

2018/2225/P - 6 Albert Terrace

Agent Response to Advice from Primrose Hill Conservation Area Advisory Committee, dated 4th July and 1st August 2018

The objections raised cover just two proposals within the application namely raising the level of a section of boundary wall by four brick courses and the inclusion of rooflights in the proposal.

We will respond to these two areas of concern.

Raising the Height of a Section of the Boundary Wall

The section of wall in question is subject to significant movement caused but the proximity of six large lime trees and an insufficient shallow footing to the existing wall. There are at least 4 visible full height cracks and some noticeable heave. The owner wishes to stabilise the wall, long-term, and the advice we have received from both a structural engineer and arboriculturalist is that the footing needs to be deeper and to avoid damage to the trees roots can only be achieved if supported on carefully located piles. This would require careful dismantling of the wall and then the reuse of the existing bricks to re-build. Contrary to the PHCAAC claim, we therefore conclude that careful demolition and rebuild of the wall is necessary. It was felt that in rebuilding the wall, raising the level by four brick courses would not compromise the conservation area for the following reasons.

1. Pursuant of Advice from the Pre-Application Consultation dated 25th April 2018

The wall currently has a number of changes in level. As noted in our Pre-Application Advice with Camden *“the boundary wall stands at something like the ‘datum’”* and levelly the height was seen as an opportunity to produce a singular datum to this section of wall. During the Pre-Application Consultation we had considered raising the entire boundary wall but the Conservation Officer felt that it *“may be more acceptable without compromising the appearance of the Conservation Area”* to *“rebuilding and raising it beyond the last gatepost”*. Pursuant of this advice we have proposed to raise just this section of wall as advised.

2. Marginal Proposed Increase

We acknowledge and agree with both the Primrose Hill CA Article 4 Direction (1983) and the Primrose Hill Conservation Area Statement in their highlighting of the importance of boundary walls, however,

- a. the proposed increase is no higher than the existing wall fronting 6 Albert Terrace Mews so we are not increasing the height to a level unseen within the conservation area.
- b. The proposed increase is only four brick courses and as PHCAAC states this *“is not great absolutely”*.
- c. Additionally, whilst the application property overall occupies a prominent corner site, the section of wall in question runs along the rear garden boundary, which does not front the open parkland

of Primrose Hill and is physically separate from the corner boundary wall by the side access gate and gateposts.

3. Reference to the 2005 Appeal (APP/X5210/A/04/1166539) Decision Letter

The Planning Inspector in this appeal was reviewing whether a large very prominent side extension should be allowed on the second floor of the application property. The Planning Inspector's comment stating that the property "*is clearly visible and is a focal point of the view from the slopes of Primrose Hill*" is unquestionable. However we feel it is misleading to infer that raising a side garden wall by four brick courses is in anyway comparable to a massively visible second-storey side extension. The side wall neither forms a frontage to Primrose Hill Park nor, due to it's oblique angle towards Primrose Hill, is clearly visible from Primrose Hill Park.

4. Loss of a Sense of Openness

This section of wall is not characterised by "*a sense of openness*" at this location, as claimed by the PHCAAC, but by the dominant row of large lime trees that sits directly behind the wall. This is clear to see in the photograph below, taken today.



5. Harm Supplemented by the Proposed Planters.

Our responses to this concern are as follows:

- a. In our pre application advice with Camden we were advised that *“defensive planting is strongly preferred”*.
- b. Currently attached to the rear, along the entirety of wall are concealed elevated timber box planters so these are not a new proposal. The existing planters are in a poor state of repair and we are proposing to replace them with a more robust metal planter. Neither the existing planters or the proposed would be visible to the wider conservation area.
- c. The conservation area generally is characterised by plants rising above boundary walls (ie defensive planting) so this would be in keeping with the surrounding area.
- d. Currently the top of the wall is characterised by an unsympathetic heavy trellis and bamboo matting. These are planned to be removed to ensure that it is the top of the masonry wall that guides the eye and provides the strong ‘datum’.
- e. This may not even be a matter for planning.

Given the above we are unclear as to why concealed planters, and their subsequent planting, would in anyway harm that character or appearance of the conservation area. We feel that sensitive planting would be far preferable to the unsightly heavy trellis and actually positively contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The Inclusion of Rooflights

We disagree with the PHCAAC comments that the rooflights would change the *“perception of the house”*. The rooflights would provide additional light into the top floor of the property which has always been a habitable floor (being served by the existing third floor windows). It is not a converted *“attic storey”* as claimed. The rooflights would provide additional light to the rear areas of the third floor which during the summer months can be heavily obscured by the close proximity, and height, of the large lime trees.

We disagree with the PHCAAC comments that the rooflights will harm the *“currently unspoiled roof slopes”* by *“disrupting the integrity of the unimpaired slopes”*. The current roof already contains one large rooflight to the rear elevation. The rooflights we have proposed sit entirely flush within the roof profile, so maintain the integrity of the roof slope, and are specifically a flush design for listed buildings and conservation areas. Further details of this can be found in the Design and Access Statement.

We disagree with the PHCAAC comments that improved amenity is only valid for habitable rooms. Clearly the staircase that provides the ‘spine’ to the house, and which is to be frequently used, would provide significant amenity throughout the property if it could be flooded with daylight (and moonlight) from above.

In our Pre-Application advice with Camden it states the following:

“the proposed roof lights are likely to be acceptable, although a clear specification will be required showing that they will project as little as possible from the flush surface of the slated roof”.

We have therefore specified a flush ‘conservation’ roof light in our application details. We would note, however, that the pair of rooflights proposed above the staircase were not subject to the Pre-Application Advice. Therefore with regards to these two rooflights, we will, of course, take advice from the Conservation Officer, in due course, and action that advice as required.

It is also important to note that rooflights to the rear elevations, and even to some front elevations, characterises a large number of properties on Regent’s Park Road including those that front Primrose Hill Park. Providing additional light, and therefore additional amenity, to historic buildings within conservation areas, is commonplace through the use of low profile rooflights.

Given that the PHCAAC has raised only objections to two proposals we therefore assume that the PHCAAC does not object to the other proposals within the application but would welcome their confirmation of this. We can’t help but think it would be useful if the PHCAAC, where they might be supportive of certain proposals, also include these comments within their “Advice” otherwise the “Advice” appears to be unbalanced and a simply a list of objections. We would welcome their further input on this and are happy to meet them on a date and time convenient to them.

A copy of this response has been sent to Elaine Quigley, the application’s Planning Officer, and to Richard Simpson, Chairman of the PHCAAC.

We trust these comments are of assistance.

Yours faithfully

Humphrey Kelsey
13th August 2018