

2112 Design & Access/Heritage Statement

18 Spedan Close, Branch Hill Estate

2112.da statement

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Note:

To be read in conjunction with Planning issue drawings.



1.0 Introduction

The application for Listed Building Consent is for internal alterations to 18 Spedan Close in the Branch Hill Estate in Hampstead.



aerial view of Branch Hill Estate

The Branch Hill Estate is a development of 42 split level, semi-detached, 4 - 6 person, modernist houses, on a steeply sloping site, designed by architects, Gordon Benson and Alan Forsyth, then of the London Borough of Camden (LBoC) Architect's department in the early 1970s for the council for their tenants, and was finally completed in 1978, then a different social, political, economic, and cultural climate.

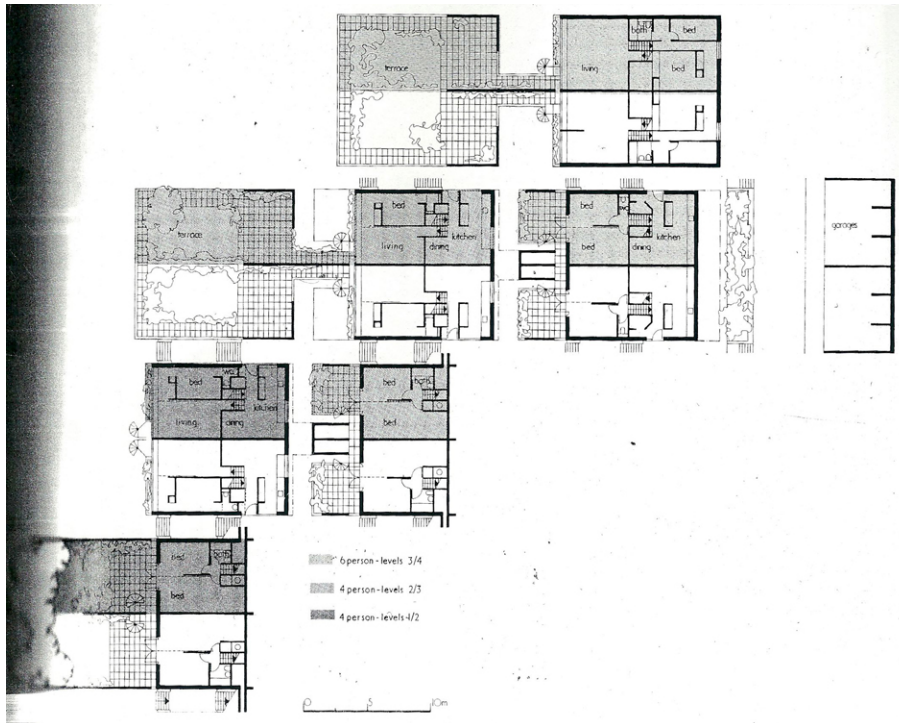
The Branch Hill Estate was Grade II Listed, Historic England (HE) listing no. 1393895, in August 2010. The list entry, with regards the internal features, reads:

"The interiors were not inspected but much can be gleaned from contemporary accounts of the estate. The front doors are all on the vertical passageways, which are paved in red brick. In the three-bedroom houses the front door leads to the kitchen and dining room area, on a split level, with steps going down to the bedrooms (which open out onto a small courtyard) or up to the living room and master bedroom (which cantilever slightly above the bedrooms so as to take advantage of the natural light and views). The arrangement is roughly the same in the four-bedroom houses, but because these are located in the first row an extra storey above the kitchen and dining room can be included where the other rows have the next layer's garden terrace. The absence of the terrace permits a large west-facing clerestory bringing light into the double-height kitchen and dining area and the living room is larger too. In each house, the kitchen counter was a permanent tiled concrete shelf and so these are likely to have been retained. Originally there would also have been storey-height doors, sliding partitions between rooms, built-in cupboards and shelves and chipboard and softwood purpose-crafted staircases. Interior fittings designed by Camden Architects' Department were always good-quality. All the window joinery survives but some of the front doors have been replaced."

