

ADVICE from Primrose Hill Conservation Area Advisory Committee
12A Manley Street, London NW1 8LT

18 January 2017

12 St Mark's Crescent NW1 7TS 2017/0164/P

Strong objections.

1. There are two main elements to which the PHCAAC objects: the proposed work to the front area, and the proposed rear addition. There are two main issues on which we object: the harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the harm to the amenity of neighbours.

2. The planning background is of a serious long-term failure to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. This has happened over time. In general terms, and addressing the houses between St Mark's Crescent and the Regent's Canal as a group, we believe that back additions and harm to the front areas originally pre-date designation of the conservation area in 1972. Very sadly, these precedents have subsequently been used to undermine the fundamental objective of designation, which includes avoiding cumulative harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This harm is particularly severe because not only is work to the front areas highly visible from the public street, work to the rear is also – exceptionally – very visible from the public domain, that is from the Canal towpath which is a much used pedestrian route.

3. The PHCAAC's advice is to limit the further harm which the present proposals would cause.

Glazing to the front area or basement lightwell

4. The glazing to the front area exists, and is established, whatever planning consent it may or may not have.

5. However, the infill of basement areas, or lightwells, is specifically addressed in the *Primrose Hill conservation area statement*, the current SPD, at PH39, which states: 'Infill or extension of basement lightwells will not normally be acceptable. These works are often unduly prominent, detract from the original design of the building, the established character of the street or involve the loss of significant garden space or historic fabric.' The policy has been upheld in appeals in the area. The policy guidance clearly applies in this case where the present glazing both detracts from the green character of the front garden, and from the forms of the front elevation – which it cuts across, harming the proportional relationships of the front elevation. This harm is made worse in terms of the character of the street: the *Statement* at p. 12 emphasizes that St Mark's Crescent '... is more intimate and enclosed in character, with a narrow carriageway, small front garden areas and a high density of development'.

6. The present proposal would make this harm worse by making the infill considerably more obtrusive. The proposal would increase the height of the glazing at its abutment with the area parapet, by increasing the thickness of the glazing, and providing a gutter above the parapet. It would also add more visible framing, in for example, the opening vent (compare existing and proposed Sections AA and detail at Section YY).

7. The PHCAAC recognizes that the existing glazing cannot be removed under the terms of the current legislation, but nor should it be made worse. We request that the applicant is asked to contribute in a neighbourly way to the enhancement of our area by removing the

glazing altogether and restoring the front elevation. If this is not accepted, we would be willing to discuss significant modifications to the design to see if some form of improvement is possible. The present proposal is seriously harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area and fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. There is no public benefit which counterbalances that harm.

The rear addition

8. The PHCAAC objects strongly on grounds of harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the harm to the amenity of neighbours.

9. The present rear addition is harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area. We note that it appears to have been built without planning consent. Nonetheless it exists: but it should not, as proposed, be made more harmful.

10. The dominant feature of the rear elevation at the lower-ground and ground floors of the existing/original house is the projecting bay window. These bay windows are characteristic of a group of the St Mark's Crescent houses, but not all: they are to a degree distinctive, and their forms are reinforced by the cast- and wrought-iron balconies which run round them at ground-floor level. This is clearly visible in the valuable survival at no. 11 St Mark's Crescent, which is unspoilt; it forms the neighbouring pair to no 12.

11. The present rear addition to no. 12, whatever its other faults, at least has the merit that it allows the rear bay window to stand clear of the mass of the addition at ground floor level. That is, it respects the essential character of the bay as projecting as a simple mass from the plane of the rear elevation at that level. The proposal would not. The railings would abut the side of the bay window harming the clarity with which the bay stands in the rear elevation as a distinct element in the elevation. This is particularly harmful because it further diminishes the significance of no 12 as one of a pair with no 11, which is unspoilt. We note that these elevations are visible from the public domain, the Canal towpath.

12. The retention of most of the bulk of the existing rear addition, and the further addition of an extra extension adds elevational complexity which further harms the surviving character of the rear elevation, both of no 12, and of the pair nos 11 and 12. This proposed set back, which seems to be a device to reduce the extra harm to the amenity of neighbours, nonetheless adds to the harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The complex form both further harms the visual importance of the architecturally significant bay, it also adds visual clutter and so prominence to the lower-ground floor elevation, where the built house meets the garden. This section of the rear elevation as to be seen at no. 11 was relatively simple. It contributed to the visual character of the rear gardens in the public views, identified as significant in the conservation area *Statement* at p. 11.


13. We also object to the further, cumulative, loss of garden space.

14. We also object very strongly to the proposals because of their harm to the amenity of neighbours by overlooking. We note the claims to mitigate the present harm, but we advise that the harm under the present proposal would still be unacceptable in terms of amenity. The overlooking into habitable rooms at such close proximity is wholly objectionable. Had the present building been submitted for planning consent we would have expected this issue to be decisive. A bad situation should not be formalized.

15. We note that it might be possible to mitigate the overlooking by a screen, but then the problem of loss of natural light and sunlight would be unacceptably worsened.

16. We also note that there is no reduction in the present proposal to the harm to the neighbours from loss of sunlight. Indeed, loss of sunlight to habitable rooms at lower-ground floor level would be worsened. The current bulk of building, which it is proposed to extend, is directly to the south-south-west of the windows to habitable rooms of the neighbours at no. 11.

17. The proposals would harm both the character and appearance of the conservation area and the amenity of neighbours. They represent further, cumulative harm without balancing public benefit. They fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Simpson', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Richard Simpson FSA
Chair