

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Position

No 131 Haverstock Hill is the centre house of a Grade II listed symmetrical terrace of three houses, dating from around 1820. The adjacent properties along the west side of the hill comprise four modern apartment blocks; with a parade of shops further up, and also down, the hill. Opposite the property (on the corner of Lawn Road) is a former Victorian public house, recently converted to a restaurant and hotel with the new addition of a mansard roof. The adjoined building has a dry-cleaners on the ground floor and has been similarly refurbished on the upper floors, again with the addition of a mansard roof. The rest of the properties on the east side of the hill are mainly large semi-detached Victorian townhouses divided into flats. A notable exception is no 148 Haverstock Hill, which dates from around the same time as no 131, and is also Grade II listed.

Architectural and Historical Significance

The National Heritage List Entry details are as follows:

‘Symmetrical terrace of 3 houses. c1820. Yellow stock brick with channelled stucco ground floor and plain 1st floor band. Slightly projecting central bay with crow step parapet having recessed panel and flanked by panelled brick pilaster strips.

3 storeys and semi-basements. 2 windows each. Round-arched doorways, Nos 129 and 133 in portico extensions, fanlights and panelled doors approached by steps. Gauged flat brick arches to recessed sashes; 1st floor with cast-iron balconies.

Central house, No.131, upper floor windows tripartite; 1st floor with stucco pediment, 2nd floor under a segmental arch. Parapets. INTERIORS: not inspected.’

Background

No 131 Haverstock Hill was rescued from dilapidation and internal destruction by the current owners in 1979. It has been a family house ever since – as intended when first built.

The property had suffered years of neglect and was in a crumbling state, infested with dry rot and suffering wet rot and subsidence. The fabric of the house was so bad that in some areas daylight was visible through the flat roof from the semi-basement four floors below. Guttering and drainage pipes hung loose and leaking. As a priority, the building was made structurally sound and watertight. The property had been used as a temple and office headquarters for a religious charitable organisation, with changes and damage to the interior design and layout as a result. The owners had drawn up plans, permissible at the time, to remove the party wall with No 129 (also owned by the charity) and form four lateral apartments. Such a scheme would have reduced the two houses to a shell, destroying not only the family home layout but original staircases, doors, architraves, skirting, cornicing, chimney breasts, marble and stone mantelpieces, and cast-iron grates.

Instead, internal original features that remain have been carefully restored, e.g. marble fireplaces revealed from under many layers of dirt, grime and paint; sash shutters discovered and put back in working order; missing or rotting skirting and architraving replaced to original design. In short, the property has been reinstated to its original status as a family home.

Proposal

This application seeks to continue the work already carried out, and further to improve the condition, functionality and security of the property, with due regard to its listed features of architectural significance and historic character, so it may survive as a family home for future generations.

Internally, repair and reinstatement of original features continues, e.g. missing or damaged cornicing is being matched to existing, with pressings taken by a specialist plasterer.

The basement is used as originally intended, as a working kitchen and living-space. Unfortunately, it has been altered considerably in the past, and little remains of its historic character. The kitchen and adjacent room have been knocked through, and a single-storey rear extension added. The area remains dark and dingy. This internal space – a current jumble of walling - would benefit from being opened up a little more, in order to let in more light and create a more comfortable and workable kitchen floor area, suited to present-day multi-generational living. As advised by Antonia Powell, Camden Senior Planner (Conservation), Development Management Team, “an echo of the earlier layout will be maintained by retaining internal wall nibs and downstands.”

The existing chimney breast, which houses the cooker as originally intended, is disproportionately large and wasteful of worktop and floor space. Antonia Powell suggests that “the curved detail to the top of the opening is not traditional,” and that it would be better “made higher with a level soffit.” Also, that it may be pared back from its 510 mm depth to 300 mm.

Safeguarding the property and its inhabitants has become an increasingly pressing issue. The entrance gates disappeared, and the stone capping on the piers and front walls were stolen overnight. Photographs of the front gates of the adjoining properties 129 and 133, which together form the listed terrace of three town houses, and of the listed property 148 Haverstock Hill, built around the same period, are shown in the Design & Access Statement. The proposed design of gates for 131 reflects and blends with the gates of these surrounding properties. It is proposed that they are electrically operated, with the same kind of discreet, unnoticeable, mechanism in use on the gates of 133, which will be further hidden by a row of motifs similar to the period, listed gates of 148 Haverstock Hill (*see* images in Design & Access Statement and Proposed Front Elevation).

Haverstock Hill is a busy, relatively narrow main road, where speed limits of 20 mph have been recently introduced. Stopping a vehicle on the road and getting out to open or close the gates restricts the traffic flow, causes tailbacks, and is a potential hazard to both other vehicles and pedestrians. Inwardly opening electronically operated gates eliminates such obstruction and danger.

For safety reasons also, a continuation of the internal staircase to the flat roof is proposed. It is to be used as a fire escape, enabling quick evacuation from the upstairs floors for family members, particularly those who are elderly or very young. It would also enable easy access for maintenance of the roof and mains water tank. This tank is positioned without any safety barrier, extremely close to the edge of the rear elevation, with a life-threatening four-floor drop to the ground below. To ensure the water tank and roof can be serviced safely, a guard in the form of a glass balustrade matching that around the ground floor terrace and steps leading down to the garden, is proposed.

Glass material, unavailable in the past, is suggested for the safety guard, as it would be the least intrusive and least impactful on the building. The owners are delighted to have researched and

sourced an ultra-clear glass recently developed by a specialist German manufacturer. Coated so that it is self-cleaning, and without a green tinge, it does not catch or reflect the light.

On advice from Antonia Powell, the roof parapet has been levelled to match the adjacent properties, and is 450 mm high. Setting the glass back from the parapet, and running it as a single piece between the chimney piers, gives it an outward-facing height of just 650 mm, meaning that it will be practically invisible. The chimney piers will shelter it completely from the view of other properties alongside on Haverstock Hill. Also, given its minimal height, relative to the four storeys of the house, the glass will be practically imperceptible from other properties with a view of the roof parapet, since these are at some considerable distance owing to long back gardens and an intervening large allotment (*see OS map extract*).