

Blackburn Park Conservation Society

Mr D. Lawless

Manchester City Council

Planning Department

16/7/2022

Dear Mr Lawless,

Re 133791/JO/2022 | Variation of condition numbers 2 (approved plans) and 3 (materials) from planning approval reference 132521/FH/2021 to allow amendments to the front roof profile and design alterations to the single storey rear extension | 25 Parkfield Road South Manchester M20 6DB

I am writing on behalf of the Blackburn Park Conservation Society to express our views on the above planning application

Thornton, 25 Parkfield Road South is an important building in the Blackburn Park conservation area. It is one of the oldest houses and built before the 1904 High Court judgement which endorsed the Blackburn Park building scheme. It is also situated in a very prominent position on the busiest road in the conservation area, Parkfield Road South.

The Planning Context

The planning context of this site is that it is located in a suburban area of South Manchester, close to the Didsbury District Centre and within the Blackburn Park Conservation Area. The conservation area designation places a requirement on the Local Planning Authority under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay, "special attention in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area" and this includes the determination of planning applications.

The new application contains many substantial and unnecessary changes which are significantly harmful to the Conservation Area. It is both surprising and disappointing that these were not envisaged at the time of the original application or that any attempts were made to consult the planning department before they were actually carried out, as they have already been built. It is difficult for us to see how this could have taken place if the original application had been serious and submitted in good faith. In many ways it makes a mockery of the planning consultation process and perhaps the City Council would like to look at ways of preventing this apparent abuse from happening in the future.

‘Fait accompli’ situation

The proposed building work is nearly finished, and all the variations proposed in the latest application have already been made. This is always a great concern to us as the applicant appears to be attempting to use the ‘fait accompli’ situation to their advantage trying to leave the Council with no option but to accept it. We trust that this will not be the case here.

The harmful changes to the front elevation roof were carried out by a single roofer working over the Easter Bank holiday weekend 15-18th April 2022 which is often a sign of nefarious activity at a time when it is not possible to report it to the relevant authorities.

Impact on the Blackburn Park Conservation Area

Front elevation roof changes

We object most strongly to the profile changes to the front elevation roof with removal of the original ‘Arts and Crafts’ design of a “Wedge” or “Catslide” dormer window roof. This has been replaced by large full depth roof section now continuing right to the main roof ridge giving an uncharacteristic alien “ski slope” appearance. This divides the main roof into three, giving a very unusual and bizarre appearance completely out of character for a building of such prominence within the conservation area and represents an unacceptable change to the roof design. We do not know of any other example of this strange appearance inside or outside the Conservation area!

We feel this issue is of primary importance and particularly harmful for the whole conservation area as there are at least 13 other the houses with exactly the same arts and crafts dormer window arrangement from the 1900s. If this change is allowed to take place here it will set a very bad precedent for the entire Blackburn Park Conservation Area and could in time result in all these arts and crafts dormer window roofs eventually being lost as these houses are reroofed in Blackburn Park.

For the first 80 years of its life the original roof design of Thornton was roofed with small Rosemary tiles then after a storm in the 1980s the house was re roofed with larger Marley tiles but still keeping the wedge dormer roof design unchanged. We understand that the applicant’s roofer is now saying the particular specification of the new Rosemary tiles they have chosen to use requires the whole design of the roof to be changed and the gradient over the dormer increased. To us this seems absurd as the original Rosemary tiles did not create problems for the any of the previous owners of Thornton and do not on the remaining 13 buildings with exactly the same type of arts and crafts dormer roof in the Blackburn Park conservation area. Recycled Rosemary tiles have been satisfactorily used on several roofs in the Conservation area.

There is a fundamental question of principle involved here. If an applicant chooses to use a material with a particular specification surely this cannot be a valid reason for altering the design of a major, significant, longstanding and satisfactorily functioning feature in a conservation area.

As you can see from above we strongly object to the change in design because of its harm to the conservation area. However if the fact that the manufacturer of these particular Rosemary tiles specification recommends a minimum angle of 31 degrees is going to be included at all as being a consideration we would like to point out a number of anomalies and incongruities.

