

Camden Square Conservation Area Advisory Committee

Spiritualist Temple
Rochester Square
London NW1 9RY

Date: 31 May 2019

Planning application Reference: 2019/1997/P

Proposal: Demolition of a rear boundary wall and construction of a replacement wall upon completion of refurbishment of the Spiritualist Temple, together with minor building works.

Summary: The proposed development fails to maintain or enhance the Conservation Area. The drawings are inadequate and information is missing and in its current form the application should be rejected. Furthermore, until these issues are resolved, the Council may wish to ask the developers to cease work on the site.

Comments:

1. It is noted that the Use Class has been identified as D1. There is thus no change of use required
2. The quality, accuracy and integrity of the technical drawings give concern
 - 2.1. Whilst the drawings appear at first to be technically adequate, closer scrutiny reveals several errors and omissions which affect the understanding of the intent of the scheme.
 - 2.2. The proposed ground floor plan and rear elevation do not show the same thing – elevation shows 2 x replacement doors, and the plan shows one of these doors infilled with engineering brick.
 - 2.3. No Section markers are given on the proposed plans to relate to proposed sections. If the CC and DD sections are in the same place as the existing plan, then the proposed sections drawn are incorrect. (Both cut through the staircase, which is at the front of the building, whereas section DD on the existing plan, cuts through the rear of the main building).
 - 2.4. No proposed roof plan has been submitted.

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- 2.5. On the proposed window elevations drawing, the existing ridge rooflights are shown as being retained. However given that it is proposed that some of the windows are being replaced for thermal efficiency reasons, such a large expanse of existing glazing might be subject to some change for the same reasons – and if this is the case then details should be given.
- 2.6. Some decorative features of the existing building have not been shown on the drawings (such as the Star on the apex of the rear elevation). We would want some assurance that no decorative features will be removed unless specifically sanctioned in the planning approval process
3. In terms of scale and proportion, it is noted that the proposal utilises existing openings and form.
4. The choice of materials fails to meet the basic requirements of the conservation area
 - 4.1. The image of proposed brickwork is not readable from the website, being an unknown file format. Therefore, no comment can be made on this.
 - 4.2. The change of window (to uPVC) and door type in the rear and side elevations is wholly unacceptable.
 - 4.3. It is possible to replicate the fine lines of the existing metal windows whilst still providing thermally efficient and acoustically-sealed windows.
 - 4.4. The Agent's comment that the proposed uPVC windows' benefits outweigh the "less than substantial harm" to the Conservation area is disingenuous, when an alternative choice of material could provide the functional requirements without doing harm.
 - 4.5. The same can be said of the proposed doors to the rear elevation, the materials of which have not been specified on the application form or in the drawings. The drawings submitted clearly show decorative doors with attractive fanlights over in the existing elevations, and it is proposed that these are to be replaced with shorter, plain solid doors of an unspecified material with larger plain glazing over. This too is doing "substantial harm" to the conservation area.

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- 4.6. It is also worth mentioning that although this is a rear elevation, and therefore suggested to be less important, it is in fact a street-facing one since the site extends a full block between two streets.
5. As mentioned in paras 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5 the style of the proposed new windows and doors neither maintains nor enhances the Conservation Area. Indeed, by the Agent's own admission, the proposed windows and doors harm the Conservation Area
6. The proposed landscaping – if indeed that is what it can be called - fails to maintain or enhance the conservation area
 - 6.1. The rear garden plan does not indicate the location for the replacement Hornbeam tree (as required by a previous planning agreement), or indeed any other landscaping.
 - 6.2. The application appears to be primarily concerned with the rebuilding of the rear garden wall. The comment on Garden drawings, however, states "proposed boundary wall to be retained as existing". Sadly this wall has already been demolished.
 - 6.3. No existing drawing of the rear garden wall has been submitted, whereas an accurate survey of this wall together with photographs should have been obtained prior to any demolition being carried out. Archive information relating to this should be located and submitted as a record of the existing, in order that the proposal can be assessed as an accurate like for like replacement as stated.
7. Whilst bringing-into-use the currently vacant Spiritualist Temple could be seen as a positive thing, the proposed development fails to acknowledge or respect the historic use of the site
 - 7.1. The internal subdivision of the space does not acknowledge the historic use of the site as a place of worship.
 - 7.2. On the proposed mezzanine plan, dry lining internally appears to be taken across the inside of the existing stained glass windows which would be regrettable, although the sections do not seem to indicate this.
 - 7.3. The insertion of a mezzanine in the majority of the main space is also regrettable.

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8. Given the extent of the internal works, it is questionable whether this could be termed "minor building works" as in the application description.
9. To fully assess the viability and technical aspects of the internal layout of the development, as mentioned in para 2 is not possible with the deficiencies in the current drawings
 - 9.1. The ground floor rooms labelled "EE" and "TT" do not appear to have any natural light or ventilation. Mechanical ventilation would be required for these rooms if they are to be used as nursery spaces (assuming this is their function). Such extract would therefore require ducting to the outside, however no detail has been given regarding this on the elevations.
 - 9.2. On the mezzanine level, there also appears to be no access to openable windows. If this is the case, then mechanical ventilation will also be required here.
 - 9.3. It is noted that some borrowed light appears to be offered via internal windows. What needs to be considered is whether this is an acceptable environment for young children in which to spend extended periods of time.
 - 9.4. Clarification of what the room labels "EE" and "TT" mean would be helpful.
10. The majority of the proposed changes to the building fabric neither maintain nor enhance the Conservation Area. Indeed, they are harmful to it.
 - 10.1. The insertion of uPVC windows and doors of unspecified finish, brings significant harm: more sympathetic alternatives should be investigated. It is entirely possible to provide the required thermal and acoustic performance without resorting to uPVC.
 - 10.2. As noted above, the replacement of the existing (already demolished) boundary wall is proposed to be a like for like replacement, however no adequate existing information for the wall has been supplied. This is fundamental to reinstating as existing.
11. Due to the technical inadequacies of the drawings and missing information, we would recommend refusal of this application in its current form. It is of some concern that work has already begun before the planning process has been completed. In such a situation it would seem appropriate to instruct the

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developers to cease work until a formal decision on the application has been reached.

12. Finally, it should be noted that when the development of the Spiritualist Temple was first mooted several years ago, there was some concern over the legal ownership of the property and whether those pressing for its development had the right to do so. Has this been resolved? If not, could the Council's willingness to register the application be challenged?

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of David Blagbrough.

Signed:
David Blagbrough
Chair
Camden Square CAAC

Date: 31 May 2019