Design & Access Statement

34 Christchurch Avenue, London, NW6 7QR

Planning Application for loft conversion and roof alteration to accommodate a two-bedroom self-contained unit with side and rear dormers and roofilghts.

Site Description

The site is located on the west side of Christchurch Avenue on the junction with Mowbray Road, within the Brondesbury Conservation Area. The building is not listed and does not belong to a designated area of distinctive residential character. The property is currently subdivided into four self-contained units and has a basement as well.

The existing detached four-storey building is located at the end of a line of semi-detached houses that form the Christchurch Avenue street elevation.
The building is of traditional construction under a pitched timber-framed slate-tiled roof.
While its period appearance and features contribute to the character of the local area, it is in need of external clean-up and reparation, and internal refurbishment and modernization.

The neighbouring buildings further along Christchurch Avenue follow the gentle slope of the street which is evident on the continuous street roofline.

Existing Views

34 Christchurch Avenue NW6 7QR

Front view from Christchurch Avenue

View from Christchurch Avenue

View from Mowbray Road

Proposal

Loft conversion and roof alteration to accommodate a two-bedroom self-contained flat with side and rear dormers and roof-lights.

The proposal seeks to convert the currently unused loft and reconfigure the central part of the roof in order to accommodate a new self-contained two-bedroom flat with side and rear dormers and roof-lights.

To provide the required headroom for the proposed unit, the proposal necessitates for the roof to be raised slightly above its current level, and for the existing second floor ceiling level to be slightly lowered. The pitch, geometry, materials and features of the slightly raised roof would be kept identical to the existing. The existing flat roof area at the rear would be reconfigured to provide better use of the loft space, while still providing sloping roofs on all sides.
The overall appearance of the existing roofline would be fully replicated, including detailed features like decorative ridge tiles and eaves, upstands, chimneys and chimney pots etc.

Christchurch Avenue gently slopes up along the line of houses from No.34 onwards.
It is evident that the neighbouring properties in the same row from No.36 to No.50 have a uniform difference in height between each pair of semi-detached houses, which follows the street sloping angle.
This however, is not the case between No.34 and the neighbouring No.36, where the drop in height is noticeably larger than between numbers 36 to 50, which can be seen on the following photograph:

Raising the existing roofline to No.34 by only 600mm would reduce the drastic difference in height between No.34 and No.36 and make it identical to the height differences between the pairs of semi-detached houses from numbers 36 to 50.
This would provide a completely consistent roofline along all of the of houses facing the street.

On the front elevation, the existing top triple window currently encroaches into the triangular area defined by the two front roof pitches and terminated by the decorative eave endings. Slightly raising the roof would align the top of the triple window with the eaves endings and thus improve its appearance both proportionally and aesthetically.

The slight raising of the roof would also allow for the second-floor windows on the rear elevation to receive flat brick arches at the top, which would match all the other rear windows and create a more coherent appearance.

The proposed conservation type roof-lights would align with the existing window pattern on the front elevation.

Conservation style rooflights

The proposed rear dormers would match the materials of the existing roof: slate dormer sides with timber sash windows, and would be adequately spaced from the roof ridges and eaves.
There are buildings along Christchurch Avenue and Mowbray Road with dormers that vary in size and style according to the character of the building, therefore the proposed dormers should not be considered out of context.

The proposed side dormers would be obscure-glazed and consistent with the existing window fenestration in size, scale and design while providing better quality of daylight to the occupant without any significant impact to the street scene.

Previous Planning In Relation To This Application

Conservation Area

Previously, we submitted Planning Application No.16/5074 with a proposal for almost identical external alterations as in this one, although with different internal arrangement and layout.

Subsequently, we submitted an appeal to the planning decision to Application No.16/5074, illustrating the arguments why we believe that our proposal would not *'result in an over-dominant form of massing that would compromise the stepped rhythm of the roof terrace, and be overly prominent and incongruous in appearance'* – as stated in the planning decision.

In paragraphs 16,17,18 and 19 of the Appeal Decision Ref: APP/T5150/W/17/3181145, the planning inspector made the following conclusions in regards to how the proposed external alterations affect the conservation area:

16. *'The increase in the height of the roof would undoubtedly be visible given the prominence of the property. However, the increase would be relatively modest and not immediately apparent within the wider context. Indeed, the current difference in height between the appeal property and 36 Christchurch Avenue is larger than the typical difference between No 36 – 50. The property would continue to sit below No 36 and the difference in height would be similar to the height differences between the subsequent pairs of semis. As such, a consistent roofline would be ensured.'*

