

PLANNING & LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION FOR

113 ALBERT STREET
NW1 7NB



BEN SMITH ARCHITECTURE

106 Grand Union Studios, 332 Ladbroke Grove, W10 5AD

t: 020 3735 5205 | e: mail@bensmitharchitecture.com | w: bensmitharchitecture.com

INTRODUCTION

Ben Smith Architecture have been appointed by the owners of 113 Albert Street to prepare an application to carry out remedial damp-proofing works to the house including tanking the vaults at the front of the property, improve the habitability and levels of the rear bedroom at lower ground floor level, and improve accessibility into the building.

THE BUILDING

The terraced property at 113 Albert Street is Grade II listed and is included within the Camden Town Conservation Area.

The house is built over five floors among a group of terraces of yellow stock brick facades, with rendered ground floors and traditional metal railings to the first and second floor. Like most of the houses on the street, no. 113 has undergone extensive refurbishment over the years, including mansard roof extensions, rear infills and complete internal refurbishments.

LISTING

113 Albert Street, as many of the houses that form part of this terrace group, was completed circa 1845. The English Heritage listing does not mention any internal features, and very few original features remain. The Listing does make specific reference to the front elevation and iron railings. These cast-iron railings and gates with spike finials onto Albert Street, although part of the listing as a subsidiary feature, are believed to not be original, but actually a modern copy to match the style and design of the original.

Some of the alterations carried out to 113 Albert Street over the years have resulted in significant damp damage to the house, which leaves sections of the interior of the house in a state of disrepair. The proposed works aim to remedy this, and relate primarily to the lower ground floor and rear of the property, which were refurbished in the early 2010's.



THE WORKS

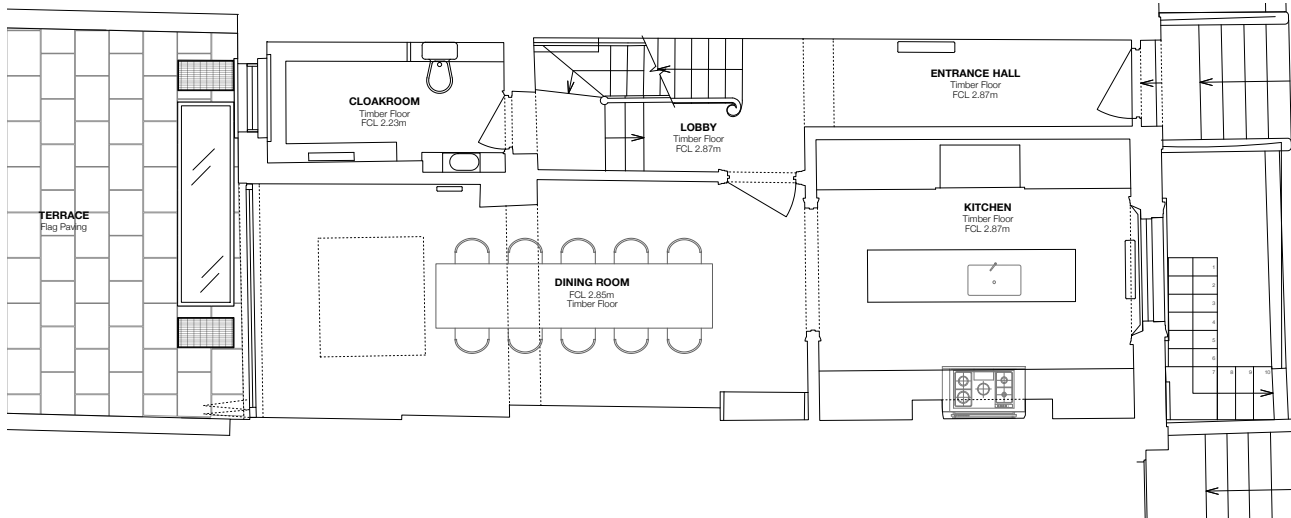
The applicants and their family have lived in the property since they purchased it in the early 2010s, and over the years have invested in refurbishing and bettering their home by renovating the interior, improving the low-quality lower ground floor work of when they first purchased the house, and repairing the sagging asphalted front steps into the property.

