

36 Lancaster Grove NW3

Heritage Assessment

Fitting out tower to provide a single
apartment 19

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1 Scope

- 1.1 This assessment has been made to consider heritage impact of proposals to fit out the hose tower of the former Fire Station at 36 Lancaster Grove, London NW3 as a single residential unit and is limited to that part of the building alone. This is delineated on the drawings.
- 1.2 It is based on examination of the building and archive material in the local history study centre and the London Metropolitan archive, together with the Survey of London and relevant planning guidance which includes the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 1.3 The study has been produced by Anthony Walker, a Conservation Architect Accredited in Building Conservation and with a postgraduate Diploma in Building Conservation. He has been a Visiting Professor at Kingston University and he lectures on Building Conservation matters at the Architectural Association and at Cambridge University.

2 Site location and setting

- 2.1 The site forms a triangular shape at the intersection of Lancaster Grove and Eton Avenue. The whole area was part of the Eton College estate which was sold for residential development towards the end of the 19th century.
- 2.2 The land used for the fire station lies within the Belsize Conservation Area, subsection 3 Eton Avenue.

3 Historical background and significance

- 3.1 Belsize Fire Station is a grade II* listed building, built in 1914-15 under the direction of Charles Canning Winmill of the LCC Architects' Department where he had been since 1892. He started work in the housing section but, following a significant fire in 1897, he was appointed to design and supervise the erection of a new fire station in Red Cross Street. In December 1899 the fire brigade section of the department was reorganised under Owen Fleming, with Winmill as second in command. The fire brigade section was given responsibility for doubling the number of London fire stations with the aim to establish six new stations every year
- 3.2 Belsize Fire Station was quite late in the fire station programme..
- 3.3 As noted by Summerson, the building combines the traditional external detailing of a larger domestic building with a robust and functional interior. Externally the proposals only make changes at the roof level below the parapet of the tower. Here the chimney flue from the basement below unlike the tall chimneys in the pitched roofs seen in the photograph in Appendix A projects only minimally above the parapet to the tower to the extent that it is not visible viewed from Lancaster Grove.
- 3.4 The main working areas of the station are united by the bold central staircase, and are all designed with a simple finishes.

APPENDIX A View of building from Lancaster Grove.

- 3.5 The Arts and Crafts domestic informality of the designated heritage asset makes it open to careful and sensitive adaptation. The internal robust finishes provide an interesting contrast to the delicacy of some of the external detailing and are strong enough to be retained. The brickwork is in an English bond with significant areas of external decorative bonding.
APPENDIX B Tower brickwork detailing
- 3.6 The London Metropolitan Archive has plans of the original building from 1913 and some with later alterations.
APPENDIX C Ground and first floor plans 1913
- 3.7 The tower contains the central staircase linking the ground first and second floor levels. Above that there is a circular staircase in one corner giving access to the upper levels of the tower with space for hoses to be hung from the top of the building.
APPENDIX D Central staircase showing a third pole for fast evacuation response.
- 3.8 The tower rises in the centre of the complex. From the third floor upwards access is by a tight spiral staircase and there is an open void in the centre of the small floor which is lit at each level by a west-facing window.
APPENDIX E Tower as it is today.
- 3.9 Central staircase. This is an impressive central feature at the lower levels which is both visually striking and at the heart of the functional activity in the building. It has a steep staircase and use in the case of an incident was supplemented by a third pole located at the western end of the well. This functionality has now been lost with the removal of the pole in the stairwell which clearly negates the original use of the tower.
APPENDIX F Photograph of stair tower interior.
- 3.10 Upper levels of the tower comprise a compact space at each level. There is a window at each level providing light and ventilation and the spiral access staircase in one corner. When the Fire Station was in active use there was an opening in the floor to allow the hoses to hang and drain into a floor gulley.
- 3.11 Significance
The building is listed grade II* and is noted as being *GV II* Fire station 1912-5, by Charles Canning*
Windmill of the Fire Brigade Branch of the London County Council Architects Department.
- The materials are brick with tile roof and tall brick chimney-stacks. This is true for the majority of the chimney stacks but clearly does not apply to that in the tower.
- The listing description describes it as: *A clever interpretation of an Arts and Crafts-style house, adapted to meet the requirements of the fire brigade. The elevation to Eton Avenue could be mistaken for a terrace of cottages.*

