



Date: 14/05/2024
Our ref: 2024/1216/PRE
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Dear Mr Chapple,

Re: 15 Church Row NW3 6UP

Internal alterations on both floors and minor external alterations on the second floor

Site and significance

The site is a grade-II-listed house making a positive contribution to the Hampstead Conservation Area.

Its significance lies in its architectural design, plan form and historic fabric. Additionally any external works to it must preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area.

Its list description notes:

Detached house. c1924. Multi-coloured stock brick with stone and red brick dressings. Tiled roof with dormer and moulded brick slab chimney-stacks. Neo-Georgian style. 2 storeys, attic and basement. Double fronted with 3 windows and slightly projecting central bay. Doorcase with enriched console-brackets supporting hood with cornice continuing across narrow side-lights, panelled reveals; patterned fanlight and panelled door. Gauged brick flat arches to flush framed sashes with exposed boxing; 1st floor with recessed apron panels. Central 1st floor sash segmental-arched with keystone and wrought-iron balcony above entrance. Parapet with stone band below and recessed panels; entrance bay with stone cornice and balustraded panel in parapet in front of dormer. INTERIOR: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with torch flambe finials to areas.

This advice is based on the site visit, carried out on 30 April, and the submitted documents, namely Heritage statement, "Proposed" (revision 2), "Demolition" (revision 2) and "Existing".

Drawings

It must be pointed out that submitting drawings are difficult to interpret. For example, the entire front of the site is hatched on the demolition plan, for what turns out to be the removal of a carpet; yet the different hatching in the back rooms makes no mention of carpet but instead indicates a change in floor level. A third level of hatching states that it refers to the removal of roofing, even though none is shown on the drawing. Often architects issue separate drawings to indicate floor finishes, RCPs, etc. Otherwise, simple annotations will suffice.

The “existing” drawings appear to have come from a different source and have dimension marks, numbers and symbols all over them that make them difficult to compare with the proposed drawings.

On the proposal drawing, confusingly, some walls that already exist are hatched, as though they are new walls.

It is suggested that, if an application comes forward, the drawings take account of these matters of general legibility and conformity to common practice.

General notes

In general, given the relative newness of the building, later additions to plan form are likely to be able to be removed. Conversely, material shown in the phasing diagram as original should be retained and will be subject to greater protection.

Terms of this assessment

The assessment of the proposed works is applied to the impact on the significance of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area. This advice does not include an assessment of any planning matters outside of listed building consent and heritage impact. If this advice fails to mention or assess any aspect of the proposals it should not be taken to mean that such elements are automatically acceptable.

Ground floor

The front door has an impressive array of period fittings that must be retained.

First floor

It is proposed to raise the floor level of much of this storey to the height of a step within a bay window. Various partitions are to be demolished. The kitchen will become an additional bathroom.

There appears to be less-than-substantial harm caused by works to a wall and cupboard between the reading room and the bathroom, which are noted in the phasing diagram to be original. This will need to be balanced by heritage benefits. There are also walls on the landing and corridor that exist and are shown as historic on the phasing diagram, yet are hatched in a way that indicates that they are to be new walls. It is not just the exterior of listed building that is protected and, as noted above, historic partitions are expected to be retained.

The heritage statement presents the view that the interior is almost entirely without merit. At one point, it notes that the plan form is “simply a collection of small boxes arranged around a corridor”. However, all plan forms are essentially arrangements of boxes and

corridors. That this plan form takes the form it does will reflect the form of the site and the demands of the client. While it is accepted that the interiors are plain and have in places been altered, further alterations will need to be properly justified and balanced. The changes to the wall between the corridor and the bathroom to allow a row of cupboards, for example, seem unduly harmful both to plan form and to historic fabric. Openings may be envisaged, but wholesale demolition not. Masonry walls can be easier to open apertures in than timber stud ones, which often contain complex load-bearing structures and require cutting through laths.

The proposal to raise the floor is unacceptable. It is justified in the heritage statement by the argument that it will “give a distinct identity to the master suite”. The heritage statement also minimises the effects on the fabric of the house. However, this is a highly disruptive intervention that will entail significant alterations to fittings and openings – affecting skirting boards, door frames and picture rails, as well as requiring the partial demolition of every doorway affected and effectively lowering all the sill heights. It will alter the spatial characteristics of more than half of a principal storey.

The removal of what appears to be a dropped ceiling in the landing corridor will need to be justified by sensitive opening-up, to prove that it is a later insertion.

