

B A Abraham  
15 Howitt Close  
NW3 4LX

**Objection to Planning Proposal for Howitt Close, NW3 4LX  
2022/3635/P**

I am resident in Howitt Close and have been a leaseholder for 18 years. I strongly object to the above planning proposal on the grounds that it will do substantial damage to a heritage asset – a well-preserved, unique 1930s building of considerable architectural merit and significance. The bulking-up of the building by the addition of an attic storey will destroy the architectural integrity of a heritage asset, adversely affect the appearance of the neighbourhood and profoundly harm the Belsize Conservation Area.

Howitt Close is listed as one of the buildings or groups of buildings that make a positive contribution to the Belsize Conservation Area. Howitt Close is not yet included in LB Camden's local list but it satisfies all of the criteria for inclusion and The Belsize Society, with the support of The Twentieth Century Society and the Heath & Hampstead Society, has applied for it to be added to the local list. It would be wrong to grant consent to any major works, and particularly of the type proposed in the current application, before the application for local listing has been considered.

LB Camden has previously described Howitt Close as a "complete composition of considerable charm which through good design suits its context well". What LB Camden said of the earlier application 2021/3839/P applies equally to the amended application: "The proposed roof extension, by reason of its detailed design, bulk, massing, height, materials and undue prominence, would compromise the form, character and appearance of the host building and would thus harm the character and appearance of the street scene and Belsize Conservation Area, contrary to policies D1 (Design) and D2 (Heritage) of the London Borough of Camden Local Plan 2017." The amended proposal would neither preserve nor enhance the character and appearance of Howitt Close and would detract from the positive contribution the building makes to the Conservation Area.

My objections to the previous planning application 2021/3839/P apply equally to this amended planning proposal and are copied below as Appendix B. In summary these are:

1. Howitt Close was very carefully designed to suit its specific location and make optimal use of the space available, but without dominating its prominent position at the junction of Howitt Road and Glenilla Road. Aesthetically it was designed to blend with the earlier Edwardian terraced housing in the neighbouring streets, whilst proclaiming its era of construction through its overall form and Art Deco flourishes. It is self-evidently of considerable architectural merit.
2. Howitt Close has maintained its architectural integrity over almost a century since its construction, remaining fundamentally undamaged and unaltered by changes, internally and externally. It is a rare example of an authentic 1930s building.
3. Adding a fourth storey would destroy the proportions of the building and make Howitt Close, at present perfectly adjusted to its situation within streets of terraced Edwardian houses, an over-prominent and jarring presence. At present the distant view of the mansion block could be mistaken for a view of terraced houses. Any increase in its height would have a negative visual impact along the length of Glenilla Road to Belsize Avenue, for a considerable distance up Howitt Road and from

Glenilla Road's junction with Belsize Park Gardens. The closest visible mansion block to Howitt Close is Sussex House, which is singled out in the Conservation Area Statement as a negative feature: "an oppressively large block" and "an overbearing flat block significantly larger than the other buildings in the street". The current proposal to bulk up Howitt Close into an oppressively large block should be firmly rejected.

4. Historic significance: Howitt Close was constructed 1932-34, which means that it was contemporaneous with the nearby Isokon flats (Grade I listed) on Lawn Road. Although in contrasting architectural styles, both were intended to provide compact living spaces for the middle classes, based on the principle of affordable, communal and well-designed inner-city living. Howitt Close was in the vanguard of offering accommodation suitable for younger, single professionals in Belsize Park; an initiative that had wide appeal and led to Belsize Park becoming 'bedsit land' in the second half of the twentieth century.
5. It would be a perverse planning decision and cultural vandalism, to allow Howitt Close, a heritage asset which makes such a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the Belsize conservation area, to be violated for the sake of just seven flats in private ownership and a CIL payment of less than £250,000. It would be a breach of the underlying principles of the conservation area if a unique, extremely well-preserved architectural gem like Howitt Close is wantonly desecrated for the sake of a few additional flats.

