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P221 Hampstead Heath Vale of Health

Public Conveniences.



Outline Condition Survey

October 2024

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1.0 Introduction

We have been instructed by Ulrike Wahl of the City of London Surveyors Department to carry out a Condition and Measured Survey of the Vale of Health Public Conveniences WC Block.

The buildings were inspected on Thursday 3rd October 2024 by Andrew Coles, Christopher Walker and Swarathmika Bharadwaj, all of Coles Conservation Architects Ltd.

The weather on the day was approximately 16 ° C and largely clear skies.

For ease of descriptions, we have described elevations as true North, South, East and West. The WC block however sits at a slight southwest-northeast access as-built.

2.0 Scope of the Condition Appraisal and Limitations

The Conditional Survey undertaken and written up here is based on a 1-day visual survey only and therefore has limitations in detail.

No building fabric was removed or opened up during our visit and concealed spaces were not inspected. It is therefore impossible to report that any such part of the fabric is free from defect. No inspection of roof concealed timbers or voids has been possible due to the existing match-boarded lining to the underside. It is important to record that this report has not been informed by specialist input from any other disciplines - archaeology, structure, mechanical and electrical, fire safety, MEP and other similar professional disciplines have not been consulted.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of any buildings, structure and construction, further surveys, both non-invasive and invasive are necessary. That said, every possible endeavour was made during the inspection to access as many parts of the building as safely possible. A ladder was used to access gutters and eaves, as well as a UAV / drone, to photographically record inaccessible parts of the roofs.





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3.0 Brief Description of the Building / Structure

3.1 WC Block

The purpose-built WC's are constructed with a solid red brick plinth, approximately 10-15 courses varying in height with the surrounding topography. It is a single storey building. There is a low plinth with a projecting chamfered special brick course, rendered over in many areas with plain brick wall face above in a Flemish bond. The plinth has been re-pointed in a hard cementitious mortar with weather struck pointing in most areas. There is a course of dentils, again in brick located below a stone cills. The plinth has a series of modern vents that appear to be a later addition. The bricks at low level have been drilled at regular intervals, presumably to inject a chemical DPC. Above the plinth is a timber frame, believed to be load-bearing. Infill panels were initially thought to be roughcast or "wet-dash" rendered on a masonry substrate. However, a previous report from Demaus Building Diagnostics from 2014 described the panels as "a dense cast breeze infill" with "non-breathable paint finish". Inspection of an area where paint was missing would lead us to believe that this is the case and the frame was erected, shuttered and panels cast as individual solid units.

The south elevation has over-hanging eaves with projecting central canted bay which was once assumed to be used as the payment kiosk. The common rafter ends are exposed at the eaves and have a curved profile with flush bead detail. Rafter ends, fascia and the underside of the sarking board exposed ends are all decorated white. The roof profile is a hipped arrangement with gablets to the east and west and dormer windows with integral vents on the north and south pitches. The building is broadly symmetrical. Dormers have arched barge boarding with flush-bead detail. The roof is finished in plain machine-made clay tiles from mixed sources on battens with no membrane. There is some ornament in the form of crested angled ridge tiles and finials at ridge termination, although some of these details are now damaged or missing. Hips are fitted with bonnet tiles with end irons and there are laced tile valleys to the projecting bay.

Windows are mainly a mix of fixed lights and top hung casements and appear to be original to the building. There are multiple sizes of windows. Ironmongery is mainly modern replacement. Some plain glass has been replaced with later Georgian wired safety glass.

The 3no. entrance doors into the building are all modern. The threshold stones are very dished from wear and have been subsequently overlaid with concrete.

Rainwater goods are all imperial sized and in cast iron. Gutters are half round profiles and are supported on purpose fabricated iron brackets fixed to the exposed sections of timber rafters beneath the eaves. Some replaced in galvanised steel. Swan-neck downpipes are connected to the gutters and discharge rainwater runoff below ground. There are large modern bulk-head light fittings over or adjacent the entrance doors as well as on the east elevation of the building. There are several overflow pipes from the toilet cisterns drilled through the infill panels.

