

No 2017/4756/P : 17 Railey Mews - Extra Basement bedroom : with 'fins'.

'Outlandish' Cladding design masks a detrimental Basement excavation

I have the most serious doubts about this extraordinary application:

1. Previous Planning conditions conveniently scrapped at later date?

In 1998 permission was given to replace a wooden garden shed (study) with two-bedroom house under strict conditions including well spaced piled foundations, provision of amenity garden space, garage parking, & obscured overlook of back gardens of 93 & 95 Leverton St. (opposite) & with no window overlooking the garden of 1 & 1a Lupton St. at side.

Significantly Condition 4 withdrew permitted development rights under terms of 1995 TPC (GPD) Order Class A - no doubt reflecting decision to grant extensive 2 bed house on small site. Not permanent it seems.

In 2009 permission was given to replace the garage with new bedroom, thereby converting it into a three-bedroom house with the inherent loss of the Off St Parking, without a no-car agreement being imposed.

As proposed current scheme converts a home from 3 to option 4 bedroom house. So in three planning moves we go from garden shed to a four-bedroom house without OSP & the loss of the original garden amenity; with the possibility of a new study room also becoming bedroom five.

The Pre-application report states:- "If the bedrooms cannot attain these [lighting] targets, then alternative non-habitable uses should be considered for these rooms." So a change of labelling potentially satisfies the planning process, independent of any need by any future occupant to re-name study, clearly an invitation to unauthorised use.

2. False pretext to justify radical change to character of the Mews?

Misleading for applicant to claim that No. 17 - was "done in 'white render' which is not the most durable approach for this location" - and which is now beginning to crack. Although in fact the building I saw rendered in standard cement render which was then painted white, and not in any supposedly vulnerable 'white render' OR being "tired".

Early on slight cracking, typical of new built soft blocks settlement addressed later ext. walls were repainted in more durable white paint using "a superior wall paint that would outlast ordinary paints" and has lasted remarkably well. Thus surface of render isn't 'tired', it is merely due for a repaint, as would be expected and the quality of the render has remained in a sound condition, & externally there is no visible flaking or blistering of the paint, except bordering glass blocks inside due to "cold bridge" easily cured with insulation bead.

The peculiar 'fins' proposed to surround the building are being put forward as an extreme solution to a non-existent problem. If paint is looking a bit 'tired', this is because a white painted wall wouldn't be expected to look its best after 9 years. South-facing elevations should routinely be painted every five/seven years in 'best practice'

The strange "cladding fins" are being put forward as a solution to a minor maintenance problem, - All painted finishes on wood or render require routine maintenance and repainting at intervals. This would be immensely difficult to accomplish, once covered with a layer of bracketed planks; while it seems the major function of it is just to disguise an issue of siting extensive window glass on boundary line.

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side wall (to garden of 1 Lupton St.)? Indeed the architect's photo illustration clearly shows only 1.7m of misted glass, but whole glazed opening in the vast frontal picture window wrapping around the corner to the garden side, to be projected over the footway up to front edge of the "fins" and noted on plans as being up to 16cm (over 6 inches). Glass to hang over a pavement.? (& thereby enlarging internal space).

3. 'Outlandish' design solutions seldom look as impressive over time as trendy designers want to persuade & 'Fins' cladding a distraction. I would suggest if any cladding were to be used, it should mitigate rather than accentuate the bulky appearance of the building. The so called cladding - jettied 'fins' overhang boundary line & provide no insulation and those angled 'blades' - don't achieve privacy either.

They also don't achieve any 'balance between daylight and sunlight to the existing house' or 'avoid an unacceptable increase in overlooking to neighbouring properties' - as claimed in both application and D&A; a large area around the tree in the garden of No.1 & 1a Lupton St. is directly in line with gaps between blades. Though not my key issue, this negates any claims that the cladding is a 'functional' solution.

The root range of the plane tree has been able to balance the ambient ground moisture with growth, while not interrupted by the piles below No.17 since it's construction, but this cannot remain unaffected by a new concrete boxed basement inserted below the surface displacing the earth which was offering sustenance to the tree in long dry seasons.

4. A design make-over too IN-appropriate for its London Mews location

The existing front elevation as built, makes some concessions to the neighbouring built environment - the Mews style hinged garage doors, & 4 square terrace apertures - reference four top windows of No.16 - the square theme repeated in the grid of glass blocks respects scale. The immediate next building was designed around a necessary function. No. 16, next door, although larger, was specially constructed in old London 'stocks' bricks, precisely to harmonise with it's neighbours.

