

# DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

In support of

Planning application for

Construction of Roof Level Extension to Create One Dwelling  
at

MOURNE HOUSE,  
MARESFIELD GARDENS, NW3

by

**Peter Newson Associates Limited**  
Chartered Architects

on behalf of

**Mr A Tripp**

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## I CONTEXT

Mourne House is a 1970s development of 22 flats situated on the south western side of Maresfield Gardens and within the Fitzjohn's Netherhall Conservation Area.

The road is characterised by grand red brick detached and semi detached "freestyle" Victorian age villas and is softened by mature trees and planting in front gardens. From the road, the site slopes westwards down towards the rear of Finchley Road properties which are screened by tall mature trees, hedgerows and boundary planting.

Mourne House was designed in 1972 by Chartered Architects, Ronald Salmon, Middleton & Associates and granted planning permission in August that year. The building replaces two detached houses and was constructed in two phases of identical design.

The design and appearance of the building is clearly a product of its age and contrasts conspicuously with neighbouring properties whilst external materials comprising red facing brickwork, painted render and tile hanging reflect those of the earlier houses. The elevation to Maresfield Gardens presents a predominantly vertical design with chamfered stair towers and brickwork spines and recesses that partly echo tall bay window and gable elements seen locally, but stops short at the truncated fourth floor flat roof, which feature has no precedent elsewhere along the road.

Balconies and roof terraces are a predominant feature of both front and rear elevations and echo top floor balustrade balconies which are a feature of original villas opposite on Maresfield Gardens.

Vehicular access alongside the southern elevation leads down to semi basement car parking accessed from the rear garden.

### **PROPOSAL (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)**

The front elevation of Mourne House facing Maresfield Gardens presents a four storey height apartment building and stair towers above a basement level garaging and service zone.

However, the rear elevation already extends to a fifth floor level to provide fourth floor level apartments with additional solaria and balconies projecting above roof level. These rooms adjoin cold water storage tank housings and lift motor rooms also standing a storey height above the general flat roof level.

The water storage tanks are nowadays obsolete and the supply can be beneficially relocated to the basement, thereby providing the opportunity to extend the existing residential accommodation at this level by infilling between and to each side of the solaria to provide one additional residential apartment.

The new accommodation can be served by extending one of the two existing lift shafts together with the existing staircases to meet means of escape requirements.

The new building line will be set back on all elevations to minimise visual impact from public viewpoints and a simple and elegant construction using neutral, transparent and matching external materials beneath a new flat roof will enhance the existing roofscape.

## **2 ASSESSMENT**

The building comprises a load bearing masonry structure with reinforced concrete intermediate floor slabs and roof slab.

It is understood that spine walls projecting at roof level gain support from a principal transfer structure slab over the garage basement level and are capable of taking an additional loading.

The only external modifications to the building apparent since construction are renewal of some windows and replacement of minor areas of cladding. The building structure remains sound and the only area that has required successive maintenance expenditure is the roof.

The roof construction is typical of its age, being poured in-situ concrete construction with asphalt on screed laid to falls. The roof is constructed in bays between upstand walls and is complicated by lift motor rooms, tank rooms and rear facing solarium projecting above the general roof level.

The original roof weatherproofing has failed and repaired over the years with water leaks occurring to top floor flats until last year. A modern single ply membrane has most recently been applied across the roof including weathering upstands and brickwork copings towards overcoming this ongoing problem.

A structural feasibility report has been prepared by Paul Carpenter Associates (Appendix 2) confirming the practicality of the application scheme. The design proposed is lightweight but rigid and will span between the existing masonry upstand walls. PCA have consulted with Camden Building Control regarding disproportionate collapse and constructional standards that have arisen since construction of the building, including insulation and sound control, which can be incorporated into the design specification to meet current requirements.

The two lifts serving the building have been updated but are not large enough for wheelchair access and can only be reached via external steps. It is possible to extend one lift to serve an additional floor level and straightforward to extend the two lift towers to meet means of escape requirements. Equally, all services are readily available and can be extended as necessary.

## **3 PLANNING POLICY CONSERVATION AREA - Fitzjohn's Netherhall**

The Conservation Area statement advises on the social and architectural hierarchy of the streets between Fitzjohn's Avenue and Finchley Road, the development history including Maresfield Gardens and the "freestyle" of Victorian influences on the architecture of the area.

Mourne House is described as “a four storey 1970s block of flats, red brick with strong vertical emphasis, replicating the feel of the properties to its north”. The building is neither included in the list of those displaying negative features nor those which make a positive contribution and confirms the houses within its immediate curtilage are unlisted.

The statement includes design advice generally applicable to the Victorian era buildings:

**Roof alterations** - A feature of the architecture of the mid to late Victorian period is the visibility of the roof. Insensitive alterations can harm the character of the roofscape with poor materials, intrusive dormers, inappropriate windows, and in many instances there is no further possibility of alterations.