I also have the following additional comments on the latest proposal.

### **Heritage Matters - the Architects & their Legacy**

I refer to the Applicant's heritage consultants Cotswold Archaeology's 'Heritage Technical Note' (dated January 2022 but not added to the 2021/3839/P webpage until August 2022), which purports "to provide further research and background on the architecture firm that constructed the building (Henry F. Webb & Ash) and assess the building according to the architect's credentials and other identified works of note". It is clear from my own research at the RIBA Library that the Note is inadequately researched and its attempts to denigrate the architects and thereby diminish the importance of Howitt Close disregard the historical context. Its conclusions are irrational and unsustainable.

The Heritage Technical Note implies that the route to practising as an architect was the same in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that passing the examinations to become an associate member of RIBA was an all-important step before being recognised as a professional architect. In fact, a century ago, RIBA was not the only society for architects and additionally many architects chose not to affiliate with any society. There were varied routes that an individual could follow to become an established, respected professional architect. Only in 1931 and 1938, after decades of lobbying by RIBA, was a legislative requirement (regarded as very controversial at the time) introduced for architects to formally register with ARCUK before they could describe themselves as 'architects'. The licentiate class of membership was first opened from 1908 to 1913 to increase RIBA's membership by drawing in experienced practising architects, who were either members of the Society of Architects or were unattached independent practitioners. Licentiate membership was reopened for a limited period after 1931, again to allow experienced architects in practice, with proven expertise, to join the RIBA.

The attempt by the Heritage Consultants to dismiss the gifted architects, H F Webb & Ash, because of their RIBA status is simply wrong. By the same logic, Cotswold Archaeology would dismiss many of the titans of modern architecture, such as Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969). All of these were contemporaries of Webb and Ash and none had formal architecture training and qualifications. Closer to home, indeed in Belsize Park, Wells Coates (1895-1958) who designed the Grade I listed Isokon Building (the Lawn Road Flats) between 1929 and 1932, studied engineering and had no formal training in architecture, although he was elected as FRIBA in 1934. The Heritage Consultants' contention that the merit of buildings should be judged according to the formal architectural qualifications of their designers is completely unsustainable. Cotswold Archaeology would presumably argue that all the buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Wells Coates are not worth preserving because their architects had not passed their ARIBA exams or equivalents!

Appendix A below provides summary biographical information for H.F. Webb and Major A.S. Ash and brief details of some of the buildings they designed as a partnership and as individuals. Appendix A is not comprehensive but is a summary based on readily available information.

The summary biographical information in Appendix A clearly shows that both Webb and Ash undertook rich and diverse training and experience, including studying under FRIBA principals, in the UK and internationally, all relevant to the design and construction of buildings. It should be noted that World War I (1914-18) at best disrupted the careers and at worst ended the lives of a generation of younger men. HF Webb was on war service from 1915 to 1918 and Major AS Ash served from 1914 until 1919. Some years later, the depression of the 1930s was a lean era for building and many architects were unemployed: it is testament to the high reputation and skills of H.F. Webb and Ash that they were engaged to design a series of buildings during this period when construction work was scarce.

The partnership of Henry F Webb & Ash was in existence for a relatively short period from 1930 to around 1934 but they were responsible for designing several significant and attractive buildings, as listed in Appendix A. Of the five buildings identified, the Ambassador Cinema, Hendon, NW4 is included in 'Played in London,' a 2014 English Heritage directory of historic sporting assets in London, endorsed by Historic England in 2015 as "focused on buildings and assets that research has shown to be of historic or architectural interest." West Heath Court, North End Way, Golders Green, NW11 is locally listed by LB Barnet for its architectural interest, on the grounds of aesthetic merits, group value and intactness. In the category 'landmark buildings and structures' it is described as a 'fine building' in Golders Green Town Centre Conservation Area.