But what is proposed was inspired by a face-lift to a 1970s Offenbach (Frankfurt) suburban garden house is not relevant or distinguished as architecture nor appropriate to its transposed setting in this Mews.

'Beautiful' is only purely subjective & a 'good design' is evolved to relate to surroundings harmoniously and IS NOT something bizarre that looks like it has arrived from another age or alien planet, or some other country. Or else a crude alien form merely disrupts the scene.

A slanted 'white cube' is being adorned with an elaborate timber-top screen only partly concealing glass on a boundary wall (which seems to be its real purpose). The result is more appropriate for Nantucket fisherman's cottage or backwoods stockade in Montana USA, but neither remarkable as 'modern architecture' nor fitting the special character of our Mews and cannot be said to deliver any real "Design Quality".

I don't believe this weird approach can ever credibly be described as being "in keeping with the current aesthetic of the house" & then to conceal that very same distinctive "aesthetic" with a vast and clunky wooden 'pelmet', plus huge picture window & describe the result as "a great looking solution" - but a great looking solution to obscurity?

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Absurd finned cladding as proposed only emphasises the awkward bulk of a distorted white cube, but was previously moderated - mostly by a cut-back corner, currently combined with an open garden amenity space required under the initial permission originally granted in 1998/9.

5. Adding a textured 'ceramicised' silica paint finish attracts grime or lichen to an inordinate number of timber slats adorning the fascia of two sides of an oddly structural form of house in a Mews location, is hardly going to provide a more durable "clean" finish, free of the incipient drab 'tiredness' factor, complained of by architects claims & not a better kind of mark to leave - on historic Railey Mews. So a 'KEIM' surface is more likely to acquire grime of airborne road dirt, & show more noticeably, than to the existing smoothly painted render.

The total running length of 170 planned slats of double storey height of 18ft is around 1,000 metres timber (in excess of 1/2 mile of wood) This statistic hardly fits with Council's avowed design objectives, unless 'excess' is new interpretation of renewable economy of scale.

I have inspected the edge-on wood slat fins of "Keim" painted planks fitted as a barrier layer close to road-way at No.89 Swains Lane N6 - as detailed in D&A Statement. Although protective in that location is useful, apart from a crash barrier aspect, clunky is not attractive.

Ugly metal fixing brackets are clearly visible between the planks are only functional, in correcting uneven surface of the wall behind. It wouldn't be easy to redecorate or clean off acquired dirt or lichen, without access from own reach or off new stair or neighbouring land.

I cannot accept the clash in styles of the new front 'lightwell' with the "Folksy" or "Scandi" appearance of the wooden cladding slats, or fins, blades whatever - contrasted with the extremely "technical look and nature of the new diffuse channelled glazed panel of garage-sized dimensions, facing straight onto the footway, at ground level. & Not an obvious feature with any relationship to a new fascia of "vertical timber fins" or the general "character for the property or the wider mews setting" as quoted in the Case Officer's Pre Application Report.

Frankly, in losing the traditional Garage style doors from the front elevation - the only element, which does relate to the style of the traditional London Mews with a subtle mix of familiar forms, is lost.

6. Implications of basement excavation on neighbour at No.16 Railey.

The construction of a any new basement would potentially compromise the structural integrity of 16 Railey Mews both during and also risk damage following excavation, on various time-scales and in different manifestations, as a drying out of substrate to foundations occurred. This bears an asymmetric loading from the principal beams supporting the entire 2nd storey above the double height vehicle entrance area. Thus is not a conventional foundation and should not be disturbed.

By attempting to insert a new concrete basement immediately alongside and below foundations to one side of No.16's frontage - undercutting existing special foundations of a critical bridging stanchion below a crucial bridging above adjacent vehicle entrance & hallway supporting overhead reinforced concrete beams, risks fatal imbalance in forces.

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Stability of 16's complex foundations not comparable No.s 6&7 quoted. Transferring (No.17's) loadings away from the existing grid of piles, carefully set some distance away from my independent boundary wall on to a new load bearing base directly relying on the banking for No16's bearing substrate is risky, and wouldn't be without new consequences, instead of established piles at a safer distance from my foundations. The scale of such procedures is totally disproportionate to outcome.

To disturb an established major building, pursuing an aggressive new subterranean adventure with implications of a very awkward to remedy slippage and expensive unintended consequences, to blight a freehold and incur excessive insurance levies reflecting those consequences is most unfair for the Council to acquiesce to or encourage any further.

