

43 BELSIZE LANE, LONDON NW3



ARCHITECTURAL REPORT

PKS Architects LLP

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Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Scope and Purpose of report
- 3.0 History and Character of the Area
- 4.0 Detailed Examination of 43 Belsize Lane
- 5.0 The Building in Context
- 6.0 Architectural Merit
- 7.0 The Current Planning Consent
- 8.0 Building Regulations
- 9.0 Recommendation

1.0 Introduction

This report sets out to review the architectural quality of the existing building at 43 Belsize Lane, London NW3, having regard to the structural report prepared by VKHP consulting engineers dated 14 December 2012.

2.0 Scope and Purpose of Report

On 14th September 2012 London Borough of Camden granted planning permission for the redevelopment of 43 Belsize Lane to form a four bedroom dwelling house. The majority of the existing building is to be demolished and re-built using current construction methods, but the consent requires the front wall facing Belsize Lane and the courtyard wall to be retained.

The purpose of the report is to assess the building for its architectural quality, condition of the fabric and contribution to its immediate setting with particular reference to the attached structural report (VKHP 14.12.12)

3.0 History and Character of the Area

Belsize Lane is situated within the Belsize Park Conservation Area, and the area known as Belsize Village. It is an area which developed between the 1850s and 1880s and comprises a largely homogeneous grouping of stuccoed terraces or semi-detached villas of three or four stories.

The properties on Belsize Lane, by contrast, are smaller in scale being two storeys, set right on the street. They are similar in character to traditional mews buildings, being comparable in scale and having, stabling / garages at ground floor with living quarters above and were dependencies to the main residences on Belsize Road. On the north side of Belsize Lane, there are different uses at ground level, such as retail, commercial or restaurant with residential above. On the south side of the Lane, the use is exclusively residential.

4.0 Detailed Examination of 43 Belsize Lane

No 43 Belsize Lane conforms to the predominant character of the street in that it presents a two storey façade to the street right at the back of pavement although its principal façade is perpendicular to the street and faces onto a courtyard. This is a similar arrangement to that which exists next door at no.41 and the two properties were originally a pair. The properties at no.45 and beyond have been redeveloped in recent times.

The street façade comprises whitewashed London stock bricks, now rather grubby. There is one first floor timber sash window offset to the right which balances a similar window in No.41 and this is the only feature, save for a brick pier at the start of the courtyard wall. The top of the wall has a thin, modern precast concrete coping, and there is a common brick area visible above the window.

The brickwork is generally in poor condition with brick coursing of very poor quality workmanship in the top half metre of wall – refer to large scale photographs. There is a steel tie evident at first floor level, presumably to restrain the wall and limit further bulging and runs right through the building.

The top metre of the wall shows signs of water ingress with the lime mortar joints exhibiting efflorescence.

The courtyard elevation is part rendered and part painted London stock brickwork with lines indented in the render to mimic ashlar stonework. The render is patchy and very uneven and appears to be de-bonded in places from the brick substrate: it is now clear the rendering covers brickwork repairs. There is one sash and one timber casement window at first floor level. The casement appears to be a later insertion and is not in character with the building as a whole. At ground floor, there is a central personnel door to access the stairs to first floor, and two garage type doors to access the space at ground level.

There is also on this elevation some ill-considered drainage pipework which detracts from the simplicity of the form and looks very ugly.

As the structural report clearly identifies, the structural integrity of the building is of concern, principally as a result of being built without foundations and having regard to its original use as stabling.

5.0 The Building in Context

As has been outlined above, the building configuration is no longer typical of its immediate setting. It is noted as a “positive contributor” to the conservation area but we consider this is on account of its historic rather than architectural form.

6.0 Architectural Merit

Architecturally, the building has little to recommend it. It is a simple brick box, undistinguished by any refinements and has been indifferently repaired in the past with patch rendering to cracked brickwork, cheap modern copings, inappropriate window insertion and ill-considered service pipework.

The building is now in very poor condition and its simple construction does not make it suitable for an extended life.

7.0 The Current Planning Consent

The consent dated 14th September 2012 permits the demolition of the building save for the street and courtyard elevations and condition 12 attached to the consent requires a structural report to be submitted to the Council demonstrating how these elements can be retained during the redevelopment. That report has been prepared by VKHP Consulting Engineers and reference should be made to it for a detailed structural assessment of the building.

The consented drawings show new, amended and re-sized openings in the existing courtyard elevation. A drawing showing the existing and consented openings is attached at appendix B. As can be seen from this drawing, none of the ground floor of the courtyard elevation remains, and it is doubtful if the first floor could stay in-situ without being re-built while the ground floor is being re-configured. With so little of the existing fabric being retained, it is unclear why this elevation merits retention.

8.0 Building Regulations

The existing building has no thermal insulation in the walls, floor or roof and is therefore very wasteful of energy to heat. The new elements of the consented building will be built in accordance with current building standards. However,

because the front and courtyard walls have to be retained, these elements will not comply with current building regulations. The only way to make these wall compliant is to line them internally with a separate thermal lining which will eat into the internal space.