Individually, both architects continued to have successful careers designing many significant and prestigious buildings. H F Webb designed Elm Park Court, Pinner, constructed in 1936 and Grade II listed. Elm Park Court is considered one of the icons of the modernism characteristic of 1930s 'Metro-land.' According to the Twentieth Century Society, Howitt Close "serves as a useful companion to Webb's well-known development from the same time, Elm Park Court, and many of the architectural pre-occupations are evident in both developments."

Mansion blocks designed by A S Ash include Norland Square Mansions, Norland Square, W11, which is adjacent to the listed terraces in Norland Square: "The mansion block does not

replicate the architecture of the listed terraces... Nevertheless, the three main bays with their paired, vertical groupings of windows and balconies give the façade a balanced, ordered appearance in keeping with the general visual character of the square.” Under the Norland Neighbourhood Plan: “changes should not involve raising the roof line, or developing any roof terraces which would clutter the existing roof line... alter the current design in terms of fenestration, balconies, bay windows, and painted versus brickwork panels.”

Locally, A S Ash was the architect of 99 Haverstock Hill (Stanbury Court), in overtly Art Deco style, which is well-appreciated in the neighbourhood and widely regarded as an exemplar of the ‘Streamlined Moderne’ style. It is described as a “handsome building in a style uniquely of the twentieth century...with its horizontal paned windows wider than they are long, smooth white surfaces, rounded corners and flat roofs.”

After World War II, A S Ash was much in demand as an architect for the Government project to build numerous blocks to serve as government offices. In 1956 and 1957, he was chosen as the architect for two highly prestigious buildings: in 1956 the rebuilding of Haberdashers’ Hall in Gresham Street, the first livery hall to be rebuilt after WWII and opened by the Lord Mayor, and in 1957 Hulton House in Fleet Street, the elegant headquarters for Hulton Press.

The Applicant’s Heritage Technical Note dated January 2022 lacks historical accuracy, substance and credibility and as such should not be used to justify the inappropriate development of Howitt Close. It would be perverse to base the planning decision on Cotswold Archaeology’s reports, to the exclusion of the views of respected heritage bodies, such as the 20C Society, the Belsize Society, Belsize CAAC and the Heath & Hampstead Society.

### **Heritage Matters - the revised design**

The Heritage Consultants and the Planning Statement claim that the revised proposals are of an understated character. The claim that the additional floor will not form a dominant presence in the street scene is contradicted by the Architect’s Design and Access Statement which states “The new storey at roof level will give the existing 1920’s[sic] building a greater presence on the street as befits it’s[sic] prominent location.” Far from being “understated”, the new proposal is as prominent and inappropriate as the 2021 planning proposal and like the 2021 application, will damage Howitt Close and harm the Conservation Area.

The white parapet is highly dominant visually and its horizontal line clashes with the predominantly vertical flow of the lines of the existing building. The newly proposed plans imply that the white parapet will have a balcony area behind it with room for plants and even benches on the Glenilla Road side. No doubt residents will add further outdoor furniture to the balcony area, which will make the top floor appear cluttered and intrusive, especially to those living in neighbouring roads who are overlooked by the new attic storey. As previously stated by LB Camden “sitting out areas result in a greater sense of perceived loss of privacy than a window”.

The few widely spaced street trees, even when in leaf, will not provide significant screening of the top storey, as is claimed. The internal lights of the attic storey in the hours of twilight and darkness in the winter months will draw attention to the height of the building and make it a dominant presence in its prominent situation.

Aesthetically, the style of the proposed windows is deeply jarring on top of such a well-preserved 1930s building, which retains throughout its original Crittall windows.

The plans are particularly vague about the finished appearance of the main entrance, with its defining 1930s decorative elements, featuring a porch with stripped, coupled Egyptian-style columns, a decorative iron balustrade and tall window in restrained Art Deco style above, and period lettering reading 'Howitt Close'. A 1933 photograph of the entrance shows that the entrance is unchanged after 90 years. It is hard to see how the proposed extra storey with its obtrusive white parapet will do otherwise than destroy the aesthetic and the integrity of the original design of the entrance.