17. *'Furthermore, the overall architectural composition of the roof would broadly reflect the existing arrangement whilst the proposed dormers would utilise matching materials of slate sides and timber sash windows. The proposal would also align the top of the existing window in the front elevation with the eaves, which I agree would appear both proportionally and aesthetically more closely balanced. Moreover, whilst I recognise front rooflights are not a particular characteristic of the sequence of buildings here, they would sit close to the plane of the roof and would align with the existing window pattern on the front elevation.'*

18. *'I recognise the increase in the roof height, the creation of a crown roof and the provision of the dormer window would increase the massing of the building behind the chimneys which feature prominently in views from the Christchurch Avenue and Mowbray Road junction. However, those chimneys are already subsumed to a significant degree by the existing roof design. The chimneys would continue to extend above the ridge of the roof whilst the hipped design of the roof would ensure that they stand apart from the main built form of the property. As such, they would, in my view, continue to be read as distinguishable architectural features and would not be unduly subsumed by the proposal.'*

19. *'I conclude, therefore, that the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the Brondesbury Conservation Area. As a consequence, it would accord with Policies DMP 1 and DMP 7 of the DMP LP insofar as they state that development should conserve or enhance the significant of heritage assets. It would also accord with the high quality design aims of the Framework as well as paragraph 131 which states that account should be taken of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significant of heritage assets.'*

Following the Planning Inspector's conclusions above, our proposed external alterations in this application are almost identical to the previous, and we therefore believe they are acceptable.

For further illustration of our proposal, please refer to our supplied drawing No.PR.08, which indicates the existing and proposed front elevations of all buildings from No.34 to No.50. The indicated street roofline, shown in dotted red, connects the existing rooftops and provides a good reference for the established '*stepped rhythm'* of the buildings facing the street.

As we stated in our appeal statement, we perceive that the existing stepped rhythm of the roof terrace is consistent only between numbers 36 and 50 along the Christchurch Avenue elevation. The difference in height between No.34 and No.36 is noticeably larger compared to the uniform differences in height between the pairs of semi-detached houses from numbers 36 to 50. In our view, the *'stepped rhythm'* currently exists only between numbers 36 to 50, excluding No.34. This should also be evident on the following photographs:

For this reason, we believe that by adjusting the height difference between No.34 and No.36 to be identical to the height differences between the pairs of semi-detached houses from numbers 36 to 50, we would be providing a completely consistent roofline and thus improving the stepped rhythm along all buildings forming this part of Christchurch Avenue street elevation.

This is better illustrated on the existing and proposed street elevations provided on drawing No.PR.08, where it is evident that the proposed elevation would provide a more consistent roofline along the whole street elevation.

Living Conditions

The remaining prevailing considerations in the Appeal Decision Ref: APP/T5150/W/17/3181145 relate to the ceiling height of the proposed floor area:

In paragraphs 6,7,8 and 10 of the above appeal decision, the planning inspector has made the following comments in regards to the proposed ceiling heights:

6. *'The appellant has provided a revised plan which shows that an area of around 64m^2 would have a ceiling height of 2.3m or more. I note that would meet the 61m^2 required for overall floor space for a 2 bedroom, 3 persons flat.'*

7. *'However, that would amount to around 73.56% of the gross internal floor area of the proposed flat. The NDSS indicates that the minimum floor to ceiling height is 2.3m for at least 75% of the gross internal area, regardless of the number of bedrooms.'*

8. *'In any event, even if the proposal were to accord with the standards in the NDSS, London Plan Policy 3.5 indicates that a minimum ceiling height of 2.5m is required for at least 75% of the gross internal area of a dwelling. This is to address the unique heat island effect of London and the density and flatted nature of most of the city's development.'*

10. *'Furthermore, the appellant's Design and Access Statement indicates that the existing second floor ceiling level would be slightly lowered. Drawing 'Proposed Section A-A PP.07' shows the maximum internal height of the second floor would have a maximum height of 2.4m. As such, the resulting second floor flat would also have substandard ceiling heights when assessed against Policy 3.5. Taking all of this into account, I find the proposal would provide somewhat oppressive and restrictive living conditions for future residents.'*

Following these comments, we have reconfigured our proposal included in this application.

Now, our proposal contains a two-bedroom flat with a gross internal area of 66m^2, of which 50m^2 are under a ceiling height of 2.5m or higher. This amounts to 76% of the proposed gross internal area with a ceiling height of 2.5m or higher, and meets the min. requirement of 75% stated in London Plan Policy.

Additionally, our proposal now limits the lowering of the second floor ceiling level to no less than 2.5m height, which also meets the London Plan Policy requirements.

With these crucial design amendments, we now believe that our current proposal successfully alleviates all previously raised concerns and should be considered acceptable.