With its tall chimneys, casements with leaded lights, canted timber bays sitting just under the deep eaves, and ground-floor bay with moulded brick mullions and transoms. Its rear, facing the yard, is a more typical LCC design with deck-accessed fireman's flats. Also impressive is the monumental tower, which does not disrupt the domestic character despite its height and breadth; the segmental arched and lattice work recessed panels in the brickwork soften its bulk.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION: Belsize Fire Station is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * It is one of the most distinctive and original of a remarkable series of fire stations built by the LCC between 1896-1914, each executed to a bespoke design, which are widely admired as being among the most accomplished examples of LCC civic architecture of this rich and prolific period; * High architectural quality - as manifest in design, detail, materials and sensitivity to context; * It is also one of the most intact, having not been extended externally, and retaining its original timber appliance bay doors, plan form and numerous other features; * In the wider context of Edwardian architecture, this station is an exemplar of the use of a domestic idiom, the Arts and Crafts style, in a municipal building; * The building groups well with its neighbours in this area noted for its concentration of distinctive Arts and Crafts houses, including the many listed houses on Eton Avenue.*

- 3.12 The background to the development of fire stations is set out in *London's Historic Fire Stations*, produced by English Heritage and the London Fire Brigade in 2010. The form of historic fire stations varies considerably. Architectural style varied and often reflected current fashion. After 1900 a significant change in design came about with an emphasis on British Design and Civic pride. It is stated in *London's Historic Fire Stations* that '*The development of architectural detailing ranging from Classical and Queen Anne through to Arts and Crafts can be seen producing stations that resemble suburban mansions*'. *The crucial emphasis seems to be designing for the location – hence Cannon Street station of 1906 had a façade like a city bank while Belsize of 1916 emulates the artists' studios of its neighbourhood.*

4 Relevant National and Local Conservation Legislation and Guidance

- 4.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990
- 4.1.1 Section 7 requires consent to be obtained for any works which affect the special architectural or historic interest of a listed building.

- 4.1.2 Conservation areas are to be designated as areas of special architectural or historic interest and special attention shall be paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.
- 4.2 National Planning Policy Framework NPPF 2019 and Planning Practice Guidance PPG
- 4.2.1 *At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.*
- 4.2.2 Section 16 deals with conservation and the following extracts are relevant to the proposals.
- When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.*
- Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.*
- 4.3 London Plan
- POLICY 7.8 HERITAGE ASSETS AND ARCHAEOLOGY*
- A *London's heritage assets and historic environment, including listed buildings, registered historic parks and gardens and other natural and historic landscapes, conservation areas, World Heritage Sites, registered battlefields, scheduled monuments, archaeological remains and memorials should be identified, so that the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance and of utilising their positive role in place shaping can be taken into account.*
- D *Development affecting heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.*
- 4.4 Camden Local Plan
- 4.4.1 In Core Policy CS14, Conserving Heritage, it is stated that the Council will ensure that Camden's buildings are 'attractive, safe and easy to use by (b) preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings'. This is amplified in paragraph 14.9, confirming that conservation area statements will be material considerations in assessing applications.
- 4.4.2 Camden Planning Guidance 1, Design
- Section 3 Heritage. Camden has a rich architectural heritage; development within conservation areas will only be permitted if it preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- Section 4, Extensions, alterations and conservatories. Alterations should take into account the character and design of the property and its surroundings, that windows, doors and materials should complement the existing...
- 4.4.3 Policy DP25 - Conserving Camden's heritage Conservation areas
- In order to maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will:*

- a) *take into account the conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;*
- b) *only permit development, within conservation areas, which preserves and enhances the character and appearance of that area;*

Listed buildings

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- e) *prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown which outweigh the case for retention;*
 - f) *only grant consent for a change of use of, or alterations and extensions to, a listed building where it considers that this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building;*
- and*
- g) *not permit development which it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.*

4.5 Belsize Conservation Area

4.5.1 36 Lancaster Grove lies within sub area 3 of the Conservation Area.

4.5.2 This sub area is described as having predominantly Victorian housing with some Edwardian examples, predominantly of two storeys with an attic level. The area is notable for its variety of styles but with a general consistency of materials with red brick walls and roof tiles. Eton Avenue is described as having large detached villas, predominantly in Queen Anne style, but with many Arts and Crafts examples. Recurrent themes include canted bays which can be seen in the existing features of the Fire Station.