### **Garden, trees, hedges & biodiversity**

The building is surrounded by a modest area of communal gardens, but there is a notable semi-circular lawn area between the street and the entrance, with what was a decorative pool in period style but now planted with roses and other flowers. The CMP indicates that this lawn area would be neither retained nor protected but would be used as a 2-storey welfare cabin during construction.

The block is surrounded by a privet hedge just inside the brick boundary wall that, together with a few street trees, soften the views from Howitt and Glenilla Roads. The planning application answers 'No' to the question "Are there trees or hedges on land adjacent to the proposed development site that could influence the development or might be important as part of the local landscape character?" but this is incorrect because the surrounding hedge is important to the local landscape and wildlife. The hedge inside the low boundary wall has been in place for decades and provides a sanctuary for a variety of birds, mammals and invertebrates. To preserve the biodiversity fostered by the hedge, it needs to be retained and given full protection during any construction activities, together with the trees within the property's curtilage.

The area of communal garden to the north-west of the building at present comprises a lawn and rose garden, shielded from the street by the hedge just inside the brick wall. The plans provide insufficient detail but this area of communal garden is clearly to be turned into a utility area – storage for bikes and bins - to service the new seven flats. This will destroy part of the limited communal garden available to the residents of the existing 46 flats, and will sacrifice yet another green haven of Camden in the interest of development. Additionally, it is assumed that it is the developer's intention is to remove part of the wall and hedge to provide road access to the bins and bike store. This will dramatically and adversely affect both near and far views from Glenilla Road.

## **Appendix A - Howitt Close Architects**

### **Henry F Webb & Ash, Architectural Partnership 1930-1934**

**c1932 The Ambassador Cinema and flats, Hendon, NW4.** Closed as cinema 1997 and reopened as a gym and fitness centre, retaining the original façade. The fitness centre is included in 'Played in London,' a 2014 English Heritage directory of historic sporting assets in London, endorsed by Historic England in 2015 as "focuse[d] on buildings and assets that research has shown to be of historic or architectural interest."

**c1934 Hillside Court, Finchley Road, NW3** (Block of 56 flats)

**c1936 West Heath Court, North End Way, Golders Green, NW11** (Block of 55 flats)  
Identified in the category 'landmark buildings and structures' and described as a 'fine building' in 'Golders Green Town Centre Conservation Area: Character Appraisal and Management Proposals' 2011. Locally listed by LB Barnet for its architectural interest, on the grounds of aesthetic merits, group value and intactness.

**1934 Howitt Close**, Howitt Road, Belsize Park, NW3 (Block of 45 flats)

**1930s Brentwood Lodge, Holmdale Gardens, Hendon, NW4** (Block of 28 flats)

### **Henry Frederick Webb (1879 - 1953)**

#### **Biographical Summary**

1893-1900 Indentured apprentice to builder & contractor. Studied at trade training school, Regent St Polytechnic & West Ham Polytechnic. Passed City & Guilds with honours in building construction, also carpentry & joinery, brickwork & masonry, also passed manual training examination for teachers.

1898-1900 Clerk of Works for various firms in London and provinces.

1900 Appointed to HM Public Works Dept of Nigeria

1902 Appointed to HM Public Works Dept of Gold Coast Colony

1906 Engineer in charge of Public Works Dept of Ashanti

1905 Whilst on leave sat for Worshipful Co of Carpenters exam in sanitary building, passed with honours & awarded bronze medal.

1906-1908 Coached by GAF Middleton FRIBA for ARIBA examination.

1909 Resigned Gold Coast appointment & spent 6 months touring Europe studying architecture & building methods.

1910-1915 Managing director of building & contracting firms.

1915-1918 War service in France (World War I).

1918-1920 Managing director of building contractors, London.

