

GROVE TERRACE ASSOCIATION
11 Grove Terrace, London NW5 1PH

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Jonathon McClue
Planning Officer
London Borough of Camden
2nd Floor, 5 Pancras Square
c/o Camden Town Hall
Judd Street
London
WC1H 9JE

19 December 2014

Dear Mr McClue

Planning applications 2014/7203/L and 2014/7024/P, 18 Grove Terrace, NW5 1PH

I am chair of the Grove Terrace Residents Association and I am writing on behalf of the members to **object** in the strongest terms to the proposals set out in these applications.

The applications have three main elements:

- an excavation of the front light well;
- a large extension at the back at lower ground level, together with a large sunken courtyard;
- various internal alterations.

We have no objections in principal to the proposed internal alterations, although we have a couple of points of detail. However, we have very serious concerns about the other two aspects of the proposal.

Context

Nos 6-27 Grove Terrace is listed Grade II* and is located in the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area. Grove Terrace, together with its gardens (front and back), not only is outstandingly beautiful, but also has a unique place in Camden's heritage.

The Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Statement records that 'Nos 6-27, with their curtilages . . . are an unusually comprehensive survival of an 18th century piece of speculative development and are listed Grade II*.' It notes that 'The Terrace reads as a unified whole but has a pleasing rhythm within it. An important aspect of the whole terrace is its front gardens with mature shrubs, railings, low walls and original flagstones that form part of the setting of the listed buildings.'

The front gardens are mirrored by the importance and setting of the rear gardens, which are at the heart of the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area, as well as in the curtilage of the listed buildings. They are bordered by brick walls of the same age as the buildings. These gardens are long and

narrow, so that each house in Grove Terrace has the benefit of views over at least three or four gardens to each side—an unsurpassed example of borrowed landscape. Together they form a large open green space that is overlooked not only by Grove Terrace itself to the west but also by Woodsome Road to the north, Boscastle Road to the east and Dartmouth Park Road to the south. The many residents of these roads have the benefit of this green space that has existed since Grove Terrace was built in the eighteenth century.

We therefore believe very strongly that it is essential to protect and preserve this space and not to encroach on it or to build on it.

Excavation of lightwell

Although dimensions are not specified, the proposed front lightwell excavation would take out most of the front garden, extending (it appears) about 4 meters into the front garden, leaving only a narrow strip of 'front garden' with shrubs at the front. This excavation would be unprecedented in respect of 6-27 Grove Terrace, and we believe the proposal should be turned down for the following reasons:

- 1 With one exception (discussed below), none of the lightwells in the Grade II* listed buildings have been excavated as proposed in this application. Although there are variations from building to building, largely resulting from slightly different topography, the lightwells are all of original shape and size. In addition, the railings surrounding the lightwells on all of the houses are aligned along the entire length of the Terrace. The lightwells and surrounding railings are an important element in the rhythm of the Terrace façade.

Contrary to the assertions in the applicants' Planning Statement, the proposed excavation would significantly enlarge the size of the lightwell and would more than halve the area of front garden. Allowing the proposed excavation would disrupt the overall unified effect of the lightwells and gardens for 6-27 Grove Terrace, would harm the relationship between the building and the street and would disrupt the unity of the overall frontage of the listed terrace. It would therefore have an adverse impact on the listed building and its setting.

Exceptionally, number 14, the larger house which forms a point of architectural interest in the centre of the Terrace, has an excavated area in its front garden. The date of this excavation is unknown, but it possibly dates to the early 19th century when this house was rebuilt, taking in the space previously occupied by a passage running between numbers 13 and 14. We do not believe this historic change should provide a precedent for number 18, which is of the same size and general layout as all the other houses in the Grade II* Terrace.

Nor should numbers 1-5 Grove Terrace be viewed as a precedent. These buildings form a separate block from 6-27 Grove Terrace, are later in date and are separately listed only at Grade II.

- 2 The proposal would involve the removal of the existing railings at the front and replacement with reproductions. The 'cast-iron railings with urn finials to the areas' are specifically

mentioned in English Heritage's listing description for 6-27 Grove Terrace. There is no justification given for the destruction of this original fabric.