4.5.3 The fire station is noted as an impressive Arts and Crafts building, with steep hipped roofs and intricate brick detailing, which forms a landmark.

4.6 England, 'Making Changes to Heritage Assets'

4.6.1 This document which has evolved from the Planning Policy Statement 5 Practice Guide was published in February 2016.

4.6.2 Paragraph 2 of the introduction recognises the need to accommodate change. *This advice promotes positive, well-informed and collaborative conservation, the aim of which is to recognise and reinforce the historic significance of places, while accommodating the changes necessary to ensure that people can continue to use and enjoy them.*

4.6.3 In paragraph 3 it is stated that *An unreasonable inflexible approach will prevent action that could give a building new life;*

4.7 It is apparent that the aspects of the heritage assets and the setting which contribute positively to their significance are those which have been identified in section 4 above. While it is proposed to make some alterations to the interior of the tower these do not harm the appearance of the character, architectural or historic interest of the tower. The opening to provide access to the roof and the removal of the short chimney which is not in character with the tall stacks set into the main roof is not visible from the ground and do not harm the appearance of the building

5 Proposals

5.1 The proposals are set out in the architects' Design and Access Statement.

5.2 For the purpose of this Heritage Assessment they may be summarised as fitting out the top floors of the hose tower to provide residential accommodation.

- 5.3 The works are predominantly internal and there are no changes to the external vertical faces of the tower visible from the ground.
- 5.4 Access will be by means of the retained spiral staircase. A small new staircase is provided to the top floor discretely located in the corner at the end of the wardrobe to provide access to the roof. A hatch will be provided to allow access to the roof and a minimal safety rail will be provided fixed to the back of the parapet wall.
- 5.5 The central opening is proposed to be infilled with an openable construction and provide a false back illuminated lay light to resemble to existing opening at second floor level and with an inset metal trim on the floor above.

6 Assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance of the Designated Heritage Asset and the Belsize Conservation Area

- 6.1 The external form of the building is unchanged and thus there is no impact on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 6.2 Externally the use of the interior of the tower as a single dwelling unit has no impact on the architectural or historic interest of the heritage asset. Other than the removal of a stubby chimney stack which is much shorter than the tall chimneys on the main roof and is an incongruous feature the alterations do not affect the external appearance of fire station.
- 6.3 Internally the form of the external tower wall is retained. An enclosure is formed around the spiral staircase echoing the corner into which it is tucked at present. The existing opening in the floor will be infilled with an openable floor and underneath will have a laylight reflecting the limited daylight which came through the opening but which when in use for hanging hoses would have been largely obscured.
- 6.5 Access to 'flat 19' is by a new lobby on the second floor which has been introduced for fire safety reasons. This area leads to what at present are roof spaces for which consent has been granted to convert them to flats on either side of the main staircase. The nature of this area has been changed with the closure of the fire station the dominant element of the hanging hoses will have gone and the upper landing leading to roof storage will become the access to the approved flats.
- 6.6 The form of the tower, the access and the central laylight will be discrete and retain much of their present significance consistent with the residential use. Changes will only be evident to those gaining access to the space and for whom the history of its use can be made available in other forms.

7 Summary.

- 7.1 The plans which accompany this application show clearly that the form of the tower is retained and that there is no impact on the external appearance or the character of the tower as a landmark within the Conservation Area.
- 7.2 Internally the overall space of the tower is retained and, as described above, the impact of the central opening is retained, albeit in a different form. The original form with hanging hoses has already been changed since currently there is no need for hanging space for hoses to drain down. The layout with a corner circular staircase is retained, and the new screen maintains the form of the existing short walls, some of which are removed but where feasible are mostly retained.

7.3 Planning applications 2018/4910/L and 2018/4394/P were refused at appeal by decision, dated 1st August 2019.

7.3.1 These applications were carefully considered by the applicant and their team in the preparation of this submission. For ease of reference the numbering which follows is that which is used in appeal APP/X5210/Y/19/3222128.

Paragraph 7. It is confirmed that the by the time of the appeal the building was no longer in use as a fire station, and that the appellants had secured planning and listed building consent for the rest of the building.

Paragraph 9. In the Reasons for Designation (see below) the fire station is described as being 'one of the most intact with its plan form and numerous other features retained'.