1920 Started his own practice in Pinner as architect & surveyor.

1928-1930 Entered into partnership with SJ Gray FSI & started practice at 18 Baker St, London.

1930-1934 In partnership with Capt. Arthur S Ash at 18 Baker St.

1920-1930s Honorary technical adviser on building patents to Institute of Patentees. Vice President of Institute of Patentees from 1922.

1933 Became Licentiate member of RIBA.

1924-1930s One of judges of building section of International Exhibition of Inventions held by Institute of Patentees.

1939-1944 In practice in Mundesley-on-Sea, Norfolk during World War II.

1945 onwards. In practice in Pinner.

#### **Buildings designed by Henry F Webb:**

N.B. RIBA Library has misplaced H F Webb's file so the record is incomplete at present.

**1936 Elm Park Court, Elm Park Road, Pinner.** Grade II listed: "Three blocks of flats linked by arched openings, of different shapes and sizes but similarly detailed and forming a homogeneous group round a central courtyard... Elm Park Gardens is recommended as an exuberant example of the colonial or hacienda style in the mid-1930s deemed appropriate for private flats intended for a middle-class community aping a Hollywood lifestyle."

### **Arthur Stanley Ash (1885 – 1966)**

#### **Biographical Summary**

1902-1905 Articled pupil to Walter Arthur Dobson, Architect of Headingley, Leeds.

1903 Passed RIBA Preliminary Examination

1906 3 years' study of interior decoration under Sir Charles Allom (eminent English decorator, who trained as an architect & was knighted for his work on Buckingham Palace) – including continual trips to Continent for study of architecture.

Worked as assistant in Buenos Aires, then as draughtsman in New Orleans, USA, then surveying in Central America. Construction & surveying work in Cuba for Cuban American Sugar Co.

1914-1919 Returned to UK at outbreak of World War I & commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant RFA.

Demobilised 1919 as Captain/acting Major.

Post WWI to South Africa re engineering interests. Several trips to South America.

1930-34 In partnership with Henry F Webb at 18 Baker St, London.

1934 Became Licentiate member of RIBA.

1934 onwards. In practice at 1 Mandeville Place, London.

1937 Became Fellow of RIBA.

### **Buildings designed by Major Arthur S Ash:**

**1930s Norland Square Mansions, Norland Square, W11.** (Block of 28 flats) Adjacent to listed terraces in Norland Square: “The mansion block does not replicate the architecture of the listed terraces... Nevertheless, the three main bays with their paired, vertical groupings of windows and balconies give the façade a balanced, ordered appearance in keeping with the general visual character of the square.” Under the Norland Neighbourhood Plan 2013: “changes should not involve raising the roof line, or developing any roof terraces which would clutter the existing roof line... alter the current design in terms of fenestration, balconies, bay windows, and painted versus brickwork panels.”

**1937 99 Haverstock Hill, Belsize Park, NW3.** (Block of 56 flats) Stanbury Court: a “handsome building in a style uniquely of the twentieth century” with “horizontal paned windows wider than they are long, smooth white surfaces, rounded corners and flat roofs”

**c1938 Lancaster Gate Terrace, Bayswater, W2.** (Block of 85 flats)

**1947 Adastral House, Theobalds Road, WC1** (Office Building for Air Ministry)

**1948 Charles House, Kensington High Street, W8.** (Office Building) Now demolished.

**c1949 Lacon House, 29-45 Theobalds Road, WC1.** (Office Building for Board of Trade)

**1950 151 Shaftesbury Avenue** (Government offices)

**1951-1955 Headrow House, The Headrow, Leeds** (Office Building above shops)

**1953 28-29 Dover Street, Mayfair W1** (Office Building)

**1956 Haberdashers' Livery Hall, Gresham Street, EC.** First livery hall to be rebuilt after World War II, & opened by Lord Mayor.

