

Note in Support of Applications 2024/4338/P and 2024/4871/L for the addition of a small mansard roof at 53-54 Downshire Hill, London NW3 1PA.

The proposed addition of a small mansard roof on the already approved extension to the property at 53-54 Downshire Hill, NW3 1PA, has generated what appears to be some confusion – and certainly some consternation -- among neighbours.

The extension itself has existed in situ for over 50 years: We already have Planning/LBC approval (2024/0222/P and 2024/1090/L) to replace the existing structure, rebuilding the site with a slightly larger footprint. The building is currently derelict and dilapidated but is an optimal site for creating additional housing, a critical priority for Camden and for the UK as a whole. The approved extension will be highly energy efficient, incorporating state of the art eco technology to create a larger EPC A rated home at the Police Stables, what was an at risk Grade II listed building.

The current application seeks to add a small mansard roof to the approved extension to allow for an additional bedroom and amenity space. The design has closely reflected Pre App guidance with a 60% reduction in the size of the proposed roof; the walls pulled back behind parapets at front and back; the length of the roof substantially pulled back from the neighbouring property at 50 Downshire Hill so that it is fully and clearly BRE compliant; the dormer windows reduced in size; the number of solar PV panels reduced to reflect consultation feedback; the area of skylight coverage on the roof reduced; and the design materially reworked so that the materials and style much more closely reflect the changes being made at the host Police Station, at neighbouring properties and in the Conservation Area more generally. We have also refrained at this point from adding a two bedroom en suite basement as was supported in our Pre App in order to avoid overdevelopment and construction nuisance to the neighbours.

It is essential in assessing this application to appreciate that the site itself is somewhat unique in that it is at the far back of the Police Station parking area and not visible from any public road or footpath. It will be behind six foot fencing and the area is private and enclosed behind 8 foot high locked gates. The site was thus characterised by the Planning Inspectorate (APP/X5210/W/23/3323353 and APP/X5210/Y/23/3323349): “The police buildings fronting the site are prominent public buildings that contribute to the HCA’s significance. The stable building is modest in comparison, and largely unseen from a public place. The contribution it makes to the character and appearance of the HCA is limited.” It is worth noting that neither the Heath & Hampstead Society nor the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum have objected to the applications nor have any neighbouring Residents’ Associations.

The proposed mansard roof is small and extends only to approximately 75% of the footprint of the approved extension and increases the height of the building by just slightly more than one metre. It is not an additional “storey” but rather a lower than normal height mansard roof. It has been designed so that there are no windows overlooking neighbouring residences or gardens and thus no privacy issues. The two dormer windows at the front are a considerable distance from the Police Station building, the owner of which has not objected to the application.

We have reflected neighbours’ concerns regarding light pollution by reducing the total area of skylights and by not seeking approval for any overlooking windows. At the same time, the addition of the mansard roof will partially obscure the lower portion of a secondary facing window on the Stables first floor, thereby reducing light pollution from that bathroom window and increasing privacy to our property and to neighbouring homes.

We have also reduced the number of solar PV panels to accommodate neighbours' objections, a difficult decision in light of the climate crisis and the critical need to make our homes more environmentally safe.

Neighbours have complained of "overdevelopment" but this is a small mansard roof, deliberately designed to minimise its height and size. Not only should the unique privacy of the site be taken into consideration but it should also be appreciated that the Police Station and the Police House next door will be brought back to life with commercial and residential additions that will positively transform the area. The small mansard roof addition is de minimis in the context of the overall setting and the anticipated changes to the site.

Neighbours have objected to the impact the small mansard roof would have on wildlife. For the sake of clarity, the extension itself is already approved and the current application is only for a small mansard roof addition to a property that has historically been entirely covered in concrete with no trees, vegetation or grass whatsoever. We will be adding trees and shrubs to the property and therefore actually encouraging wildlife.

Neighbours have objected that the addition of the mansard roof does not add an additional property unit to the housing count in Camden and should therefore be rejected. While it quite obviously increases the number of bedrooms, living and amenity space at the property, it does not add an additional "housing unit" because the approval of the extension was conditioned on agreeing not to use it as a separate property without planning approval. This is our family home and not an AirBnB or rental unit but it is quite odd that Camden Planning would insist on a condition that limits the creation of new housing stock in the borough, in particular given the high priority the Government has placed on new home building. And presumably if the extension were an additional housing unit it would generate additional Council Tax for the borough. Given that the extension with mansard roof would have two bedrooms – the home size considered "High" priority by Camden – it seems incredibly odd that the Planning Department has set this condition. In any event, the mansard roof would add to the space available for housing in Camden even if the Planning Department insists that it should not be considered a separate housing unit.

We have taken a design led approach to the small mansard roof which will be of high quality materials approved by the Council's Planning Department. The aesthetic echos the design language of the approved plans for the Police Station as well as neighbouring properties. We have substantially reflected the guidance in our Pre App process, fundamentally changing the size, shape and materials of the mansard roof: It no longer appears as "top heavy" and is clearly subordinate to the Police Stables building, inset behind parapets on each side, establishing a graded hierarchy across the roof line. The mansard roof in no way challenges the primacy of the Stables building and the gap between the flat roof and the pitched roof preserves the limited view that existed from the Police Station while also respecting the utilitarian heritage of the space.

The site was originally classed as sui generis but we have converted it to residential, Camden's priority land use. The historical use of the site means it already has an unusual shape which would likely not be allowed if newly built. But the building configuration already exists and it is what it is: Our goal is and has been to create a high quality, environmentally outstanding home from listed buildings that were literally falling down. The character of the site means we can do this without removing trees or damaging the ecosystem. For these and many other reasons articulated above we would respectfully ask and hope that this application be approved.