The main purpose of this new phase of proposed works is to:

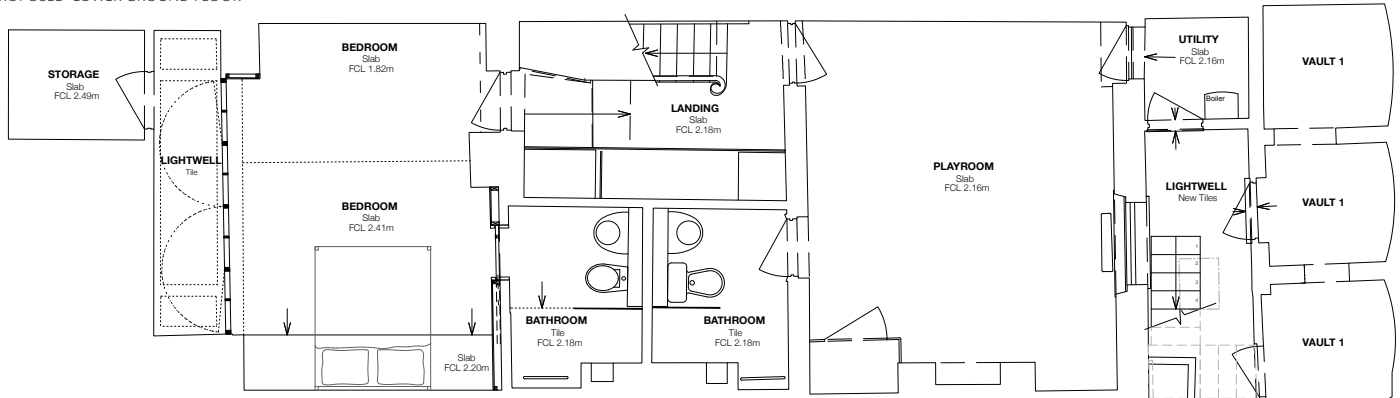
1. rationalize the floor levels in the rear bedroom at lower ground floor level, to ensure this can be used safely as a guest bedroom, including by the applicants' elderly parents;
2. connect both existing lightwells at the rear to make a larger usable space and help bring light into the rear bedroom; and improve how this lightwell relates to the transition between the ground floor and terrace/garden;
3. improve the damp-proofing of the lower ground floor and ground floor level, currently suffering severe damp issues;
4. improve access into the building by replacing the currently steep and impractical steps into the front lightwell, and resurfacing the steps up to the main entrance
5. improve the thermal performance of the property by strategically replacing three windows for double glazed units.

The first three items have been assessed holistically and comprehensively to deliver a single solution that improves the practicality of the building and its water-tightness, with the aim of preserving the integrity of its fabric. The last two items aim to enhance the functionality and aesthetics of the home.

PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR



PROPOSED LOWER GROUND FLOOR



Scale 1:100

1. FLOOR LEVELS

The lower ground floor layout currently comprises of:

- a large bedroom at the front, currently used as a playroom. This faces onto the front lightwell, which will mostly remain unaltered.
- a large bedroom at the rear, used as a guest bedroom, facing onto 2no. separate lightwells.
- 2no. central bathrooms, each accessed directly from each of the bedrooms.

The works aim to improve the currently impractical floor levels in the rear bedroom and create a more functional and luminous lightwell to serve this space. This rear bedroom currently has a step in the middle of the room, which splits the usability of the room but also creates an obstacle difficult to navigate around by guest with limited mobility (such as elderly parents).

In order to address this, but also limit the disruption and excavation works to the house, we propose to essentially “push” this step towards one side of the room. This would remove the step from its current central location but would also allow us to preserve a “safe” zone around the footings of the house, to avoid complicated underpinning works.

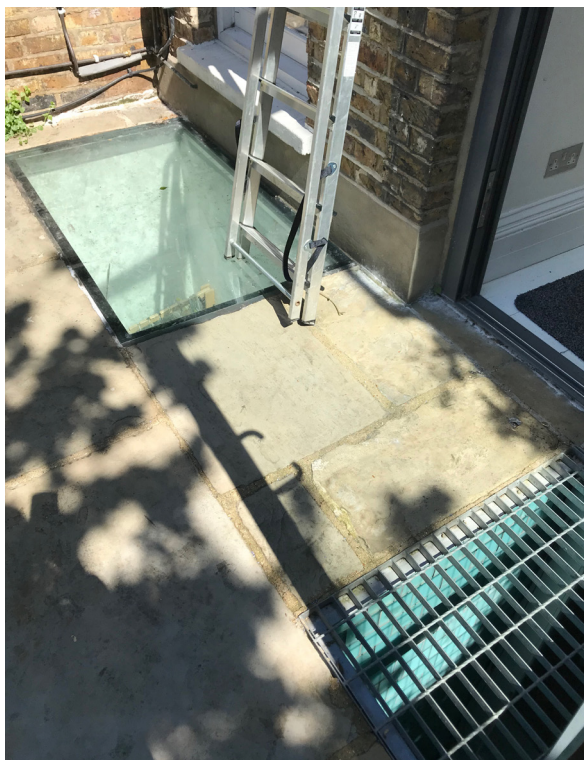
2. LIGHTWELL CONNECTION

The rear bedroom at lower ground floor level currently faces onto 2no. separate lightwells:

- one covered by a metal grille, directly outside the bi-folding doors at ground floor level that lead from the dining room into the garden
- one with a walk-on rooflight that leads to a storage room under the rear terrace.

This current configuration results in two separate small lightwells, which are not practical nor do they maximise natural daylight into the room. The metal grille located directly in front of the doors onto the terrace is in the area with heaviest footfall and makes for both an impractical and uncomfortable transition.

The scheme proposes to combine both existing lightwells by excavating the 900 x 950mm section between both lightwells, to connect them and create a functional, brighter external space ancillary to the guest bedroom. Directly above, at ground floor-level, a large, central walk-on rooflight will allow natural light into the space below and create a more practical and aesthetic threshold between the dining room and terrace. At either side of this central rooflight, two smaller metal grille sections will allow natural ventilation into the space below. The lightwell itself will be rendered white to maximise light into the bedroom below, and a set of double glazed Crittall-styled doors and fixed panels will maximise further the natural daylight into the room.



Existing rooflight and gridded lightwell cover



Lightwell grille cover directly outside main access to garden

3. DAMP-PROOFING

The key driver of carrying works to the house, apart from the functional work described above, is to correct the severe damp-proofing issues of the property. This scope of work is based on an extensive survey commissioned by the applicant, which is appended to this report. Some key issues are:

- Water ingress in the rear elevation, around the existing lightwells, which have caused water to flow into the masonry at GF level, and through the structure into the lower ground floor. As a result, the interior plaster and decorative finishes are stained and damaged.
- The external ground level at the rear drains insufficiently, causing rainwater to pond by the rear elevation and damp conditions at the base of the wall resulting in decaying timber internally.

The damp-proof report recommends various actions to improve the weathering of the house, including:

- As part of the works to connect both lightwells, the damp-proofing at the base of the rear elevation and around the lightwell would be improved, by installing cementitious waterproofing slurry to the walls below ground (retaining and façade) under sand-cement render.
- The level of the rear terrace at ground floor level is to be retained, but the surface drainage would be improved to avoid water stagnating at the base of the elevation. During the works to connect both lightwells, adequate falls will be created away from the building, to ensure the surface water drains towards the rear garden instead of against the building.
- Any damages or cracks to the elevations (brickwork or render) will be adequately repaired and infilled to prevent water ingress into the structure.
- Any rotten or decaying timber is to be replaced like-for-like, and sealant around weak structural openings is to be replaced.
- All internal decorative timber currently stained or affected by damp will be replaced to match the original
- All stained plasterwork and skim is to be treated and redecorated

This will improve the overall appearance of the house by removing the damp-staining in the lower ground floor and preventing these reoccurring.



Mains access with blistered asphalted steps (above)
Interior damp damage (below)



Weak waterproofing point around metal grille over rear lightwell

4. IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESS

MAIN ACCESS

The main access into the (raised) ground floor is via a series of steps up from street level. This arrangement is repeated along the terrace group of buildings, although the finish and treatment of these differs amongst the properties. In the case of 113 Albert Street, the steps are coated in a bituminous treatment that, as can be seen in the appended damp investigation report, show signs of damp damage. As part of the works we proposed to strip back the existing damaged asphalt and clad the treads and risers in Portland stone, with bull-nosed edges to the treads, to match neighbouring properties, such as no. 115. This would help enhance the overall appearance of the main access, and the terrace group in general.

LIGHTWELL ACCESS

The property has a secondary entrance via the front lightwell into the lower ground floor area. This is accessed through the railings and gate that run the length of the terrace (subsidiary feature of the Listing), and down a steep cast iron staircase.

The gate itself is only approximately 650mm wide, and the stair is not only steep but also slippery due to water collecting on the treads. The rubbish and recycling is stored in the front lightwell, away from clear view from the street, and the narrow steps therefore serve as the only route for the waste disposal removal. The current configuration with narrow, steep, slippery steps, and a narrow gate onto the street, makes maneuvering even the smallest of the council's recycling bins up to street level a hazardous activity.

