

**THE ELMS FITZROY PARK LONDON N6 6HS**  
**PRELIMINARY DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT**  
**FOR THE REINSTATEMENT WORKS**



**FINAL VERSION**

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- 4.01 The infilling of the bays on the south-east corner:

## **5 PROPOSALS FOR THE REINSTATEMENT WORKS**

- 5.01 As has been demonstrated above, The Elms started as a modest villa for George Basevi, but it is likely that Basevi died before he could complete his ideas for the building. Subsequently, the building was altered and extended, and the simple, Soanean elegance of the original villa was subsumed in a more florid style later on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building was then extended further in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the most intrusive and dramatic changes being its conversion into seven family units around 1950.
- 5.02 It should be stressed that English Heritage did not inspect the interiors at the time of the listing, and consequently their significance to the status of The Elms as an historic artefact could not have been known to EH when they were making their assessment of the property.
- 5.03 Given the extent of the alterations since Basevi died, both internally and externally, it is difficult to be sure whether any of the original Basevi interior survives. Even in the pair of main living rooms on the west side of the ground floor, the decorative elements appear to be much later than Basevi, including the decorative arches around the central opening (and it should also be noted that the linking of the two rooms probably does not date from Basevi's time).
- 5.04 Following extensive efforts at research into the provenance of the building, and after discussions with architectural historians Dan Cruickshank and Paul Velluet, it seems most likely that the west side of the building – defined as being from the eastern wall of the inner hallway westward – may have derived in terms of its overall plan form from Basevi (although the relationship between the inner hallway and what is assumed to have been an original entrance on the east side is not known). The whole of the house to east of this area should be assumed to be of a later date.
- 5.05 Please refer to Dan Cruickshank's report 'The Elms, Highgate: Observations on the building's chronology, construction history and on the proposed works of repair and restoration', which forms part of this pre-application submission.
- 5.06 Cruickshank sets out a detailed assessment of the retained interior elements in Section 7 of his report ('The Evidence of the Photographs'), and he highlights his concerns as to the quality of much of the retained interior elements:

*"A number of photographs, in the possession of English Heritage, and taken in late 1988 before the interior was greatly altered, preserve fascinating information about the interior of the Elms. The photographs are a far from complete record of the interior, and are open to interpretation, but they do suggest very strongly that the main interiors had been greatly altered after completion by Basevi or - more controversially - that many of the key interiors were not designed or completed by Basevi at all but finished by another, very pedestrian hand, after his death. In short, what the photographs show is an interior that is, generally, disappointing artistically, and which displays a*

*remarkable absence of the quality - particularly in the application of antique sources - to be expected in a first-rate Basevi interior created for his own habitation and - as such - an showcase for his talents."*

- 5.07 Nevertheless, Cruickshank does conclude that it should be possible to recreate damaged and lost interiors in the west side of the building. It should be emphasised that this is an *interpretative* strategy, in acknowledgement of the primacy of Basevi's role in creating The Elms; we cannot know for certain whether any of the existing internal fabric dates from Basevi's time.
- 5.08 It is therefore proposed to treat the whole of the west side of the building on ground and first floor as the Basevi interior (the new basement below the principle reception rooms having been constructed this century). This creates a clearly defined area within the final building, both internally and externally, that is highly legible in relation to the rest of the development.
- 5.09 Where there is doubt as to the provenance of the interior surfaces, Mr Cruickshank has suggested an approach to defining suitable new decorative elements, to be derived from other appropriate examples of Basevi's domestic architecture. He concludes:

*"Photographs and drawings must be studied and information extracted and, where directly relevant information cannot be found, inspiration must be taken from appropriate Basevi buildings and from those sources that he is known to have used. Insights must be gained about Basevi's design principles in the late 1830s. For example, how did he use historic sources? Were his Greek Revival designs generic or 'cameos' based on specific prototypes. Most probably the latter, as was typical of Greek Revival architects, with detailed derived from key iconic buildings. For example it would appear that the cornice in the library was derived from details on the Erechtheion on the Acropolis in Athens."*

- 5.10 This proposition is now placed here before the LPA for their comments and response.
- 5.11 It should be stressed that the reinstatement drawings included with the pre-application are a work in progress – the finessing of the detail continues in consultation with the client's appointed historical advisers, Dan Cruickshank and Paul Velluet, with the aim of achieving as historically accurate interiors as possible, given the association of the building with George Basevi.
- 5.12 A more detailed written assessment of the reinstatement works will be included in an up-dated version of this Design & Access Statement when the formal applications are made to the LPA.
- 5.13 A detailed specification is presently being developed for the reinstatement works in the historic areas, and this will form part of the final application for Listed Building Consent. However, it can be said that all new render will be lime based; timber partitions will be finished in lathe and plaster; a specialist company such as Locker and Riley will be used to create the new cornices, with squeezes taken from the existing cornice on the library. New joinery will be painted softwood.
- 5.14 In the meantime, the following points are made with regard to the applicant's proposals in respect of the mechanical and electrical works:

