

CM/DT/AW/PD9317

email: [chris.miele@montagu-evans.co.uk](mailto:chris.miele@montagu-evans.co.uk)

07 February 2014  
Jan Donovan  
Rolfe Judd Planning  
Old Church Court  
Claylands Road  
The Oval  
London  
SW8 1NZ

By post and email

Dear Ms Donovan

**PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, GONDAR GARDENS, RESERVOIR SITE, WEST HAMPSTEAD, LB OF CAMDEN, NW6 1 QF  
APPLICATION REFERENCE NO: 2013/7585/P**

We were instructed by the applicant, Linden Wates (West Hampstead Ltd) in connection with the above proposals.

The land was previously subject of an application which was refused, and then appealed (APP/X5210/A/12/2188901). That appeal was dismissed on grounds of inappropriate detailed design.

We had no involvement in that earlier scheme.

**Our Instructions**

We were instructed to assist with the revised proposals in two ways.

First, I was asked to review the appeal decision, visit the site and then assess Rolfe Judd's emerging proposals. My instruction was to treat this as an independent expert analysis. On that basis, I concluded that the new proposals, substantially similar to the submitted design, addressed the detailed points made by the Inspector. The elevational treatment is materially different in important respects to the appeal scheme.

Second, and following on from that initial review, our instruction was to prepare a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment, forming a separate chapter of the Environmental Statement accompanying the scheme.

The new application was registered on 28 November 2013 under the local planning authority reference no. 2013/7585/P. This is a full application.

Montagu Evans is very experienced in this line of work, and completed the required chapter in line with Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment third edition (the new edition of the industry standard on landscape and visual impact assessment).

I should add that I personally have long experience of this specialism. I was one of the author's of the first London View Management Framework (working for the GLA, this became SPG to the London Plan, and has been subsequently updated). I have also been involved in visual impact assessment of developments in very sensitive locations (in or adjoining AONBs, World Heritage Sites, conservation areas, National Parks).

I will also add that the design issues are not affected by any sensitive statutory land designations. The site does not fall within the setting of any designated heritage assets. The site does fall within the setting of some non-designated heritage assets, identified within the Built Heritage Assessment by CGMS and the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment by Montagu Evans, and there has been due consideration to any special interest of these non-designated heritage assets in the revised design.

### **The Inspector's Reasons**

In general the Inspector found much to recommend the scheme; indeed, in her summing up (paragraph 20), she referred to the scheme's significant benefits.

Her concerns about the detailed design derived from the following considerations.

First was the effect of the proposals on local character. She acknowledged there were examples of contemporary design locally, but was concerned at the impact of the particular design over such a long frontage.

Second, she found that the local area had certain notable and distinctive characteristics which were material to any design proposed over such a long frontage. These local influences are analysed at length in the Design and Access Statement forming part of the current application.

Third, she identified a number of features which did not complement that area's character. These were:

- The brick projections intended to repeat the proportions of houses and bay windows in the area were too varied in size;
- There were large expanses of unrelieved brickwork (notably on the two large projections);
- The combination of geometric shapes and the four storey, flat roofed sections served to differentiate the whole design from the surrounding area;
- Finally, she found no 'visible', that is, 'apparent' connection of the proposed details to the 'intricate shapes, decorative detailing (including red brick and white mouldings) or the strong vertical emphasis seen in the surrounding houses' which 'combine to determine the character of West Hampstead' (paragraph 18) .

The Inspector concluded that in all other respects, the design was acceptable. The scheme's height, scale, layout and depth of the proposals would complement buildings locally, providing 'a strong sense of enclosure' (paragraph 17). She took no point against the use of materials either.

The Inspector did not at any point endorse a particular style, and it is clear that her concerns only related to the street façade. Neither did she find the drawings deficient or inaccurate, leading her to question the deliverability of the architectural proposal before her. She took no point against the intrinsic design quality of the proposals either.

This decision is clearly worded and specific, and drafted, on my reading, to offer very clear guidelines for any revised proposals.

As you know, such a decision, recent in date and offering clear advice on how to address reasons for the dismissal, carries great weight in the determination of a revised application. All other aspects of the scheme being equal, officers are bound to focus their assessment on the new schemes response to the Inspector's reasons.

Necessarily, the Inspector's reasons take the form of criticisms. I think it is helpful to turn these into positive statements about what any new design should achieve to complement the character of the area. From this decision, then, I take the following positive design cues:

- Consistency in the scale/size of the projecting bays;
- Limited areas of unrelieved brickwork;
- A consistent geometry to tying the building elements together; and
- Some readily apparent link between the proposed details and the existing architectural detailing in the area, such as contrasting mouldings or decorative detailing.

