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Design Statement
- **91 York Way**
Camden
London
N7 9QF

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introduction



front elevation of no. 89, no. 91 and no. 93 york way

91 York Way is an existing 3-storey residential terraced townhouse containing 3 x 1 Bed flats – one flat on each floor all linked by a communal staircase.

The proposal is to keep it as a residential development with 3 flats. It takes its inspiration from the site's context and by adding an additional floor to the existing building it will become integrated into the existing street skyline.

The changes we propose to the rest of the building will enhance the spaces contained within while remaining true to the building's surroundings. Materials will be in keeping and matched with what already exists on site and its context. New windows will retain existing proportions and materiality.



rear elevation of no. 93, no. 91 and no. 89 york way

The development aims to implement the following:

Flat A (Ground Floor)

Reconfigure existing room arrangement to allow for more usable spaces for the occupiers and to add a small rear extension creating a dining area out into the garden (similar to the extension at No. 89 York Way which is full depth to the rear boundary) but would end 1.5m from the rear boundary wall. The flat would remain a 1 Bed.

Flat B (First Floor)

To remain as a 1 Bed but the room arrangement to be reconfigured to allow for more usable spaces for the occupiers. Currently the existing bedroom dimensions mean a double bed cannot occupy the space (and so is unusable by a couple) and we have relocated the bedroom (11m²) to the rear of the property.

Flat C (Second and New Third Floors)

To add a loft extension (similar to both No. 89 and 93 York Way) creating a 2 Bed flat. The existing room arrangement will be reconfigured to allow for more usable spaces and to reflect the changes required by the small increase in occupants by added a dining area/study room.

response to the camden udp

The applicant has attentively reviewed the UDP and framed the application accordingly. Having taken exhaustive soundings from local residents, the local residents' association and the Council's Planning Department, and inputting the results into the application, scheme and drawings, the applicant believes it has adhered to the various criteria, supplementary and other guidance, conservation area statements and the spirit of the UDP as a whole, as further set out herein.

Through the intended improvement of the Premises, as envisioned in the application and in accordance with the UDP, it is the applicant's intention to protect and improve the amenity of the Borough's residents and visitors, by fostering a safe, pleasant and healthy environment in which to live and by encouraging a more balanced use of the Premises. The application is to change the constitution of the Premises away from bed-sits for transient occupants to long term family-oriented occupation in order to bring accommodation back into use, to provide decent housing and to reduce crime associated with persons who have no stake in their community. The Premises (when in previous occupation) was subject to and showed signs of illicit drug-use: it is intended that the re-modelling of the Premises to family units will preclude such illicit use.

The proposed development seeks to keep largely within the existing building envelope of the Premises, but to offer increased habitability. The Premises is situated close to shopping and work areas, is on several bus routes and very close to London Underground and rail facilities, thus minimising or removing the need to use private transport. The proximity to King's Cross and the conversion of one 1-bedroom unit to a 2-bedroomed flat (as contained in the application) will allow more flexible use and attract a diversity of occupants. They may, in addition, wish to work in the King's Cross development, thus maximising the return and retention of income within the direct locality and borough.

It is recognised that there is a surfeit of single person dwellings in the locality and a relative lack of slightly larger units suitable for couples. By taking small one-person flats suitable only for single, short-term transient residents in the existing building and remodelling them to attract young couples and a family, the intention behind the proposal is to increase (albeit in a small way) the usability of the existing Premises. This is sustainable development and improves on the available existing permanent residential accommodation with no harm to scarcely available public space or local residents.

Sustainable Communities

As previously noted, the Premises were (partially because of their own internal configuration and space constraints) a focal point for drug use and disenfranchised persons (various items of drug paraphernalia has been found on site and one flat was populated by a lone, disaffected person who was intent on abusing others racially) and generally attracted rootless occupants. Sadly, the immediately locality receives a poor press although this could be remediable.

Being on the edge of Camden and Islington, it is felt that neither Borough cares enough to do anything positive with York Way. The remodelling of the Premises under the application will target couples and a family as being the ideal occupants who are long term owner occupiers with a stake in re-balancing the downward slide in the locality.

Regeneration

The applicant's foregoing comments are also applicable here. In addition it should be noted that the Premises is on the boundary of various large estates and also areas of a completely different social stratum, between which there is little interaction. The development of the Premises as envisioned by the application will better allow, by means of social renewal, the transition between such disparate social groups rather than belonging squarely to one or the other as it does now. In this way it is hoped that the development will soften the divide and aid in a small way to increased social cohesion.

