

Dear Ms Henry,

I wish to object, again, in the strongest possible terms against the proposed addition of a storey to Howitt Close. As I have explained in my objection to the first planning application (see below), the unique characteristics of a wholesome art déco building in the conservation area of Belsize Park played a crucial role when deciding to purchase a flat in the building. The freeholder would considerably reduce the value of my property. The proposed extension by an additional storey would also make a mockery of the original design and affect the entire neighbourhood in a most detrimental way.

There are several pertinent reasons to object to this planning application, but before I do so, I would like to express my deep concerns about the process of this renewed planning application, as it seems that David McKinstry, the conservation officer with the Council, had made up his mind about the changes to the original design, as emerges from an e-mail which forms part of the documentation for the new planning application. In this e-mail, dated 13 July 2022, Mr McKinstry states that 'the revised proposal can be supported' if the changes proposed by the architects of the freeholder are implemented. I trust that you are familiar with this correspondence.

While I accept that an applicant will have meetings with the Council's officers while developing a design for a building, the wording of this message implies that Mr McKinstry did not show the necessary restraint in expressing his views, and thus may well have impacted on the Council's – in fact, your, Ms Henry – decision-making process. I would have expected that a conscientious officer would have kept their views for themselves until the entire consultation process is concluded: a process during which not only members of the public immediately concerned by the planning application, such as myself, and very much invested in the outcome of the process, voice their concerns, but also more qualified and distant voices, such as heritage societies or professionals of architectural history. What can we expect of the Council's deliberations in this matter of very considerable concern for our well-being if Mr McKinstry had already made up his mind, and very unprofessionally shared it with others?

While Mr McKinstry obviously wanted to get over with this whole matter as quickly as possible, I trust that you will apply more care and consider this matter with the same precision which spoke of your refusal to grant a planning permission – I was very impressed by the thoroughness of your report published on August 3, 2022.

Most importantly, the new planning application does not sufficiently address the central requirements of Camden Council's policies on planning permissions in conservation areas, namely or to 'enhance' or to 'preserve' the character of the area. As voices more expert than myself have explained most eloquently, the new planning application would have an extremely detrimental impact on the appearance of Howitt Close itself, and a similarly negative impact on the conservation area of Belsize Park.

The materials submitted by the applicant are hastily and carelessly produced, continuously speaking of Howitt Close as a 1920s building (though built in 1933), repeats the misleading

statement of the first planning application of the original design of an ‘unfinished appearance’ (p.5), does not include a credible Construction Management Plan. I urge you to carefully review the ‘Energy and sustainability’ assessment for this planning application, as the new design includes a few solar panels of the size of an ironing board which cannot seriously be considered a sufficient solution to this ever more pressing issue. The reason, in my non-expert understanding, for this being that solar panels which would efficiently improve the energy balance of Howitt Close would need to be significantly larger and therefore also more visible than these sad excuses of solar panels included in the current design, and thus further adding to the bulky appearance of the new design. Equally important seems to be that the current plans do not seem to include all the technically required elements, such as beams, drains, and vents, which would add height and thus, visual mass to the proposed new storey.

The new planning application reflects the attempt of the commissioned architect to come up with some window-dressing ‘improvements’ to create the impression that the serious concerns expressed over the first planning application have been addressed. Taking into consideration the changed window design and the slightly receding front elevation of the new storey, the choice of materials and the mass of the added floor itself will inevitably ruin both the elegant appearance of the building mentioned by most serious experts and create an overbearing presence of the building in the neighbourhood.

This impact of the proposed new storey is even acknowledged in the planning application, where the architects state that the proposed addition would lead to ‘a greater presence on the street as befits its prominent location’ (p. 23, Full planning application ‘compressed’). This is in direct contradiction to the – overall extremely poorly documented – heritage statement by an Mr Coe, who obviously hoped to satisfy the wishes and needs of the freeholder by stating that ‘the revised scheme proposals have sought to achieve an understated character’ and ‘will not form a dominant presence’ of the added storey.

What is it? ‘Greater presence befitting Howitt Close’s location’ or ‘understated character’? These contradictory statements in the new planning application only reflect the lack of consideration for Howitt Close itself, now on a pathway to a local listing due to the endeavours of The Belsize Society and The Twentieth Century Society, a lack of consideration for the conservation area of Belsize Park, eloquently deplored by the Belsize Conservation Area Advisory Committee, and the disregard of leaseholders and residents living in the building.

I would like to conclude with a few observations.

