

Muthoora, Leela

From: John Malet-Bates [REDACTED]
Sent: 17 March 2015 18:00
To: 'Andrew Dutton-Parrish'; 'David Evans'; David Castle
[REDACTED]
Cc: Planning
Subject: 2014/7598/P: Flat G, 71 Fitzjohn's Avenue:

Dear All,

I have been questioned by Camden Planning case officer as to HCAAC's objection to the rooftop scheme for the above and asked by him and the applicant to review the objection I posted on behalf of HCAAC following members' agreement to objection. The applicant states the case officer is minded to recommend the scheme for approval. That the planners see fit to ask for HCAAC's review on account of an applicant's further request is unfortunate, although it gives me a chance to explain more fully why !!!.

I do think this tiny scheme should be refused as drawn, scheme to be revised much as I proposed originally to the case officer, but with a variation.

(Generally volunteers do not have time to revise the honest assessments requested of them and to which officers should have due regard.)

Nonetheless I took up the invitation to visit the premises to see the existing position and to judge the proposed changes, taking on loan the applicant's drawing copies including the architect's Design & Access Statement (DAS). Having again reviewed the drawings and briefly sketched for the applicant a proposal I think might be acceptable I start herein with the DAS.

Design & the existing building's status.

The DAS holds that the building itself is of little significance for assessment of detail and it is 'only' part of the wider context and this scheme should be so judged.

My recommendation is both that the building's detail and the wider context are material to assessment of this scheme, both counting against approval of the proposal as drawn.

The existing top conservatory is accepted both because with the terrace and balustrading it had consent so long ago and because of its 'appropriate and limited form' relative to the building's detail and its limited visibility from surrounding areas. It is also acceptable in its uniqueness and relative modesty and as not setting a precedent for current or future planning consents, having gained consent at a time of less appreciation of the importance of conservation in our area. The existing building, stated as purpose-built for flats, has an important substantial but compact form and good relation to nearby similar buildings. Its roof profiles originally without the terrace balustrading fitted the general design principle of houses and other buildings in having stated the natural limit of upward development. As such it was and is an important contributor to the Conservation Area.

Existing lift installation

The current lift installation with small housing on the roof is shown in the 1986 application drawings, removing the DAS doubt in this regard.

Design in the new proposal

The new proposal, both in raising the lift service to the terrace level, as well as in the expanded building resulting from this, is objectionable in form and as a precedent for further development and for surrounding buildings. This is because of the proposed volume exceeding the existing and as the evident basis of a potential fuller building for more accommodation. The DAS emphasises the proposed building's height as limited to 'the ridge line of the existing conservatory'. Indeed, architects so often make this point in dismissing the increased bulk resulting from projection of a significant mass beyond the original. In this case, the 'existing ridge line' is a very small pinnacle of the slender sweep of the conservatory 'pagoda' roof and is not to be taken as the base line for increased building mass topped by an ugly new roof.

The proposed new access housing and roof is to be considered mediocre and as such the proposal goes against Camden's policy of high quality design.

Also and most unfortunately, the proposed building is said to need a new 'conservation' rooflight to admit light to the flat which is well provided by the existing conservatory and would be lost because of the proposed building.

Use.

I once did a scheme for a hotel client who promised the LPA that the additional storey I achieved for him would be used only for essential staff accommodation. That he later asked me for a design for extension of the proposed lift showed his real aim to extend accommodation against his undertaking and planning policy. I do not accuse this applicant of such, but have an eye to at least a future owner as well as to the possible temptation to cover the terrace should the lift extension indicate its increasing use possibly in all weathers. Certainly, the promise of direct lift access to the terrace, generally unheard of, indicates substantial use for gatherings rather than use by a perhaps disabled person and family.

There is already a 2-person highly pleasant direct-access sun-trap terrace on the west side of the flat.

Access

The proposal is for lift access to the top-of-roof terrace rather than force continued use of the single-storey spiral stair which is stated to be both difficult now to use and likely to worsen with the applicant's increasing age. The spiral stair is not generous in width but is entirely adequate in the annals of occasional terrace access. The DAS stresses the occupant's inconvenience in trying to use the spiral stair.

The purpose of 'Design & Access' statements is as the base for assessment of a scheme as to the ease of access to be provided vis-avis the Building Regulations and, where necessary, the Disability Discrimination Act requirements. This proposal does not fall under the requirement to provide a universal access facility envisaged under those regulations, although I can see the potential for increased access if the lift extension were to be consented.

Existing conservatory and lift overrun

The DAS states, as somehow and typically justifying the proposal, that the existing conservatory is deteriorating and its junction with the lift overrun pitches is poorly-detailed. I find this to be untrue. Having accessed the roof terrace I saw nothing of structural stress nor of degradation in the conservatory structure or roof which in any case I know could readily be rectified if so by resin etc. repair in which I am involved daily. The junction with the brick building is well-sealed and there are no water leaks to the interior.

Summary and response to DAS rear-page summary.

Planning history.

1. The original lift motor housing is stated, in 1986, as being 'existing'.
2. Not so. The conservatory eventually built is smaller than the 1986 consent, as shown in the 1992 application.
3. Previous extension application. It seems the original 1986 proposal was not built so the 1991 application was a renewal.
4. The 1992 refusal was clearly correct as the original 1986-1991 application scheme was not built. The 1992 decision showed the limits of rooftop development to which we hope Camden will adhere. As such, I am surprised at the re-reference by the case officer.
5. Clearly these were attempts at investment development having nothing to do with disabled access.

Environmental statement.

1. Transport – agreed.
2. Waste management - agreed.
3. No loss of amenity – agreed, the terrace is an outstanding and surprising asset to the flat.
4. Access Statement. Indeed, a significant investment return would result from the proposed work.
5. Sustainability – recycling of the existing is not the point. The proposed works involve fresh and significant carbon embodiment, also with more lift use proposed to the terrace.
6. Ventilation – no change, but query any works to existing chimney stacks not part of the official proposal description nor apparently justified unless used to try to disguise the proposed increased mass and bulk.
7. Lighting – a sign of intended late evening use and capable of expansion. We would ask for no fixed external lighting at this level.
8. Daylighting and amenity – obvious, but control of light pollution is not mentioned.
9. Water – no change.

10. Habitats. This assertion – “more useable as garden space thereby enhancing potential natural habitats” is not explained and is likely not true. There is no proposal for landscaping, which would in any case increase the impact of the terrace and would have to be assessed afresh reference use of the terrace.
11. Neighbour consultation – one can imagine a lack of concern on the part of other residents in the same building. This is not a test of local consultation.

Design conclusion.

We ask, again, for revised design IF this additional and unusual facility is to be considered, let alone consented, with a view to minimising the impact of the proposed changes and to preclude the possibility of more mass for increased accommodation. Any proposal should also be assessed as to potential impact of any ‘garden use’ asserted here with its probable domestic additions of furniture, awning, balustrade planters, more lighting, patio heater.....

Considerable design effort must be invested here to minimise the structure and its impact in view of the advantageous access to be afforded as well as the certain financial investment return from this proposed facility. Planning consent should not be a rubber stamp.

I will continue, following review of the outrageous Hyclm Arthur House replacement scheme, with my proposal and photos showing more realistically than in the DAS the problems with the scheme as drawn.

Best regards,
John