- 3 The original coal hole covers are still in place at 18 Grove Terrace, and we assume that the original coal cellars (which form part of the listed building) are also still in place. The proposal would involve the demolition of these original cellars, again with no justification.
- 4 The proposal would be contrary to Camden's policy in respect of listed building and conservation area basement developments. The Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy states that 'the Council will normally resist basement development fronting the highway due to the impact on the appearance of the conservation area.' In addition, paragraph 27.11 of Camden's Development Policies states:

'In the case of listed buildings, applicants will be required to consider whether basement and underground development preserves the existing fabric, structural integrity, layout, inter-relationships and hierarchy of spaces, and any features that are architecturally or historically important.'

The proposed removal of original fabric, the change in the historic size and shape of the lightwell, and the change in the relationship of the building to the garden and street are all contrary to this requirement.

Rear extension

The proposed extension at the back would be 7 meters long, and it appears that it would extend the width of the existing building (from garden wall to garden wall). A long strip of rooflight is proposed along the left hand wall. Beyond the extension itself, the garden would be further excavated down to basement level to create a courtyard at basement level, with a length about the same again as that of the extension (so a total length of development of about 14 meters). This courtyard would be rendered and painted white. There would be stairs from this courtyard up into the remaining (much reduced) back garden. We object to this development for the following reasons:

- 5 At 7 meters, the extension would be nearly as long again as the original depth of the house. We believe this would be an excessive development for the scale of the house and garden. It is out of proportion with all the existing extensions on the remainder of the Terrace, which (although they vary in date and style) are all roughly of the same (relatively modest) proportions.

The applicants state (DAS p. 7) that the extension would be 'in keeping with the length of' the existing extension of number 19, but they give no figures for comparison. The extension at number 19 was strenuously resisted by residents of the Terrace, in part because it could be cited as a precedent for future development. Camden's Development Policies at paragraph 24.13 recognise that 'Past alterations or extensions to surrounding properties should not necessarily be regarded as a precedent for subsequent proposals for alterations and extensions.' In any event, unlike number 19, this extension would cover the entire

width of the house, so has a greater volume. Even if number 19 were acceptable as a precedent (which it is not), this is an incremental worsening of the impact of number 19's extension. The residents of the Terrace have serious concerns that if permission is granted for this extension, the Council could have difficulty resisting similar developments elsewhere on the Terrace. The cumulative effect would be devastating to the character of the listed building.

- 6 The Association has always been very concerned about the building of new structures in the gardens of Grove Terrace. This extension, which occupies an excessive part of the garden, not only would intrude into views from the houses of the immediate neighbours but would impinge on the views up and down the gardens, which as noted above is one of the most significant features of the Terrace.
- 7 The further extension for a basement level courtyard is also unprecedented and would create further undue incursion into the garden. The proposal to paint the courtyard white would make the courtyard very visible among the green gardens of the Terrace. The area of the garden available for planting would be greatly reduced, again adversely impacting the green aspect of the gardens. It would thus further significantly erode the aspect of 'borrowed landscape' which is such a feature of Grove Terrace, and adversely impact both the character of the conservation area and the setting of the listed Terrace.
- 8 The size of the garden extension also raises concerns about the impact on the stability of other houses in the Terrace, both during construction and in the longer term. The application documents do not detail how the neighbouring houses will be supported during excavation and construction of the extension. The houses in Grove Terrace have minimal foundations, and are likely to be adversely affected by the significant excavation proposed. Moreover, they are located on London clay, which is prone to shrinking/swelling, heave and movement. Contrary to the statements in the Basement Impact Assessment that there is no evidence indicating any possible shrink-swell subsidence in the local area, there is frequent movement of the houses in Grove Terrace. At present, the houses tend to move in concert, as a block, so there is limited visual evidence of such movement on the exterior. However, the application documents make reference to using 'conventional underpinning methods'; there is serious concern among the residents that underpinning one house could have significant impacts on the stability of other houses in the Terrace.
- 9 Camden's Development Policy 27 states that 'the Council will only permit basement and other underground development that does not cause harm to the built and natural environment and local amenity'. By virtue of the size and unprecedented incursion into the garden, the proposed development contravenes this policy. It also is at odds with the growing consensus that basement extensions should not be permitted on listed buildings. The Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, for example, has recently adopted a total ban on basement extensions for listed buildings.
- 10 The degree of excavation that would be required for this development is a major concern. If this were done with mechanical diggers, the impact on neighbouring properties could be

significant. In addition, the excavated spoil would all need to be removed through the front of number 18 or from Grove Terrace Mews (which runs behind the Grove Terrace gardens). However, there is a weight limit at the entrance to the Mews as a result of the fragile cellars running under numbers 21 and 22. In either case, removal of this quantity of spoil would result in many months of disruption. The numerous lorry movements required to remove the spoil will regularly block the narrow single-lane Grove Terrace, creating safety concerns about accessibility for ambulances and fire engines, in addition to disruption to residents. The scale of the works is simply unacceptable in such a constrained environment.