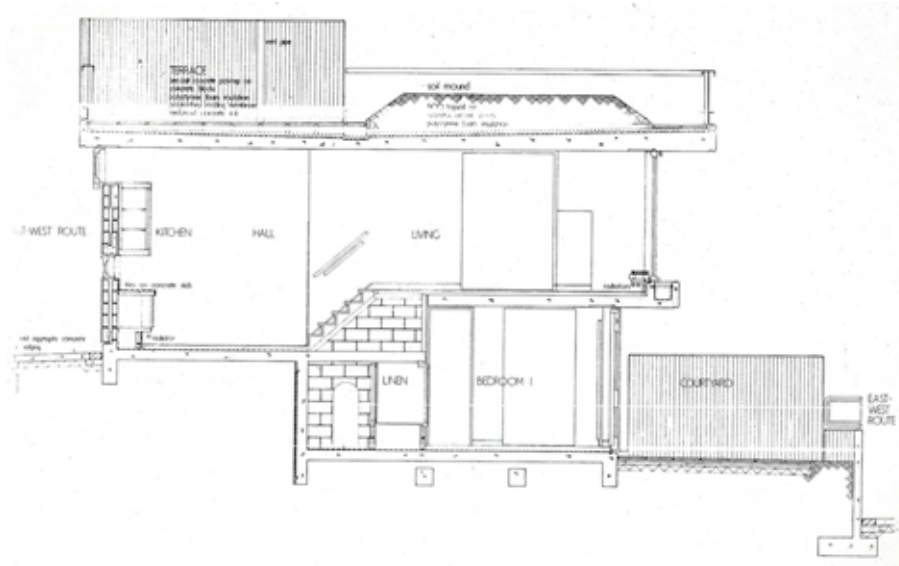
Subsequently, the proposed alterations require Listed Building Consent.

2.0 Physical context:

2.1 Original house



original floor plan



original section

The site had a restrictive covenant on it requiring any houses on to be semi-detached and a maximum of two-storeys high. Subsequently, all of the houses in the Branch Hill Estate have ingenious split level sections designed to make the most of the steeply sloping site and maximise density. The garden of 18 Spedan Close is above the mid and upper levels of 32 Spedan Close, and in turn the mid and upper levels of the house are below the garden of 4 Spedan Close. 18 Spedan Close was designed as a four person house. On the mid level of the house is the entrance hallway, kitchen, and dining area. From a contemporary floor plan of the estate, section through a typical house, photos of other houses, and descriptions of the estate, originally the hallway probably had a low wall to the kitchen, so that you would have been able to see between the hallway and the kitchen. The kitchen had a long run of low level units, with a ceramic tiled concrete worktop and ceramic tiled splashback, low level slot windows, wall mounted cupboards, and continuous high level clerestory slot windows. There was probably a low wall and built in shelves, between the two levels of the dining and living areas.



contemporary photos of kitchen & dining areas in a larger six person house

On the upper level was the living area, parent's bedroom, parent's toilet, and external walkway to the garden. There was a wall and sliding door between the living area and the parent's bedroom. There was possibly a low wall and built in joinery including a desk in the parent's bedroom. On the lower level were two children's bedrooms, bathroom, and external courtyard. In between the two bedrooms is a sliding timber door. The larger bedroom had built in cupboards.

The houses were originally intended to be flexible and "provide a range of accommodation with its own character to meet the changing needs of the family", as stated by Gordon Benson in a Building Study of the estate in the Architect's Journal (AJ) of 20th June 1979, soon after the estate was completed. The split level section, and different shapes, sizes, and locations of windows create a variety of spatially interesting, differently sized, differently naturally lit spaces. The original sliding

doors between the living area and parents' room and between the children's bedrooms would have increased the flexibility of the spaces. However, the original low wall and built in shelves between the dining and living areas "limits furniture arrangements" and this together with the original low wall between the former parents' bedroom and the glazing "conflict with the principle of free space", as pointed out by architect and critic Christopher Knight in the AJ Building Study.

