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Re. Application 2021/0456/P  
152A Agar Grove NW1 9TY  
Response to objections by the Camden Square Area Advisory Committee

Dear Mr Hope

The Camden Square Conservation Area Advisory Committee has objected to this application, however, the committee's objections are inaccurate, ill-informed, based on misunderstanding of the science of noise and its measurement, and include unsubstantiated and outright false accusations about the validity of information submitted with the application.

In response to the committee's comments, with numbering referencing those of their report:

#### The Canopy

2.1 There are many local precedents of the same or similar canopies fitted within the conservation area. Within 100 metres of the application property there are examples of identical canopies at 27 and 85A Agar Grove. The canopy at 27 Agar Grove is virtually opposite the address of the Camden Square Area Advisory Committee at 88 Agar Grove. There are also identical canopies fitted at numbers 11, 13, 21, 106 and 112 Agar Grove, and many, many more throughout the conservation area.

At 152A, the canopy is positioned at low level, to the flank wall of the entrance steps, the existing design and geometry of this entrance to the lower ground floor flat is functional rather than to an aesthetic model: there is no symmetry, decorative moulding, geometry, or detail for the canopy to jar with.

2.2 The materials – black painted metal and translucent polycarbonate - are bland and inoffensive. The canopy is a lightweight, unobtrusive fitting, having and leaving no permanent impact on the historical fabric of the building, and which will, in the context of the longevity of that building, be a temporary and inconsequential, but while in place, a functional addition.

2.3 The canopy is a very minor alteration which many households in the area have found of benefit, without detriment to the conservation area. The popularity of the product is in part due to its ease of installation and it seems to be a common assumption in the area that installing one is not a *building operation* as defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3. The committee questions the validity of the noise survey while admitting to no expertise on the matter.

3.1.1 The committee is incorrect in its understanding of the measurement of noise and the noise report. This is illustrated by their proposition that two noise emitters of 60 dB would result in 120 dB noise output. This is wildly wrong. Decibels are a logarithmic scale and an increase of 10 dB means a tenfold increase in noise. It would take not two but a *million* 60 dB noise emitters to increase noise output from 60 dB to 120 dB. The committee's following comments on the noise report may be taken to reflect a profound lack of understanding of the science and measurement of sound.

3.1.2 The conclusion of the noise report, prepared by a reputable consultant specialising in the recording and assessment of noise levels is that the installations meet Camden policy and will not cause noise nuisance. The committee may choose not to believe it, but this is a professionally prepared, robust report in an area where the committee have no expertise. If the committee wish to present a rebuttal from another consultant, then they are free to do so.

3.2.1 150 Agar Grove has not been included in the monitoring programme because the closest sensitive receptors (i.e. windows that may be affected) are at 152B and 154 Agar Grove. The identification and selection of receptors is part of the methodology of noise assessment, as set out in the introduction to the submitted report, in accordance with BS:4142:2014.

3.2.2 The heat pump units are used for heating for the three-bedroom flat. The building is nineteenth century with solid, uninsulated walls and large single-glazed windows on the north side, so the heating requirements are relatively high. The use of air sourced heat pumps for domestic heating is encouraged by government policy and is likely to become compulsory for new homes in the next few years.

3.2.3 The acoustic consultant considered it reasonable to assume background noise at the front of the building, on Agar Grove, is higher than at the rear of the building. The assessment was made in relation to background noise at the rear, being

the lowest background noise on the site. The noise produced by the units was assessed to meet the required standard relative the lowest background noise on the site and so, necessarily, also meets the required standard to any higher background noise level. If the committee believe the background noise level will be higher at the back of the building than on the street side, then this would explain their objection. However, this is an unreasonable proposition, and the committee's objection on this point is also unreasonable.

The measurement of background noise was carried out on Monday 11 and Tuesday 12 January 2021, during Covid restrictions to movement. Even with this exceptionally low background noise, the installation was able to meet the required standard.

3.2.4 The noise assessment was made based on existing physical arrangement with no specialist acoustic housing. The acoustic report concluded the equipment met the standard required by Camden's policy without such housing. There is no basis for the suggestion that further mitigating measures are needed.

3.2.5 As a matter of fact, the units installed are heat pumps, which are designed to be used for heating and cooling. The applicant uses them primarily for heating – as would be expected in this climate. Their sustainability depends on how they are used and the means of electricity generation.

3.3 Ownership of the application property is not a planning matter, excepting in that the correct notices were served prior to the application and correct ownership declaration was made. Both notices and declaration were correct for this application. The owners of the application property are the applicant, as lessee, and the freeholder. As a matter of fact, no part of the application site is demised to the flat at 152B Agar Grove.

3.4 All other owners of the land were served notices of the application. The lessee 152B is not an owner of the application property.

3.5 The London Borough of Camden, the freeholder of the property, was served the appropriate notice. No response is known.

3.6 The cost of the project works stated is a standard tick-box element of the online full planning application form used, relating to policies on thresholds for the provision of affordable housing. It is the lowest figure available for that section. The figure is not an estimate of the cost of the works but an artefact of the set-up of the

application process, which requires completion of a form not specifically designed and not really appropriate for this kind of very small development. The application property is a flat and the applicant does not have the benefit of being able to use the simpler *householder* procedure.

**The committee does not object to the design and appearance of timber housing of the air conditioning / heat pump external units.**

The committee makes the accusation that the application 'bristles with errors and half truths'. However, the ownership information in the application is accurate and notices and declaration have been made correctly; and the acoustic report is professionally prepared in accordance with BS4142:2014. It is not clear what the committee have in mind when making these unsupported accusations, nor why they should choose to make such intemperate, unreasoned and unfounded statements, assertions and insinuations when carrying out their duties as planning consultees.

The committee makes speculative objections to the validity of acoustic report with manifest lack of understanding – indeed with profound ignorance – of the subject and with no evidence or contradicting analysis. The committee makes unfounded accusations about the accuracy of the application information. The committee makes no objection to the appearance of the air conditioning units' housing. The committee overstates the impact of a very minor alteration – the canopy – and objects to it vehemently, while apparently tolerating the proliferation of identical canopies in the conservation area, including one visible from its doorstep.

Conservation area advisory groups perform an important role when employing their local knowledge and expertise in a measured and reasoned way. However, in this case the stridently hostile tone, and vehement, unreasoned objections in areas where they clearly have no expertise, undercuts the value of such a consultative body.

Given the national policy on climate change is tending towards increased use of air sourced heat pumps, it would be well for the committee to address its lack of expertise in the area before offering comments in future.



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Regards

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