space between the corner towers reduces the detached towers' unique role in the composition of the pair of houses that are among the most important in the conservation area due to their uniqueness and position. It elides their form with the new roof.

Further, it undermines the landmark role that the towers play in the local street scene and their contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is not possible for such a radical and conspicuous change to preserve the conservation area and the alien design and undermining of the tower's modelling and four-square detachment, and their landmark role cannot possibly amount to enhancement.

This negative impact is compounded by the extensive areas of aluminium framing, glazing and balustrading which are also unsympathetic to the detailed design language characteristic of the conservation area. The intervention is neither Gothic Revival, nor Italianate, nor a minimalist, reticent contemporary foil to established patterns. The negative impact that results would only be compounded by roof terrace paraphernalia

and planting. The proposed aluminium windows at second floor level are also alien – neither sympathetic nor complementary in design or materiality.

For all these reasons, the proposals cause harm to the significance of the pair of houses, undermining their positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area and likewise detracting from the significance and special interest of this part of the South Hill Park Conservation Area which is neither preserved nor enhanced. The proposals would set a disturbing precedent.

5. Compliance with Policy and Conclusions

These impacts cause harm to the significance of heritage assets contrary to policy. The harm caused by this overdevelopment is ‘less than substantial’ but the harm is not outweighed by any identified public benefits. Consequently, the proposals do not accord with national legislation in respect of conservation areas and the National Planning Policy Framework’s heritage policies.

The proposals do not accord with Camden’s policies and guidance either. Notably, this includes Policy D1 parts a,b, e, f and m. These seek designs that respect local context and character, that preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets, that has high quality details that complement local character and which integrate well into surrounding streets and open spaces, as well as preserving strategic and local views.

They also fail to accord with Policy D2 which states that the council will not permit development that causes less than substantial harm without the public benefits that convincingly outweigh the harm. The duty also requires development to preserve or enhance conservation areas. Neither occurs with this proposal.

Further, the South Hill Park Conservation Area Statement contains guidance the proposals fails to comply with. Notably, Policy SHP1 which requires that: “All development should respect existing features such as building lines, roof lines,

elevation design, and where appropriate, architectural characteristics, detailing, profile and materials of adjoining buildings.

Additionally, Policy SHP15 notes that some alterations at roof level have a harmful impact on the conservation area and in any case should “respect the integrity of the existing roof form.” It states “existing original details should be precisely matched.” An accompanying image caption states: “All alterations or extensions at roof level should not alter the distinctive shape and profile.

The proposal fails to meet this demand, radically altering the distinctive shape and profile of the roof and being unsympathetic in their details, form and materials.

Additionally, Camden issued Home Improvement supplementary planning guidance in January 2021. It calls for the new development -to have regard to:

- Character and proportions of host building, neighbouring ones and wider area;
- The existing common pattern of development and rhythm of gaps, buildings and street features;
- The visibility of your property from long views along the street, from further away if it sits at higher level, and from public spaces
- Preserves strategic and local views.

It also notes that: “In order to be acceptable by Officers, materials should be contextual and “should relate well to the existing character and appearance of both the existing home and the wider area, particularly in Conservation Areas and listed buildings.”

It also requires that an extension “does not result in excessive light pollution that adversely impacts adjoining properties.” The large areas of glazing proposed at roof level to the rear and flanks proposed for the Site will not comply with this requirement. It will result in extensive high-level lighting being visible across the conservation area after dark in incongruous fashion and possibly from Parliament Hill on Hampstead Heath itself.

It also requires that roof extensions consider their prominence in the streetscene and the wider area and consider land topography. At Parliament Hill, topography will serve to exacerbate the negative impacts of the proposal as set out above. Nor is the proposal “proportionate to the roof slope being extended”. Indeed, the slopes are being altered altogether and are to be disproportionate. Nor do the roof terraces proposed “preserve the roof form and complement the elevation upon which they are to be located.”

For all these reasons, the proposals cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the pair of houses, undermining their positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area and likewise detract from the significance and special interest of this part of the South Hill Park Conservation Area which is neither preserved nor enhanced. The proposals would set a disturbing precedent and are contrary to legislation, policy and guidance.

In reaching these conclusions, great weight has been given to the desirability of preserving the special interest of the assets. It is urged that the application be refused.

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