

2112 Extension Design & Access/Heritage Statement

18 Spedan Close, Branch Hill Estate

2112.external dah statement

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1.0 Introduction

The application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent is for minor external alterations to 18 Spedan Close in the Branch Hill Estate in Hampstead. The proposed alterations include the addition of a gate on the store in the lower patio; the replacement of the gate on the lower patio, fence panel on the lower patio, and front door; re-painting the steelwork garden balustrades and spiral stair; and removal of a self-seeded sycamore tree.



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 overall layout with reference to the gardens, reads:

“The whole estate is ordered by the strict geometry of the orthogonal plan, which admits little variety of perspective, although the slipped grid to the north of the site interrupts the regularity a little and the plentiful greenness of the garden terraces softens its effect. The brick paving of the paths is also highly characterful.

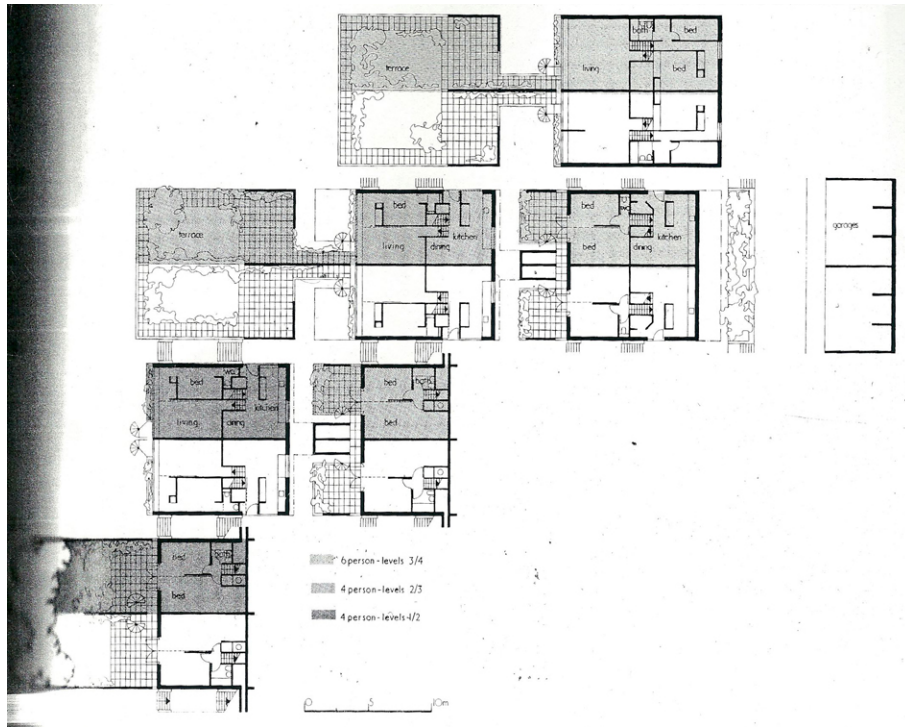
Each house has a garden terrace on the roof of the next house down the slope, accessed from the living room's French door via a gangway over the horizontal passageways and courtyard. An outdoor metal spiral staircase in the courtyard provides additional access to the gangway and thus the garden terrace and living room too. Each terrace has a top soil, to allow residents to plant a garden, and utilising the full load-bearing capacities of the reinforced concrete roof slabs; there are also window boxes incorporated into the roof slabs along the front of each living room window. Only the bottom row of houses has ground-level gardens. The garden terraces project slightly from the storey below which, given this is the living room of another property, creates a sense of privacy, something further enhanced by the concrete walls shielding the more exposed corners of the terraces.”

The Estate is also within the Hampstead Conservation Area, and as outlined within the Conservation Area Statement, Spedan Close makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The Branch Hill/Oak Hill area is designated a borough Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) as outlined in the Camden Biodiversity Action Plan.

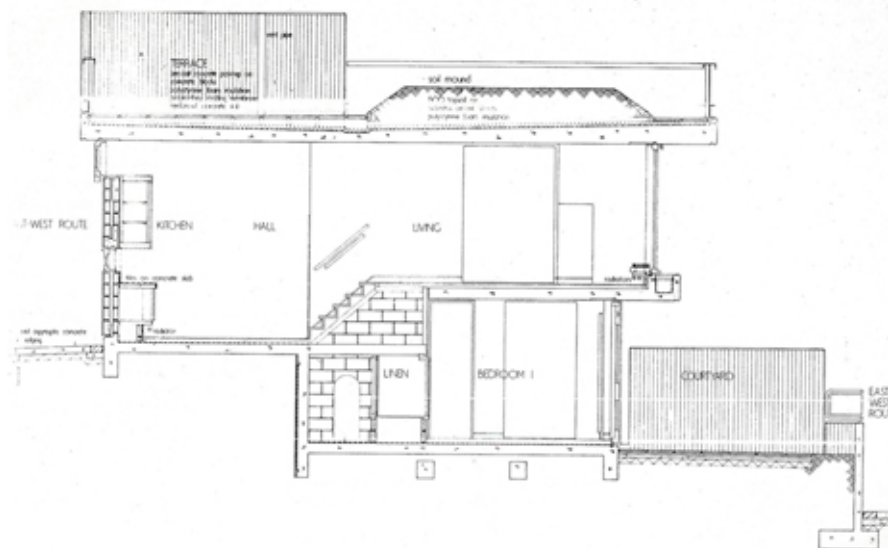
Subsequently, the proposed alterations will require LBC & Planning Permission.