- a) The approach to the servicing of the listed elements is to keep this as simple and as low-key as possible, whilst at the same time maintaining the obligations under the current Building Regulations.
- b) Previous proposals for comfort cooling in the ground floor rooms has now been dropped, due to the disruption this would cause to the historic fabric. The only exception is for the two main bedrooms at first floor, where the eaves spaces of the roof over offers a discreet location for the comfort cooling units, with ducts linked to discreet flush grilles in the ceilings of the two bedrooms.
- c) Elsewhere, throughout the listed elements, ventilation is controlled by the simple expedient of opening a window.
- d) In the basement, there is a requirement for some fresh air ducting, because there are several internal rooms. This ducting is run at high level within the corridor, and will be hidden above a suspended ceiling.
- e) The shower room and the kitchen in the basement will be vented by discrete vents taken to the external wall, and hidden behind the decorative screen on the south elevation.
- f) Elsewhere, ventilation ducts are taken up to the roof, on the inner (west) side of the east wing roof, and connected to tile vents.
- g) Except in the two main reception rooms at ground floor, all the rooms in the listed element will be heated with traditional cast iron radiators. In the two ground floor reception rooms, the concrete floor over the recently installed basement below allows for the installation of under-floor heating.
- h) The electrical installation must comply with the Building Regulations, which means setting socket outlets at a minimum of 450mm above finished floor. This height is an awkward one in terms of historic interiors, because it often clashes with wall panelling, and other decorative elements. We have therefore shown on the room drawings suggested locations for all the socket outlets, data sockets and the like, for discussion with the LPA.
- i) Room switches are similarly shown on the room drawings, in locations we feel are the most appropriate, again for discussion with the LPA.

## 6 REINSTATEMENT OF THE RETAINED JOINERY

6.01 Prior to demolition commencing in 2003, all the internal joinery elements were carefully removed, and stored on site. Subsequently, and in accordance with the provisions of the Section 106 Agreement, a specialist joinery conservator was instructed to prepare a detailed assessment of every item retained. The conservator appointed was Luard Conservation Ltd, whose appointment was approved by the LPA.

6.02 Luard Conservation Ltd produced a spreadsheet listing all the items retained, and giving an assessment of each item. Where feasible, comments were made as to the provenance of certain elements: for example, Luard concluded that the majority of the floorboards taken out of the original building were already second hand when installed at The Elms, because they had already been underscored to suit joist centres that did not match those at The Elms.

6.03 Noting that *"Prior to removal it is likely that the conditions in the house were not conducive to the safe preservation of the timber"* Luard describes the approach adopted as follows:

*"The attached catalogue of timber elements looks at each separate piece of timber as a stand alone item, and considers its condition and suitability for re-introduction in isolation. It should be borne in mind that most of the individual pieces of timber are part of a larger assemblage and until these are put together it will not be possible to realistically assess the chances of successful re-integration of the whole. The recommendation of 'reuse' in the catalogue should be read with the above comment in mind and means 're-assess' or 'review' when all surviving elements of a particular detail have been assembled."*

6.04 Luard also expresses concern at the extent of defective timbers retained, and comments:

*"It is my firm recommendation that any sections of timber that contain evidence of fungal spores or growths, and have been degraded by fungal attack, should be removed from site and destroyed by burning; this should be carried out as soon as possible to reduce the possibility of the spread of these fungal spores. There is evidence of the activity of Brown rot and Dry rot (Serpula Lacrymans) on the timber at present."*

6.05 At the request of the LPA, this did not happen, although defective timbers were subsequently stored, covered up, in an external area.

6.06 Luard notes the poor condition of the property and the fact that there had been no maintenance undertaken for a considerable period of time before the current works were begun, and this clearly contributed to the generally poor quality of the external fabric. He comments:

*"By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the house had been on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register for some ten years and in 2002 Camden's Jenny Reid accepted that 'Given the dilapidated state of the building, it is anticipated that several areas will have to be renewed'"*