Also, "the length of the kitchen counter might be considered excessive and impractical, particularly as its permanent construction (tiled concrete shelf) makes it impossible to modify".

Additionally, "there is a contradiction between the upper level, lit by the generous, indeed splendid, window wall, boldly detailed and beautifully proportioned, and the dim half level only directly lit at that distance from the sitting room above, and the clerestory window over the continuous kitchen cupboards".

"The main bedroom in the smaller house has its own WC and basin off it, but is remote from the bathroom on the lower floor. Given the money, a bath or shower should obviously have been included here".

2.2 Existing house

Externally, 18 Spedan Close remains largely unaltered since it was constructed, with original board marked concrete and rendered external walls and painted timber framed glazed doors and windows. Minor external alterations have been carried out by previous owners:



exterior views

- The original unpainted board marked concrete walls have been painted, the same as the rest of the properties in the Branch Hill Estate.
- The original openings in party walls between lower terraces in the estate were identified as "questionable for privacy and a route for exploratory cats and straying babies" by Christopher Knight, in the AJ Building Study. As a result, the original opening in the party wall between the lower terrace and adjoining lower terrace has been blocked up to address this problem, similar to the majority of properties in the estate.
- A stained panelled timber fence has also been erected on the party boundary between the original grass areas on the upper terrace, for the same reason, and again similar to the majority of properties in the estate.
- The first owner has replaced the original painted flush timber main entrance door with a painted panelled timber door with a curved fanlight, apparently within seven months of completion, from a photo in the AJ Building Study.

Unfortunately however, Christopher Knight's criticism was particularly prescient, because internally, the house has been significantly altered by previous owners since it was constructed, as original walls have been extended and others removed and all of the original fittings, except for the sliding doors between the children's bedrooms have been removed:

- A wall has been built between the hallway and kitchen to enclose the former, with an
- incongruous curved arch above the opening between the hallway and the dining area.
- The original built in cupboards in the hallway have been removed and replaced with painted timber framed louvred cupboard doors.



view of replacement front door, extended walls, curved arch, replacement cupboard doors, and balustrade

- The original kitchen finishes and fittings, including the ceramic tiled concrete worktop and tiled splashback, have been removed and the kitchen re-fitted.



view of re-fitted kitchen

- The original low wall and any built in shelves between the dining and living areas have been removed and replaced with an incongruous balustrade constructed with painted turned timber balusters and handrails, with painted timber framed louvred cupboard doors below.
- Incongruous false nib walls and an arched beam have been added between the dining and living areas.



views of false nib walls and arched beam, replacement balustrade, and louvred cupboard doors

- The original wall and sliding door between the living area and former parents' bedroom on the upper level has been removed to create a two bedroom house, but with a larger living area.
- The original low wall and built in joinery between the former parents' bedroom and the glazing has been removed for the same reason.



view of living area, partly formerly the parents' bedroom

- The original finishes and fittings in the former parents' toilet on the upper level have been removed and the room re-fitted as a guest toilet.
- The original built in cupboard doors in the children's bedroom have been removed and replaced with sliding timber doors.
- The original bathroom finishes and fittings have been removed and the room re-fitted.



view of re-fitted bathroom

- Some internal walls have been re-plastered and many have been lined with painted woodchip wallpaper.

3.0 Planning Context

3.1 Heritage Significance

The HE listing states that the Branch Hill Estate was recommended to be Grade II Listed for the following principal reasons:

- "Special architectural interest of this bold, modernist design of 1970 by Benson and Forsyth".

- "Complex stepped-section, which works brilliantly on a sloping site governed by strict covenants".
- "The use of materials is sophisticated and the smooth-finished, white concrete contrasts with the dark-stained joinery and exposed structural-skeleton, the latter immaculately-detailed with board-marking and chamfering".
- "One of the best estates designed by Camden Architects' Department, pioneers of low-rise, high-density housing in the 1960s and 1970s".

