
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY
The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

Planning
London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
Town Hall,
Judd Street
London
WC1H 9JE
planning@camden.gov.uk

Your reference: 2015/2750/P
Our reference: 2015/10/025

22 October 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Flaxman Court, Flaxman Terrace, London WC1H 9AR (Bloomsbury Conservation Area, 1907-8, Joseph & Smithem); application for the replacement of all existing windows with white painted timber framed and polyester powder coated steel framed windows

The Victorian Society has previously commented on this application (see our letter of 02 July 2015) and we are disappointed to see the replacement of the original windows has now been approved. As detailed below, replacing all of the existing single-glazed timber windows is likely to be unnecessary given the minimal benefits this will entail and the great expense it is likely to incur. By repairing or draught-proofing the original windows and introducing secondary glazing, much the same performance as double-glazing can be achieved at a significantly lower cost – and without harming the appearance of this important building. Replacing the aluminium windows with something more sympathetic and user friendly is welcomed however.

There are many serious misconceptions surrounding the repair, replacement and energy efficiency of historic windows. This poses an increasing threat to the significance of countless listed buildings and conservation areas. Based on several comprehensive studies by Historic England, the key points to consider in almost every case are:

- **The significance of historic windows (and fittings)** – they are integral to the architect's original design, with detailing representative of contemporary fashions. The high quality of materials used is unlikely to be replicated. The timber used in eighteenth and nineteenth century window frames had a far lower proportion of sapwood than the plantation grown timber that is used today. As a result, historic window frames will often remain serviceable for over 250 years, compared to the mere decades of contemporary joinery.
- **Modern glass** can never replicate the beauty of historic, hand-made glass, which is distinctive for its imperfections and soft reflection of light. Machine-made produces much harsher, flat and lifeless reflections. Therefore, even if like for like frames with single glazing are proposed, the loss of the original

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1 Priory Gardens, London W4 1TT
Telephone 020 8994 1019
admin@victoriansociety.org.uk
www.victoriansociety.org.uk

glass would still present a detrimental and far from subtle change in appearance.

- **Repair and replacement** – ‘Traditional timber and metal windows can almost always be repaired, even when in quite poor condition and normally at significantly less cost than complete replacement’ (p.7 *Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Secondary glazing for windows*, Historic England, March 2012). Advice contrary to this is usually received from the company quoting for replacement windows. Rotten sections are usually replaceable.
- **Energy efficiency** ‘Repair, draught-proofing or secondary glazing is likely to be more cost-effective than replacement with double glazing’ (p.53, *Traditional Windows Their Care, Repair and Upgrading*, Historic England, April, 2015). Less than a quarter of the heat lost through a typical traditional window escapes by conduction through the glass; there is relatively little to gain by introducing double glazing.

Yours sincerely

Alex Bowring
Conservation Adviser