

Planning Statement
Westminster City Council

Reconfiguration of Flats 3 and 4
32 Hyde Park Square
W2 2NW

Introduction

- 1 This application seeks permission to re-configure two 2 bedroom flats (Flat 3 and Flat 4) at 31/32 Hyde Park Square, so as to create a four-bed family duplex and a self-contained one bed flat.

The proposed works

- 2 The existing flats are 2 bed apartments described in more detail below.
- 3 The building is listed Grade II and a Heritage Statement accompanies this application. The re-configuration is achieved by works of reinstatement, reversing elements removed when the lateral apartments were created in the 1950's. These consist of; the re-provision of the staircase in No 31 between 2nd and 3rd floor and closing the party wall opening between 31 and 32 at 3rd floor.
- 4 The plans of existing and proposed describe the revised layout and limited works required to achieve it. These are accompanied by a Design and Access Statement.

Pre-application consultation

- 5 A pre-application consultation has been undertaken which confirmed our interpretation of the land use policy context and the approach to the heritage considerations.

Planning Policy

- 6 Our client would like to have a family sized home which is an aspiration in sympathy with one of the main drivers of the City Plan which is to address the '*continuing need to provide family-sized homes*¹'. The Plan defines family sized homes as having 3 to 5 bedrooms² and this proposal is to create a 4 bedroom apartment. The need for family accommodation is established in Policy 10 B.
- 7 Against that general background the relevant policies for this proposal are Policy 8 B and C which are reviewed below.

¹ Para 8.8

² Para 10.4 and glossary

The existing flats

- 8 Our client lives in the 2nd Floor Flat as shown below. It has two en suite bedrooms, a living room and a dining room. The kitchen is narrow and was inserted in the original staircase enclosure of No 31 when converted in the 1950's.



- 9 This is a 'non-family' flat as defined by the City Plan being only 2 bed.

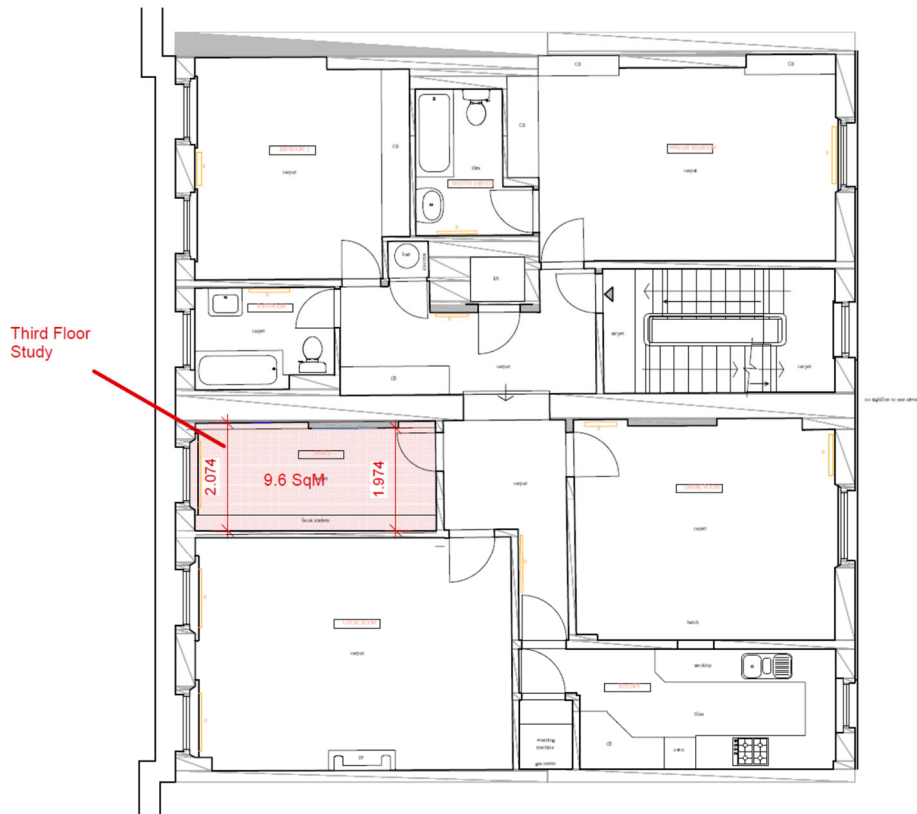
- 10 The 3rd Floor Flat is almost identical the only variation is that it has a study alongside the living room to the front.



- 11 The study is narrow and marginally short of the National Standard width of a single bedroom.