HE also states that "in each house, the kitchen counter was a permanent tiled concrete shelf and so these are likely to have been retained. Originally there would also have been storey-height doors, sliding partitions between rooms, built-in cupboards and shelves and chipboard and softwood purpose-crafted staircases".

Externally, 18 Spedan Close remains largely unaltered, but internally has been significantly altered, so its primary heritage significance is its contribution to the architectural composition of the estate. Its secondary significance is the plan layout of the principle spaces and the split level section, and the later alterations have harmed this.

3.1 Planning Policy

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

Section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act requires listed building consent for any works for the demolition of a listed building or for its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its character as a building of architectural or historic interest. Section 16(2) places the duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the Building or its setting in determining applications for listed building consent.

Section 66(1) states that 'In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.'

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021):

The National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out national planning policies for England, was updated in July 2021.

The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, notably para 10 “at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

Section 16 of the NPPF relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment, and applies to plan-making, decision-taking, and the heritage-related consent regimes under the 1990 Act.

Heritage assets, as per Annex 2 of the NPPF, are defined as ‘ a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).’

In paragraph 189, the NPPF goes on to state that heritage assets ‘should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations’.

The NPPF, by way of para 194, requires applicants for listed building consent to describe the heritage significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, including any contribution made by their setting. It then states that ‘the level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.’

Paragraph 197 identifies three key things that Local Planning Authorities should take into account when determining applications for listed building consent:

- a) ‘The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and

c) The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.’

When undertaking the assessment required by para 197, para 199 states that ‘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 (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be).’ It is this final sentence that gives us the grading ‘system’ – Grade II, Grade II* and Grade I.

Under paragraph 202, ‘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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.’

The London Plan 2021:

The latest London Plan was adopted in March 2021, and applies strategic planning policy across the whole of London. The policies most relevant to heritage are found in Chapter 7, ‘Heritage and Culture.’

Policy HC1 of the London Plan states that ‘development proposals that affect heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to the assets’ significance and appreciation within their surroundings’.

Camden Local Plan 2017:

The Camden Local Plan 2017 is the core document within the Borough’s Development Plan, which also includes the Policies Map and Site Allocations Plan, amongst others.

The relevant policy here is D2 – Heritage. The application site is one of 5600 listed buildings in Camden. With regards designated heritage assets, the policy states:

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

- i. resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;

- j. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and
- k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting”.

3.2 Planning History

A proposed scheme for similar alterations was granted Listed Building Consent ref. 2015/2503/L, in June 2015, but this has not been implemented and has expired.

3.3 Local Planning History

Proposed schemes for the refurbishment of the kitchens and bathrooms in the following LBoC owned houses in the Branch Hill Estate were granted Listed Building Consent in June 2016:

- 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, & 12, ref. 2016/0283/L
- 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, & 22, ref. 2016/0281/L
- 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, & 42, ref. 2016/0284/L

4.0 Social Context

Around two thirds of the houses in the Branch Hill Estate are still owned by the LBoC and the remaining third are in private ownership. The house has been in the family’s ownership for ten years and the applicants would like to carry out the following work to create a family home for them to live in:

- Removing the later internal alterations.
- Reinstating original features, including an opening between the hallway and the kitchen; built-in shelves between the dining and living areas; and a sliding screen in the same location as the original in the living area to create a bedroom.
- Re-fitting joinery and the kitchen and bathroom in line with modern expectations and the spirit of the original scheme.
- Addressing the shortcoming identified by Christopher Knight, by re-fitting the toilet on the upper level as a shower too, as previously granted consent.

5.0 Justification & Statement of Significance

Given that the secondary heritage significance of 18 Spedan Close is the plan layout of the principle spaces and the split level section, and that later alterations have harmed this, there is scope for removing these, reinstating original features, and for re-fitting the later joinery and kitchen and bathroom finishes and fittings in the spirit of the original scheme to improve the heritage setting.

