

Design statement – Reinstatement of basement windows @ 10 Norfolk Street

We have recently renovated this property following three years during which it was left uninhabited. It had fallen into a state of quite deep disrepair and was actually uninhabitable when we acquired the property. The renovation works involved only reconfiguring and renewing the internal aspects of the building and we had been led to believe by our architects that this did not require any planning consents.

The renovation we undertook was designed to try to preserve and restore some of the original features of the building and the basement windows were a key element of this. Prior to purchasing the property, we noted that the window openings internally had been infilled with non-original materials, namely breeze blocks which had been inserted into the window opening and a render applied on the outside surface only (see pictures attached to this email). While it is impossible to determine exactly when or why this happened, on further inspection it would appear that this was undertaken because of structural weakness that had developed in the lintel over the window. We presume under one of the former caretakers of the property a decision was made that it would be more economical to infill this space rather than go to the expense of replacing the window lintel. Unfortunately, an original feature of the building was therefore removed.

In order to verify this conclusion, we consulted with the Regency Society and were fortunate to find an original picture of the property dating back to 1928. This can be found online at http://regencysociety-jamesgray.com/volume29/source/jg_29_006.htm, but a copy of this image is also attached to this email for your convenience. This clearly shows the original windows at basement level as well as the opening extending into the pavement area. A bay window also appears in the property at this site, leading us to speculate that the property was at one time or another likely to have been a retail premises with store room underneath and a prominent window display, alongside the advertising hoarding on the side of the property (currently disused). This conclusion was supported by the fact that the window height at the property is significantly larger than any other properties in the street. The original horizontal and vertical details on the façade of the building can be seen in this image also, allowing us to accurately verify the correct size of the window openings which corroborated the conclusions we had drawn from the breeze blocks found inside the property. As a result of this, we felt, and continue to feel, very confident that the reinstatement of the windows was in line with the historic features of the property with respect to size and position.

Regarding the materials used, we have understood that in spite of the planning for the windows being rejected, as per an email received from the planning department on 8 July 2021, "We did previously investigate the other UPVC windows at your property but found that they were not in breach of planning control, since although the property is in a Conservation Area, there is no Article 4 Direction restricting this particular change". These windows were also more than four years old. In installing the new windows, we therefore attempted to provide as close a match as possible to the ones currently installed at the property in order to avoid any inconsistency in the overall look of the property. We believed this to be the most sensitive solution given the pre-existing uPVC windows.