Internally there are further modern bulk head lights fixed to the timber match-boarding with surface ran conduit. There are old gasolier fittings that survive and wall sconces complete with glass shades. Tiling with coloured dado and decorated plaster finish to wall face with timber match-boarding over. The stalls appear to be primary to the building – doors are constructed of thick planks, ledged and braced. There are iron brackets in the stalls that support the (modern) cisterns. These are in an Art Nouveau style with water lily pattern. Internally within the ladies WC, there is a stable-door arrangement to the former kiosk with a pair of glazed shutters over where the attendant must have stood / sat to collect payment.

The east side (gents) has been heavily altered with the construction of an accessible WC, which we understand was undertaken in the early 1990's.



4.0 Historic Context

The public conveniences are independently listed at Grade II and the Keepers Box and the sunken wall are listed together at Grade II designation. For reference, the Historic England entries are as follows:

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AT TQ 2669 8662, HAMPSTEAD HEATH

Official list entry:

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1378677

Date first listed: 11-Jan-1999

List Entry Name: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AT TQ 2669 8662

Statutory Address 1: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AT TQ 2669 8662, HAMPSTEAD HEATH

Location:

Statutory Address: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AT TQ 2669 8662, HAMPSTEAD HEATH

County: Greater London Authority

District: Camden (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: TQ 26690 86620

The building is within the Hampstead conservation area.

5.0 Public Conveniences Condition Survey

5.1 Roofs



General view of the north roof pitch taken from UAV / drone – plain clay tiles with roll top to ridge terminating in decorative finials and roll top ridge tiles to dormers.



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Photograph from UAV / drone showing missing finial from east end of ridge.



Roof open to void between rafters under tiles



Inadequate lap on tile coursing

The roof was opened up locally to inspect the substrate. The construction is s/w timber battens nailed directly to common rafters with a plain tiled finish. There are no sarking / closed boards, no insulation nor breather membrane. For the building's remote location, this build up is vulnerable. With mature overhanging trees and high risk of vandalism (or people climbing onto the roof), any damage to the tile finish results in rainwater ingress directly into the building, tracking down the timber match-boarding that is fixed to the underside and sitting on the wall plate at the head of the load bearing timber frame.

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These issues are likely compounded by the poorly set out gauge of the tiles and use of tiles from a variety of manufacturers that are all slightly different dimensions, with different cambers and fixings. This has caused an ill-fitting finish of tiles in some areas, particularly at abutments, verges, valleys etc. The triple lap of the tiles was also noted as being less than the recommended 65mm in several areas (see right hand photo above).



The above photos show some of the mixed tiles that have been used in the (fairly recent) re-roofing of the building. There are Redland Rosemary tiles with 3 nibs – majority in red, with some in blue as well as different types of other machine-made tile. Most of these are unbranded – some have three nibs and some have a continuous lip to upper edge.

It would appear that quite a few of the tiles have been salvaged from elsewhere and have been mixed with new tiles. Some have old damage / defects.



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Damaged tiles – cracked or missing, most likely from impact – either from persons climbing on the roof or from falls of branches from the surrounding overhanging trees.



Apex end finial – one extant and one missing at east end of roof. The bonnet tiles terminate in end irons and one was noted as being missing.

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Laced valley could not be fully inspected as safe access was not in place to clear the leaves. However, the abutment at the courses that were able to be inspected lower down the valley were poor and did not seem to be sufficiently weathertight. Projecting lead soakers had been introduced in an attempt to adequately weather these areas.

There was also at least one crested ridge tile that was damaged, as photographed above (LHS).



The valley tiles to dormer windows are ill fitting and there is a large build-up of detritus and organic matter. An amount of rainwater ingress at this abutment would be likely. On the north side, bramble, ivy growth and a large amount of buddleia plants are growing over the building in areas. This is detrimental to brickwork, tiles etc. as it can cause displacement.



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There are 4no. dormer windows with integral air vents in the apex, which are fitted with insect mesh. It was not possible to inspect the barge boarding for rot due to lack of safe access. There was wet rot fungus found in the timber cills however, predominantly at the ends, where end grain had had prolonged exposure to rainwater. This is resultant from lack of regular redecoration, but also due to the poor detail. The cills are tight on the roof, leaving inadequate room for a drip and consequently water ponds. All were found to be damp despite no rain the night before inspection.

There are some gaps below the eaves that are vulnerable to insect infestation or bat roosts – The photograph above is the RHS of the projecting bay, which is open with no mesh. In the area where roof tiles were removed, evidence of a bee hive was found (inactive).



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5.2 Chimneys

None.