This application is for a roof level extension, however, aspects including sensitive design and use of appropriate external materials have been carefully considered in accordance with the relevant statement advice:

**Design** – Not all development has been successful in contributing to the character of the Conservation Area. Where development has not positively contributed to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, it concerns:

- Use of inappropriate materials
- Inappropriate bulk, massing and/or height
- Inappropriate signage
- Impact upon views
- Possible impact upon soil stability

Noting Policy F/N1, New Development, the design is required to respect existing features such as roof lines, elevational design and, as appropriate, architectural characteristics, detail, profile and materials of adjoining buildings. New development should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the Conservation Area which, it is considered, the existing roofscape does not do.

Policy F/N15, Roof Extensions, advises how alterations within the Conservation Area can prove harmful, whilst the roof in this instance is untypical of the area and currently offers no significant architectural merit.

Soil stability issues have been addressed by Structural Consulting Engineers, Paul Carpenter Associates (PCA) in their Structural Feasibility Report dated 29 June 2011 (Appendix 2).

#### **4 INVOLVEMENT**

The freeholder of the building has engaged Chartered Architects, Peter Newson Associates Limited (PNAL) to establish whether the construction of a penthouse dwelling would be feasible and additionally overcome roof maintenance issues.

PNAL telephoned Rob Tulloch, Planning Officer, West Area Team (ie Fitzjohn's and Netherhall Conservation Area) Development Control Planning Services, at the

London Borough of Camden on 16 June 2010 to obtain initial planning advice which was noted as follows:

“The principle of one extra floor with 3-4 flats is acceptable, set back from front of building. No overlooking or loss of light issues, property to rear in excess of 30m away.

“Will need to consult with Transport Planners on car parking – usually look for car free development, but outside of centre and possibly 1 space/unit max could be justified.

“Building is situated in Conservation Area and proposals will need to enhance appearance.

“No planning contributions – threshold is 5 units, possible small contribution towards ‘Construction management Plan’, or ‘Services Management Plan’.

“The number of units and floor area proposed fall below threshold for formal pre-application discussions – can email in first instance to Camden Planning Department and follow up with meeting a duty planning officer.” [Appendix 1]

PNAL emailed Rob Tulloch on 23 November 2010 enclosing sketch layout drawings 575/SK04 and 575/SK05 proposing a single additional flat at roof level with access via a new dedicated external lift, requesting further informal discussion [Appendix 2].

PNAL emailed Rob Tulloch on 6 December 2010 seeking a meeting who responded by telephone the following day advising his need to discuss our proposal with the Design Team on Tuesday 11 January [Appendix 1]. Following which email received from Rob Tulloch on 21 January 2011 confirming “no objection in principle to the creation of an additional floor at Mourne House.” “The property . . . . [Appendix 1].

2 February 2011: Application to Camden Building Control for record Building Regulations drawings - unsuccessful.

25 March 2011: Structural Report, load bearing and progressive collapse received from Paul Carpenter Associates following discussion with Camden Building Control.

PNAL email to Rob Tulloch on 29 September 2011 advising scheme proposal progressed following pre-application advice, and now ready to submit planning application.

Response from Rob Tulloch, advising a new team now deals with pre-application advice and need to contact Advice and Consultation Team Manager at Camden Alex Bushell [Appendix 1].

PNAL planning application submitted 7 October 2011, registered Ref: 2011/5050/P by Camden on 23 November 2011.

Camden email dated 7 December 2011 response from planning officer, Neil Zaayman, “cannot support application in its current form . . . There are clear views along the street of the application site, especially as one approaches from the north and we feel that the extension would appear bulky, overly dominant and visually intrusive” [Appendix 1].

PNAL email to Neil Zaayman on 9 December 2011, “Surprised at your conclusion bearing in mind the positive pre-application advice” and willing to amend current application [Appendix 1]

PNAL phone conversation with Neil Zaayman Monday 12 December and Neil Zaayman email 12 December and refusal reasons [Appendix 8].

Planning Refusal , refer to Planning Statement [Appendix 1].

PNAL request for pre-application advice 26 January 2012, providing letter and photographs and revised scheme proposal.

PNAL email 7 March 2012, meeting at Camden with planning officer Ben Lemare and Conservation Officer, Antonia Powell [Appendix 1].

Camden formal pre-application response 25 April 2012 [Appendix 1].

## **5 EVALUATION**

In common with many 20<sup>th</sup> Century apartment blocks, Mourne House has the potential for additional residential accommodation to be provided at roof level, which already includes original storey height residential solarium and services structures. This can be achieved without alteration to the appearance of the building below roof level and will overcome ongoing flat roof maintenance problems and enhance and upgrade insulation, servicing, soundproofing and finishes to both the existing and proposed accommodation.

The principal of added accommodation at roof level was confirmed by a West Area Team Planning Officer whilst noting its Conservation Area location requires careful design consideration, chiefly to respect the adjoining properties and will need to enhance appearance which, from public viewpoints, is restricted to eye level views from Maresfield Gardens.

The height for a new flat roof above the existing Solarium and lift motor rooms will marginally increase the overall height of the building but not disproportionately above that of adjoining properties which are staggered along this sloping street.

Any increase in visual impact can be reduced by setting new construction back from existing perimeter walls and using simple recessive design and external materials.

