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Laura Hazelton  
Supporting Communities Directorate  
Regeneration and Development Planning Management  
London Borough of Camden  
Town Hall  
Judd Street  
London WC1H 9JE

Dear Laura,

I am writing directly to you as I am an old friend of the owners of no. 9 Rosecroft Avenue, London NW3, which adjoins no.15. The front and rear gardens adjoin also. The development of no. 15 is the main subject of this letter. My friends have been resident in Rosecroft Avenue since 1967 and they are now both in their 80's. I am concerned about the effect on their health and well-being of their having to deal with a succession of non-approved building works at no. 15 and the poor response from Camden Planning department in addressing these problems, which appear to arise in part through its own lack of Planning Enforcement and Building Control.

I'm concerned, as an architectural designer of some 21 years' private practice experience in London, and 12 years' experience with leading design practices prior to this, viewing the manner in which Camden Council's planning application and permission process has served my friends, in the context of the development being undertaken by the owner of no.15.

I have experience with the planning process, through my own projects, which are often refurbishments and modifications to houses, sometimes being listed properties or properties located in designated conservation areas. These projects invariably come with fairly strict requirements to design and build in scale and in sympathy with the local vernacular, employing suitable details, materials and finishes accordingly. My private practice work has largely centred on the Westminster & RBKC planning jurisdictions, but on occasion I have worked with an architectural designer colleague and friend who is resident in Camden and works on projects in the area. Through our periodic discussions on projects generally, I'm aware of planning issues in Camden and listed building & conservation area issues that he has dealt with.

I am familiar with Rosecroft Avenue and the local conservation area having visited my friends here since the mid 70's. The area benefits greatly from the diversity and quality of its early Edwardian Arts & Crafts domestic architectural heritage, with its fine diversity in use of materials, of artisan detailing and quality of construction. I notice something new of quality each time I visit. Some of the more modern architectural adaptations are also of interest, merging for the most part, through their

proper regard for scale, use of materials and standard of construction, with the area's designated conservation area status.

Since November of last year I have become aware of the protracted process my friends at no. 9 have endured in their endeavour to bring to the council's attention elements of the development of no.15 which have been at variance with planning drawings approved by Camden. I understand that some parts of the development at the front and side of this property are to receive, or have now received, a Planning Enforcement notice.

The owner of no.15 has now applied for a 'retrospective' design revision to confirm elements of construction, which have been already built, ahead of any formal approval from Camden.

This application for variation seeks revision for a number of changes to the rear extension design. Amongst a number of other items, alteration to the previously built extension flat roof didn't comply with the planning drawings, which reflected that originally built. The revised and retrospectively submitted extension roof arrangement still conflicts with clear design intent shown on the 2015 'approved' elevation, but strangely it appears that Camden may now be prepared to approve this 'already built' design variation.

Building work on this property commenced over a year ago. During the autumn of 2015, several substantial changes to the Approved planning design were attempted, such as a 60cm increase in the overall height of the ground floor extension and raising the level of the new terrace above. It was only because of the vigilance and prompt action by my friends at no. 9, who thoroughly checked available but not particularly informative and rather minimal planning drawings, that corrections were made to work in progress.

A further unauthorised change to the 2015 planning drawings resulted in the first floor rear extension roof being raised, removing the eaves fascia board and the rainwater gutter which it carried. The retention of these latter were fundamental elements of the original planning Approval. In addition to the now unconnected, un-routed guttering, all of the rainwater from a substantial area of the roof of no.15, had damagingly discharged, for a considerable period of time, onto the timber wall of no. 9 and party wall.

It should be noted that there are technical issues relating to these unsanctioned roof line changes mentioned which have been brought to the attention of the Building Control officer, who visited site some 5 weeks ago, at my friends request: the passage of all rainwater from the ground floor extension flat roof, the first floor flat roof and a major area of the upper sloping roof, has been altered and re-directed to discharge directly onto the ground. There is no gully, nor any evident proper soak-away arrangement. The re-directed rainwater now discharges worryingly into a narrow (about 30cm wide) area of inaccessible ground between the new no.15 extension and the party garden wall. My friends are waiting upon urgent action from the Building Control officer on this building regulations compliance issue.

It appears that Camden is not prepared to comprehensively follow up and enforce its own Planning & Conservation area rules at the rear of the property. This is precisely where the developer's actions, by repeatedly building 'at variance' to planning drawings, followed by retrospective 'permission'

applications for unsanctioned construction, is having a detrimental effect on the property and the health and well-being of my friends at no. 9.

My friends are entitled, not least as longstanding taxpayers, to feel reassured that their interests are being taken seriously within the planning process. Every person has a right to develop their property within the legal framework, but the rules need to be observed, with all parties playing by the same rules.

All of this leaves one questioning the effectiveness of the planning process if that process can be manipulated in an underhand way by a developer. This subverts the established 'boundaries' of the permission given and the Planning & Conservation area guides. This 'permission' is a 'back stop' and should reflect and secure the valid interests of my friends and indeed all the neighbours interests. For the Council to not effectively monitor and police the planning process sends a poor message which can only further degrade observance of planning rules and encourage contraventions such as those described above. There follows from this a negative effect on standards of design, construction and the consideration of the environment generally. There follows also, a scepticism and mistrust of local democratic accountability and erosion of public confidence in the planning process.

Further to the above, it appears that a number of contradictory statements have come back from the Council, post the original planning permission, where the clear application of planning rules and necessary enforcement action was needed and could have been taken.

When it was noticed by my friends on a number of occasions, that building works were clearly at variance with the planning drawings, well documented site feedback was promptly provided to Camden. Camden acknowledges that they are dependent upon this kind of vigilance and feedback, and perhaps over dependant; it is alarming to contemplate how much non-approved or unmonitored work goes undetected. Where effort is made to report, there is an understandable expectation that that fair and appropriate action will be taken by the Council, enforcing the terms of a Planning Approval and addressing other reported issues.

It appears, from recent correspondence received by my friends from Camden that the rear construction component at no.15 seems not to be being given the importance justified by Planning and Conservation area stipulations. This development project directly affects the neighbours and can be seen by them from their rear gardens, directly or obliquely. This is unquestionably a more constant exposure than that experienced by the passer by on the street and should not be treated with less significance, as would appear to be the current Camden approach. Although front facades are given an historical emphasis, buildings have an architectural totality and integrity.

It is noteworthy that my friends at no. 9 designed and built a rear extension scheme approximately 15 years ago, and as designers themselves, they had their own careful standards. At that time they also had to satisfy the council's requirements that their design and construction considered the local vernacular and site precedent of roof scape, preservation of existing eaves lines and use of materials. All of these requirements and guidelines were (and still are) intended to preserve the character of development within the context of the conservation area, in other words the Council's own planning and conservation area rules. It would be highly reprehensible and indicate double standards if the current development of no.15, referred to here, is treated any differently.

Unresolved rainwater drainage issues driven by unsanctioned initial construction, materially affects no. 9 to the rear, as has been noted earlier. This situation would be compounded should the Council now allow approval of the current 'retrospectively' applied for 'variations' to the original planning permission. It would be questionable also if the Council is downgrading in importance, post planning, very important issues requiring clear action and resolution, because they are occurring at the property rear, not the front.

Clarity and leadership on the matters set out here are now needed from Camden, Planning Enforcement, Planning & Conservation and Building Control. These issues, all resulting from unsanctioned construction are completely interconnected and need to be addressed with coordination.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Robinson