**1957 Hulton House, Fleet Street.** (HQ offices for Hulton Press)

### **Appendix B Copy of my Objection to Planning Application 2021/3839/P**

I am resident in Howitt Close and have been a leaseholder for 17 years. I strongly object to the planning proposal on the grounds that it will damage a well-preserved, unique 1930s building of considerable architectural merit and significance. The bulking-up of the building by the addition of a

mansard roof and an extra storey will destroy the architectural integrity of a heritage asset, adversely affect the visual appearance of the neighbourhood and profoundly damage the conservation area.

Howitt Close was very carefully designed in 1932 to suit its specific location and, internally and externally, it remains fundamentally undamaged and unaltered by changes over the ninety years since construction. It has maintained its architectural integrity over the best part of a century and is unspoilt by major additions or changes. After surviving intact the second world war, unlike some Howitt Road properties, and escaping infelicitous developments in the post WWII era, it would be deeply ironic if the building were to be desecrated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whilst defined in the The Belsize Conservation Area Statement (2003) as a building making a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the conservation area, and apparently subject to the protections of a conservation area.

### **Aesthetic appeal of Howitt Close within its location**

This L-shaped building was clearly designed to make optimal use of the space available, but without dominating its prominent position at the junction of Howitt Road and Glenilla Road, with Belsize Park Gardens a stone's throw away. Aesthetically it was designed to blend with the earlier Edwardian terraced housing in the neighbouring streets that predated it, whilst proclaiming its era of construction through its overall form and Art Deco flourishes. The proposal to add a fourth level and mansard roof would destroy the proportions of the building and make Howitt Close, at present perfectly adjusted to its vicinity within streets of terraced Edwardian houses, an over-prominent and jarring presence.

Camden Council in its 12 May 2020 preplanning advice to the developer acknowledges the architectural skill, integrity and appropriateness of the building in its present form:

"The existing building is constructed as two brick storeys topped with a white roughcast one. This two-plus-one composition, with the use of a pale storey above a darker mass below, combined with the topography of the street which gently declines towards the site, means that although at three full storeys above ground it technically contains a storey more than the surrounding houses, it does not appear more bulky. In addition, the scale has been carefully designed, with the use of setbacks and tripartite "bay windows", giving a plot width akin to that of a house, and through the use of domestic materials – red brick and roughcast – as seen on houses across the street. As it stands, it is considered to be a complete composition of considerable charm which, through good design suits its context well."

The same document goes on to describe the adverse effect of any alterations to the building's height:

"The site is prominent, being adjacent to a T-junction and addressing a curve in the road. This means that it is visible in long views along Howitt Road from the north-east and along Glenilla Road from the north-west. It is also freestanding, set apart from surrounding buildings, particularly to the south-west, and this means it is highly visible. Any alterations to its height would therefore be visually prominent from various points in the streetscape. The building is terminated with overhanging eaves and a flat roof; a unique feature of the building...

Any extension would also have to be mindful of the prevailing height of surrounding buildings. The relevant streetscape to the building, is less the larger buildings of Belsize Park Gardens as shown in the drawings, but the smaller scale of Howitt Road which the building addresses."

The Belsize Conservation Area Statement states that "Roof extensions and alterations, which change the shape and form of the roof, can have a harmful impact on the Conservation Area". Such extensions "are unlikely to be acceptable where:

- It would be detrimental to the form and character of the existing building...
- The roof is prominent, particularly in long views".

The Heritage Statement commissioned by Daejan Properties Ltd implies that the flat roof of Howitt Close is something of an aberration in Howitt Road but, rather than an aberration, the flat roof should



be seen as a conscious choice by the architect to restrict the height of the building. As described by Camden Planning above, at three full storeys above ground the building technically contains a storey more than the surrounding houses (two storeys plus an attic level within mansard roofs) but, due to the flat roof coupled with other design features (such as two brick storeys topped with a white roughcast one – i.e. a pale storey above a darker mass below) described above, it does not appear too tall. But, at three storeys, Howitt Close is already at the maximum height to blend in aesthetically with the neighbourhood.