Application Ref 2011/5050/P submitted by PNAL on 7 October 2011 followed these principals, but was refused due to the Council's view that the proposed access to roof level via a new dedicated external lift, had inevitable visual implications and the appearance of the proposed accommodation was considered incongruous and unduly prominent and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the street scene.

Noting Camden's "Fitzjohn's Netherall Conservation Area Statement" that "Mourne House is a 4 storey 1970s block of flats, red brick with strong vertical emphasis, replicating the feel of the properties to its north", PNAL identified properties to the north that displayed mansard roof accommodation, a precedent that could be applied to Mourne House and would create a recessive new roofline set back in a traditional manner and prepared a fresh design proposal on this basis.. At the subsequent pre-application meeting Conservation Officer, Antonia Powell, found this design approach "imaginative", "acceptable" and "a happy solution", "that sat more comfortably with the host building", however officers now disputed the principle of additional accommodation at roof level.

Officers' opinion was again that the bulk, height and scale proposed, particularly when viewed from the south at street level, would be harmful with an inappropriate visual impact and overwhelming height, and noting the additional height of tank and motor rooms on top of the proposed extension resulted in this design proposal not being progressed.

Following subsequent consultation advice, the current fresh scheme was developed, reverting to a simple flat roof solution with the appearance of being small and lighter in respect of the proposed additional storey and set back from both front and side elevations. From the attached visualisations [Appendix 5], it is apparent the present scheme will not appear either incongruous or unduly prominent and is designed to enhance the appearance of the 1970s block by providing a recessive horizontal element that also continues the visually strong original vertical spines, recessed modelling and angled terminations at roof level in a carefully considered response to the original detailing and materials and maintaining a subservient and neutral manner.

The roof height is set by the existing solaria and lift motor rooms already at this level and the new accommodation is created between these elements and set beneath a visually floating flat roof. There are no lift motor rooms or tank housings projecting above this level.

From the previously planning application and later pre-application advice, it is apparent that officers' primary concern is the visual appearance of any roof extension when seen from ground level looking either north or south from Maresfield Gardens.

The 1970s planning permission consented storey height roof level structures, for both residential accommodation and services installations, with the former concentrated towards the rear and the latter sited centrally on the roof space. A corner of the solaria can only just be seen from the ground level oblique views and the tank rooms from in front of the building appearing unobtrusively above each recess beside the stair towers.

This application design retains this same structural front building line as the existing tank rooms with only 2.0m forward extensions following the plan form projections of the host building.

The attached careful visual study of the proposed roof level extension set back from the main façade as above [Appendix 5] confirms this will not appear “overwhelming” or “incongruous” and in our view will enhance the overall appearance of this building within the Conservation Area.

## **6 DESIGN CRITERIA**

The design brief seeks to achieve a single penthouse apartment on one level providing three bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms and an open plan living/dining/kitchen area with access to outdoor space or spaces. The design approach has been to seek to enhance the external appearance of the existing building in compliance with Policy F/N I and improve the quality of existing external building materials and overcome ongoing maintenance problems with the present flat roof.

A feature of the roof at this level are the existing projecting rear solaria together with water tanks and lift motor rooms which, however, are not generally visible from public eye level view points at ground level.

Alternative means of escape from the penthouse and provision of maintenance access, requires an extension of the two existing staircases which can be readily achieved using monopitch roofs set back from the front parapet walls, an extension of the canted design at the head of original spine walls.

To reduce visual impact when viewed from Maresfield Gardens, the penthouse front façade is to be set back from the existing front building line in accordance with the pre-application advice received in Appendix 1 and this will create open roof terraces. To the rear, the building line is set by the existing solaria and the depth of the existing roof terraces maintained for the new construction.

Within the new floorspace created, bedrooms and bathrooms are sited at each end of the building, each side of fire protected inner lobbies and with a large central living/dining/kitchen open area.

## **7 DESIGN & MATERIALS**

The penthouse roof extension is intended to appear recessive and subservient to the existing exterior which is predominantly bright red/orange facing brickwork with lesser white painted render panels contrasting the front elevation whilst to the rear, the white painted panels predominate and the projecting brickwork becomes more three dimensional.

Therefore, the new façades and eaves lines are set back from the front, rear and side elevations and the materials chosen are neutral and predominantly transparent glass, inset beneath a horizontal eaves line intended to visually terminate the vertical brickwork shafts.



The appearance of the new structure will be limited to a range of three external materials, glazing and painted render to match existing materials and zinc sheet metal roofing applied to new copings, eaves and stair tower roofs.

Simple, modern, full height fenestration will be set between projecting painted render spine wall panels and frameless glass balustrading at perimeter walls will maintain openness at roof level.

The new roof will be fully insulated and waterproofed using up-to-date sheet materials.

## **8 ACCESS**

Mourne House was constructed before access for the disabled was taken fully into account and although provided with lifts, there are stairs to both front entrance doors and from the basement car park.

The proposed penthouse accommodation cannot be served by a wheelchair accessible lift but internally the accommodation is arranged on a single level with wide and simple circulation routes. A disabled standard WC is provided and all rooms have level access to an outdoor space.

**PETER NEWSON ASSOCIATES LIMITED**  
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