

Response to proposals for 64 Rochester Place

Y2015/2697/P

Rochester CA

Design

The Design Statement states that “it was important at the outset that the new construction should be clearly distinguishable from the existing building. The reason for this was three fold:

a) To embrace the new technology of the 21st Century as a response to the hi-tech

industrial use inside the building.

b) To show how the proposed extension will transform but still compliment the

original building whilst remaining secondary to it.

c) The existing building provides a minimal contribution to the neighbouring conservation areas. This smarter and cleaner extension will improve the building’s relationship with the adjacent conservation areas.”

However, the conservation perspective is different. There is, indeed, no reason for the new construction to be ‘clearly distinguishable’.

* Rochester Place was mainly developed in the earlier part of the twentieth century, and many of the buildings are one or two-storey, with pitched roofs and light industrial use.

* The adjacent 55a Rochester Place was recently approved for development with a scheme that entirely retains the mixed industrial and Victorian character of the existing and adjacent buildings.

* It is not a necessary logic for hi-tech industry to ‘embrace the technology of the twenty-first century’ in building, since hi-tech has been successfully

integrated within Victorian architecture in, for example, Kings Cross / St Pancras schemes.

- * The extension certainly will not '*compliment*', and making it 'clearly distinguishable' doesn't necessarily complement the existing building
- * 'improve the relationship'? Conservation of space is important and increasing the height of the existing structure (some of which is built where preferably there would be garden) increases density and denies the low scale of the mews.

"The concept of a contemporary extension is entirely in keeping with the technological character of the street and the buildings uses."

Rochester and Jefferys Conservation Areas were created in 2001. By hard work of local people, there has been some success in retaining the earlier 20th century character, and retaining mixed industrial uses. How 'technological' is the mews, which has two painters' studios, architects, writers, car repairs ...? And how long will 3-D printers last compared with the building?

While the Inspector recognised the existing Rochester Place properties with brick and render, no building has the proposed "fibre cement panels", which in addition to the existing render of the building would be an unacceptable intrusion. [The excessively large grey cladding of the building at 27 Rochester Place shows how poor materials can harm the character.]

The applicants say Camden CPG1 says:

Windows, doors and materials should compliment the existing building.

[Camden CPG1 actually says 'complement']

The tree.

2.9 Outlook & Sense of Enclosure from St Pancras Way

“A large sycamore tree in the garden of number 120 St.Pancras Way obscures the view of the proposed extension”.

The tree is deciduous and therefore the extension would be easily seen for six months of the year.



View of 51-61 Rochester Place from north

Moreover, the proposed height will create significant damage to the views to the south east from Rochester Terrace, see above. The building of 51-53 Rochester Place was approved only before the Conservation Area of Rochester and Jefferys was created. Since that time, there has been a strong campaign to maintain light into the centre of the ‘square’. This is particularly important for the row of Grade II listed houses in St Pancras Way, where higher building near their rear garden would have major impact on light and sense of enclosure, and therefore amenity, as well as blocking the existing views from Rochester Terrace.

Note that the heights of the St Pancras Way row have not been allowed to be raised (since the Listing in 1994), and the heights from Rochester Place (as a mews) should therefore be kept subsidiary.

Inadequate Heritage Statement

The Heritage Statement is detailed, but has been drawn from examination of OS maps. The Consultants have not inspected Camden's Local List, where they would have learned that Rochester Place is locally listed (compare statement at 2.35) and - on inspection - is currently being restored. Further attention would have recognised that there are several similar cobbled mews in the neighbourhood, and indeed probably other roads around are tarmacked over cobbles

2.42 Royal College Street ... the views from the windows in the rear elevation of the terrace ... towards the application building and Rochester Place in general are very obviously not significant ones in heritage terms.

This statement is contentious. 'Very obviously'? The view from the north is highly important - of the back elevations of the Grade II Listed row of St Pancras Way, and the gardens and tree within. Compare the open view from the north over a one storey building with the heavily blocked view of over 57-59 Rochester Place. Similarly, at present the St Pancras Way houses have rear views towards the upper floors of the rears of Rochester Terrace, part of Rochester conservation area. Why are these 'not significant'?

2.43. The application building does not, in our opinion, contribute in any meaningful way to the setting of ... the adjoining conservation areas ... Certainly, there is no credible reason for considering that it makes a 'positive' contribution.'

The site does make a 'positive' contribution, in its industrial character - an important aspect distinguishing Rochester Place from nearby mews (eg Camden Mews and Murray Mews) that have mostly been rebuilt into contemporary small residences rather than retaining their industrial character (although there is concern to retain small businesses now also in these mews).

The applicant should be clear, in the Heritage Statement, that South Kentish Town conservation area advisory committee has on several occasions made the case for the industrial character of Rochester Place. This was not included in the 2001 Conservation Area Statements (Rochester, Jefferys), but there is now better recognition by Camden of the importance of mixed industrial / residential character.

And it is not age alone that makes character, although the area has a significant 200-year history. Until around 2008, the area on either side of the North London railway line was formally recognised as industrial zone (and the line still retains workshops directly below the viaducts). The frequent mention in the Heritage Statement of the 'scientific instruments' gives insufficient recognition to historical importance the instrument works founded by Adam and Otto Hilger in 1873 (then in Tottenham Court Road) and moving to the purpose-built site at St Pancras Way / Rochester Place after the first World War. Hilger manufactured precision instruments, for use world-wide, and made significant scientific advances (particularly spectrometers) under Frank Twyman

Frank Twyman FRS
at Hilger 1898-1958



(Hilger moved to new works in Kent in the 1960s, and continue as Hilger Crystals, part of the larger US company Dynasil. The works were subsequently used as offices by a public service union, and then by Camden Council's services.)

The comparison of planning history is biased:

In describing several sites where there has been approval for height extensions, the Heritage statement is not impartial: it has not listed the several nearby sites in Rochester Place where proposals were **rejected**, nor considered the self-censorship restrictions arising from conservation area and planning guidance

36-38 Rochester Place:

2005/1691/P Demolition of existing B1 offices and garage and redevelopment to provide a 3-storey building - refused at appeal.

50 Rochester Place:

2014/1538/P. Erection of a single storey extension above existing garage/workshop to provide one 2-bed flat at first floor level. - refused.

2008/1635/P. Erection of two-storey extension above existing garage/workshop to provide two 2-bed flats at first and second floor levels. - refused

9300288

Change of use from single storey B1 unit into two double storey mixed use (live & work) units with residential and studio parts. (Plans submitted) (withdrawn)

52-54 Rochester Place

9300288. Change of use from single storey B1 unit into two double storey mixed use (live & work) units with residential and studio parts. (withdrawn)

56-58 Rochester Place

9300751

Elevational alterations and the erection of a roof extension in connection with the refurbishment of the building for use for purposes within Class B1 - refused

64 Rochester Place

2010/4318/P. Erection of second floor roof level flat (Class C3) and alterations and extensions to existing office (Class B1a) including: partial rear extension at ground and first floor, replacement of single front entrance door and double garage doors and new opening in rear wall at ground floor level following the demolition of ground floor lean-to - refused.

The neighbouring building 51-53 Rochester Place received planning approval before Rochester conservation