- 11 The effect of the extension on the historic garden walls is not clear from the application documentation, but is a serious concern. There is no explanation how the walls (which have no foundations) would be protected during the construction. Although not expressly suggested in the application documentation, we would like to make it clear that it would be totally unacceptable for the historic walls to be demolished and reconstructed.
- 12 The proposed rooflight would introduce an extensive area of glass which would create night-time illumination. The Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy specifically notes the 'quality of darkness at night' that characterises the conservation area. The Grove Terrace gardens contribute significantly to that quality. At present, they constitute a large area of darkness with minimal external lighting; this is extremely rare in London. The use of rooflights in this extension thus would not only be intrusive to immediate neighbours, but would also erode the character of this dark area more generally. There are no enforceable means of preventing this. Day-time reflection would also be intrusive.
- 13 The proposal for a green roof is also of concern. It would be out of keeping with the gardens for the rest of the Terrace and, if not properly maintained, could become an eyesore. There are no enforceable means of ensuring its upkeep and maintenance.

Internal alterations

As noted above, we have fewer concerns about the proposed internal alterations. Our overriding concern would be to see the retention of any original or historic material. However, we would note the following:

- 14 It is proposed that a fireplace on the second floor be removed. If this is an original fireplace, this should not be permitted.
- 15 A doorway on the ground floor is to be blocked up. If this is permitted, the original door should be retained in place and the blocking up should be done in a way that is completely reversible.

Application documentation

- 16 No heritage statement has been submitted with these applications. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 128 that:

'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'.

There is some minimal discussion of historic aspects in the Planning Document, but we do not believe that is sufficient to meet the requirement in paragraph 128 of the NPPF, or the requirement of paragraph 132 of the NPPF that there be clear and convincing justification for any harm or loss to a heritage asset. Application 2014/7203/L should not have been validated without an adequate heritage statement.

- 17 Camden's Development Policies at paragraph 26.10 require a construction management plan to identify the potential impacts of the construction phase of the development and state how any potential negative impacts will be mitigated. The very cursory Construction Method Statement provided by the applicants is completely inadequate for the scale of the works proposed. For example, there is no description of how the neighbouring houses and walls would be supported and protected during construction. Nor is there an adequate description of how traffic would be managed on the narrow, one-lane Grove Terrace.

Conclusions

The proposed development would:

- cause harm to the special interest of a listed building and adversely impact on features of special architectural or historic interest, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Camden Development Policy 25(f);
- result in the demolition of a part of a listed building without any showing of exceptional circumstances, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Camden Development Policy 25(e);
- cause harm to the setting of a listed building, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Camden Development Policy 25(g);
- undermine the existing uniformity of Grove Terrace, contrary to Camden's Development Policies at paragraph 24.13;
- neither preserve nor enhance the character or appearance of the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area and would impact adversely on the visual amenity of the Dartmouth Park

Conservation Area, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Camden Development Policy 25(b);

- not preserve garden spaces which contribute to the character of the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage, contrary to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Camden Development Policy 25(e);
- by reason of its length, size and scale have an adverse impact on the quality of life and amenity of neighbours, particularly in respect of outlook and artificial light levels, contrary to Camden Development Policies 26(b) and 26(c); and
- lead to the loss of open space and harm the appearance or setting of the property or the established character of the surrounding area, contrary to Camden Development Policies 27(e) and 27(g).

The importance of settings such as the Grove Terrace gardens is emphasised in Camden's Development Policies at paragraph 22.15:

'The setting of a listed building is of great importance and should not be harmed by unsympathetic neighbouring development. While the setting of a listed building may be limited to its immediate surroundings, it often can extend some distance from it. The value of a listed building can be greatly diminished if unsympathetic development elsewhere harms its appearance or its harmonious relationship with its surroundings.'

For these reasons the proposed development should be refused.

We would like to be notified of the date for any committee consideration of the applications and to have a representative attend and speak at any such meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Ellen Gates
Chair
Grove Terrace Association



cc: Chair, DPCAAC
English Heritage
Georgian Group