

Christian Leigh

Chartered Town Planner

Leigh & Glennie Ltd 6 All Souls Road, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 9EA
01344 297094 | mail@christianleigh.co.uk | www.christianleigh.co.uk

31 Belsize Park Gardens, London, NW3 4JH

Planning Statement in support of an application for a side dormer, new windows on side elevation of house, alteration to front garden and lower ground floor elevation, alteration to rear elevation and terrace at ground and lower ground floor, and infilling of rear modern lightwell with alterations to basement

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Introduction

1. This Statement has been prepared to support a planning application for works at 31 Belsize Park Gardens, London. The property is a single family dwellinghouse that lies within the Belsize Conservation Area. The proposed development is described above and in further detail in the accompanying Design & Access Statement (DAS) by Jonathan Tuckey Design.
2. The appraisal in this Statement follows a visit to the property and the wider area, along with a review of relevant planning policies and planning history of the surrounding area. The most relevant items in this regard are Policies A1, A5, D1 and D2 of the Camden Local Plan 2017, the Belsize Conservation Area Design Guide (2010), Belsize Conservation Area Statement (2003), Design (2019, and as proposed to be amended 2020) and the Basements SPD (2018, and as proposed to be amended 2020).
3. The property is not listed but, as the site lies within a conservation area, it is necessary to identify the significance of that Area as a heritage asset in order to carry out the appraisal contained in Section 9 of the NPPF. Such an assessment is set out in the Belsize Conservation Area Statement (BCAS). This recognises Belsize Park Gardens as being at the core of the Conservation Area, being a residential street characterised by the repeated form of the stucco villas, whose design gives a strong identity and unity of appearance to the Area (page 12).
4. The continuous building line and repeated forms, with narrow gaps between, assist in this uniform rhythm. There have been modifications, extensions and alterations to many properties, as shall be examined later, but the significance of the Area as a heritage asset therefore derives from this pattern and consistency of buildings and the street pattern.
5. The main elements of work raise distinct issues and so are addressed in turn, namely:
 - The side dormer extension and windows to the side elevation



Directors:
Christian Leigh BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI
Jane Glennie BA(Hons) MA

- The alterations to the rear of the property
 - The alterations to the front lower ground floor and front garden
 - Modifications to the basement and rear lightwell
6. There are also internal changes proposed to the house. As the property is not listed these are not matters that require permission or consent from the Council.

Side dormer and windows

7. There is currently accommodation within the roof of the property, with dormers at the front and rear and with rooflights to the side. As demonstrated in the DAS, and also seen in the attached photographs, the character of Belsize Park Gardens is one of large semi-detached Italianate villas that have seen many modifications to the roofs: there is a majority of altered roofs over unaltered roofs. The adjoining property of No. 33 has a side dormer.
8. Many of these alterations are visible and of poor design, whilst others are more subdued in their appearance and relate better to the host property and the wider area. But the key feature of all these changes is that there is no consistency at roof level: changes have occurred, and continue to occur. The recital of relevant planning history for nearby properties contained in the DAS shows that permission for these changes has continued into recent years.
9. It is important to note in this regard that the BCAS for this part of Belsize Conservation Area does not refer to the changes at roof level being a detractor to the Area *per se*. Page 13 refers to '*examples of inappropriate dormers, a poor side extension and prominent roof terrace areas (i.e. at Nos. 2-6 Belsize Grove)*', whilst page 16 of the BCAS sets out the negative features of the Area and, again, refers only to those dormer and terrace extensions that are '*inappropriate*' or '*prominent*'.
10. Thus, with the great majority of properties having seen changes to the roofs, it is clear that – provided such changes are undertaken with sensitivity to the host property – then further changes can be accepted. Such an approach to design is also supported by Policy D1 of the Local Plan which states as criterion a) that the Council will require that development '*respects local context and character*'. That is also contained within the Key Message at Section 2 of the Design SPG.
11. The submitted drawings show the proposed side elevation would have similar proportions to the existing front and rear dormers at the property, and so would not impose in height, scale or proportions that appear out of balance with the rest of the roof. The siting is kept behind the retained chimneys, to further reduce any visual impact and to ensure retention of original architectural features to the property. The BCAS does not oppose new roof extensions: page 36 states that what is opposed are '*overly large, inappropriately proportioned dormers, and the addition of mansard roofs*'. The proposals at No. 31 would not breach this guidance.
12. The proposed windows on the side elevation are minor changes to this part of the house, with their position and design respecting the character of the house. This work does, in fact, fall under permitted development under Class A of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the

GPDO 2015 (as amended). Whilst an Article 4 Direction exists at the property (and the wider Conservation Area) this only concerns works to the elevations of a dwellinghouse that fronts a public highway or private street. However, for convenience and clarity, these works are included in this planning application.

13. Similarly, the drawings show a replacement rooflight on the side elevation, to replace an existing rooflight. This falls within Class C permitted development rights which, being on a side elevation, are not removed by Article 4 Direction covering the property and wider area. However, for convenience again, these works are included on the submitted drawings.
14. The Council's design policies are aimed at achieving the highest standard of design in all developments. Policy D1 of the Local Plan requires development to consider the character, setting, context and the form and scale of neighbouring buildings, and the quality of materials to be used. Policy D2 states that within conservation areas, the Council will only grant permission for development that preserves and enhances its established character and appearance.
15. The Design SPG states that all schemes should consider the context of the surrounding area, the host building itself, to use good quality sustainable materials, and should also seek opportunities for improving the character and quality of the area. Paragraph 2.11 of the SPG further states that good design should respond appropriately to the existing context by ensuring the scale of the proposal overall integrates well with the surrounding area; carefully responding to the scale, massing and height of adjoining buildings, the general pattern of heights in the surrounding area; positively integrating with and enhancing the character, history, archaeology and nature of existing buildings on the site and other buildings immediately adjacent and in the surrounding area, and any strategic or local views, vistas and landmarks.
16. Paragraph 3.9 of the SPG also sets out the requirement that development will be permitted within conservation areas that preserves and where possible enhances the character and appearance of the area in line with Local Plan policy D2 and the NPPF.
17. The proposals would therefore be appropriate to the host property and the wider area, and would not have any impact upon the recognised character and significance of the Conservation Area. This would satisfy Policies D1 and D2 of the Local Plan, the Design Guides, and the BCAS.