Paragraph 10. It is stated that the tower is an impressive structure. It should be recalled that there are no alterations to the exterior of the tower and the only modifications are to two small chimneys which in fact are not visible from street level. The interior is certainly not visible from street level.

Paragraphs 11 and 12. It is confirmed that a key part of the tower's significance '*rests on its impressive appearance*'. Internally the narrow spiral stair and hose drying chamber, together with a slightly larger hatch to provide additional light to the 5th floor bedroom are items which the Inspector gave as examples of *minor alterations (that) would not materially compromise the external appearance or character of the tower which contributes to the special interest of the listed building and provides a landmark within the Conservation Area*.

Paragraph 42. The Inspector noted that while local residents may have expressed concern about the effects on the Conservation area, in practice the limited extent of the external alterations would mean that there would be little if any effect on public or private views and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area would be preserved.

Paragraph 47. The Inspector confirms that in providing an additional dwelling with reasonable living conditions this would contribute to the Borough's housing stock.

7.3.2 The internal alterations do constitute less than substantial harm and, in accordance with paragraph 193 of the 2019 NPPF, make it possible to achieve a viable use of the building while retaining its historic and architectural interest.

7.4 Although the conversion does include alterations to the interior of the tower the proposals do make provision for access by friends and others who otherwise would have no ready form of access to the upper three floors of the tower and provide access to long distance views over the surroundings.

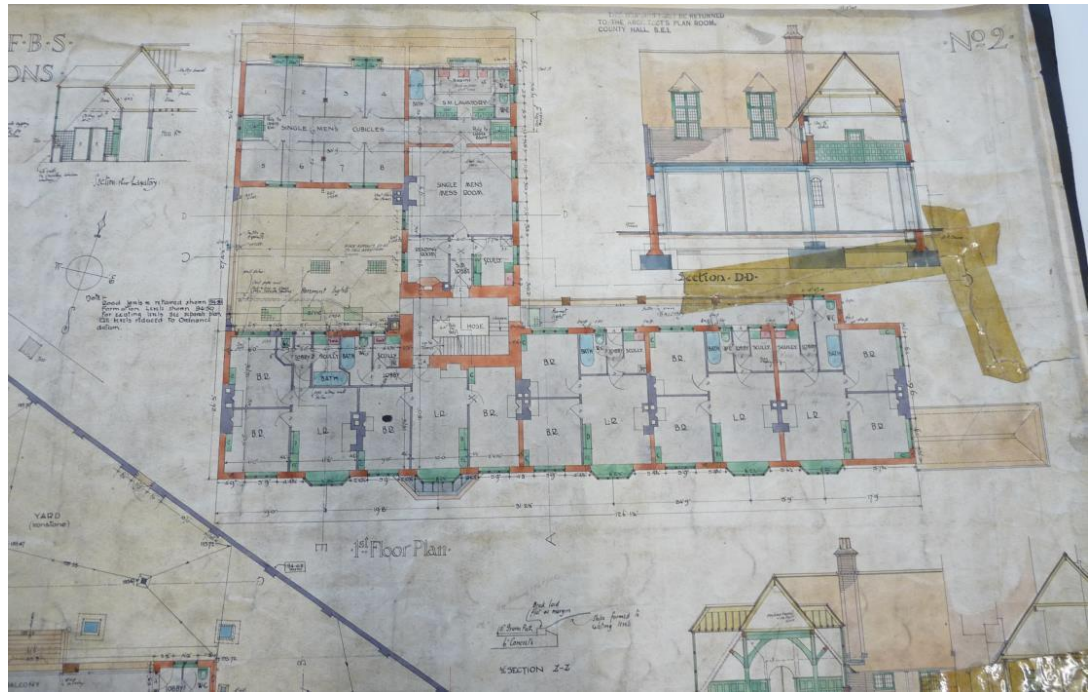
7.5 It is considered that the conversion of the tower does provide a benefit to all those who are able to gain access to the upper floors and roof, and it would seem that the use specific design renders it unusable for other uses thus denying it having any viable use without alterations being permitted.

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**APPENDICES
APPENDIX A**

Fire station viewed from Lancaster Grove





APPENDIX E

Tower as it is today showing the modelling of the tower and the decorative brickwork



APPENDIX F

Photograph of stair tower interior



APPENDIX G

1913 West Elevation facing adjoining house Millbank showing windows in the tower
By courtesy of the London Metropolitan Archive City of London



