**2021/3839/P- Howitt Close, Howitt Road NW3 4LX**

Mansard roof extension to create 7 flats (for the purpose of consultation: 1x 1bed, 5 x 2-bed, 1x 3-bed)

**Relevant planning history**

1961- Application for an additional storey refused under London County Council

**Assessment of significance**

Howitt Close forms part of the Belsize Park Conservation Area and is identified as a positive contributor in the Belsize Conservation Area Statement. Within a conservation area the Council has a statutory obligation to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. While the majority of buildings in the immediate vicinity are terraced Edwardian houses and semi-detached Victorian villas, Howitt Close is distinctive as piece of post-1918 development. However, its scale and materials respects the general character of its neighbours in terms of the façade, but the form of the building, reflects its inter-War construction. It appears to have been developed in the 1920s-early 1930s (certainly prior to 1934 when an application was submitted for alterations to a flue) and seems to have been designed by the firm of Henry F. Webb and Ash.

Although different in form from the terraces in Howitt Road Howitt Close is not an anomaly within the Belsize Park conservation area. The Glenloch Investment Company which erected Howitt Close was responsible for erecting Glenloch Court and Banff House in Glenilla Road around the same time, both of which have flat roofs. Flat roofed inter-war blocks of flats are therefore part of the prevailing character of this part of the conservation area.

**Assessment of proposals**

*Principle of works*

There is no policy which prohibits a roof extension in principle, however, the need to demonstrate that the works would preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area and the positive contribution made to the area by the subject site is a statutory obligation. Clearly the works would not preserve the character and appearance of the area because there is a perceptible change, therefore the key assessment is if they would enhance the character and appearance of the area.

The works seek to create a mansard extension to the entire roof of the building. No evidence has been presented to suggest that the building ever had a mansard, and its flat roofed condition is apparently indicative of its inter-War design, indeed together with the details of its entrance bay, it is one of the main distinguishing features of the building as an inter-War construction.

Setting aside the principle of the mansard, it is also the case that the proposed design of the mansard has not been properly reconciled with the scale and proportions of the host building. Many of the dormers equal (and some exceed) the width of the principal windows on the façade, resulting in further disruption to the architectural cohesion of the building.

The creation of the mansard has been presented as making the building more contextual to its neighbours but it is unclear why this would be seen as a benefit. It would certainly make the subject site more visually dominant, but greater dominance would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. It would create a roof form more akin to the mansards of the earlier Edwardian buildings, but again this would demonstrate neither preservation nor enhancement since the inter-War character of the subject site is made legible by the existing flat roof and this forms part of the historic character of the area, and has done for nearly a century. Therefore the proposals neither repair nor restore any previous historical condition, nor do they help better reveal or enhance the existing historic or architectural character of the area.

The Belsize Conservation Area Statement has regard to roof extensions as follows: “Roof extensions and alterations, which change the shape and form of the roof, can have a harmful impact on the Conservation Area”. Roof extensions “are unlikely to be acceptable where: It would be detrimental to the form and character of the existing building.”

The application does not comply with the Council’s guidance on roof extensions in the Belsize Park Conservation Area and does not enable the Council to meet its statutory obligation to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Belsize Park Conservation. Accordingly, this application should be refused.  **Relevant Design & Conservation Policy and Guidance**

* The NPPF 2021 - Chapters 12 and 16
* The PPG - Design 2019, Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment 2019
* The London Plan 2021 –Chapter 7: Heritage and Culture
* Conservation Area Guidelines- Belsize Park
* Historic England Advice Note 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets (2016)
* Historic England GPA2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment
* Historic England GPA3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd edition)

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