

**Comments by Justin De Syllas and Annette Main, First House, Dartmouth Park Road, NW5 1SU on Application number: 2017/2381/L, Listed Building Consent and Application number: 2017/2383/P, Full Planning Permission.**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The withdrawal of the previous application for permission to make changes to Flat 6, Grove End House, led to the hope that the applicants were going to respond to some of the objections that were made by heritage organisations and by the neighbours that would be most affected by the proposed changes. Disappointingly, while some minor modifications have been made, the changes that would be most damaging to the listed building have not been dropped in the current application.

Most of the changes that have been made are minor and essentially remedial improvements to the historic fabric of the listed building. These have been made in consultation with Historic England and other organisations and officers. The new application does not, however address the major objections raised in relation to the previous application, the proposal to remove the mansard roof at second floor level on the east elevation and to add a third floor attic extension at third floor level. Historic England objected to both of these changes in the previous application and it is to be hoped that it will not change its position on these substantive issues in exchange for the minor design modifications conceded by the applicants.

It is also noted that the applicants have not made any concessions, in their revised proposals, in response to the concerns expressed by their close neighbours about the impact the major additions to the listed building would have on its appearance and the increase in overlooking and overshadowing these would bring.

**2. IMPACT OF EACH THE PROPOSED CHANGES**

It is a requirement that any proposed change to a listed building in a conservation area should enhance and preserve rather than detract from the environmental and historic value of the building and its surroundings. In the lengthy Heritage, Design and Access Statement supporting this application a number of changes are proposed which together, it is claimed by the applicants, would offer substantial public benefit.

Although there are some aspects of the proposals that would enhance the existing building, this cannot be said of them all.

- The proposed changes to the front elevation together represent a tidying-up of the most important elevation of the existing building and would be welcome, but these enhancements are little more than one would expect from a conscientious freeholder as part of their maintenance of the building.
- The most significant change proposed to the south elevation is the addition of white painted render over the existing cement render. This threatens to turn an authentic-looking rendered gable with its scored stone line 'rustication' into an example of bland twenty first century gentrification. Looking at the before and after images, shown in the planning submission, the bright white of the proposed insulated render would be extremely strident seen against the mellow colour of the brickwork of the front and rear elevations, see Figures 1 and 2 below. Not only would this detract attention away from the best features of the existing building, the front and rear elevations, it would also highlight the fact that the south elevation, as the applicants put it, *“is the result of a series of ad hoc changes over time ... the legacy of different forms from different periods of building work [which] result in a formally unresolved composition.”*<sup>1</sup> The applicant’s proposed changes would do nothing to remedy that fact; indeed they would take the series of ad hoc changes a step further.



**Figure 1. Grove End House, views of south and front elevations**

- The proposal to replace the mansard roof on the east elevation with a considerably higher, and therefore more prominent, set-back vertical brick façade has the inauthentic feel of a modern addition attempting to fit in with the character of the Regency building to which it is being added, see Figure 2 and Figure 6 below. This proposed elevation follows none of the conventions of classical architecture and no Regency architect would have designed the elevation in this way. First the second floor elevation would have either been raised in line with the lower floors or the set-back would have been much larger in plan. In addition the windows and storey height of the second floor elevation would have reduced in size and proportion and would therefore not have matched those of the floors below. The enormous window proposed over the existing ground and first floor bow window certainly has no

<sup>1</sup> Section 3.7.9, applicant’s Design and Access Statement

precedent in Regency architecture because a flat brick arch of the kind shown would not have been able to span such a distance.



**Existing**

**Proposed**

**Figure 2. Grove End House, views of south and rear elevations**

The photograph, in Figure 3 below, of the rear elevation of Grove End House before the addition of the mansard roof shows that before the changes made in 1965 the scale of the buildings of Grove End Terrace stepped down from Cumberland Villa to the right, to Grove End House in the centre, to 1 Chetwynd Villas on the left.