6.07 Commenting generally on the floorboards taken from the house, Luard notes:

*"The majority of the floorboards appear to be of a high quality pine, anecdotally they come from the long room on the west of the house. All these boards are rebated along each edge and are roughly thinned with a chisel where they cross each floor joist. The underside of all the boards are almost black with dirt, though the chopped out sections are almost fresh; this implies to me that these boards have been re-used from another site, especially as the chopped out sections are far wider than the joists would have been. In my estimation these boards date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but could have been brought into The Elms at any time since. I believe that work was carried out to the house after WWII, and again in the 1970s or 1980s. While the lower surface of these softwood boards shows them to be of good quality timber the upper surface shows them to be worn, uneven, of a grey colour with a broken surface. These boards have not been varnished/polished for a long time and will require re-machining to bring them into a condition where they could be re-used. Many of these boards are split and unusable, after re-machining I would expect a larger number to be found to be unusable."*

- 6.08 With regard to the skirtings, Luard notes:

*"There are at least three styles of skirting board moulding in storage, both in construction and design, reflecting two 19<sup>th</sup> century and one 20<sup>th</sup> century installation.*

*The present skirting boards in the ground floor hall are not original as they extend along the enclosed under-stairs cupboard; there is a moulded panel on the under side of the stairs that would not have been enclosed when installed."*

- 6.09 It should be noted that, for the reinstatement works, and as advised by Dan Cruickshank, we are using the skirting profile in the library as being typical of the Basevi era, and this profile will form the basis for replication in the ground floor and first floor of the west side building; a more modest adaptation of this profile will be used in the basement.

- 6.10 With regard to the internal doors, Luard comments:

*"There are doors of a variety of patterns in store, and from positions of different status. We think that the oldest doors are those with the half round detail let vertically into the centre; where the oldest doors are internal the panel mouldings are proud of the surface, as in the existing door at the bottom of the stairs in the Hall, leading to the Library.*

*In my opinion there are thirteen doors that because of design and condition should be considered for re-integration in the house, the rest of the doors are either of inappropriate design, have been altered, or are damaged to the extent that they should not be considered appropriate for inclusion."*

- 6.11 It should be noted that, whilst the serviceable doors as identified by Luard will be examined during the reinstatement works, for the areas that have been identified as being most associated with Basevi, we are using as the template for the internal doors the existing door into the library off the inner hall, including the form of the frame and the architrave. As with the skirtings, a more modest form of this door will be used in the basement.

- 6.12 With regard to the front door (in effect, the south entrance door) Luard notes that this can be re-used. This will be reviewed with the LPA as part of the pre-application process.

- 6.13 Luard makes an important point about safety in dealing with the retained timbers:

*"Nearly all the timber is painted to some extent, most of the earlier applications will contain lead. The reworking of these elements will require the installation of health and safety procedures to safeguard all operatives. All working of lead based paints should not be carried out dry as it is the dust that is dangerous. This means that if any re-machining is to be carried out the paint will have to be stripped first, using either caustic stripper or methylene chloride based stripper. Any sanding should be carried out wet, using either white spirits or linseed oil."*

- 6.14 Luard concludes with the following comments:

*"Given the placing of the house on the English Heritage 'Buildings at Risk Register' for ten years before 2002, and the acceptance by Camden council Officers in 2002 that there were elements that would require replacement, we should start from the viewpoint that the timber elements in some areas of the house would have required replacement before they were removed seven years ago. The bad condition of further wooden details would only have become apparent upon opening up, and stripping of paint, as most of the rot is hidden on the enclosed surfaces and in the end grain of the timber*

*The house has been altered a variety of times in its history and there may be timber details that are inappropriate to its present use, there are certainly some details that have been installed since the listing of the house in May 1974. Some, if not all, of these details should not be re-installed.*

*Care should be taken when considering disposal of sections of timber to ensure that mouldings and profiles are not lost. These sections should be kept until and relevant information has been recorded."*

- 6.15 The assessment of the retained joinery by Luard Conservation Ltd has been used to identify those elements that can be restored and reinstated. Where such elements are either incomplete, or in too poor a condition for reinstatement, the items will be replicated to match. In such instances, it might be necessary to use items from several elements to make up one complete item – for example, the window shutters at ground floor. This work can only be meaningful done once the reinstatement work is underway, in consultation with the LPA.

- 6.16 It should also be noted that, where items are considered to be sound enough for reinstatement, the Luard assessment of each such item will be used as a guide, pending a final assessment of all such items, in consultation with the LPA, once the reinstatement works are underway.

- 6.17 AP(a)'s reinstatement drawings, which show the proposed works on a room-by-room basis, incorporate, where relevant, extracts from the Luard spreadsheet as it pertains to each room. Where joinery elements are missing,



or incomplete, or cannot be used, the original timbers will be used a basis for renewal on a like-for-like basis.

- 6.18 Whilst the full Luard Conservation Ltd joinery assessment and report was originally sent to the LPA in May 2011, a further copy is included as part of the pre-application documents.