To remedy this we propose to widen the existing (non-original) gate by a single finial to achieve a more comfortable (approx.) 700mm wide opening. We would then also replace the current impractical stair with a new cast iron one, in the style of the existing, but with a consistent, more gentle pitch and perforated treads (to avoid stagnating water) for ease of use. We have been liaising with a specialist metalworker to ensure we can achieve a finish for both railings/gate and stair that respect the history and fabric of the building to preserve the consistent style of the building and rest of the terrace group.



New proposed steps to raised ground floor to be clad in Portland stone to match neighbouring properties



Existing steep, slippery and narrow stairs leading to front lightwell

5. WINDOW UPGRADE

Finally, and in order to improve the overall performance of the building, and in specific the comfort of two key bedrooms, we propose to replace two of the original sash windows, for new double-glazed units that matches the design of the original.

The first of these windows is located at lower ground floor level and faces onto the lightwell at the front. Although this window is on the front elevation and faces onto Albert Street, it is located below the levels of the pavement, and so not prominently visible from the street. This window serves a guest bedroom that doubles up as a playroom for the applicant's young children. The current single glazing makes the room drafty and uncomfortable during the colder months, and a loud bedroom onto a street busy with heavy pedestrian traffic even during the night. As you can also see on the report the window itself shows signs of water damage. Replacing this window for an identical window with double glazing would not only improve the habitability of the room and improve the performance of the home, but also make good some of the issues created by the damp problem.

The second of the sash windows we propose replacing is located at the rear of the property, at third floor (roof) level, so it remains practically invisible from external view. This window serves as one of the children's bedrooms and the single glazing, combined with the poorly insulated roof above, makes the room difficult to heat in the winter, and with its south-westerly orientation hot in the summer. As above, replacing the window in this frequently used room will improve the habitability of the space.

In addition to these two original sash windows, this application also hopes to get permission to replace the existing but not original French doors that allow access to the existing first floor terrace at the rear. These windows were added to the property during one of the numerous renovations that were done on the building over the years. We propose to replace these glazed doors with like-for-like French doors, with double glazing.

We understand the importance of preserving the appearance and character of Listed Buildings, and sash windows are an integral part of this. Your Camden Planning Guidance (CPG1) stresses this significance, but also expresses an understanding that, under certain conditions, the replacement of original windows for new double-glazed units can be acceptable. We strongly believe that improving the energy performance of the building to making it a more habitable space with minimum energetic consumption whilst preserving the character of the property is achievable, and should be considered. The replacement casings would be custom made so that window frames, glazing bars and general appearance of the new windows match those of the original. These will be manufactured following the guidelines and advice of English Heritage, by a fabricator with experience working on historic buildings.



MATERIALS

The scheme proposes little external work to the front elevation, and all that proposed is either to address the damp-proofing issues of the house, improve the habitability of the rooms and accessibility to the property, or enhance the overall appearance of the Listed Building

To the rear at ground floor and above, the scheme does not propose any external work except remedial work to address the damp-proofing issues highlighted in the report and the replacement of a single sash window at roof level. Any work or replacements will be strictly to match the design of existing.

Externally at lower ground floor level, the lightwell walls will be rendered white with light-coloured Crittall-style doors and fixed glazing to maximize the natural light into the bedroom.

Internally, the original floor and lath and plaster linings, as well as other original features (fireplaces, ceiling roses, cabinetry etc.) have already been replaced over the years, so the proposed work to the lower ground floor does not alter any original features.

The floor layouts are unaffected by the works, and the upper floors will remain unaltered, except for minor remedial decorative work.

SERVICES

The existing services to the house will remain unchanged.

AMOUNT

The proposed works would increase the area of the external lightwells at the rear by 0.9sqm (from 2.7sqm to 3.6sqm). The works proposed does not increase the internal floor area of the property.

LANDSCAPING

The current configuration at the rear of the property comprises of a deep terraced section with flag paving directly against the rear elevation, with a generous garden beyond.

The scheme proposes to retain the existing paved area but create a subtle fall away from the building and towards to garden, to work with the recommendation of the damp-proofing report. The existing paving slabs will be retained and reused.

ACCESS

Access to the main house is from Albert Street and will remain unchanged by the proposed works.

REFUSE & RECYCLING

The refuse and recycling route will remain unaffected by the works.