

9th July 2014

3 Leverton Street
Kentish Town
London
NW5 2PH

Attn: Mandeep Chagger
Camden Council Planning Department
Town Hall
Argyle Street
London WC1H 8ND

Dear Sir or Madam,

Listed Building Application ref. 2014/3394/L - Assembly House, Kentish Town

I am writing to raise several objections to the submitted listed building application. I live close to the Assembly House, and the proposed changes to the rear of the the establishment are of concern to me.

Firstly I would like to state that in basic principle, I support the use of the upper floors of the Assembly House for hotel guest accommodation. If viable, it would bring useful new hotel accommodation into the area. My concerns are about how the proposals have been drawn up, which I believe to be ill-considered and detrimental to both the Assembly House building itself and to the conservation area within which it sits. I believe that the client and their architects could, for little or no more expense, achieve their functional requirements whilst showing a great deal more respect for the historic fabric and appearance of the area.

The following are my objections:

Firstly, matters concerning the accuracy of the application information.

- 1) Section 3, description of the proposed works; the applicant gives an incorrect allocation of the class use of the proposed new use of the upper floors. These are not A4, as they state, but C1.
- 2) Section 9 of the planning application form asks whether the proposals include total or partial demolitions. The applicant has stated 'No'. This is incorrect, as the application drawings show that both internal and external demolitions are required as part of the works, most importantly to parts of the rear facade of the building.

The application should be withdrawn and resubmitted when accurate. It can then be properly assessed.

Secondly, matters concerning the nature of the proposed new additions in relation to the Grade 2 listed Assembly House building, set within the context of the conservation area.

- 3) The external additions described in these proposals are to a Grade 2 listed building set within a conservation area. The use of an open steel staircase and new lift clad in 'rendered metal panels' are completely out of context in the area. This applies to both the architectural forms proposed (open staircase and lift shaft bolted onto the back of a building) as well as the materials (exposed steel structure and rendered panels). The design makes absolutely no effort to harmonise with its environment in the conservation area, and the materials proposed for the additions make no attempt to harmonise with the listed building to which they will be attached. Neither do they attempt to contrast as a piece of good modern design. They are cheap functional additions tacked onto the back of a Grade 2 listed building. To help protect the integrity of the conservation environment, the new additions should show more sensitivity to their context, and either attempt to properly 'blend in', or else make a bold, interesting and well executed modern design statement. Not just be the cheapest, easiest option requiring the least thought. That approach shows simply no respect to anyone or anything.
- 4) The Planning Statement submitted with the proposal (see section 1.6) describes the additions as fitting 'seamlessly into the recess at the rear of the property'. This is a completely misleading statement. Firstly the additions do not fit in 'seamlessly' - did whoever wrote that actually look up the meaning of the word? The rear elevations of the Georgian and Victorian properties in the area retain a generally homogenous

look of plain brick with large and well proportioned window openings with sash windows. The new proposals are for an open steel staircase and a render clad lift shaft. Hardly 'seamless'. And secondly, the additions do not fit 'into a recess'. Rather, as the drawings clearly show, they span right across the rear elevation of the building, all the way up to the third floor. Their scale will have a significant impact on the entire rear elevation of the building. Defacing it with a cheap metal escape staircase and cheaply-clad lift would be a huge shame and set a bad precedent for listed buildings in Camden as well as for future developments within a conservation area. The excuse that 'the new additions are on the back and so won't be seen' simply doesn't carry any weight in a densely built-up and populated part of London, where many people will see these new additions, both local residents and visitors - long into the future if the proposals are given permission.

- 5) The proposals are a crude design solution to the issues that the applicant is trying to address. Together with a good fire engineer, the client and architect should be able to devise and agree with the local fire officer an effective escape strategy for occupants of the upper floors (in the event of a fire) that doesn't require such large and clunky attachments to the rear of a much-loved and prominent listed building. Or indeed any attachments at 2nd or 3rd storey level. Particularly as the number of potential occupants in the bedrooms on the upper 2 floors, for whom the new metal escape stairs are allegedly needed, should be around just 12 people max (5 guest rooms and one bedroom for the manager). Even a small internal stair from 2nd to 3rd floors where they currently locate their linen room, linking to a neat, fully clad external stair down to the 1st floor stair leading down to the ground floor, would be massively less intrusive. I don't believe this is a well considered design proposal - it makes very little effort to balance the functional needs of the client with the broader concerns of the historic environment within which it would be located.

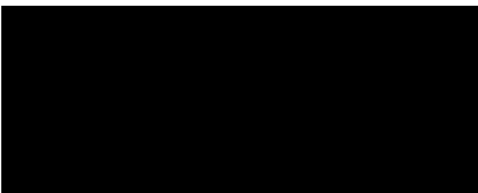
Thirdly, bad new design proposals requiring retro-fit nuisance solutions.

- 6) At times pigeons are a nuisance in the area, using the parapets of local buildings to gather on during the day. But they don't have a good night-time roost in the area, which helps control the nuisance they can cause. However a relatively sheltered and unused external steel staircase would provide an ideal night-time roosting and possibly even nesting place (close to their food source of dropped fast-food containers and chicken bones from the local take-aways). The retro-fit solution to this would be to cover it in a mesh net with anti-roost spikes on the exposed edges - as it stands the design proposals make no attempt to build-in measures to help prevent this problem. So this is just a new-build proposal awaiting a retro-fit solution to a problem that it has created in the first place. As before, I think this is an ill-considered piece of design that should be sent back to the drawing board.

So, to summarise: the information in the application is incorrect in a number of important aspects; the design proposals are ill-considered and detrimental to both the Grade 2 listed building of the Assembly House and also to the context and setting of the surrounding conservation area; the functional requirements of the new proposals could be achieved with far greater respect for historic context of the building without incurring greater cost; and lastly the proposals could show greater respect for the concerns of the neighbours of the Assembly House by addressing potential sources of nuisance, as well as respecting the quality of the built environment in this conservation area, where we live.

I trust these concerns will be considered as part of the council's evaluation of the submitted application.

Your faithfully,



Richard Porter