**Figure 3. Grove End House, rear view from the east, 1965**

Soon after this photograph was taken the second floor of Grove End House was extended over the whole of the first floor with a set-back mansard roof over the rear elevation, modelled on the characteristic slate clad mansards of Georgian buildings across London. The whole point of a mansard roof is to create habitable space at roof level while maintaining the proportions of the elevation below by expressing the additional floor as a roof. The use of a mansard roof served to minimise the impact of the additional accommodation on the rear elevation and was used, in this instance, as an appropriate and respectful response to the historic building and its context.



**Figure 4. Grove End House, rear view from the east, 2016.**

But as can be seen from the contemporary photograph in Figure 4 above, despite the effort to minimise the impact of the additional floor by using a mansard roof, its impact is quite overbearing when viewed from the gardens of Chetwynd Villas. Raising the height of the second floor elevation, as proposed in the planning application, would significantly increase the overlooking, light pollution and overshadowing of the Chetwynd Villa gardens and would create an even more abrupt change in scale between Grove End House and Chetwynd Villas.

It is acknowledged that some aspects of the existing mansard roof at second floor level were poorly designed and executed in the 1960s. The line of the mansard was stepped back in order to accommodate a ‘means of escape’ route from the neighbouring property. In addition, the windows installed in the mansard, both dormers and Velux, are poorly positioned and of an inappropriate style in the context of the listed building, see figure 5 below. It was not the use of a mansard roof in this location that was a compromise; it was the way in which it was executed. If, as the applicants claim, the rooftop ‘means of escape’ route is no longer required, the weaknesses in the design of the existing mansard could easily be corrected by rebuilding the northern section of the mansard roof to align with the southern section and replacing and realigning the crude existing windows with appropriately designed dormer windows.



**Figure 5. Grove End House, showing set back in existing mansard roof to accommodate a ‘means of escape’ route from the adjoining property.**



Such a change would have a significant impact because the mansard roof on Grove End House is visible from a number of places in the public realm surrounding the site. The most obvious of these is the view from Chetwynd Road which is shown in the left hand image of Figure 2 above. But there is also a clear view of the mansard from ground level at the junction of Dartmouth Park Road and Boscastle Road, as shown in Figure 6 below. Raising the second floor elevation, adding a third floor and raising the chimneys would have a significant impact on this view.



**Figure 6. View of the mansard roof of Grove End House from Dartmouth Park Road.**

The second storey set-back brick elevation, with which the applicants propose to replace the mansard roof, would create a taller and even more overbearing rear elevation to Grove End House, see Figure 7 below. The 'proposed' view shows that neither the raised second floor rear elevation nor the third floor attic storey is related, visually, to the classical Regency design of the existing building. These proposed changes therefore fail to pass the test that they should preserve and enhance the listed building and its context.

- The most fundamental change proposed in the planning application is the addition of *“an attic storey that is inspired by the original forms of the roofs [of Grove End House at second floor level] and by the work of Sir John Soane (arguably the most accomplished architect from the period Grove End House was built).”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Preface, applicant's Design and Access Statement



Existing



Proposed

**Figure 7. Grove End House with proposed additions seen from the south**

The way in which the shape of the proposed attic storey has been derived from the form of the M-form roof that once existed at second floor level is illustrated in a set of diagrams shown in the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement, see Figure 8 below. These four diagrams are very clear and helpful, in so far as they illustrate the way in which the design was conceived. What the diagrams do not reveal, however, is that the M-form roof that once existed at second floor level could not simply be reproduced at third floor level because there isn't a suitable platform surrounded by parapets on which to place it.

