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**Building Appraisal for
102 Camden Mews
September 2014**

Number 102 Camden Mews is located towards the Northern end of Camden Mews, on the South East side of the mews, between York Way to the North and Torriano Avenue to the South and is four doors removed from what appears to be one of the very few original mews buildings in this part of the street, number 108.

The first buildings on the site are shown in the 1873 O.S. map which suggest that these earliest buildings may have been coach houses for carriages, each of the houses in Clifton Road (now Cliff Road) having one.

By 1893, as shown in the O.S. map of that date, this part of the mews had been more fully developed to include the present mews buildings which were thus probably first built in the 1870s or 1880s. The arrangement of the mews buildings was very unusual in that the buildings on this, the South East side, were arranged "sideways" to the street, with virtually no windows facing the mews itself save for one to light the staircase which was, and still is in number 108, adjacent to the front wall and a small window, perhaps to light a WC. The principal windows looked out of the long side elevations at first floor, probably over an open yard, with, behind it, either a coach house for carriages or a stable as suggested by the 1873 O.S., map in which latter case the carriages would have been kept in the ground floor of the two storey mews building itself.

So, rather than offering a continuous street elevation to the mews the mews buildings were two storey buildings, probably in pairs, each building looking over its own courtyard to one side which would have had gates opening, and closing it off, from the Mews. There were large, high ground floor openings in the side elevations of the buildings so as to permit access for horses or carriages between the yard and the building.

The O.S. map of 1895 seems to show such an arrangement, although it would seem that even then some of the yards had been built over so as to enclose what had been open space. Or perhaps some of the buildings were built in this way, partly one storey and partly two, with space for carriages and horses.

Subsequently, the single storey yards were redeveloped and in-filled, sometimes with two or even three storeys, some of which were set back so as to retain something of the earlier pattern of development, but, sadly, the clarity and interest of these mews has been almost obliterated.

The earlier pattern only survives, albeit rather faintly, between 92 to the South and 108 to the North; there are now no open courtyards, all having been built over or at least roofed over, but 92, 94, 102 and 108 have two storey elements facing the street with their principal windows looking out over the roof above the single storey element beside it. These single storey parts, which have taken the place of the earlier open courtyards, now only survive immediately adjacent to the mews, their rear portions all having been redeveloped with two storeys to the rear. The single storey part of 100, now part of 102 still survives as a garage. 104 and 106 have been dreadfully mauled having had pretentious and utterly inappropriate windows inserted into their front elevations, presumably because what had been single storey elements have been raised so as to obliterate the first floor windows in their side walls. Between 94 and 100 the pattern has been entirely lost, the new buildings having a series of equal repeated bays. Only 108 survives with its original front and side elevations substantially intact and its courtyard still readable as a garage, although here, too, the building behind the earlier courtyard has been redeveloped with two storeys.

The front, mews, elevation to 102 was rebuilt comparatively recently, probably in the last fifty years, using a hard modern brick, possibly a fletton although being painted, it is hard to say. In any event the character and detail of the original elevation has been largely lost to a crude, cheap, inappropriate, modern wall although the size and shape of the wall and the door position reflect the old building behind. The South West elevation, however, which faces over the now roofed courtyard, has survived largely as built at first floor level with its original openings in the original wall.

The North West side of the Mews is far more conventional with a continuous two storey elevation and large garage type openings below the first floor windows, at least where the older buildings survive.

The newer buildings are chaotically varied and seem to reflect little of the character of the original mews, although this does now give the mews as a whole a richly diverse character which is almost picturesque in its variety.

In writing this document we have taken account of Planning Policy Statement 5, in particular, policies HE6 and 7. The following two paragraphs in which we assess the significance of the existing building at 102 Camden Mews are a direct response to policy HE6.1.

Although number 102, through its plan and massing, still demonstrates a link with the original pattern of the mews buildings, in losing its original front wall and having a very poor quality garage in what used to be the yard, its public face, the elevation to the mews has lost its historical importance and authenticity. However, behind this elevation much of the fabric and plan form of the original mews building survive with some original first floor windows overlooking what had been the courtyard. These windows are in the brick side-wall which is also original although much altered at ground floor level. Some of the internal joinery would appear to be original.

The Camden Square Conservation Area Management Strategy refers, at 7.7 to “quality, erosion and loss of detail” and discusses the harm caused by the removal or loss of original architectural features and the use of inappropriate materials; in this case the fabric of the front elevation has been lost together with all architectural features and It is questionable whether it does now make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

However, the side elevation and indeed the mass of the building, which remains unchanged, does make a positive contribution and to extend and enhance it by means of a modern building should be considered, particularly if the new work were to be developed with an understanding of the scale and pattern of the original buildings on the site, as is the case here.

The current proposal has been developed in response to an analysis and understanding of the existing buildings on the site, and in response to the reasons for refusal of the last proposal for the site. In writing this document we have also taken account Planning Policy Statement 5, the English Heritage PPS5 Planning Practice Guide, Camden Council’s Core strategy and the Development Policies in Camden’s Local Development Framework as well as policy HE7.5 which states that “Local Planning Authorities should take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment. The consideration of design should include scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and use.”