An ornamental arcade is to be introduced on the landing. This is justified in the heritage statement by saying it will echo the arches on the ground floor and “reintroduce an element of neo-Georgian design to the first floor, thus enhancing its character”. A similar form is shown on the short section of the historic plans, but at right angles to what is proposed. Nothing is shown standing on the landing in the plans so it is difficult to understand what was built. In this case, the proposed free-standing screen’s columns will crowd the bannisters and break the spacious landing into two cramped volumes, one of which will be just half the width of a stair. Even the heritage statement acknowledges that the staircase is one of the most notable parts of the house, albeit of “low level significance”. It is unlikely that so dramatic an alteration to so principal a volume will be considered acceptable unless it can be conclusively proven to be a scholarly reinstatement of a removed 1924 feature. Simply adding an arched form is not appropriate.

Second floor

Again, a large part of the drawing has been hatched, only for the legend to indicate that this simply means that the parquet floor is to be retained.

This level benefits from three small, conventional dormers and an oversized inset one of non-traditional form. This addresses a roof terrace and has a large retractable awning. There are two steps up from the room to the terrace level and it seems unlikely that this house had a roof terrace while it still possessed its garden. An original dormer at this point would have looked at the back of the parapet of the bay; however, the one on the side of the house does face the parapet.

Various partitions and fitted furnishings are to be removed at this level, along with the ceiling. Because the existing drawings are not easy to read, it is difficult to be completely sure what is intended. However, a room marked as “linen” on the historic plan is to be demolished and it is proposed to make a penetration through the chimney stack.

The penetration of the chimney stack will cause harm to plan form and historic fabric and is unacceptable.

Generally, the removal of ceilings is discouraged, not just because of issues of historic fabric, but because it tends to move the host listed building further away from, rather than closer to, its historic form. After mediaeval times, open roof trusses in domestic buildings are a modern form that is entirely at odds with the neo-Georgian aspirations of this house. This being a somewhat atypical house, acceptability will be dependent on its not being historic fabric.

Roof

The rear of the house is prominently visible from Frognaal Way and the south. It is unlikely that this house had any form of roof terrace when built. Therefore, the visible presence of a roof terrace is atypical and harmful, both to the listed building and the conservation area, and should be reduced, not increased.

The existing inset dormer arrangement on the roof has full-height sliding aluminium patio doors, with glazed returns and glazed spandrel panels at floor level. It is atypical and prominent and therefore undesirable, and attempts to enlarge it would be unwelcome. However, it may be possible to improve the existing design while inserting a modest dormer. Bringing the plane of glazing forward would at least eliminate the glazed returns. Improvements could include reducing the glazed area and breaking up the glazing into smaller panes. Any dormer would need to be traditionally detailed. The aluminium patio doors envisaged would not be considered an improvement.

It is likely that a plain metal handrail will be acceptable. The lowering of the terrace deck will have the effect of reducing its necessary height.

However, it will need to be explained why the terrace deck is at the height it is. It seems improbable that whoever built the opening decided to raise the newly accessible terrace to a level higher than the room it served; if anything, given the choice, it would be normal to have it lower. This suggests that the deck level represents the house's original eaves height and as such will form an integral part of the roof as a whole.

This leads to the possibility that the level of the terrace deck is in some way related to the height of the room in the bay below. The square bay on the first floor has a structural crossmember apparently at the position where the attic room has a step, lending credence to this theory. Any works to the terrace deck level that entail structural alterations will be unacceptable.



The satellite dishes should be removed. The awning is a discordant and noticeable feature at high level and should be removed.

Conclusion

For the reasons given above, the proposal as it stands is considered to cause less-than-substantial harm with no public benefits, contrary to the NPPF and policies D1 (Design) and D2 (Heritage) of the Camden Local Plan, and would be resisted.

Listed building consent application information

On the basis of the works shown above, planning permission will also be required (alterations to roof form including construction of a dormer window)

Should you choose to submit a listed building consent application which addresses the outstanding issues detailed in this report satisfactorily, I would advise you to submit the following for a valid planning application:

- Completed form – listed building consent application
- An Ordnance-Survey-based location plan at 1:1250 scale denoting the application site in red
- Floor plans at a scale of 1:50 labelled 'existing' and 'proposed'
- Elevation drawings at a scale of 1:50 labelled 'existing' and 'proposed'
- Section drawings at a scale of 1:50 labelled 'existing' and 'proposed'
- Section and elevation drawings (where existing and as proposed) of any window and joinery alterations at an appropriate scale
- Design and access statement
- Heritage statement
- The appropriate fee
- Please see supporting information for planning applications for more information.

We are legally required publicly to consult on applications with individuals who may be affected by the proposals and for all external works to a grade-II listed building. We would put up a notice on or near the site and advertise in a local newspaper. The council must allow 21 days from the consultation start date for responses to be received. You are advised to contact your neighbours prior to submission, to discuss the proposals. Non-major applications are typically determined under delegated powers, however, if more than three objections from neighbours or an objection from a local amenity group are received the application will be referred to the Members Briefing Panel should it be recommended for approval by officers.

This document represents an initial informal officer view of your proposals based on the information available to us at this stage and is not binding upon the council.

Kind regards,

Nick Baxter

Senior conservation officer