Listed buildings hold special architectural and/or historic interest. This Statement of Significance, made in accordance with para 194 of the NPPF, follows the guidance set out by Historic Environment PPG Para 006, and considers the various aspects of heritage interest:

- ***'Archeological interest:*** *There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.*
- ***Architectural and artistic interest:*** *These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.*
- ***Historic interest:*** *An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.'*

Group interest – the way a building interacts with those around it, especially those around it which are also designated heritage assets – is also a consideration.

The interests above are also complemented by Historic England's Conservation Principles guidance, which outlines the four different types of values that a designated heritage asset may have: Evidential Value, Historical Value, Aesthetic Value, and Communal Value.

Assessment of significance:

The site, as outlined by the Historic England list entry, holds much of its value or 'significance' in its external appearance, focusing mainly around the way in which the low-rise, high-density housing fits within its very constrained location, in which the design of the building complements and follows the natural slope of the land. The reasons for listing also focus on the bold, modernist design and elegant use of materials, which are of their time.

That is not to say that the interior of the property does not hold value or contribute to the assets significance, but the interiors do not contribute to the overall external aesthetic value of the estate.

The building is of little artistic interest over and above the general form of the buildings within their sloped landscape, which overall offer great architectural interest. The detailing is simple; telling of the Modernist style but also of being built by a Council for public housing at great cost at the time. The estate follows strict geometry dictated both by its surrounding topography and of the Modernist style.

With regards historic value, prior to the building of the Estate, the area was merely the grounds to Branch Hill Lodge, and prior to that, fields to the south of what is today Hampstead Heath, part of the countryside outside of the old core of London. The grounds of Branch Hill Lodge, just over 4 acres, were allocated for social housing following purchase by Camden Council in 1965. When designing the Estate, the Architects' Department decided to retain the mature wooded areas of the grounds of the Lodge and by only developing the lodge's former lawn and gardens, just over half the plot. This resulted in the Estate and the Lodge today remaining surrounded by mature wooded areas. The main historical value of the site comes from its evidence of attitudes to social housing and architecture in the 1960s and 1970s, including materials, the design of the internal environment and the way families at the time functioned, and cues to the sites former history as grounds of the Branch Hill Lodge.

As the Application Site is part of a housing estate, it is integral to the group value of the listing; harm to or loss of the application site would undoubtedly harm the setting and overall aesthetic and value of the estate as a whole. There are a small number of surrounding listed buildings outside of the estate, notably the Grade II listed Oak Tree House to the south-west, and The Gardens, Branch Hill (Grade II) to the north-east. However, the Estate does not form part of their immediate setting, nor

vice versa, and as such the Estate does not have group value with any listed building in the surrounding area.

6.0 Proposed Scheme & Assessment of Proposed Works

Subsequently, the scope of the proposed scheme includes:

- Retaining the existing painted concrete and rendered external walls and painted timber-framed doors and windows, but re-painting the rusting painted steel spiral stairway and balustrades to match existing.
- Removing the existing later painted panelled timber front door and replacing it with a painted flush timber door.
- Removing the existing wall between the hallway and the kitchen and the later curved arch above the opening between the hall and the dining area, to improve natural light in the hallway and views between the hallway and the kitchen and dining areas, as the spirit of the original scheme.
- Removing the existing later painted timber louvred cupboard doors in the hallway and fitting timber cupboard doors.
- Removing the existing later kitchen finishes and fittings and re-fitting the kitchen, with a long run of low level units, worktops, and wall mounted cupboards between the low level and high level slot windows, as the spirit of the original scheme.
- Removing the existing painted turned timber balusters and handrails between the mid and upper levels, and the timber framed louvred cupboard doors below the balustrade. Replacing the balustrade to the stair with a low painted plastered wall and replacing the balustrade between the two levels with a slatted timber balustrade and timber shelves, to maximise natural light in the dining area and views between the two levels, closer to the spirit of the original scheme. Fitting a built-in timber bench to make the most of the tight dining area.
- Removing the existing later false nib walls and an arched beam between the dining and living areas, as the original scheme.
- Fitting a sliding timber screen in the same location as the original in the living area to create a bedroom.
- Fitting a built-in foldaway bed in the bedroom to maximise space.
- Altering the walls around the existing guest toilet, and re-fitting the room as a shower room and toilet. This would have no impact on the plan layout of the principle spaces.