Daejan's Heritage Statement downplays the architectural uniqueness of the building and makes no mention of the excellent state of authenticity and preservation of the building. It is unlikely that the highly debatable view expressed in the Heritage Statement that "the addition of the mansard storey would be considered to represent an overall enhancement to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area" would be shared by those without a financial interest in the project. Most would consider the flat roof, coupled with the deep eaves, distinctive and attractive features of Howitt Close. The building in its present form is highly valued in the neighbourhood and the addition of a fourth storey and mansard roof is likely to be widely considered as inflicting substantial harm on a heritage asset. Howitt Close is the only mansion block in its immediate vicinity and the extra storey would add bulk to what is now a well-proportioned and not over-dominant building. The closest visible mansion block to Howitt Close is Sussex House, a short distance away on Glenilla Road, which is singled out in the Conservation Area Statement as a negative feature: "an oppressively large block" and "an overbearing flat block significantly larger than the other buildings in the street". The current proposal to bulk up Howitt Close into an oppressively large block should be firmly rejected.

Daejan's Heritage Statement discusses the blocks (Glenloch Court, Wimborne Mansions, Banff House and Moor Court) on the junction of Glenloch and Glenmore Roads, although these are completely out of sight from Howitt Close and its surroundings. These blocks are four storeys high with flat roofs. The implication is that these blocks are classified as "neutral contributors" to the conservation zone as a result of their flat roofs. In reality it is not the lack of a mansard roof that makes these blocks less attractive and emphasises each building's bulk and height but the fact that they are four storeys high and tower above the surrounding terraces - as Howitt Close would do with the addition of a fourth storey. Part of the visual unattractiveness of these blocks in their context is because they are disproportionately tall for the width of the streets in which they are located. An extra storey on Howitt Close would have a similar effect at the bottom of Howitt Road: the block would loom above the street making it over-dominant in contrast to its current harmonious presence.

Daejan's Heritage Statement attempts to downplay the impact of the additional storey on the views towards Howitt Close from the north-east, south and north-west but it does not go so far as to suggest that there would be no adverse effect on these views. Howitt Close is already visible for the length of Glenilla Road as far as Belsize Avenue but in its present form it could be taken at a distance for a terrace of houses. Closer up, it is an imposing presence and the height and width of an extra storey would make it over-dominant. Daejan's Heritage Statement refers to the "utilitarian style of the western elevation" but this is highly subjective and unjustified. This façade is entirely in harmony with the rest of the building and its slightly simpler design complements the glimpse of the front and view of the eastern wing, which can be seen simultaneously from the north-western approach. Again from the north-east Howitt Close can be seen from a considerable distance up Howitt Road but, as from the north-west approach along Glenilla Road, it could be a view of terraced houses until one approaches fairly close to the mansion block. From Belsize Park Gardens and the southern approach along Glenilla Road, Howitt Close is already an imposing presence and an additional storey would spoil the streetscape along this stretch of the road.

### **Historic significance of Howitt Close**

Howitt Close was constructed between 1932 and 1934. A 'Notice of new buildings, drainage works, and apparatus in connection therewith'<sup>i</sup> dated 27 October 1932 was filed with the Borough of

Hampstead. This Notice was signed by Henry F Webb & Ash and the same business is shown as the owner of the site/building. Howitt Close first appears in the General Rate book for Belsize Ward made 6 April 1934<sup>ii</sup>, which shows that the 46 flats in the building were fully occupied by tenants as at April 1934, by which time the building was owned by London Mayfair & District Properties Ltd.

The Daejan Heritage Statement incorrectly dates the property ("represents a 1920s addition," "constructed in a single phase, between 1920 and 1935" and "possibly indicates that the building was constructed in the early 1920s") and, as such, the statement cannot interpret correctly either the individual significance of the building or its importance within its historical context.