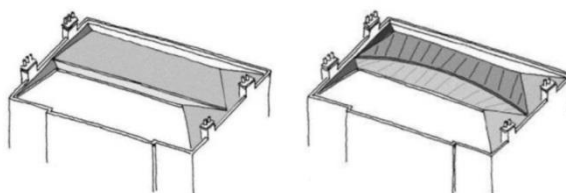


Fig 92 & 93: Diagrams showing addition of the hipped ends and the arching of the valley gutter

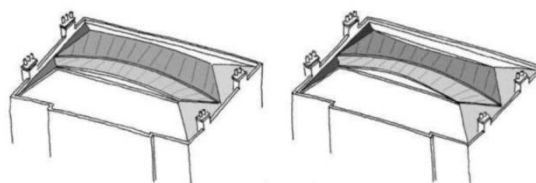


Fig 94 & 95: Diagrams showing light reflector and scalloped edges to reduce visual impact

**Figure 8. Grove End House, diagrams showing the development of the design of the proposed attic storey**

It was in order to create this platform that the applicants proposed replacing the mansard roof at second floor level with the vertical set-back second floor rear elevation. In other words the motive behind the applicant's desire to replace the mansard roof has more to do with facilitating the development of their attic storey extension than improving the east elevation.

Nor do the applicant's four diagrams tell the full story because they have not included a drawing showing the final modelling of the proposed attic storey. Despite producing an encyclopaedic Heritage, Design and Access Statement, the applicants have shown very little clear three dimensional information about the architectural form of the proposed attic extension. Given that the addition of this attic is the most significant change to the appearance of the listed building being proposed one would expect to see it better represented. In order to assist the officers and councillors assessing this application, and the other consultees, it is suggested that an accurate and detailed drawing of the attic storey seen in perspective from above should be requested from the applicants.

This would show that the final form of the attic storey bears little relation to the former roofs of Grove End House at second floor level. The final proposal is, in fact, an uncomfortable compromise between the organic forms of the attic storey proposed in the earlier, now withdrawn, planning application for this site and the historic precedent of the hipped roofs, long since lost, which once existed at second floor level.

The applicants claim that their *"scheme has been the result of very detailed research and can only be fully understood by following the thought process that has led from research to design."*<sup>3</sup> A careful reading of their Design and Access Statement suggests, however, that the applicants have known from the start exactly what they want, which is to increase the floorspace in their new flat by adding an additional floor and that the historical research and analysis are being used to justify this major change to the listed building. While some of the minor changes proposed are informed by the history of the listed building, the major changes proposed are not and would damage the integrity of the original structure. Assessed objectively the proposed new additions would be alien interventions, architecturally; neither historically appropriate nor convincingly contemporary.

### **3. OVERALL ENHANCEMENT OF THE LISTED BUILDING**

While it is acknowledged that some of the minor changes proposed in this planning application would enhance the historic building, but, as is argued above, the major changes proposed would have a detrimental impact. Overall, therefore, the proposed changes would have a more negative than positive impact.

The applicants quote Planning Policy Statement 5. Clause HE9.4 which states: - *"Where a proposal has a harmful impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset which is less than substantial harm, in all cases local planning authorities should...weigh the benefit of the proposal (for example that it helps to secure the maximum viable use of the heritage asset in the interests of its long-term conservation) against harm."*

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<sup>3</sup> Preface, applicant's Design and Access Statement

The flats in Grove End House are located in a desirable residential area close to Hampstead Heath with good local schools and other facilities. As a consequence these flats have significant value in today's housing market. The applicants may wish to present themselves as the saviours of a threatened historic asset but there is no risk to the future optimum viable use of this listed building. The applicants are, in fact, intent on maximising the value of their portion of the historic building through additional development. The proposed trade-off of minor cosmetic enhancements to the listed building in return for permission to make significant additions would not provide any overall benefit to the public. The changes proposed would, however, clearly benefit the applicants by increasing the floor area and value of their property. Their claim that *"the public benefit from the highly visible enhancements outweigh any perceived – and much less visible- harms"*<sup>4</sup> is, at best, a gross exaggeration and does not provide a valid basis on which to grant planning and listed building consent.