5.3 Rainwater Goods



Rainwater goods are in cast iron with half-round gutters and round downpipes with swan-neck pipes to account for the overhanging eaves. They are supported on the timber rafter ends with purpose made brackets. Many of the older iron ones appear to have never been removed, with mechanical fixings decorated over many times. Where they have been removed, there are several modern replacement brackets in galvanised steel. These are ill-fitting to the gutter profile. The gutter was loose in several areas (not critically so).

We we're unable to see the operation of the gutters and downpipes on the day, but some connections were poor and likely leak between sections. The gutter and downpipes themselves did not seem in too poor condition. The backs of downpipes were inspected by hand (where they typically fail) and these generally seemed to be ok and fit for refurbishment.

There were a couple of minor areas of impact damage and these sections would require replacement with matching sections in imperial sixed profiles.



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The principal issue with the operation of rainwater goods on the building is the amount of leaves, moss and other organic matter that collects. This dramatically impedes the operation of the gutter. Thankfully, the building has wide overhanging eaves and overspill is kept away from the wall face. Even still, there is one area where water ingress from defective rainwater goods has caused extensive wet rot of the primary structure – see section 5.4 – walls.



The downpipes are connected to below-ground gullies. We were unable to ascertain if these were free-flowing or where they discharged – i.e. soakaway (?). Several were overgrown with ivy.

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There is a short section of cast iron gutter either side of the projecting bay on the south side. On the LHS, the gutter was found to be "wedged" in place with a tile at the valley end. The gutter is fitted with a cast iron shoe which discharges rainwater over the last few courses of tiles and into the lower gutter. There is a projecting lead "soaker" which has been fitted below the shoe. It is clear that this arrangement has resulted in extensive rainwater ingress into the fabric of the building for a sustained period. Consequently, the structural timber frame and window below are extensively rotten.



This corner adjacent the projecting bay was found to be very damp during the inspection – likely from uncontrolled discharge from the iron shoe, leaking gutter from the dormer and a back-fall and overspill where gutter has been "wedged" in place. The adjacent bracket had been fitted with a sheet of lead, which has largely protected it from rot. The same cannot be said of the timber below.



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5.4 Walls



The above photo shows an area where an overflow spout has been drilled through an infill panel and damaged the decoration, revealing the substrate. There were no visible defects noted to the panels.

There has clearly been a history of damp within the building, evidenced by the previous interventions noted. Several ventilation bricks have been crudely cut into the wall and two courses above the chamfered plinth, a chemical DPC has been installed (note regular drill holes). Neither of these measures are likely to be effective means of addressing the damp as they are attempting to address the symptoms of damp and neither address the source of the problems.

Further damp analysis would be required to categorically identify the issues; however, it is likely that the rendered plinth and pointing mixes are keenly cementitious based and trapping moisture. In addition, un-maintained rainwater goods, unmaintained gullies and a high surrounding ground level can all contribute to damp fabric / environments.

Although the masonry has clearly had issues of damp, its condition overall is not too bad. The load-bearing timber frame, however, now requires significant structural repair due to extensive decay.



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On the LHS of the projecting bay on the south side of the building, the defective gutter, cast iron shoe arrangement and cracked tiles has caused significant rot to the timber structure and window. The soffit, fascia, curved structural brace, adjacent post, window cill, sole and head plates around the opening are all rotten. These are beyond repair and will require wholesale replacement. We noted some deterioration of the plaster board and internal finishes, but the true extent of degradation will not become apparent until the repair is underway. It is likely that some rafters will be rotten where concealed in the roof and will require scarf repairs.

It is interesting to note that the panels in this area are noticeably different in appearance to elsewhere on the building, incorporating much larger aggregate – they appear to have been re-cast. Our supposition is that this part of the frame has rotted out in the past and has failed again.



The photos above show full penknife penetration in structural timber. We tested as many areas as possible, but for a more accurate account of the extent of timber decay, a rot survey (micro drilling with resistograph) is recommended – see section 8.2.

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4.0 East Elevation



The other part of the building where extensive rot was located was on the east elevation. Again, there has been a historic problem here. The above diagram is an excerpt from an April 2014 report from Demaus Building Diagnostics Ltd. where structural timber was found to be rotten, cut out and replaced with new.



Perhaps the removal of rotten timber in this area did not go far enough at that time as we found one of the ogee timber braces to be badly decayed. The removal of rotten structural timber here and on the south side will require the replacement of the adjacent infill panels.