Additional Benefits From The Proposed Development

The existing fabric of the building looks worn out, has accumulated a lot of dirt over the years, and is also defective at places. The proposal includes cleaning and repair, where required, of the external fabric of the building. This would be really beneficial not only for this property, but also for overall appearance and standard of the whole area.
A very obvious example for this would be the neighbouring No.36 (next door), where external cleaning and repair have evidently helped to bring the building back to its former glory:

No.36 before

No.36 after

Landscaping

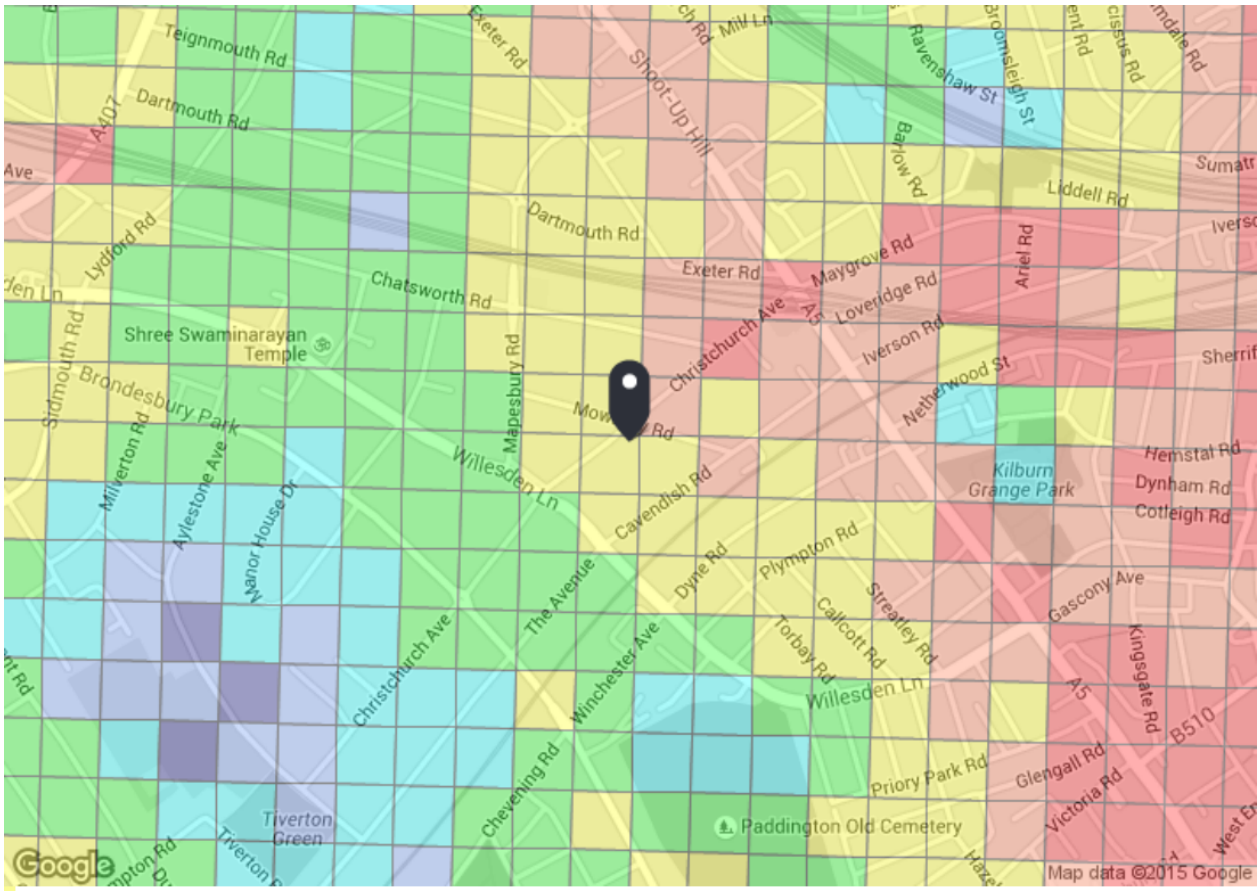
The 590m^2 communal rear garden provides adequate external amenity space and is accessed via the existing side gate.

Access

Access to the building will remain as existing with the main access to the front door from a public footpath on Christchurch Avenue.

At present, the 4 units on site have the right to apply for a car parking permit. There is also currently a car parking space on the drive with the opportunity to increase parking spaces in accordance to demand. The site is located within a PTAL rating of 4-5 having good transport links; and TIM rating of less than 15 minutes.

Based on the above, the site does not have any accessibility issues.