The development is small scale however it is submitted that it will bridge the various disparate social characters of the area (see applicant's note above), make good use of amenity (open space and sporting facilities are available at Market Park and on the Astro turf) and not impact adversely on the density of the surrounding area; not causing harm to either.

The extent of the site will remain largely as it is and the design (made in close collaboration with the Council's Planning and Conservation Departments) adheres to the norms of the locality, retaining various features of interest to the Council (parapet walls for valley roof, reopening bricked up windows etc).

The development is a mix of two one-bed flats suitable for couples and one two-bed suitable for a small family. Local facilities include several schools, open space and shops within short walking distance and extensive shopping and leisure facilities not much further away in Camden, Kings Cross and Holloway.

As noted above there is very good bus, tube and rail service ranging from being situated right outside the door of the Premises, to a short walk away. The marginal increased impact of each occupant fully using the public transport available is low, whereas the social utility of the same is high.

Amenity for occupiers and neighbours

The proposed development set out in the application retains the original protections for overlooking and does not (according to the sun-path analysis already undertaken and given the distance to any properties to the rear of the Premises) adversely affect sunlight or daylight levels to occupants or neighbours. It will not create increased artificial light levels, noise or vibration levels beyond normal residential limits nor lead to odour, fumes and dust being created. There are adequate facilities for storage, recycling and disposal of waste off the public highway, ie within the front garden of the Premises and it is not anticipated that any microclimate will be created or affected.

Increasing the supply of new housing

The application intends to bring back into use three, hitherto empty, residential units and with a slightly higher number of occupants than previously. Although small scale, the applicant is mindful of Camden's housing target and wishes to play a role within that. At this time the housing market is difficult and may stagnate further, however the applicant wishes to try to get some usable and more flexible space to be made available to prospective owner-occupier residents. By their nature, housing made for owner occupiers rather than bed-sits tend to be of a higher quality and the applicant is happy to demonstrate other housing it has provided within north London to this end.

The proposal increases usable and habitable floor space and provides additional decent residential accommodation to a good standard (it is the practice of the applicant to offer guarantees to purchasers eg through Zurich or NHBC). The Premises have been long-vacant but have several times recently suffered attempts by squatters to gain access. Obviously, occupied houses are less likely to be squatted and only with the application being granted can the Premises be usefully occupied within the criteria discussed above.

The application is in accordance with this criterion: the Premises' envelope remains largely the same but widens the pool of possible occupants to increase the level of affordable housing. The marginally increased density of the application will make more efficient use of local transport, shopping, leisure and other amenities and increase their viability and catchment population. For example, this is because, being couple- or family-oriented, immediately local shops will be more likely to be frequented than by transient (or currently non-existent) occupants. The benefit to the local economy is heightened by this "multiplier effect" as the local shops are themselves "family concerns" with a proportionally larger stake in the locality, rather than do large multiples.

Again, the application is an extension that increases usable and habitable floor space and provides additional decent residential accommodation to a good standard. At this time the housing market is difficult and may stagnate further, however the applicant wishes to try to get some usable and more flexible space to be made available to prospective owner-occupier residents. The proposal complies with the minimum density.

response to the camden udp

As noted, the proposal intends to move the Premises away from small one-person flats to larger couple/family occupation. The mix is intended to address the incidence of the particular social problems faced by the area of York Way and this Premises in particular (drugs, racial abuse, other crime). This connection is long recognised by various disciplines as arising from poor quality and mono-format (ie predominantly one-person) dwellings.

The Premises has been vacant for some time, not merely because it is in partly in disrepair but because of its internal layout and facilities. The proposal intends to address and solve these shortcomings and to bring back into use good, decent housing stock that is reasonably centrally located.

Mix of units

Having reviewed the site conditions and the constraints to be faced, in consultation with the Planning Department, local residents and the local residents association, it was suggested by the Planning Department that one 2-bedroom unit would create a good mix with the remaining two 1-bedroom units.

The applicant firmly believes that the proposal will enable a good standard and quality of accommodation to be made available to a wider section of the public and make the amenity of the area more inclusive, at the same time without any ensuing deterioration of amenity of others both within the Premises (there are none) and adjacent.

The application has been sensitive to the character of the existing environment whilst allowing minimal change or any deviation therefrom. The proposed alterations are intended to enhance and underline the stylistic cues of the surroundings and at the same time allowing expression of valid standards of design, undertaken by an architect in full discussion and collaboration with the Planning Department.