- I am convinced that the visualizations included in the planning application itself do not correctly reflect the real proportions and visual impact of the planned construction, and I urge you to carefully review the submitted construction plans.
- Also, there are contradictions in the visualizations of the arrangement of windows for the façade of the proposed new elevation towards Glenilla Road between the ‘Addendum’ (dated 16.8.2022) p.7 and 8, apparently considering meetings with Council, and the ‘Design compressed’ file, p. 23, the latter with an earlier date (5.8.2021), thus preceding meetings with Council. **The more recent design is even more bulky and overbearing than the earlier one. I wonder whether this is the kind**

of so-called improvements which led David McKinstry to conclude that the new design might be supported. This is very disconcerting.

- The planning application speaks of 'enhanced communal areas' (p. 31 of the 'compressed' full planning application) but fails to identify what these do consist of (unless you define the destruction of the bed of roses in the front garden by the welfare cabins is considered such an enhancement).

Most importantly, I would like to urge you to take the very serious and comprehensive objections of the experts as seriously as you did for the first planning application. Not one of these experts has been convinced by the window-dressing efforts of the new planning application, and it speaks volumes that the freeholder had to resort to an obscure Cotswolds heritage 'expert' – who even succeeded in contradicting the architects themselves, as explained earlier. It takes much more care and consideration to develop a design which truly 'enhances' the character of unique neighbourhood such as Belsize Park than the proposed 'off-the-shelves' design proposed in the new planning application, and it is your responsibility to indeed make sure this unique neighbourhood is preserved.

With best wishes
François Guesnet

Earlier objection:

Dear Ms Henry,

I wish to object in the strongest possible terms against the proposed addition of a floor to Howitt Close. I am a leaseholder in the building since more than ten years. As many of my fellow-leaseholders, the unique characteristics of this art déco building have played a significant role in deciding to move into this building and to purchase a flat in it.

Like the vast majority (if not all) leaseholders and tenants in the building, I am convinced that the proposed construction will have a) a hugely negative impact on the wellbeing of its residence, b) on this part of Belsize Park as a protected Conservation Area, but also c) on the everyday lives of ourselves and our neighbours. In my view, there is not the shadow of a doubt that Camden Council has to refuse this planning application.

a) Negative impact on the residents of Howitt Close: With 46 flats, the building is already very densely populated. Already now, there is not enough space to manage the waste of these flats. Already now, deliveries, visitors and people involved in small works in one of the many flats create a constant flow of people in the building. The proposed 7 new flats with realistically 10 to 15 new residents will considerably reduce the quality of life in the building.

The Construction Management Plan, added only today (27 October 2021) to the planning application, demonstrates that this application can only be implemented by destroying our

front garden with a two-storey 'welfare cabin' (p.42). I assume that the developer, who has shown an appalling lack of consideration for the wellbeing of the residents of Howitt Close by not undertaking any form of consultation, considers this irrelevant collateral damage – for us residents, it is a major infringement on our wellbeing. The proposed planning application does not only very significantly and negatively impacts on our wellbeing during the proposed construction. It will also reduce the value of our properties by creating a cramped and overburdened building.

b) The proposed addition of a roof destroys the uniquely elegant appearance of Howitt Close by adding a heavy, overwhelming and dominating feature to a finely balanced and beautiful neighbourhood. It will negatively impact on the appearance of Howitt Road, Glenilla Road, and Belsize Park Gardens. More qualified objectors (the Conservation Area Advisory Committee) have already stated that the intentionally misleading statements by the developer about creating a building more in synch with the neighbourhood is an attempt to sugarcoat a blatant attack on a built environment which is unique and which Camden Council is **obliged** to protect by rejecting the planning application. The attempt to put lipstick on a pig's snout by claiming that the added floor would positively contribute to the neighbourhood is a travesty, and cannot obscure the only objective of this planning application of making a profit.

c) Beyond the negative consequences for life in Howitt Close itself, also the neighbourhood will be negatively impacted: The added floor will reduce the privacy of a very significant number of houses and flats in the immediate vicinity of the building. It will take away light from a large number of neighbours and thus reduce their wellbeing, but also the value of their properties. This part of Belsize Park is already a very densely populated neighbourhood. Adding seven flats will add traffic, noise, and problems to parking (even if indeed the leases for the new flats should, as they need to, include a clause preventing the new residents from acquiring parking permits). Also, it is very likely that construction works will not be possible without destroying the grown environment: especially the hedges and trees of the front garden.

Yours sincerely

François Guesnet