



26<sup>th</sup> September 2021

2021/3394/P

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**Formal Objection to application 2021/3394/P regarding the erection of railings, opening of lightwell, and alteration to shopfront to include glazing at 107 King's Cross Road.**

The Bloomsbury CAAC objects to application 2021/3394/P on the basis of harm to the conservation area through inappropriate and poorly designed alterations, and the precedent set for similar alterations to be made throughout the conservation area.

107 King's Cross Road is a typical three storey Georgian / early Victorian terrace with a Mansard and basement level. Window architraves, brackets and the shopfront all appear to be Victorian in origin. The cornice at parapet level appears to have been effaced in the post-war period, with photos showing it present in 1901. The site lies at the north-eastern extremity of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is listed as a positive contributor. It sits within a context of typical Georgian and early Victorian terracing along King's Cross Road, most of which are in an exceptionally poor condition due to commercial pressures and a lack of proper enforcement activity. There was significant evidence of widespread illegal alterations to properties in the immediate locality.

The basement level had been covered over likely in the post-war period with a concrete slab. The applicant has 'opened-up' the basement level by removing this slab and has erected railings around the perimeter in an attempt to emulate traditional Georgian and Victorian basement levels nearby. The historic shopfront has also been altered to allow more light into the basement level. The basement level is now being used as a residential unit. While not of heritage consideration, the residential unit was of poor quality and appeared to consist only of living quarters and a small bathroom with no kitchen.

A site visit was conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021 with LB Camden officer Ewan Campbell. At the site visit it was clear that the works had been planned and completed to a very poor standard. The principle of opening the basement level is not objectionable in heritage terms as it restores the original appearance of the building. However the quality of the works were of an unacceptable standard and we object on these grounds as being contrary to policies D1 and D2 of the Camden Local Plan.

### *Railings*

The railings were of a design entirely inappropriate to the historic and architectural significance of the host building and conservation area. Any replacement railings should be of a profile to match existing nearby historic examples with this justified in a design and access statement. Beyond this, the railings did not comprise a plinth/upstand to house the railings, but the railings had been affixed directly to the pavement beyond the boundary of the site. It was not clear exactly how the railings had been affixed to the pavement but they appeared to be glued. Part of the railings had been affixed directly on top of a CATV inspection cover making its access impossible.

### *Stairs and Basement Glazing*

The stairs were of poor design being constructed of mild steel checker plates. The glazing at ground floor level is of a poor design and workmanship. Basement levels typically reflect the upper storeys in terms of solid-to-void ratio, design, and materiality. The basement level elevation was completely glazed. The applicant explained that this was necessary to allow enough light into the basement unit for residential use. It was also recognised on site that the visibility of the basement level is low from the public realm, making this of minimal immediate impact to the conservation area. However approval of the application would set a precedent for similar alterations throughout the conservation area. Pressure for conversion of basement units from commercial to residential and associated changes to the basement elevations is high. It is therefore our view that this should not be accepted on the grounds of poor design and precedent set for future alterations of poor quality.

### *Further Alterations Not Included in Planning Application*

The historic shopfront had been altered to host a large panel of glazing at stall riser level, allowing light into the basement unit. This alteration was not included as part of the planning application drawings. The ground in front of the two doorways had been replaced by thin mild steel checker plates. An application should be submitted for these alterations and considered separately.

### *Conclusion*

While we are not opposed to the alterations made in principle, the design of the alterations was of an unacceptable quality given the status of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Paragraph 1.2 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal states that '*Bloomsbury is generally regarded as an internationally significant example of town planning*'. Paragraph 7.1 of the Camden Local Plan states that '*good design is indivisible from good planning.*'

For these reasons we object to the application on the basis of harm to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area without public benefit to outweigh that harm, and the contravention of policies D1, D2, and D3 of the Local Plan.

**Bloomsbury Conservation Areas**  
*Advisory Committee*

26<sup>th</sup> September 2021





*Above: Inappropriate design quality of railings. Mild steel checker plates at ground level. Railings affixed to pavement. Glazing is visible at stall riser level*

*Below: Railings affixed to cable TV inspection cover*