One of the significant merits of Dols Wong’s current proposal is that it retains the existing mews building which is clearly readable within the proposal as a whole; it would be abundantly clear to any user that the original building has been added to rather than knocked down and re-built, and, moreover, the two first floor windows would remain unaltered, overlooking a flat roof at first floor, as they always have done.

When the terrace of buildings from 94 to 100 was built the pattern of paired mews buildings separated by paired courtyards was utterly destroyed, leaving the garage to number 100 as a left-over fragment, its original relationship to its parent, number 100, having been lost, and it is of great credit to Dols Wong’s proposal that it seeks to re-establish something of the character of the earlier arrangement by building a second mews building on the site of the garage to number 100 such that it, too, would overlook the courtyard to 102. Thus two mews buildings, the old and the new would share and overlook a single rather than a pair of courtyards. This re-invention of the historic plan form is particularly evident at ground floor where the two mews buildings, the old and the new, have matching elevations facing each other across the glazed over courtyard.

In using and adapting the historic plan form Dols Wong have cleverly and elegantly taken the opportunity to mediate between the modern elevation of number 100 and the earlier, albeit very poorly rebuilt, elevation to number 102. Rather than build in a late 19th century manner they have proposed a modern building which would respond to both its modern neighbour at 100 and some of the historic elements, particularly the plan form, of the mews building of number 102.

In looking at the policies governing works and amendments in conservation areas, there are three policies in particular that discuss the design of the proposal: CS14, “Promoting High Quality Places

and Conserving Our Heritage”, DP24, “Securing High Quality Design” and DP25 “Conserving Camden’s Heritage” and, if you take the view, as I do, that the design is of high quality then the proposal could be regarded as not conflicting with these policies. For example, paragraph 14.3, policy CS14 states:-

14.3 Camden has many special and unique places and historic and modern buildings of the highest quality. As well as preserving this rich heritage, we should also be contributing to it by making sure that we create buildings of equally high quality that will be appreciated by future generations. The design of the places and buildings that make up our local environment affects us all and our quality of life. **High quality design is visually interesting and attractive but it is not just about what things look like. Good design makes places that put people first, are welcoming, feel safe and are enjoyable and easy to use for everyone**, whether they are living in, working in, or just passing through the borough.

It seems to me that Dols Wong’s proposal accords very well indeed with the quoted paragraph above, particularly in respect of the sentences that I have highlighted which bring to the fore aspects of a proposal which are fundamental to its success. Designing new proposals for a conservation area should not solely be about copying to fit in, but about designing a building to respond to its context and surroundings, to enhance its surroundings by being a good neighbour to the existing buildings, whilst, at the same time, making a building that provides spaces which are suitable for their purpose and a pleasure to use. I think this proposal manages this very well; the internal spaces would be very well lit, a joy to use and provide accommodation of a high standard.

Policy DP24 –“ Securing high quality design” states

The Council will require all developments, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings, to be of the highest standard of design and will expect developments to consider:

- a) character, setting, context and the form and scale of neighbouring buildings;
- b) the character and proportions of the existing building, where alterations and extensions are proposed;
- c) the quality of materials to be used;
- d) the provision of visually interesting frontages at street level;
- e) the appropriate location for building services equipment;
- f) existing natural features, such as topography and trees;
- g) the provision of appropriate hard and soft landscaping including boundary treatments;
- h) the provision of appropriate amenity space; and
- i) accessibility.

I do not think that the current proposal would necessarily conflict with any of the clauses above.

Considering policy DP25, and looking at the clauses relating to conservation areas, the policy states that:

In order to maintain the character of Camden’s conservation areas, the Council will:

- a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;
- b) only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;

- c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;
- d) not permit development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and
- e) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage.

Here, it is clauses b) and c) above which have been very successfully addressed by the applicants; the modern elements of the proposal have been skilfully woven into the existing fabric of the mews and the surviving elements of the existing building which do make a positive contribution to the conservation area have not been demolished but have been retained and carefully woven into the fabric of the proposal as whole.

Referring to the Camden Square Conservation Area appraisal and Management Strategy we note that both Camden and Murray Mews are characterised by modern or recent developments that "take an imaginative approach to development in the spirit of a mews' scale, form and variety of styles and materials" and that it is "the inventiveness and variety which is characteristic of these mews" It seems to us that Dols Wong's proposal falls squarely, and elegantly, into those categories, and that the project, if realised, would both reinforce and enhance those very qualities.

We also take the view that it would make a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and as such should be given consideration under policy HE7.5 of PPS5.

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APPENDIX

Documents consulted and referred to:

O.S. maps dated 1850, 1873, 1895, 1915, 19564 and 2011.

Camden Square Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy.

Planning Policy Statement 5

National Policy Planning Framework

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment Practice Guide

Camden Council Core strategy

Camden Council Local Development Framework; Development Policies,

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