A construction date between 1932 and 1934 means that Howitt Close was contemporaneous with the (Grade I listed) Isokon flats, located less than half a mile away on the east side of Haverstock Hill. The design of the Isokon flats was developed 1929-1932 and they were officially opened in July 1934, shortly after Howitt Close was first occupied. A huge amount has been written about the Isokon building – a project “to design an apartment building and its interior based on the principle of affordable, communal and well-designed inner-city living... But it was not a working class building – it was aimed at intellectual, working middle class people.”<sup>iii</sup> The Howitt Close flats were also intended to provide compact living spaces for the middle classes. The original plans<sup>iv</sup> for the building were titled ‘Proposed Block of Small Type Flats.’ Howitt Close had a restaurant from the very beginning in the lower ground floor, with ‘Ash & Fitch’ (presumably the caterers) occupying the restaurant and associated accommodation at April 1934<sup>v</sup>. The famous Isobar restaurant in the Isokon building was not opened until 1937, when the communal kitchen in the block was converted into a restaurant. The impetus behind Howitt Close was similar to that of the Isokon building and, with its contrasting architectural style, it provides context for a modernist building like the Isokon flats. Without good comparable examples like Howitt Close, which remains very close to its 1930s state, the significance of the Isokon flats is diminished.

It is notable that the business ‘Henry F Webb & Ash’ was the original owner and developer of Howitt Close. There can be no doubt that the Henry F Webb concerned was the architect Henry Frederick Webb (1879-1953) who designed Elm Park Court, Pinner, constructed in 1936 and now Grade II listed. Elm Park Court is considered one of the icons of the form of modernism which took hold in ‘Metro-land’ in the 1930s, a form of modernism which owes more to Art Deco than to the later ‘brutalist’ strand of modernism. Whilst the green and white colour-scheme of Elm Park Court gives it a very distinctive character, its Art Deco heritage is apparent and the development has a number of features in common with Howitt Close. Over and above its intrinsic architectural merit, Howitt Close is significant as another building designed by HF Webb, an architect important to north-west London as the designer of the iconic Grade II-listed Elm Park Court.

In contrast to the well-publicised and dramatic history of the Isokon Building with its celebrity tenants – “Very few pre 1945 tenants do not have a Wikipedia entry”<sup>vi</sup> - Howitt Close has had a quiet history, and remarkably little has been written about it. It is understood that it was used as residential accommodation for civil servants at some point and further research could reveal an interesting story of an early example of inner city, partly communal living for the middle classes. In contrast to the Isokon Building, which fell into an appalling state of disrepair under Camden Council’s ownership and required total refurbishment, Howitt Close has remained in a reasonable state of repair over the past 90 years, partly because it lacks some of the structural design faults which contributed to the Isokon’s deterioration. It is fair to say that Howitt Close, as a pleasing presence in its location, has been taken for granted over the best part of a century, at least until the threat to the architectural integrity of the building posed by the current planning proposal. In my opinion, it is only a matter of time before Howitt Close becomes highly valued and rightly appreciated for its distinctive architecture and its well-preserved authenticity, leading to listed status – unless, that is, the current planning proposal succeeds in desecrating the building before then. It is vital that the building is preserved unviolated for posterity.

It would be a perverse planning decision, and nothing less than cultural vandalism, to allow this building, a heritage asset which makes such a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the Belsize conservation area, to be violated for the sake of the addition of a mere seven flats in private ownership and a payment in lieu of affordable housing of less than £250,000. It would be a breach of the underlying principles of the conservation area if a unique, extremely well-preserved architectural gem like Howitt Close is wantonly desecrated for the sake of a few additional flats.

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<sup>i</sup> Available in Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre

<sup>ii</sup> General Rates made 06.04.34, available in Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.ignant.com/2016/04/04/the-secret-history-of-londons-isokon-building/>

<sup>iv</sup> Available in Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre

<sup>v</sup> General Rates made 06.04.34, available in Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.ignant.com/2016/04/04/the-secret-history-of-londons-isokon-building/>