From the drawings available to us we have measured the angle of the original wedge dormer roof to be 27.7 degrees and the new revised “ski slope” roof to the ridge section to be 28.8 degrees. So the harmful alteration only represents a marginal change in angle which even then fails to meet the 31 degrees suggested anyway so entirely negating that argument. The whole main front elevation roof only has an angle of 33 degrees and the new replacement garage roof angle is merely 26 degrees but still planned to be covered in the same Rosemary roof tiles.

Additionally, these days waterproof under membranes are used, as they have been on this roof, further negating these issues.

We are at a loss as to why this change to the roof profile has been made and the excuse of the 31 degrees specification could be an afterthought. Maybe LDM Slate Roofing Limited are not familiar with working on Rosemary tiled roofs, particularly in conservation areas, or maybe this re fabrication of the roof has just generated more income.

Additionally the edges of the “ski slope”, main roof and apex of the right hand side dormer have been covered with a red plastic edging strip and not pointed in the original way. This does not meet the condition that the materials to be used on external elevations shall match those on the external elevations of the existing building in colour, size and texture in the interests of visual amenity, pursuant to Policy DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy.

133791_JO_2022-ELEVATIONS_2-1948899.pdf is inaccurate as it does not show the “profile of the retiled dormer” extending right up to the top of the ridge tiles.

Removal of characteristic Edwardian Chimney Stacks

We strongly object to the removal of the three fine decorative brick chimney stacks which is damaging to both the front and rear elevations. Brick chimneys are an important characteristic of such Edwardian houses particularly in the area that Blackburn Park Conservation Area was designated to conserve. The chimneys on Thornton are especially fine examples. They are built with three different types of brick, two shades of red and one yellow for the corners, displaying vertical relief feature bilaterally and with typical red chimneypots. This can all be seen on the chimney on the left-hand side of the front elevation which still remains. We would ask that all three chimneys be rebuilt as chimney stack removal has not been permitted when requested before elsewhere in the Conservation Area in accordance with the City Council's Unitary Development Plan policies DC1 and H2.2 e.g. Application ref. no. 16 December 2008 088624/FH/2008/S2 Removal and re-building of chimney stack, 26 Barlow Moor Road, Didsbury, Manchester, M20 2GJ.

Indeed the chimneys on Thornton are of much greater character and quality than those on 26 Barlow Moor Road, possibly the finest examples in the Conservation Area, and even more important to conserve. None of the four chimney stacks were removed during the recent similar refurbishment of neighbouring 21 Parkfield Road South.

Changes to the rear extension

We object to the change of design to the rear elevation extension. The original proposed central window was in proportion to the others on the elevation and with common brick to the side and rear walls of the extension to match the house. We think this including the rear extension brickwork below this window to the ground level will retain the character of the

house rather than the new proposed black painted louvres and frames which will detract from the quality and appearance of the property.

Rear elevation 'roof lights'

We strongly object to the changes to the rear elevation roof lights. One is now much larger and out of proportion to the others in the rear roof of the property. The original three rooflights on the right of the rear roof already existed from the reroofing in the 1980s although we think the new ones that have now been installed are larger than shown on the drawing and detrimental to the appearance of the rear elevation. All these windows have also now been installed in a much lower position in the roof than the new drawing indicates. Their lower edge is currently so low that coincides with part of the bottom windowpane of the side windows of the building. They all appear to be so low down in the roof, below 1.75m from the floor, that they are not actually "roof lights" but more side windows so someone just standing can look straight out with serious loss of privacy for the neighbours.

Front elevation right-hand dormer window design.

The window frame that has been installed on the front elevation in the gable wall of the right-hand dormer does not correspond to the design shown on the drawing PL203 REV P1 and having these four horizontal panes is out of keeping with the character of the house and other similar house dormer gable windows. Also the black wooden decorative V above the window is too narrow in proportion compared to the original and neighbours and has a mean un Edwardian like appearance. Drawing PL203 REV P1 shows it to be broader.

Summary and Conclusion

From all the details given above it can be seen that the new proposal fails to preserve or enhance the character of the Blackburn Conservation Area and is in conflict with Heritage Policy EN3 and Development Management Policy DM 1 of the Manchester Core Strategy. It is also contrary to the Guide to Development in Manchester Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance and should be refused.

Kind regards

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