Even if this was done to improve the thermal performance of the walls, VKHP has advised that the existing brickwork is in such poor repair, that a separate structural wall would have to be built to support the new first floor and roof. This adds unnecessary additional expense and loses even more useable area.

9.0 Recommendation

Having reviewed the quality and integrity of the existing building in some detail, one is compelled to arrive at the logical conclusion: that the portion of the existing building which was to be retained should instead be re-built. It seems perverse to attempt to retain part of a building which is in such poor repair, with no architectural merit, and is outdated in terms of its sustainability credentials.

If it was architecturally or historically significant, or of sound construction, there would be a better case for its retention but, as it stands, there seems very little objective reasoning for its partial retention.

If re-built, the building would have the same form as the existing and would contribute in the same way to the streetscape as it does now, maintaining the original layout and design facing a courtyard, unlike the modern development further along Belsize Lane. Nothing of any value would be lost by the rebuilding exercise and the re-built structure would have a long and assured lifespan. For the reasons outlined above it is our considered view that any objective assessment of the existing building would arrive at a similar conclusion.

PKS Architects LLP

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APPENDIX A

PHOTOGRAPHS OF STREET AND COURTYARD ELEVATIONS



Front Elevation to Belsize Lane



Detail of Front Elevation showing:

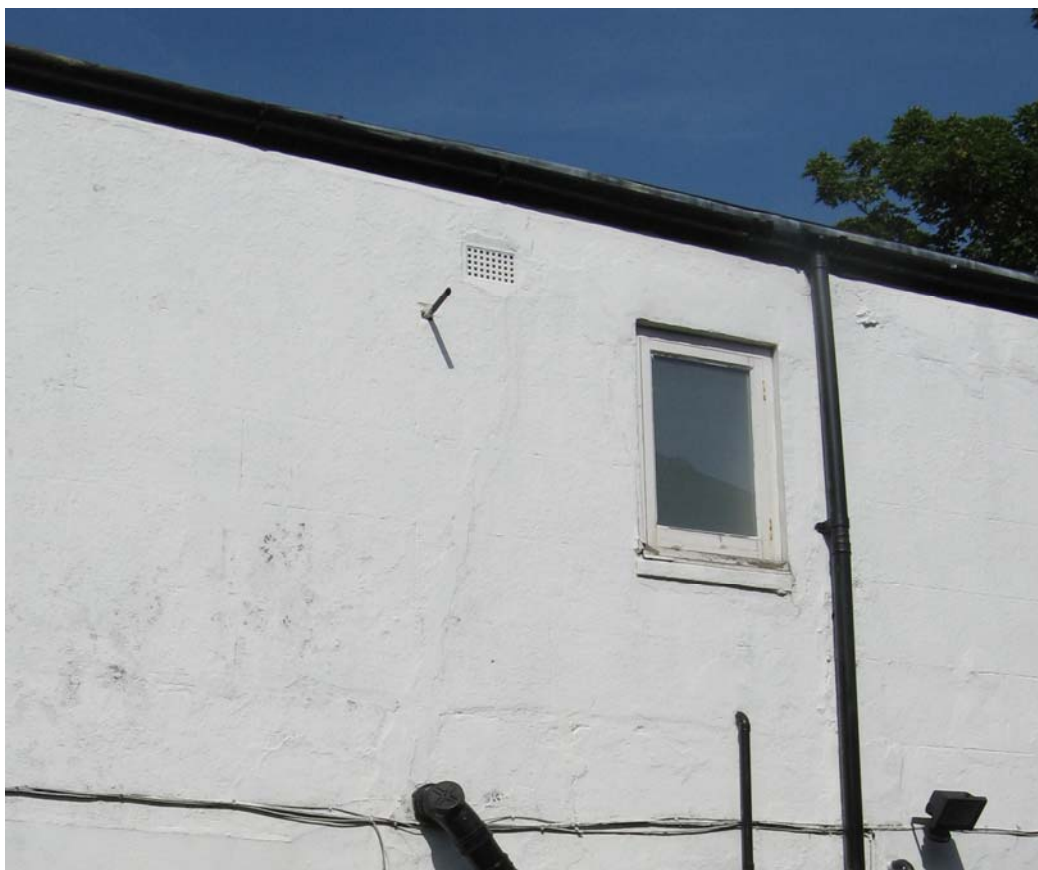
- damp ingress at top of wall
- poorly executed brickwork
- common brick arch
- steel tie at 1st floor



Modern precast concrete coping



Courtyard Elevation above Courtyard wall and gate



Part Courtyard Elevation showing uneven render and window insertion



Part Courtyard Elevation showing services

APPENDIX B



Elevation showing existing and consented openings in Existing Courtyard Elevation



Indicates area to be infilled



Indicates area to be demolished