#### 4. THE SCALE OF THE GROVE END TERRACE

The applicants claim that *"the design of the attic storey re-establishes a more balanced scale relationship with the neighbouring building."*<sup>5</sup> Having gone to some lengths to explain that the proposed attic extension cannot be seen from the front of Grove End House, their claim that the attic extension would increase the scale of the building as seen alongside the other properties on Grove End is unconvincing. The only place from which the attic can be seen from the west is *"the long view of Grove End House from Gordon House Road"* and as the applicants concede, this view *"could be regarded as negatively impacted by the proposals."*<sup>6</sup> What they fail to acknowledge is that much closer views of second and third floor additions would be clearly visible from within the conservation area from Chetwynd Road and Dartmouth Park Road. Viewed from the rear, these changes would increase the cliff like mass of the rear of the Grove End terrace of houses.



**Figure 9.** Rear elevation of Grove End Terrace (left) and sketch axonometric showing the transition in scale between Lynton and Cumberland Villas, Grove End House and Chetwynd Villas, (right).

<sup>4</sup> Section 8.9, Conclusions, in the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.

<sup>5</sup> Section 10, Conclusions, applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.

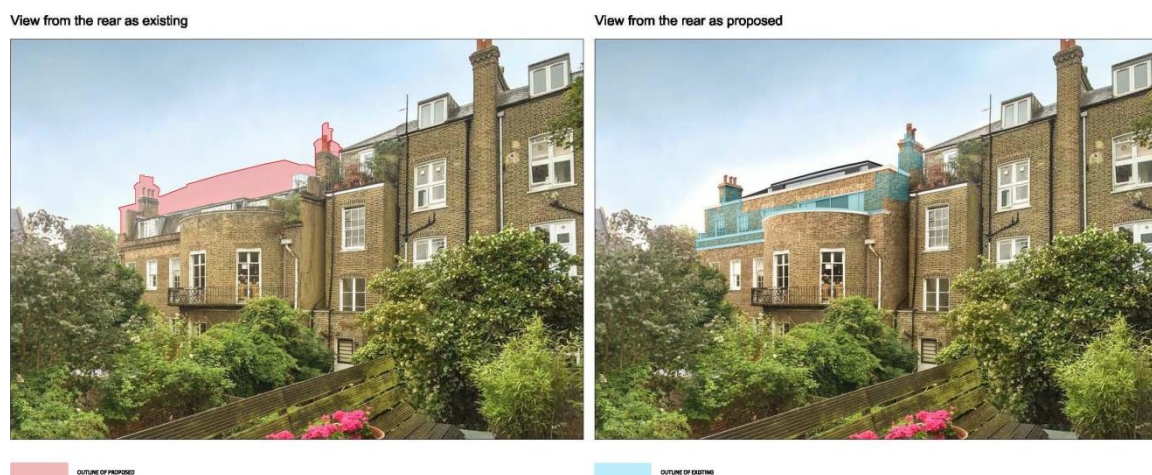
<sup>6</sup> Section 8.9, Conclusions, in the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.



As it exists, there is a pleasing variety in the skyline to the rear of Grove End Terrace, see Figure 9 above, which is typical of the back of old buildings. The proposed increase in the scale of the rear elevation of Grove End House, by increasing the mass of the building, would have a detrimental effect on the neighbouring properties in terms of outlook, daylight, sunlight and overlooking, as noted in Section 5 of this document.

## 5. OVERLOOKING AND OVERSHADOWING OF NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES

A consequence of setting the proposed additional third floor back from the front of the building, in order to make it less visible from Highgate Road, is that it would be very visible from the properties behind Grove End House on Chetwynd and Dartmouth Park Roads, increasing the overlooking and overshadowing of the gardens behind the houses of Chetwynd Villas and the windows of First House and Lamorna on Dartmouth Park Road. The site plan shows that Grove End House lies directly to the South of First House on Dartmouth Park Road. First House is already very overshadowed, and the creation of an additional floor and the raising of the second floor rear elevation of Grove End House would cut out a considerable amount of the existing sunlight received by First House in the middle of the day in winter. In addition the proposed kitchen/dining room of the proposed attic extension on Flat 6 would look straight into the living room of First House, see Figure 10 below.



**Figure 10.** Grove End House looking due south from the terrace of First House Dartmouth Park Road showing the impact of the proposed changes to the skyline.

