

Charlotte Street Association

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**Regeneration & Planning,
Development Management,**
London Borough of Camden,
Town Hall, Judd Street,
London WC1H 8ND.

5th June 2016

For the attention of Zenab Haji-Ismael, Planning Officer.

By email to: planning@camden.gov.uk
and: zenab.haji-ismael@camden.gov.uk

Dear Zenab Haji-Ismael,

Re: ref. 2016/1345/P: 28 Charlotte Street, W1T 2NF

Conversion of existing single dwelling house to provide 4 self-contained flats, including the enlargement of existing basement, erection of a 2nd Floor extension, and alterations to rear elevation and roof form.

I am writing on behalf of the Charlotte Street Association. Further to our committee meeting, and the more recent site visit of last week, we wish to strongly object to the proposals in this planning application for the reasons set out below.

Introduction:

28 Charlotte Street was built in 1750s/1770s, and, with its 3 large windows across the front elevation, is a significant Georgian townhouse, and forms part of the significant Georgian terraced buildings of Charlotte Street within the Charlotte Street Conservation Area. The original exposed brickwork and the windows of the front facade still remain, unlike some of its Georgian neighbours where stucco has been applied in later years to the front elevations, (re-facing and addition of decorative surrounds to the windows in the 19th Century). We believe that it is the only remaining single family Georgian house in the street, and which remains undivided.

Our main objections are:

- (1). The loss of the single family house.
- (2). The virtual gutting of the building and thus the loss of the main features and characteristics of this as a Georgian townhouse.
- (3). The proposals for the rear elevation facing onto the Crabtree Fields, the Public Open Space.
- (4). The erection of the proposed 2nd Floor rear extension.
- (5). The proposed changes and replacement to create dormer windows to the existing roof extension (4th Floor level) at the rear.
- (6). The loss of quality of this building as a Positive Contributor in the Conservation Area.

Continued to page 2

Re: ref. 2016/1345/P: 28 Charlotte Street, W1T 2NF - *continued:*

Loss of single family house

We object to the loss of the single family dwelling.

This is the only remaining single family house in this terrace in Charlotte Street, and one which remains undivided.

Gutting of the building

It needs to be appreciated that this is not the usual conversion of flats within the original construction/structure of the existing building, but entails major demolition of basic parts of the building, including the demolition of the 1st and 2nd Floor ceiling/floor constructions in order to achieve this particular proposal.

One of the main characteristic of Georgian urban terraced architecture is not just the facade, but also the spatial qualities and the proportions of the rooms, and the inter-relationship of the rooms; the staircases and the internal details of window reveals to give gradation of natural light.

The height and the proportions of the main front rooms, especially at 1st Floor, are a particular characteristic of Georgian terraced housing.

The proposal effectively destroys the key features of this Georgian house, particularly:

- (a). The loss of the 1st Floor volume and its ceiling height (being lowered by 415mm; 16 inches); and the proposed sub-division of the main front rooms overlooking Charlotte Street (into a bedroom and a bathroom).

To clarify, this means that the floor/ceiling constructions to the 1st and 2nd Floors are being demolished, thereby destroying the proportions of the main 1st Floor rooms (and also 2nd Floor rooms) an essential feature of a Georgian house.

In addition, the proposed ceilings for 1st and 2nd Floors are shown flush with the heads of the window openings, thus destroying the existing architraves and the decorative panelled timber reveals at the head of these windows on both floors.

- (b). The effective loss of the existing Georgian staircase:

The alteration to the storey heights and to the plan would appear to lead to the loss of the existing staircases at each level.

- (c). The loss of all the chimney breasts, at every floor level, both front and rear rooms.

The Studio:

No mention is made of the existing double-height Studio, at the Ground Floor rear, which was purpose designed (in late 1960s ?) by the architect Charlotte Baden-Powell for the well known 20th Century abstract artist Adrian Heath; (whose works are included in the Tate gallery's collections).

On the applicant's Existing Plan this is referred to as a "study"; and in the Planning Statement is merely referred to as "... The rear ground floor of the residential accommodation benefits from a double ceiling height and is a likely rear extension of the original house."

This Studio has a wonderful ethereal quality of natural daylight and space. It is a simple but very skilful design, evolved from the existing building at the rear of these premises. This wonder space will be lost under the current proposals.

Continued to page 3

Re: ref. 2016/1345/P: 28 Charlotte Street, W1T 2NF - *continued:*

Existing back elevation and Crabtree Fields:

In this case, the back elevation is seen (by the public) as much as the front elevation, because it is seen from Crabtree Fields, the Public Open Space.

We strongly object to:

- (a). Proposed double-height vertical window slots in the rear boundary wall;
- (b). Propose 2nd Floor extension.

