

Date 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016  
Your reference 2016/5647/L 50 Albert Street  
Our reference HR/HRS/TT/RWB  
Enquiries to Ross Barber



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Rachael Parry  
London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
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Dear Rachael

**Proposed Balcony replacement Works - 50 Albert Street, London NW1 7NR**

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity of responding to the objections set out by Mr. Middleweek, the leaseholder of 50B Albert Street, to the above proposals.

In order to respond, we have extracted verbatim the text from Mr Middleweek's objection to the above works, which we have set out below in italics. Our responses are included under each statement in bold italics, where relevant.

Text from objection dated 16/11/2016, 22:34:47

*I write to object to this planning application, described as being for reinstatement of a defective stone balcony and associated work, which has been submitted by Camden Council as the freeholder of 50 Albert Street. I am the leaseholder of 50B Albert Street.*

*The planning application has been made on the basis of a wholly flawed assessment of the condition of the balcony. It is not defective.*

***LB Camden Response: We do not agree with the above statement. Like any responsible Authority, Camden puts the health and safety of its residents and members of the public foremost in its considerations. In this instance, two different Structural Engineers, commissioned by Camden, have advised that the balcony cannot be considered safe and fit for purpose. Hence, Camden has installed a scaffold in order to make the situation safe until reinstatement works have been completed.***

*There are two longstanding cracks in the balcony that go from front to back, but this leaves each section of the balcony effectively cantilevered, and I am advised that these cracks could even have been there since the house was first built. I have a report from a structural engineer who advises that as there is no separation gap between the balcony surface and the front wall, there is no cause for concern about the structural integrity of the balcony. The structural engineer is not merely neutral on this point, but advises leaving the balcony well alone (apart from possibly filling the cracks), as replacing the balcony unnecessarily is to interfere unnecessarily with the fabric of the building. The upper front wall of the house is built on top of the balcony and removing and replacing the balcony is a complicated procedure which carries a significant risk of damage.*

**LB Camden Response: Again, we do not agree with the above statement. We reiterate that two different structural engineers commissioned by Camden have reviewed the existing stone balcony and both have advised that the works set out in the planning and listed building consent application are necessary to ensure the future integrity of the building and the safety of the balcony element. We note what appears to be a water-resistant painted finish has been applied to the top face of the balcony, and it is possible that latent cracks and other defects could be present below this membrane. In respect of the statement that the two front-to-back cracks may have been present from installation, we firmly believe that this is not the case. It is likely that these cracks were hairline for a period of time, and may well have simply been painted over with the water resistant paint mentioned above. However, the hairline cracking is likely to have widened through the course of time and during hot, dry, summers (2003-2006, for example) subsidence, ground and thermal movement between them are likely to have caused the front wall of the house to move, thus opening the pre-existing hairline cracks to the stone balcony.**

*I have asked stone repair consultants to look at the balcony and quote for repairs to the cracks. They have universally agreed with my structural engineer, one pointing out that there is also no sign of movement where the balustrade fixes to the wall, which is another sign that the balcony is not subject to movement and is certainly not in need of replacement.*

**LB Camden Response: If the balustrade handrail is effectively secured to the masonry work at each end of the front wall, a parallelogram effect could occur to the members if movement were to occur, giving the impression that there is no movement. The balcony balustrading, in any case, is in need of repair. You advised that you asked stone repair consultants to look at the balcony and quote for repairing the cracks. This is different from asking them to holistically look at the balcony to see why these failures have occurred in the first instance, and putting a package together for the remediation of any defects noted.**

*Camden put up scaffolding to prop the balcony on an "emergency" basis in August 2014, a full four months after receiving a report from their contractor that the balcony was dangerous. This contractor never came in to the property to properly inspect the balcony. His report showed two low quality photographs of the underside of the balcony, a few lines of handwriting, and a tick in the "dangerous" box. The propping has been up now for over two and a quarter years, blighting the property and the street.*

**LB Camden Response: It is unfortunate that the scaffold has been erected for such a period of time. However, as noted above, it has been necessary to ensure people safety in respect of potential failure of the existing stone balcony. Once the proposed balcony replacement works are completed, then the scaffolding can be "struck" and the "blight" you mention, subsequently removed.**

*The Design, Access and Heritage Statement relies on the report of a "stone consultant". I attended his inspection. He is not an independent surveyor, nor a structural engineer, but the stonemason who Camden's repairs team wanted to do the replacement work. He was effectively pitching for the job when he conducted his inspection. His assessment is clearly biased. Just to deal directly with a couple of the points in the statement:*

**LB Camden Response: It does not suggest anywhere in the Design, Access and Heritage Statement that the stone specialist is independent. However, his observations have been backed up by two structural engineers, which has led to Camden putting together a proposed package of renewal works for the balcony. Thus, we fail to see how the stone specialist's assessment "...is clearly biased" as suggested. We believe there is justification for the balcony replacement works to proceed as set out in the Design Access and Heritage Statement.**

3.4.3 - "As will be noted from the image below, there are at least four large front-to-rear cracks". The image shows three cracks and the central one is the join between the two balcony slabs. The description is incorrect.

**LB Camden Response: We do agree that there are two visible cracks to the balcony, with the centre "crack" being the joint between the two stone slabs.**

3.4.4 - "Another point the stone specialist made is that the stonework to the balcony is extensively weathered, so some of the original depth of stone has crumbled away through the course of time, making it less structurally effective than when it was installed. We note that the existing balcony would have been 89mm thick, so the reduction in thickness through weathering would be significant." The edges of the balcony are still almost square, and the balcony has not moved so it cannot have lost any thickness where it meets the wall. The paint has peeled away from the underside from water going through the cracks, and that is essentially all.

**LB Camden Response: It is interesting you note that paint is peeling to the underside of the balcony from water seeping through the cracks. This clearly illustrates that the cracks extend all the way through the stone slabs. The initial cracking may only have been minor in nature, however, once hairline cracks form, water enters these crevices, freezes and expands. This opens up the cracks and through the passage of time the initial, minor, cracks will widen, fill with detritus, and lengthen. In respect of your comment that "...the balcony has not moved", there is clearly evidence of cracking to the balcony, which extends through the thickness of the slabs, that will have been caused by movement.**

I am dismayed that Camden have gone to the expense of producing this planning application which is for unnecessary and potentially damaging interference to the fabric of the building. I would like to speak about this at committee.

**LB Camden Response: With regards your comment about Camden going to the expense of producing this planning application we, like the general public, have a statutory duty to apply for planning and listed building consent for this type of work. We have liaised with the planning and conservation team since we became aware that the balcony required renewal. The initial correspondence was with Catherine Bond, Principal Planner, and in order to satisfy her criteria we were asked to provide:**

- **A Listed Building Application, complete with Ordnance Survey extract and drawings to illustrate the extent of works.**
- **A combined design and access statement and heritage statement**
- **Condition survey of the existing balcony.**
- **Thorough schedule of repairs for the works to illustrate to the conservation officer that the balcony will be reinstated to the standards they expect.**

We trust the forgoing does explain why it is necessary for the works to be completed at the earliest opportunity and why the comprehensive Design, Access and Heritage Statement was required to ensure compliance with statutory obligations.

Yours sincerely



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**Housing Repairs Service**

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