PTAL output for 2011 (Base year)

4

Easting: 524381, Northing: 184378

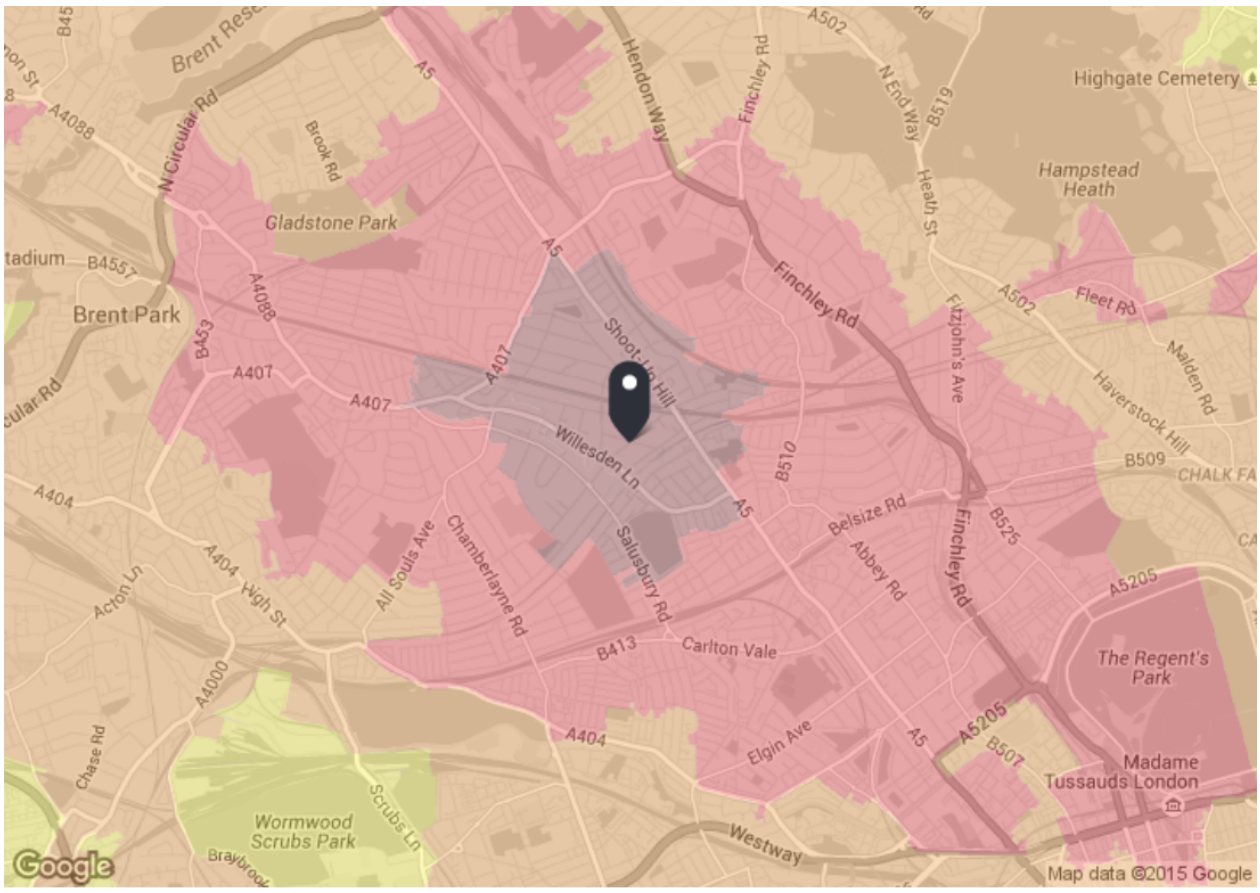
Map key - PTAL

- 0 (Worst)
- 1a
- 1b
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6a
- 6b (Best)

Map layers

PTAL (cell size: 100m)

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON



TIM output for 2011 (Base year)

Mode: All public transport modes, Time of day: AM peak, Direction: Average

Easting: 524381, Northing: 184378

Code: NT086A05A

Map key - Travel Time

- < 15 minutes
- 15 - 30 minutes
- 30 - 45 minutes
- 45 - 60 minutes
- 60 - 75 minutes
- > 75 minutes

Map layers

- Travel Times

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

Conclusion

The proposal makes use of the existing loft space to provide an additional residential unit, which is much required under the current housing demand. We firmly believe that the proposed development will have a positive impact to the existing building and the surrounding area. The development is therefore sustainable, supporting economic growth and preserving the local character.

The proposal seeks to integrate the proposed contents within the existing fabric of the building by sensitive design that will preserve and enhance the character of the existing building and surrounding area.