Each of these points requires some interpretation but in general terms they are straightforward enough.

They are not necessarily discrete points; for example, reducing areas of unrelieved brick cladding changes the character of the design, and the means of achieving this (mouldings, for example) serve to introduce the 'readily apparent' link which the Inspector advised.

### **The Proposals**

The Design and Access Statement demonstrates how the design has responded to the Inspector's concerns. The summary drawing on page 49 is particularly helpful in this respect. This sheet also presents the previous and current proposals and so enables a direct comparison.

#### Consistency in the scale/size of projecting bays

The dimensions of the two sets of projecting bays have been regularised.

The three larger projecting bays to the longer element of the scheme are each 10 metres in extent. That fourth, on the single block to the side of the gap, is 9 metres, but practically this will appear the same size in normal viewing conditions.

Thus the four important organising elements of the façade are consistent and well defined.

An additional set of smaller bays have been added to the elevation to reflect the prominent bay windows which contribute to local character. These secondary bays are themselves regular, as one would expect in an older form of terraced development.

The introduction of these smaller bays is a very important 'move'. They, together with the larger bays behind, will set the character of the elevation as it will be appreciated in oblique views. Thus the front of the scheme will move in and out in depth, with the eye catching the corners of projections in different, contrasting materials. This is the effect of much of the late Victorian and Edwardian buildings in the area.

#### Areas of Unrelieved Brickwork

The new elevation has a more solid appearance. The proportion of window opening to brick facing has been materially reduced.

Furthermore, the openings have a reconstituted stone lining that reflects, in contemporary form, more traditional window/door surrounds, providing a finer grain of detail.

#### Consistency of Geometry Tying the Buildings Together

The introduction of projecting bays and the increase in the area of brick facing produce a solid, well defined form, which can be appreciated in elevation but will be particularly apparent in real viewing conditions.

Overall, the new elevation is more orderly than the appeal scheme. The previous fenestration pattern lacked any apparent link to the traditional architecture which contributes to the character of the area.

The openings in the revised scheme are grouped on a more obvious vertical alignment. The bays achieve this and other design details, but so does the sloping roof treatment with dormers. These will be appreciated as vertical accents terminating the vertical grouping below, and in that way the elevation will appear more regular. The sloping roof also obviously relates to traditional roof forms, answering one of the Inspector's concerns.

#### Readily Apparent Detailing Tying the Proposals to Buildings in the Area

The appeal scheme had been based on a contextual analysis which generated a specific design response. That is clearly set out in the previous D&A.

The Inspector's comments are very clear here. She recognised, in effect, that the design was based on local sources. She concluded, however, that the prototypes for the design were too remote, such that a casual viewer, say, would not appreciate the link.

In other words, she wanted some more obvious reference to defining features in the area, without however, for a moment suggesting pastiche or facsimile.

Two features of the design answer this directly, the smaller projecting bay windows (bays are common in the domestic architecture in this part of London) and the use of white aperture linings contrasting with the brickwork. Such constructional polychromy is a feature of late Victorian and Edwardian speculative housing (terraces, semis and mansion flats) of the area.

I should also point out that the final detailing of the projecting bays and window spandrels present another opportunity for finer detailing if the authority, or another Inspector, finds this is desirable. There is no reason why some form of pressed ornament couldn't be worked into some of the bay cladding or window detailing, and that could easily be delivered through a condition. In other words, the lack of finer grain relief should not be a reason for refusal because it can be dealt with by a condition (the Circular on conditions is clear on this).

The sloping roof, mentioned earlier, achieves the same objective.

#### Concluding Remarks: Character of the Design Generally

Overall the character of the design has changed significantly.

The Appeal scheme used contextual influences to inform the underlying geometries of a design based on a modern language of abstraction. That scheme was attractive in itself, but somewhat austere when you consider the variety, colourism and general liveliness of some of the good quality building stock in the area.

Its design was, the Inspector concluded, 'contrasting', which she found harmful because of its extent.

The revised scheme before the Council is very different. It draws more obviously on the local vernacular. The elevation appears more solid. It has variety and picturesque qualities (contrasting materials, projecting elements, a lively pitched roofscape) which do obviously relate to the sort of late Victorian and Edwardian housing design one finds in this part of North London.

In that process the character of expression has changed to one that I would call 'contemporary contextualism', modern but respectful. It is also, I think, an elegant and balanced design, and so one of high quality.

For these reasons, I conclude the Inspector's concerns have been addressed satisfactorily and in full. This is not surprising because the design is the work of a very experienced architect who set out, expressly, to answer her detailed points.

I trust the above is clear and of assistance.

Yours truly,



**DR CHRIS MIELE IHBC MRTPI  
SENIOR PARTNER  
MONTAGU EVANS LLP**