Figure 11, below, was taken from the dining room of First House Dartmouth Park Road at 13.32 on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017. This shows that in the garden of First House the sun barely rises over the existing roof of Grove End House. The applicants acknowledge in their Heritage, Design and Access Statement that the changes they propose would reduce sunlight to parts of the first floor terrace of First House Dartmouth Park Road, by two hours in winter.<sup>7</sup> The impact on the ground floor windows and the garden of the house would, therefore, be considerably greater.

<sup>7</sup> Section 9.2, Sunlight, in the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.



— OUTLINE OF PROPOSED (WINTER SUN)

**Figure 11. View of Grove End House from the ground floor Dining Room window of First House, Dartmouth Park Road.**

The poor quality of the photograph is because it was deliberately taken on a cloudy day so that the glare would not completely black out the foreground. Had the sky been clear the sun would have been just above the roofline. The red line indicates the approximate height of the proposed set back vertical brick elevation at second floor level showing that in mid-winter it would cut out the little midday sunlight that is currently received.

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORKS

The applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement states: - *"The structure will involve some steel beams to be inserted into the floor zone between the first and second storeys (there should not be any need to disturb or damage ceilings on the first floor)."*<sup>8</sup> My experience, as an architect, of working on the renovation of grade II listed buildings is that it is very unlikely that this work could be carried out without causing damage to the existing floor structure which is 200 years old and may in parts be 300 years old according to the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.

The section drawings showing the existing and proposed second floor suggest that the structural strengthening of the second floor and the improvements in its insulation would be done without increasing the depth of most of the second floor while at the same time reducing the depth of part of it. If I were a resident of one of the first floor flats in Grove End House I would be extremely sceptical of any assurance that all of this can be achieved without causing damage to the flats below.

<sup>8</sup> Section 4.14, in the applicant's Heritage, Design and Access Statement.

## **7. THE ARCHITECTURAL POTENTIAL OF THE EXISTING FLAT**

The fundamental issue that is raised by this planning application is whether there is a convincing Case for Change to justify granting permission for the extensions and additions proposed for Flat 6. As the applicants point out, Flat 6 is itself an addition to the original Grove End House which already has a floor area of about 113 sq. m. This is, in other words, the largest flat in terms of floor area in Grove End House. A flat of this size is deemed to be sufficient, using Camden's residential minimum housing space standards, for an 8 person dwelling (see CPG 4.14 and 4.15). There is, of course, no prohibition against a dwelling being larger than the recommended minimum space standards but, in this instance, a case cannot be made that more space is needed in Flat 6 to meet minimum housing space standards. Nor does the additional floor space for which planning consent is sought increase the number of residential units or provide any other public benefit.

As the applicants demonstrate, however, in their proposed second floor plan, Flat 6 could be remodelled to create a more rational layout and to bring it up to the standard of the other flats in Grove End House. There is, therefore, no reason why improvements to the layout of the flat could not be achieved by working within the existing envelope. What an opportunity for an architect, to create a contemporary interior within, this attractive historic building while at the same time improving its exterior appearance by carryout the improvements to the mansard roof on the east elevation discussed above.

Such an approach would provide a flat with bedrooms facing east and living spaces facing west, all with exceptional views and hours of sunlight. It would also provide ample opportunity to introduce top light, in the manner favoured by the Regency architect Sir John Soane, into the centre of the plan. It would also surely be possible for a discrete, set back access staircase to be provided to a roof terrace on the existing second floor roof, located towards the front or western side of the roof so that it did not overlook First House on Dartmouth Park Road or the gardens of Chetwynd Villas behind.

Adding a third floor to this building is not necessary to the achievement of an improved Flat 6, but the harm to the listed building that would result from this and the proposed change to the rear second floor elevation cannot be justified in terms of the public gain that would be realised by the relatively minor remedial works to the existing fabric. Nor, indeed, is there any reason why all of the proposed improvements to the other parts of Grove End House could not be implemented without extending the property. It is surely incumbent on the owners of the Grove End House to maintain the property and to act as custodians of this 'heritage asset' as it stands.

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