If the envisaged enhancement by providing a sub optimal accommodation is seen in relation to the adverse factors of such an application, the subversive nature of the combination of experimental contrivance must be seen as a step too far in a conservation area without wild ideas.

The architects self proclaim their partnership with the OSA Office of Subversive Architecture: **Is this "subversive" a valid recommendation? Do applicants not discuss intentions of the plan prior to submission?** I still await the geo/tech report & I intend a response in detail to the whole basement impact plans implied or inferred, once submitted.*

7. Substantial Noise & disruption set against true 'impact of growth'

Light levels have been compromised to upper rooms - to gain the extra space for the new staircase and basement area. In effect the existing accommodation is being "degraded in pursuit" of an over ambitious and inevitably under-lit basement bedroom area barely meeting the minimum 1% ADF required; failing dull days of month, natural light deficient?

Any excavation of the basement will cause immense disruption to the peaceful character of the Mews which allows many residents to work or practice in their homes. It is an area where creative work is carried out and where low external sound levels are crucial to concentration.

The removal of around 200 cubic metres of clay in skips - would take place over several months and a great many skip movements; N.B. skip lorries arrive in the early morning, dragging both empty & partially + full skips of heavy clay into position for collection and disposal. This invasive procedure would never have been approved back at a 1998 decision or certainly shouldn't be allowed planning at this juncture.

The excavation process requires powerful compressors running noisily in the Mews, digging for much of day before concrete trucks arrive on a regular basis with reversing alarms, for several months & episodes for "setting off" further adjustments to levels and a continuous low grinding noise of concrete mixers to fill the daily excavated voids.

This level of disruption isn't justified by a rejig - for a new extra basement bedroom suite and in digging out the inferior basement level not only damages the special character of the mews - set against only a marginal benefit for householder, but most antisocial agenda, cause immense discomfort or disruption to the activities of many residents.

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If "Basement Impact Assessment" means anything, it should surely not be considered without reference to the months or years of aggravation following undertaking a course more in keeping with indulged fashion - than in any true value to real character or a quality of the Mews.

Or - under **Planning Policy Framework & Local Plan Policies** etc.

In the quality of life disrupted, vainly attempting to achieve the **DP 24** London Plan objective, achieving "good design" (self described) or "high quality places" but here only an opinion - in a wrong place, (promoting high quality places AND conserving OUR heritage) clearly should not be invoked, while simultaneously contravening the spirit of **DP25** Conserving Camden's Heritage. Gimmicks and "fins" don't work.

Please note LDF Core Strategy "Impact of Growth" is not served by an unnecessary scheme of aggrandisement of one 'oddball' property value, at the expense of interrupted quality of life for many months in Mews

DP26 (Managing impact of development on occupiers and neighbours) is further out-flanked not ameliorated by long-winded policy intentions of complex vehicle movements to make the disruptions 'acceptable'?? Every new operation results in noisy interruptions to quiet of mews.

Underpin/excavation can only be justified as an unavoidable remedial necessity of last resort, not as a first call for a dubious 'benefit' that would inevitably damage other people, by the highly disruptive process of upheaval. I'm against risky works near No.16's foundation. My ability to operate unaffected or enjoy living or carry out my work is not possible in close proximity to a most invasive building site.

The Assessment

5 Planning Considerations material to Determination are contentious in Application, with all points of issue covered extensively above.

The application presents a bizarre 'style clash' of opposite agendas

- * **DESIGN (& impact on Conservation Area)** - Bulky 'FIN' barrier effect
of plank display 'air-vent style' clashing with vast tech-style panel glazing both at first floor level, unrelieved by fenestration/framing & with distinctly uncomfortable sensation in walking past so close to a large area of obscure channelled glass panel on a narrow pavement.
- * **Basement excavation** - Enormous vibration in tortuous process of dig noise & disturbance especially felt with the brunt borne by myself.
- * +Consequent settlement damage & issues of subsequent reinstatement.
- * **Amenity** - Loss of a garden, damage & disruption to peaceful quality of traditional London Mews **in misplaced bid for architects showcase**
- *
- * **Trees & Landscaping** - Reduced root range and available sustenance.
- * **Transport** - Oppressive noise aspect of truck arrivals & reversing.

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The failure to satisfy five criteria comprehensively is self evident

It's a matter of regret to object to someone's dream 'grand project' & especially with a good neighbour in a small community of residents. Regrettably this project doesn't raise a bar, it certainly lowers it.

I look to the Council to uphold the spirit of the policies espoused.

Very Sincerely ... Stephen Coe