

GROVE TERRACE ASSOCIATION
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Dear Mr. Gracie

Planning application 2016/0758/P, 17 Boscastle Road, London NW5 1EE
Erection of a single-storey 1-bed house (Class C3) following demolition of single-storey garages
and garden store to the rear of the property

I understand that the architect and planning consultant for the referenced development have sent a letter responding to some of the issues raised in comments filed in respect of the development. While not wishing to prolong debate on the issues, the residents of Grove Terrace believe that some of the statements in that letter cannot be left unchallenged. As chair of the Grove Terrace Association, I set out the following comments on behalf of the members.

Neighbour consultation

The architect states that they have sought to work with the community. In fact, the so-called consultation with neighbours has been a sham from the beginning. The notice inviting residents to a 'coffee morning' was misleading; it stated: 'I am writing to let you know about a new development **to take place** in your area. The garages at the rear of 17 Boscastle Road, and also accessible via Grove Terrace Mews **are to be developed** into a new home.' There was no recognition that planning consent would be necessary or indication that this was a pre-application consultation.

At the event itself, the members of the applicant's 'team' made no real effort to understand the concerns of neighbours. They were very much in 'sales' mode. Several residents reported that there was significant resistance to comments made, for example about the visibility of the site from their houses, with the planning consultant arguing (on the basis on no evidence) that there were no such views. Residents' comments overwhelmingly were that no development should take place in the garden; the applicant has simply ignored those comments.

The letter reports that the GTMA declined a further meeting on the grounds that there was nothing to discuss. That was the case, because it had been made clear to the applicant that there were no changes to the scheme that would make a development in the garden acceptable.

Heritage

The architect asserts that there has been no explanation of why the development would destroy the character of the mews. On the contrary, we have explained our concerns at length; please see my previous letter of 11 March 2016. The mews is a rural lane with only low level garages facing onto it. The introduction of a residence would be completely at odds with that character.

The letter also asserts that the height and massing of the proposed development 'echo' those of the garages in the mews. The development would reach up to 3.8m high on the Mews frontage; by comparison, the garages on either side are only 3.0m and 2.5m. The proposed development therefore would have a scale and visibility that the garages do not.

The architects assert that views of the new house would be very limited. On the contrary, the site is visible from the upper floors of most houses in Grove Terrace and many of those on Boscastle Road. This will particularly be the case in the winter and at night, when the lights will be very intrusive.

The architect asserts that the objectors misunderstand the purpose of the conservation area. We understand that character very well. The proposed development would not represent 'evolution' in the area. Instead, it would destroy the very features that are characteristic of this part of the conservation area: the greenery, the rural feel, the darkness at night, the low level buildings of ancillary use, the small scale and intimate spaces.

Moreover, the architect makes no mention of the impact of the development on the Grade II* listed Grove Terrace and its setting. Grade II* buildings are buildings of more than special interest. Only 5.5% of listed buildings are Grade II*. Under paragraph 132 of the NPPF, substantial harm to grade II* listed buildings 'should be wholly exceptional'. The letter does not attempt to explain why that should not be the case here.

Light pollution

As mentioned in the letter, the security light installed by the GTMA was removed as a result of complaints. Other motion-activated security lights in the mews remain on for a very short time, usually no more than 30 seconds. This causes minimal intrusion, compared to the likely level and duration of light coming from a permanent residence. The same is true of lights of vehicles, which in fact are very rarely seen at night in the mews. The existing house in the mews is set well back at the end of the mews behind a large garden and is not visible from any but the closest houses in Grove Terrace. The proposed development, on the other hand, will be located more centrally at the entrance to the mews and, as noted above, will be visible from the upper storeys of most houses in Grove Terrace. The architect's arguments to the contrary are simply not supported by the facts.

Nor would a condition be a satisfactory solution to the problem of light pollution. Even if a condition could be fashioned to adequately define the shutters and blinds to be installed (and were effectively enforced), no condition can ensure that the shutters and blinds are actually used.

Neighbour amenity

It is true that the mews is in regular use, by pedestrians, children, cyclists and occasionally vehicles. These uses are short-term, however, and none creates the disturbance for neighbours that the comings and goings in a permanent residence would create. The architects also seem to think that creation of disturbance is acceptable because the residents of Grove Terrace already live on a busy road. She fails to appreciate that that is one of the reasons that we value the peace and quiet of the gardens and mews so much.

Contrary to the statement in the letter, the owner of the adjacent garage has confirmed that they have no electricity in their garage, have not had a supply from 17 Boscastle since 1995 and absolutely do not have free electricity from them. As stated in their objection letter, they rely upon light from the windows.

Precedent

The letter recognises that it would be 'entirely unacceptable' for all the garages in the mews to be developed. We wholly agree, but do not have the architect's confidence that the development would not be treated as a precedent. Another resident of Boscastle Road has already said he intends to make a similar application if this one succeeds.

We have already set out the reasons why the proposed site does not afford substantially greater potential for development than do neighbouring properties. In any event, the letter does not address the possibility that two owners could join together to create a new site.

We do not agree that the proposed development would create 'visual interest' if located at the entrance to the mews. Instead, the extremely modern style will jar significantly with the Georgian style of Grove Terrace on either side of the entrance to the mews, to the significant detriment of the setting of the listed Terrace.

Conclusion

The architect claims that 'some of the most passionate objections have been received from those least affected'. We do not know which objections she is referring to. All the residents of Grove Terrace, and most of those in Boscastle Road, are affected, either directly or by the threat of future development.

We make no apology for being passionate about our homes and the history of Grove Terrace. We are not seeking simply to resist any change or to freeze the conservation area. Rather, we are seeking to protect a unique survivor of London's history which, once lost, cannot be regained.

The architect requests that the application be considered rationally on its planning merits. We would support this. The application and the subsequent letter have made much of the personal circumstances of the Gladstones. The residents of Grove Terrace are all sympathetic to the situation of Mr Gladstone. However, even if that were a relevant consideration, it should be clearly understood that the Gladstones are a well-off couple living in a large and valuable house. They are

not without resources and options. Sympathy for their circumstances should not be a deciding factor in the consideration of this application.

For the reasons set out above, we would urge you to refuse the application.

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

Yours sincerely,

Ellen Gates
Chair
Grove Terrace Association

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Ellen Gates.