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5.5 Windows



The large window to the women's WC on the south side is completely rotten and requires wholesale replacement like-for-like.



Ironmongery is generally modern but appears functional. Some windows are painted shut and there is at least one cracked pane of glass (to the bay window on the south side).

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5.6 Doors



There are 3 external framed and boarded timber doors. The doors to the men's and women's toilets are both of some age, but with replacement ironmongery. The door to the accessible WC is in a design which apes the older doors, but it is modern – assumed to be installed when this part of the building was altered in 1997. There did not appear to be any functional issue with the doors.

5.7 Internal Finishes



Walls are lined with white ceramic tiles and dark mauve coloured dado tiling. There are some areas of damage / defect, but generally acceptable.



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Ceilings and the void above the stalls are lined with timber match boarding, assumed to be the original internal finish. It was not possible to inspect the match boarding closely. It would be prudent to allow for some isolated repairs given the history of water ingress and roof finishes build up.

5.8 Fixtures and Fittings



There are some old fixtures and fittings, including these brackets that support the cistern. The built in carpentry, including the stalls and stall doors all appears to be primary to the building. A few issues notes, but generally acceptable condition.

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5.9 M&E



There are several modern external bulk head light fittings that are incongruous and detract from the architectural significance of the building. There are however, functional.



Internally, there are similar modern bulk heads and surface run modern conduit and junction boxes. There are old gasolier pendants and wall sconces which are of historic interest and should be retained.

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6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 General Summary of Condition of the Building / Structure.

6.1.1 WC Block

On initial inspection, one could be forgiven for thinking the WC block is in reasonable order. However, a poorly laid roof finish and poorly maintained rainwater goods have caused significant defects that if, unaddressed, will undoubtedly lead to further deterioration and loss of historic fabric.

The decayed structural timbers are of the main concern as these are load bearing parts of the building. This, together with the large rotten window on the south elevation betrays a long and sustained history of rainwater ingress.

Although the roof finish has been recently re-laid, it has several fundamental problems and complete re-roofing cannot be discounted as an option. Regardless of what decision is made with the roof, the rainwater goods require some attention, repairs and improvement to ensure that they function as intended.

Internally, it would be desirable to improved / repair finishes, but the external envelope should take priority.

6.2 Further Survey Work

The below are additional surveys that would be beneficial to understand more about the nature of some of the defects we have noted in this report. Some may be required for planning / LBC purposes:

- Asbestos management survey
- Below Ground Drainage survey
- Electrical safety (EICR)
- Water testing / legionella
- Ecology / Bat survey (might be required for significant roof works)
- Mortar / masonry laboratory testing
- Timber decay survey

6.3 Recommendations and Priority Works

6.3.1 WC Block

Regarding the roof, there are two options:

- i) Patch repair and improve details wherever possible and within the budget. This will prolong the life of the roof but will not guarantee further deterioration in years to come.
- ii) Re-roof the building. This will provide the opportunity to improve all details across the roof – i.e. dormer cills, cheeks, valleys, gauge etc. One might also specify a vapour barrier and eaves carrier and possibly counter battens or, for a more robust finish, sarking boards with counter battens and battens over. Insulation might not be advantageous as the building is not inhabited. The choice of tile for re-roofing would be paramount – It would be best to not salvage and relay the existing, but more towards a more uniform handmade or machine made tile.





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Rainwater goods should be carefully taken down, labelled, and restored. This might involve sand blasting existing paint finishes, replacing any defective lengths, reinstating with replacement brackets where necessary. The gutters can be caulked and redecorated and downpipes properly fixed back. Below ground drainage can be jetted out or lined to improve operation.

Of greater priority than the roof is the cutting out and replacement of defective structural timber and replacement of the rotten window. The infill panels will need careful consideration as to what is put back.

Internally, there are improvements that can be made, however, the defects noted externally will be quite costly to remediate, so we have not made any recommendations for refurbishment beyond local repairs where water damaged.

7.0 Next Stages

CCA are in the process of completing the measured survey drawings of the WCs. Once these are completed, we would like to meet with the client to agree the scope of repair work and how the existing budget can be most-beneficially spent.

Following this, we would compile drawings and documentation for a listed building consent application. We could also organise and seek quotations for the recommended surveys that might inform the scope of works further.