2.0 Physical context:

2.1 Original house

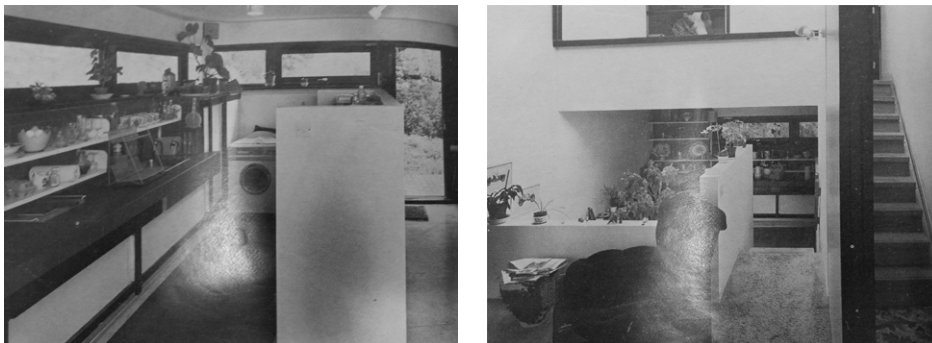


original floor plan



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.



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. On the lower level were two children's bedrooms, bathroom, and external patio.

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. However, a close study of drawings and photos, and visiting or talking to people living in the houses reveals that the split level plan and built-in fittings limit furnishing and the use of spaces so that they are not as flexible, nor as adaptable to the changing needs of families as Benson & Forsyth's original stated intention.

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. These are re-acquiring the patination of age as they become increasingly stained and covered with algae growth.
- The original openings in party walls between lower patios 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 patio and adjoining lower patio has been blocked up to address this problem, similar to the majority of properties in the estate. Likewise, the original slot in the concrete patio wall to the communal walkway has been blocked up with a couple of painted timber battens for privacy.
- A stained panelled timber fence has also been erected on the upper terrace by the original grass area on the party boundary to neighbouring 17 Spedan Close, for the same reason, and again similar to the majority of properties in the estate. A timber trellis has also been erected on the upper terrace above the party boundary concrete wall too.

- 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.

The timber gate is rotten and falling apart. Some of the paintwork on the steelwork spiral stair and garden balustrades is flaking and some of the the steelwork is rusting, and it would be good for this to be redecorated to avoid further corrosion. The store in the lower patio does not have a door, nor gate.



non original front door



tree in lower patio



garden balustrade

Internally, the house has been significantly altered by previous owners since it was constructed.

A sycamore tree has self-seeded in the planter in the lower patio and though it provides some natural greenery to the setting, it has grown too large and could damage the existing building.

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".

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.'

Section 72(1) states that 'in respect to any buildings... in a conservation area... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

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”.

Other relevant policies include:

- A1 – Managing the impact of development
- D1 - Design

3.2 Planning History

A proposed scheme for internal alterations was granted LBC ref. 2022/1736/L, in June 2022, and work on this is due to start shortly. An earlier proposed scheme for internal alterations was granted LBC 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. As mentioned above, some occupiers have added extensions to provide additional space to their homes. The house has been in the family’s ownership for ten years and the applicants would like to carry out the proposed works to maintain and improve it.

5.0 Justification and Statement of Significance

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 and assessment of proposed works

The proposed alterations include:

- The addition of a sympathetically designed gate on the store in the lower patio, for security.

- The replacement of the rotten timber gate on the lower patio to match the store gate, again for security.
- The replacement of a more sympathetically designed fence panel on the lower patio
- The replacement of a more sympathetically designed front door.
- Re-painting the steelwork garden balustrades and spiral stair to match existing and the others on the estate for maintenance.
- The removal of the sycamore tree to prevent it damaging the fabric of the existing building.

Subsequently, the proposed alterations would preserve and enhance the setting of the Listed Building and the contribution that the Branch Hill Estate makes to the conservation area.

Tree:

There is a Sycamore Tree (T1) located in the rear garden growing directly adjacent to the boundary wall. An Impact Assessment Report has been produced by Wood Consulting and submitted with this application. The tree has been surveyed to assess its condition and the impact that this may have on the existing building. Following the assessment it has been concluded that as the tree continues to grow, it would lead to damage to the listed boundary wall. It is also concluded that the garden is small for this growing tree, in fact the assessment concludes that in its current size it is already overgrown for its space. Therefore, as the tree continues to grow over the coming years this would only result in damage to the listed wall and possibly the dwellinghouse.

The Sycamore has been assessed as a BS5837 Category C tree and therefore it is of a low quality and contributes very little to the amenity of the locality. It is considered that such tree should not be considered as a constraint against the development and its removal should not be resisted.

NPPF Test:

The special interest of the listed building would not be harmed and as such the requirements of Chapter 16 of the NPPF are not engaged.

7.0 Summary:

The proposed alterations would not harm the special historic or architectural interest of the designated heritage asset and would be fully reversible in the future. The proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area. The proposed scheme meets the objectives of the NPPF, London Plan and local Camden planning policy and should be considered for approval. Should the local planning authority be minded to grant permission and consent subject to conditions, our client would be happy to accept.

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).

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- Hampstead Conservation Area Statement,
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/7549418/Hampstead+CA+appraisal.pdf/11b738f9-02be-b84b-f66d-e19e0218daf8>, accessed 06/05/2022.