HOUSING DESIGN QUALITY AND STANDARDS C4.1.2

A one bedspace, single bedroom must have a floor area of at least 7.5 sqm and be at least 2.15m wide

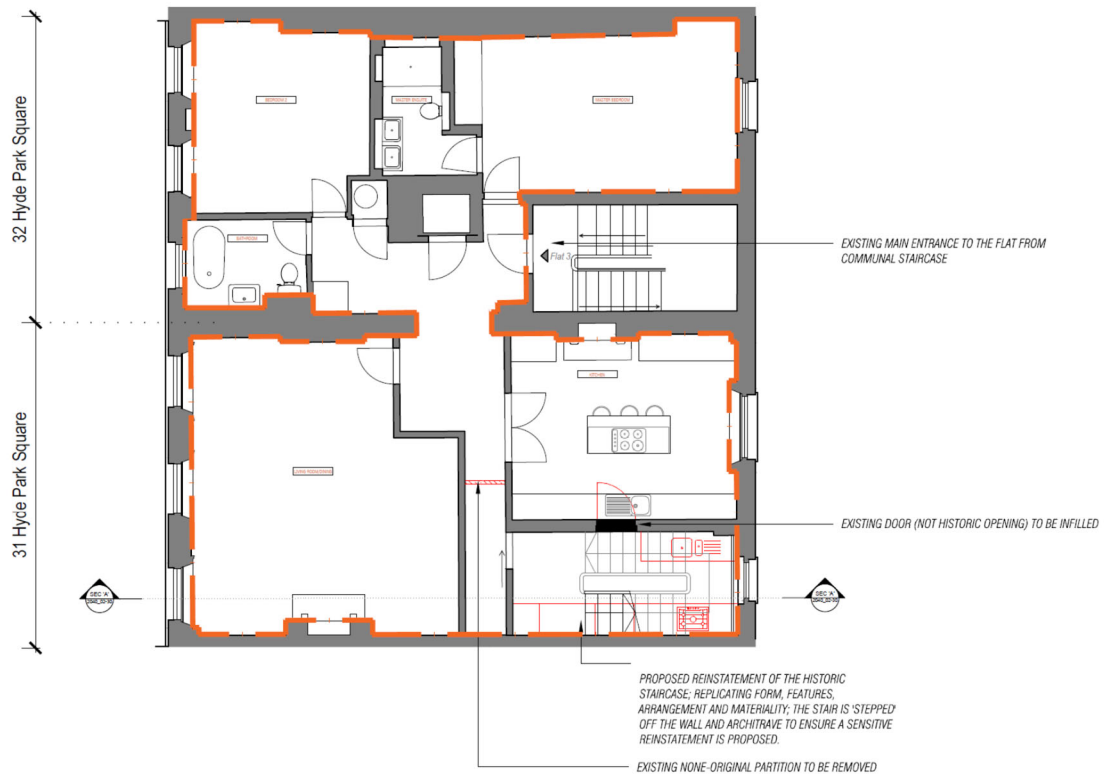


This room is remote from the other bedrooms and next to the main living room. It is not especially practical for a family, either as a nursery or for school age children. However, the main reason it is not used as a bedroom is that, with the prevalence of working from home, it is of most value as a study. As such the flat is a 2 bedroom flat with study and a 'non-family sized' dwelling.

- 12 Although both flats are spacious, they are constrained by the historic plan form. The original house plan at these levels generated one room to the rear and two rooms to the front one of which was only one window wide. Even without the statutory heritage constraints the room capacity of the plan is limited by its fenestration, there are not enough windows to create more rooms.
- 13 The 1950's conversion provided two bedrooms with en suites on one side of the former party wall with the other side providing the living area. The latter offers no real scope for additional family bedrooms, especially as the kitchens are small and require the room adjoining for dining.

Creating a family sized flat and a one bedroom flat

- 14 The proposed reconfiguration is to turn these two non-family apartments into a 4 bed family sized apartment and a one bed apartment.
- 15 There is an opportunity to do this in a sympathetic manner simply by reversing some of the works that were done in the 1950's. The first element is to reinstate the staircase in number 31 to link the 2nd and 3rd floor using the original stair enclosure and a replica staircase.



- 16 The second element is to close the lateral perforation made in the 1950's between 31 and 32 at 3rd floor. This creates a duplex adding two bedrooms and a study to our client's flat accessed via the new staircase. The result is a balanced four bedroom family home that our client needs.



- 17 The scheme also delivers a one bedroom apartment that is self-contained and accessed from the communal lift and stair as existing in no 32. This is a one bed apartment that meets the National Standard and can be achieved within the existing plan form by a simple conversion of an en suite into a kitchen area.

Policy assessment

Policy 8C

EXISTING HOUSING

C. All existing residential units, uses, floorspace and land will be protected, except where:

1. the reconfiguration or redevelopment of supported or affordable housing would better meet need; or
2. non-family sized housing is being reconfigured to create family sized housing.

- 18 In turning to Policy 8 C it is to be noted that the scheme does not involve the loss of any residential floorspace or any loss of residential units, it simply re-configures two non-family 2 bed flats producing a 4 bed and a 1 bed flat instead. The bedspaces are increased from 8 existing to 10 proposed.

