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17th September 2020

Dear Ms. Meynell,

Re application ref. 2020/3157/P and 2020/3588/L for roof extension to 33 Betterton Street.

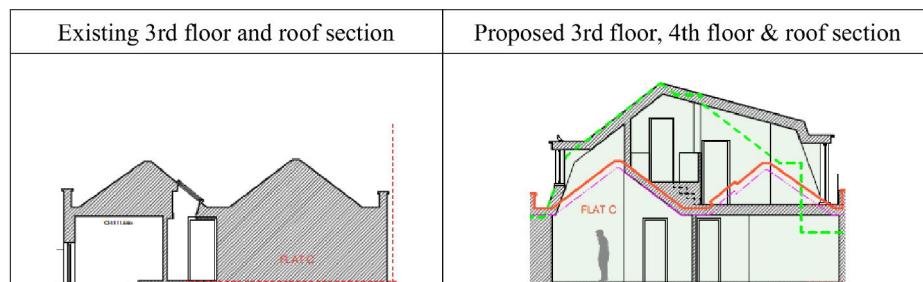
We OBJECT to this application on conservation and amenity grounds, as well as the grounds of incorrect / incomplete information upon which to determine the application.

Conservation aspects

The application seeks to transform the roof and add a storey to the building which is out of keeping with its historic character and which harms the conservation area.

The building's listing states that it comprises 4 storeys and basement. This application seeks a fundamental change to 5 storeys. It would be achieved by the destruction of the characteristic early 18th century shallow double-pitch 'M' roof. Few of these survive in central London, and their preservation is important. This one was repaired sensitively when the building was refurbished, like many in the area, in the 1980's, and most of its historic fabric remains. It is a feature of special architectural and historic interest, not least because the building follows a typical pattern introduced following the Great Fire of London. These roofs were designed to slow the spread of fire at height.

At present the top floor flat cleverly uses space within the shallow pitched roof without damaging it. The applicant's proposals would sweep this away and add a bulky modern roof form, one storey higher. These sections from the applicant's pack show a comparison:



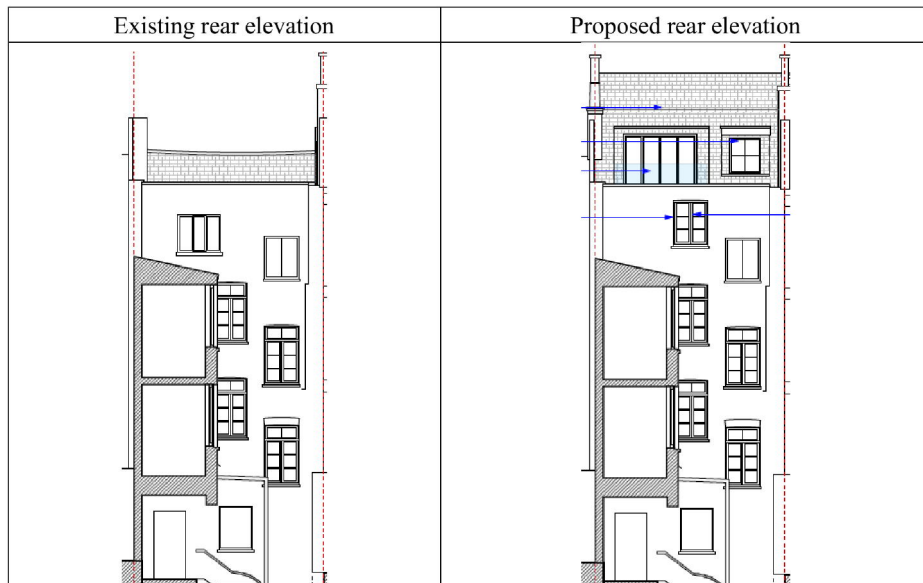
We utterly oppose the view presented in the applicant's heritage statement that unifying the front of the building with the rest of the street is a good thing, and that "it is highly desirable to expect all changes to be unified within the setting of Seven Dials". Indeed, the council's planning committee made clear that this is not Camden's view when refusing a nearby application (ref. 2017/5659/P) at 39-49 Neal Street. That development would have introduced uniformity to the roofscape, and in the process erased the charm of a street that is characterised by the variety of its frontages. Below is an image of the street commissioned by The Seven Dials Trust, and used at that planning committee.



The Seven Dials Conservation Area was designated at the outset with 'Outstanding' status - one of only 38 such areas out of c. 6,000 conservation areas in England. Many of the late Stuart houses remain, but the streets reflect the changes of later centuries, with an unusual number of early 19th century shopfronts and brewery buildings. There is no merit in adding to the height of old buildings to match newer buildings and, in the process, destroying the historic character.

The materials proposed for the development at 33 Betterton Street are likewise out of keeping. For example, grey roof slate is shown in the plans, which is not used on other buildings from this era in the conservation area; terracotta clay would be historically correct, and that is the current roof finish.

At the rear, the application abandons any attempt for sympathetic alteration, suggesting a floor-to-ceiling modern window and Juliet balcony – both of which are inappropriate on a listed, early 18th century dwelling house. These elevations from the applicant's pack show a comparison:



Internally, it is unclear from the applicant's plans how much architectural harm will be caused. However, the building's listing states that it has a "good early C18 staircase to top of house with closed, moulded string, square newels and twisted balusters", and part of this would certainly be destroyed under these proposals.

Amenity aspects

The application seeks to make external and internal alterations which will harm the amenity of neighbouring residents.

At the rear, 33 Betterton Street faces a number of other dwellings to the back and side. The addition of a 4th floor, with floor-to-ceiling windows and a Juliet balcony on the parapet, will lead to those dwellings suffering increased overlooking and noise. If you were minded to grant any consent, then we would ask that a planning condition be attached that these windows should be fitted with frosted glass, and remain closed after 9pm.

Internally, detail is again unclear from the applicant's plans, but at the very least these proposals seem to constitute over-development to a building with narrow internal access. Consent in 2015 to convert the ground floor to a 3 bedroom maisonette resulted in doubling the building's bedrooms from 3 to 6. This 2020 application would add yet another bedroom, and one that needs to be accessed by passing all the other flats.

Incomplete and incorrect information

The building provides fire escape to neighbouring dwellings at 20 Endell Street, and perhaps to others. The impact of the proposals on these has not been addressed by the applicant.

The development would be done against the wishes of all occupants of the building at 33 Betterton Street, including, importantly, the holder of a long lease on flat 3 where the alterations are proposed. The applicant has not explained why an application is desirable under these circumstances.

There seem to be a number of errors in the application, including the roof tiling mentioned above, as well as the existing roof shape at 20 Endell Street and the configuration of the rear elevation at 31 and at 33 Betterton Street as shown on the plans. We ask that the applicant be required to provide correct information.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bax
Chair, Planning Subcommittee

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