- Retaining the original wall and sliding door between the children's bedrooms.
- Removing the existing later sliding timber doors from the original built in cupboard doors in the children's bedroom and replacing these .
- Removing the existing later bathroom finishes and fittings and re-fitting the bathroom.
- Lining the poorly insulated blockwork cavity walls and concrete ceiling slab with 40 mm thick insulated plasterboard (12.5 mm thick plasterboard with 25 mm thick PIR insulation) with an integral vapour barrier to improve thermal insulation and reduce the effects of cold bridging, while maintaining the sightlines of door and window frames.
- Refurbishing original window hinges and handles, replacing later locks and the later obscured panes of glass in the clerestorey slot window with clear to match existing adjacent, and internally re-painting the windows black, as originally.
- Stripping the existing painted woodchip wallpaper lined internal walls and painting and re-plastering these.

It is envisaged that the proposed alterations would be fully reversible in the future.

The full list of proposed internal works are listed above, although it is acknowledged that some do not require listed building consent. For the avoidance of doubt, there are no external alterations currently proposed.

A large amount of historic fabric survives internally, although the interior has been altered in the past. It is our intention to reverse harmful alterations as part of these proposals, reinstating historic features where possible, making minor alterations to ensure the house works as a modern family home, and overall refurbishing the property with high-quality finishes to ensure its continued use and longevity.

NPPF Test:

It is considered that the interior of the property contributes little to the significance outlined above. Much of the fabric to be lost internally is not of special interest as it was altered or introduced later. Any alterations to the plan form as part of the proposals are to bring the house back in line with the original design intentions. Overall, the proposals would provide heritage benefits in refurbishing and returning the property closer to its original design. Should the works above be considered to cause any harm to the heritage significance of the building or estate as a whole, this would clearly be at the

low level of 'less than substantial'. In our view, in accordance with para 202 of the NPPF, any harm would be outweighed by the benefits mentioned above, namely that of reinstating historic design features and plan form.

7.0 Summary:

The proposed scheme retains the plan layout of the principle spaces and the split level section, remove later harmful alterations, reinstate original features, re-fit the later joinery and kitchen and bathroom finishes and fittings in the spirit of the original scheme to improve the heritage significance. The proposed scheme would sustain the significance of the grade II listed Branch Hill Estate and is in line with the statutory duties, NPPF, London Plan and Local Plan, and should be considered for approval.

8.0 Sources:

- "Branch Hill Estate", HE list no. 1393895, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1393895>
- "Camden's Cream", by Nick Wates, page nos. 1030 - 1032, published in the "Architect's Journal" (AJ), 31st May 1978.
- "Building Study" by Gordon Benson & Christopher Knight, page nos. 1261 – 1276, published in the AJ, 20th June 1979.
- "A Tale of Two Schemes" by Jos Boys, page nos. 19 – 22, published in "The Architect", October 1979.
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/contents> (Accessed: 17/04/2022).
- Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance by English Heritage, pages 28 - 32, published April 2008.
- Planning Practice Guidance, Historic Environment, last updated July 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment> (Accessed 17/04/2022).
- National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021, pages 56 – 58. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf (Accessed 17/04/2022).

- Camden Local Plan Policy D2, pages 233 – 236. Available at:
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/4820180/Local+Plan.pdf/ce6e992a-91f9-3a60-720c-70290fab78a6> (Accessed on 17/04/2022).