Alterations and extensions

As already notes, the application has been sensitive to the character of the existing environment whilst utilising minimal change or any deviation therefrom. In regards to the height, scale, massing, proportions and bulk of development, particular care has been taken to reflect the norms of the local area and adjoining buildings, especially in relation to parapet walls and fenestration.

The proposed alterations are intended to enhance and underline the stylistic cues of the surroundings and at the same time allowing expression of valid standards of design, undertaken by an architect in full discussion and collaboration with the Planning Department.

As a result, the proportions of the slightly enlarged Premises (sited as it is between two others with larger roof-level extensions) reflects more fairly the proportions and style of the original than do the adjacent buildings.

response to the camden udp

In particular the extensions in the application are definitely subordinate to the original building and do not detract from it, especially as they are quite hidden from general view. The extensions are sited to minimise impact on neighbours and residents and passers-by. The massing is consistent with minimal impact on such groups as the extensions are not readily viewable from the street or from the rear.

The colour and texture of the existing parapet wall to the front of the Premises is disconcertingly patchy because different style and colouration of bricks have been used in a haphazard manner in the fairly recent past. It is intended to use matching bricks in the works to minimise any incongruity in materials.

Again in the fairly recent past a stairwell rear window has been inexplicably bricked up, it is intended to restore the window opening for aesthetic, functional and safety reasons.

Windows to the extensions reflect the size, spacing and character of the original so that the works form an imperceptible growth of the whole. The application would produce a more pleasing effect than the current situation: the Premises is currently dwarfed on each side by buildings with bulkier extensions having little sympathy with the original design; in contrast with the application which has taken the original design to its heart.

The architectural integrity of the original building has been maintained by the retention of front parapet wall and valley roof-line at the rear.

The original garden is largely already paved over and has a small mound of earth piled into one corner serving no aesthetic or useful purpose. There are no trees in the garden.

The building services equipment are already sited in purpose built safety cupboards, conduit, boxed-in or (in the case of gas meters) externally and out of sight.

Particular care has been taken in the design being put forward as part of the application so as not to cause harm to the integrity of the appearance of the building or environs because it is recognised that the adaptation and evolution of the existing Premises (as shown in the application) is far more appropriate than revolution. The intention of the application is to adhere to the form, proportions and character of the existing Premises by continuing its style, coloration, fenestration and roof level detail.

Amentity space

There are no trees on the site of the Premises.

Because the applicant is convinced that outside amenity is good for all, originally the applicant also wished to adhere to the UDP's recommendation that opportunities should be considered to provide roof or terrace gardens above ground level. This was more so the case, because immediately adjacent properties have such terraces both on first and second floors.

Whilst the initial designs and original application showed the inclusion of a roof terrace at first floor level, the Planning Department felt it appropriate to take into account the concerns of various neighbours (who themselves have the benefit of terraces). Mindful of the desire not to upset anyone, the applicant has not requested a terrace on this occasion, however it should be noted that matters expressed to be "concerns of the neighbours", may be questionable in their intent.

The application's intent is rather to rescue, not undermines, the existing uniformity of the street. There is little existing uniformity in this section of York Way, and to the extent that the roof extension fulfils its function, its style and format is intended to bridge the gap where each adjoining property has its own roof extension (of no particular discernible local style) yet continuing the style of the existing Premises.

There will be no loss of boundary enclosures.

The Premises is within a conservation area and the applicant is sensitive to the necessary criteria and submits that the application does not do any harm to any affected conservation area's character, appearance or setting, but rather enhances it. The Council is no doubt aware of the need to foster development and that there is a balance to be struck between development and preservation of a living city in aspic. It is submitted that the application is on the right side of this balance.

The applicant has focused on the application not causing harm: neither to the integrity of the existing building, adjoining and neighbouring occupants nor to the wider built environment.

In conclusion, the applicant would like to stress that the application has been made with full disclosure to the Council's Planning and Conservation Departments, local residents and the local Resident's Association. There has been full discourse with the relevant Council Department and the applicant has put into practice the suggestions and recommendations of such departments.

The application seeks to provide increased, good quality, housing of a more flexible and improved nature than currently existing in the Premises to the end that local amenity in its wider sense is improved through the Premises' contribution to lessen the incidence of crime and to contribute to social renewal, albeit in a small but positive way.

The applicant respectfully commends the Council's Planning authority to grant the application.

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