Alterations to the rear of the property

18. The rear of the property differs from the other half of the semi-detached house of No. 29 to which No. 31 is attached. There is no rear bay window to that property, whilst there is a single storey rear extension. This creates a sense of imbalance at the rear; no particular symmetry exists or is necessary in any changes in this location.
19. The proposed works would see alterations to the rear windows at lower ground floor. As with the side windows, this in fact represents permitted development under Class A. The submitted drawings also show a change to the existing balcony/terrace at raised ground floor level, in order to make this terrace area more usable from that level of the house. As noted in the DAS, a similar enlarged area has been allowed elsewhere in the street.

20. Due to the existing lack of symmetry between No. 31 and its neighbour there would not be any harmful effect on the character of the property or on the wider Conservation Area. The existing balcony/terrace affords views towards rear gardens. This degree of overlooking would not change, and there is a notable distance between the terrace/balcony and adjoining boundaries.
21. These works to the rear of the building would therefore not have any effect on the character of the area, and would lead to no change to the amenity of adjoining residents. Thus, the scheme would comply with Policies A1, D1 and D2 of the Local Plan and the Design Guides.

Alterations to the front of the property

22. The existing front garden to the property is partially lowered, descending from the street to the front window of the property at lower ground floor. The works follow the grant of permission in 2014 (ref. 2014/3491/P), which saw alterations to the original form of the house in this area. It is common along Belsize Park Gardens to see fully lowered front gardens with access from the house. This area of garden at No. 31 is underused and so the submitted plans show a further lowering of the front garden and the change of the window to doors, in order to provide access.
23. This change would not lead to the loss of any important landscaping or a front garden/yard area of importance to the Conservation Area. There is diversity in the street, as noted in the DAS, and the existing front area at No. 31 has been modified. The changes would be minor and reflect this character. Hence, the requirements of Policies D1 and D2 of the Local Plan, the Design Guides, and the BCAS would be satisfied.

Modifications to the basement and rear lightwell

24. Planning permission was granted in 2011 for works to the property, including the creation of a basement beneath the house that extended into the rear garden and a new rear lightwell (ref. 2011/3704/P). This permission has been carried out and the basement implemented in accordance with the planning permission.
25. This new application seeks to cover the existing lightwell and hence incorporate that area into the basement. No new construction works at the basement level are necessary for this element of the works. However, the drawings do show a minor enlargement of the basement at the rear of the property to 'square off' an existing wall that exists. Upon further investigation of the 2011 permission it became apparent that the Basement Impact Assessment at that time in fact appraised a basement larger than that permitted in 2011 and so this new submission is now made. As noted in the DAS, further information can be provided on this matter if required.
26. The changes to the lightwell would not lead to any harm to the appearance of the building or the wider Conservation Area, due to the absence of visibility of these works. Similarly, the minor change to the basement will not affect the character of the area, and the relevant requirements of the Basements SPG would be satisfied, namely:
 - The minor change of squaring-off the basement will not create any difference in appearance to the house.

- There would not be any material change to the area of garden occupied by the basement: over 50% of the garden would remain, and the depth of the basement from the main house would not increase.
- There would remain a set-back from the neighbouring boundary to No. 29 the same distance as exists to No. 33.
- No impact would occur to vegetation or trees.
- A construction management plan would be accepted, to be subject to a planning condition.

27. The minor changes at the rear of the property at basement level therefore represent works consistent with Policies A5, D1 and D2 of the Local Plan, and the Basements and Design SPGs.

Summary

28. The application property is a substantial house that lies within an area where there have been many small changes to buildings over the years. The established character of the area derives from the general consistency in terms of scale and form of the houses, with smaller changes at the roofs and to the elevations of the properties not detracting from that character. This is the recognised significance of the Conservation Area as a heritage asset.

29. The proposed development would respond to this character by showing changes that are relatively minor in scale. At roof level there would be the provision of a dormer that is of appropriate proportions to the other dormers. Planning policy does not prohibit such changes, but rather seeks to encourage designs appropriate to the area. The alterations to the rear, side and front of the house are similarly of modest proportions and scale to the house and area.

30. The proposals would therefore not cause any harm to the significance of the heritage asset and so would comply with the NPPF. The policies of the development plan, and accompanying supplementary planning guidance, would also be satisfied. Thus, planning permission can be granted.

Photographs of property and wider area



No., 31 from the street, with side dormer to No. 33 visible



Views of dormers to property and neighbour



Dormers and additions to properties along Belsize Park Gardens



Dormers and additions to properties along Belsize Park Gardens



Dormers and additions to properties along Belsize Park Gardens



Existing lowered garden area at front of No. 31



Rear of No. 31



Adjoining property of No. 29, showing lack of symmetry to pair of houses



Properties adjoining No. 31



Existing lightwell to No. 31, to be covered