- 19 The opening requirement of Policy 8 C is 'no loss' and as this is achieved, on a strict reading of the policy, the exceptions at 1 and 2 are not needed as there is no loss to excuse.
- 20 There would also be 'no loss' if the upper flat were to be taken as a 'family-sized' flat (i.e. counting the study as a sub-standard 3rd single bedroom). In that scenario the starting position would be one family sized flat (sub-standard) and one non-family sized flat and the outcome would maintain one of each type, albeit with the quality of the family sized flat very much enhanced.
- 21 With no loss the analysis of 8C could stop at this point but the City Plan advice given in relation to the exceptions in 8 C is relevant because it emphasises the weight that is given to the benefit of re-configurations that create better quality family sized homes.

"8.8 The high cost of land in Westminster and its limited availability mean that all existing housing uses must be protected. The acute shortage of affordable housing and the continued need to provide for family-sized homes mean that the only exceptions where the loss of residential uses or floorspace may be acceptable is where they are being reconfigured to better meet these needs....."

"8.9 To help meet the continued need for family sized housing in Westminster, we will allow the loss of one existing non-family sized home where this is being reconfigured or merged with another to provide larger units (de-conversion), provided other options to extend the building to create larger units have first been explored. Properties that are de-converted to create family-sized homes should not exceed the 200sq m maximum unless it is demonstrably impracticable to do so."

[Underlining added]

- 22 The Plan gives such weight to the benefit of creating a good quality family sized home that it is prepared to countenance the loss of a non-family unit to achieve it. In circumstances such as this proposal it must follow that the policy thrust is to very much welcome the creation of a family sized home without having to lose a non-family home. It is clearly a preferred solution.
- 23 The proposal is therefore very much in sympathy with the objective of the policy which seeks to improve the balance of family and non-family homes and does this without reducing the overall stock of either.

Policy 8 B

- 24 The existing 2 bed flats are 140 sq m GIA 2nd floor and 145 sq m 3rd floor. The 4 bed duplex would be 222 sq m and the new one bed flat 62 sq m.
- 25 Our client's larger family home would be 22 sq m GIA above the 200 sq m cited for 'new homes' in 8B. [Para 8.9 also relates this to existing housing.]
- 26 The area of the duplex flat created is a product of the inherited plan of these former houses. Working with the plan form is the most sympathetic (and probably the only) approach to the listed building and the size of flat produced is a product of the original house dimensions and nothing else. There is no obvious alternative that would reduce the size to 200 sqm.

- 27 The advice at 8.9 is clear that it is acceptable to breach the limit where it is demonstrably impractical to make the dwelling smaller. *“Properties that are de-converted to create family-sized homes should not exceed the 200sq m maximum unless it is demonstrably impracticable to do so.”*
- 28 Para 8.11 also notes that, as here, heritage considerations can lead to the impracticality of achieving the 200 sq m. *“The only exception to this will be where a larger unit is needed to ensure the protection of a heritage asset or a converted home as we recognise that it is not always practicable or appropriate to merge parts of the floors to create larger units.”*
- 29 Both pieces of advice support the conclusion that the excess area is in accordance with these examples.
- 30 Furthermore, the reason for the policy is the harm caused by large dwellings (as cited by the Plan para 8.11) which suppress the achievement of higher densities and prevent the supply of more homes. This harm is not generated in this scheme since the extra area does not have any effect on supply of homes as there is no loss of area or dwellings in the reconfiguration. The size of the flat is simply a result of the position of the original party wall.
- 31 Finally, the excess is relatively small and it should be borne in mind that it is not possible to provide outside amenity space in listed buildings and the City Plan encourages more internal space in compensation (Policy 12 D).

Policy conclusion

- 32 Our conclusion is that the proposal would be in accordance with the City Plan for the following reasons :-
- a. It delivers a good quality 4 bedroom family dwelling and a good quality one bedroom dwelling from two non-family sized dwellings thereby enhancing the number and quality of family dwellings as sought by Policy 10 and 8C 2.
 - b. It is in accordance with Policy 8 C because there is no loss of units or floorspace.
 - c. It is in accordance with Policy 8B because, although the size of the 4 bedroom flat is 222 sq m this is the result of practical and heritage considerations and does not result in suppressing housing supply.
- 33 For these reasons we believe the scheme complies with the emerging City Plan and were comforted that this was also agreed in the pre-application consultation.

Bikes and bins

- 34 We were asked at the pre-application stage to confirm the arrangements for cycle and refuse storage.
- 35 There is a bin store on the lower ground floor but no communal bike store and no opportunity or ability to create one.
- 36 As the re-configured apartments are part of a 1950's conversion there is no scope for change outside the apartments but equally the proposals are not increasing the number of units and there is no current problem with refuse and bikes managed by residents satisfactorily.