The Children's Play area of Crabtree Fields backs onto this boundary wall. The proposed tall, double height, narrow open (unglazed) "window" slots in the wall falsifies the scale of the building, and will impact on the Children's Play area.

These tall slots will also create overlooking from the flats, and takeaway the feeling of safety and security within the Play Area itself; (for example, mothers use this part of the Play Area, because it is secluded, to breast feed their babies).

In addition, the "openness" of these proposed window slots, down to ground level, take away the solidity of the brick wall, and will become too "fragile" a boundary between public and private spaces.

Although the application refers to cutting these slots on the existing wall, we think that in practice it is too optimistic to retain the existing wall; it is likely to be demolished to achieve the proposed design.

The illustrated architectural examples shown in the applicant's Planning Statement to justify this design are not appropriate: some of the examples are non-domestic and some are domestic, but they are of completely different contexts and scale, and generally on sites where there is more space available.

Proposed 2nd Floor rear extension.

We strongly object to the proposed 2nd Floor rear extension, even though it is set back. Its scale and height will loom over the Public Open Space, and destroy the existing unity. There is no other such rear extension in this part of the terrace above the existing 1st Floor height. This is another feature of the proposals that is detrimental, not only to the Conversation Area, but also to the setting of this Georgian house when viewed from the park/Public Open Space.

Proposed rear dormer windows (4th Floor level):

We think that the **existing** design of the top floor extension and its small rear terrace, with its emphasise on the horizontal, is sympathetic to the original parapet with its strong horizontal "skyline", that is so characteristic of this type of Georgian terrace.

We think that the proposed change to dormer windows is pastiche. In any case, in design terms the three proposed dormers are much wider than would be expected of original Georgian dormers; and thus will not be subservient to the horizontal parapet line as would be expected in such a Georgian terrace.

No. 28 is a Positive Contributor in the Conservation Area:

As set out in Camden's "Charlotte Street Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan", No 28 Charlotte Street is a Positive Contributor to the Conservation Area.

The quality of such a positive contributor to the Conservation Area arises not only from the facade of the building, but also from its interior and its spatial qualities, and the back elevation. The qualities of a Georgian terraced house is not just the facade, but the whole house as an entity. Camden has a statutory duty to protect buildings so identified.

Continued to page 4

Re: ref. 2016/1345/P: 28 Charlotte Street, W1T 2NF - *continued*:

Quality of the proposed accommodation:

- (1). We think that aspects of the proposals provide poor quality for the residential flats. In particular, the daylighting and outlook of Flat 1 (rear Basement and Ground Floor maisonette), with outlook on to a brick wall only 1.5M away at basement level, and onto the open slots in boundary wall only 1.5M away for the ground floor rooms. Also, the tiny, shared, glazed internal lightwell to Flats 2 and 3 is likely to be unsatisfactory and squalid in practice (and with noise issues between the flats).
- (2). Despite the scale of the proposed works and the effective destruction of this fine Georgian building, no disability access is provided to any of the flats. When we raised this at the pre-application meeting with the applicant's team, the architect did consider retaining the existing ceiling/floor levels (and thus a stepped section within Flats 2 and 3), because there is no lift access.

The applicant's Planning Statement:

- (1). The section referring to the pre-application meeting with us/Charlotte Street Association downplays the in-depth discussion and does not express the strong views we expressed, including with regard to the dramatic reduction of ceiling height of the 1st Floor; the proposed treatment of the back elevation (onto the play area/Crabtree Fields); the excessive sub-division; and the loss of the main features of the Georgian terraced house.
- (2). The Statement downplays the degree of demolition and stripping out. In practice, we think that the proposals are likely to lead to much more demolition (behind the front facade) than implied on the drawings; (e.g. knock on effect of removing existing ceiling/floor construction will lead to demolition of the main spine walls). Also, it is not clear to what extent original features (e.g. panelled doors, frames architraves, windows and window reveals) are being retained.

Draft Construction Management Plan:

Briefly comment as follows:

- (1). No mention of likely disruption, and access, during building works to rear wall etc.
- (2). Para 4.3: construction programme in fact not raised with CSA.
- (3). Para 5.8: refers to "few residential apartments"; in fact, there are residential flats in all the buildings in this terrace, except No.s 26 and 32.
- (4). Para 6.3: aerial map appears to show proposed construction vehicle route along Goodge Street (from Tottenham Crst Rd) against one-way west-east traffic flow.
- (5). Section 8: There should be a Planning Condition that regular (monthly) construction liaison meetings are held with local residents.

For the all above reasons, we think that planning permission should not be granted.

Yours sincerely,

Clive Henderson,
Committee Member,
On behalf of Charlotte Street Association.

Copy: CSA Committee.
Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee.