

53 Park Town

Statement of Significance & Heritage Impact Assessment

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1.0 Introduction

Project Summary

This statement has been prepared to accompany the Planning and Listed Building Consent application relating to the proposed refurbishment and extension of 53 Park Town.

The proposal consists of the part removal of some internal walls and a small extension to the lower ground floor, creation of a lower terrace and minor alterations to create/improve accommodation on the upper floors.

The proposed extension to the lower ground floor is effectively an infill beneath the current balcony. Within the lower ground floor some internal walls have been removed to open up the space and maximise natural light to this area. The works will also include for superficial repairs to the existing property.

This document provides a description of the immediate and surrounding setting of the heritage asset and provides justification for any impact that the proposed works may have.

We have produced a Design and Access Statement that gives broad overview and further justification and explanation for the decisions made. This should be read in conjunction with the other application documents.

2.0 History of Site and Surrounding Area

2.1 Historic Background of Park Town

The site is within the designated North Oxford Suburb Conservation Area. A draft Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced and has been the subject of consultation. The following historical account of the development of Park Town is taken from this appraisal.

“Although St John’s College is synonymous with the development of North Oxford, the first planned development in the suburb was not within their control. Samuel Lipscomb Seckham was appointed by the Board of Guardians in response to his proposal for a development of substantial houses for the emerging middle classes: Park Town.

Initial investment in the development was slow but all the houses were occupied by the 1860s. Although the small houses of North Parade had been built in the 1830s – 1840s, Park Town was perceived to be an area of urban development surrounded by a rural landscape with no sense of identity. The nearest church was in St Giles and Summertown to the north was virtually a self-contained village, Park Town belonged to neither one nor the other.

In an attempt to try to alleviate the problem of isolation and to encourage further development, FJ Morrell (churchwarden and College steward) petitioned St John’s for the establishment of a parish to provide a free church (ie. one where pew rents were not charged) to serve the new community of North Oxford. St John’s eventually agreed to provide the land for the church, and appointed Seckham to draw up plans for the layout of new residential streets. Seckham’s proposals of 1854 were based around the Walton Manor Estate with grand Italianate villas along Woodstock Road, a church and smaller terraced houses to the west.

The scheme was not a success with only two houses being constructed, 121 and 123 Woodstock Road. The proposal for a church in the center of this development was not acceptable to Morrell who preferred a more central location to provide a ‘heart’ to the new community and be within easy reach of all sectors of the new suburb.

By 1860 Seckham had lost interest in developing St John’s estate with William Wilkinson taking over as supervising architect. Wilkinson’s gothic preferences were more in keeping with the overall vision St John’s had for their land, his initial auctions to dispose of plots were not successful. Despite the release of new land in Northham Manor, development was slow with only 37 houses having been built by the mid-1860s”.....“ The exceptions to the dominating gothic included Park Town, which pre-dated Wilkinson’s gothic suburb by approximately a decade.

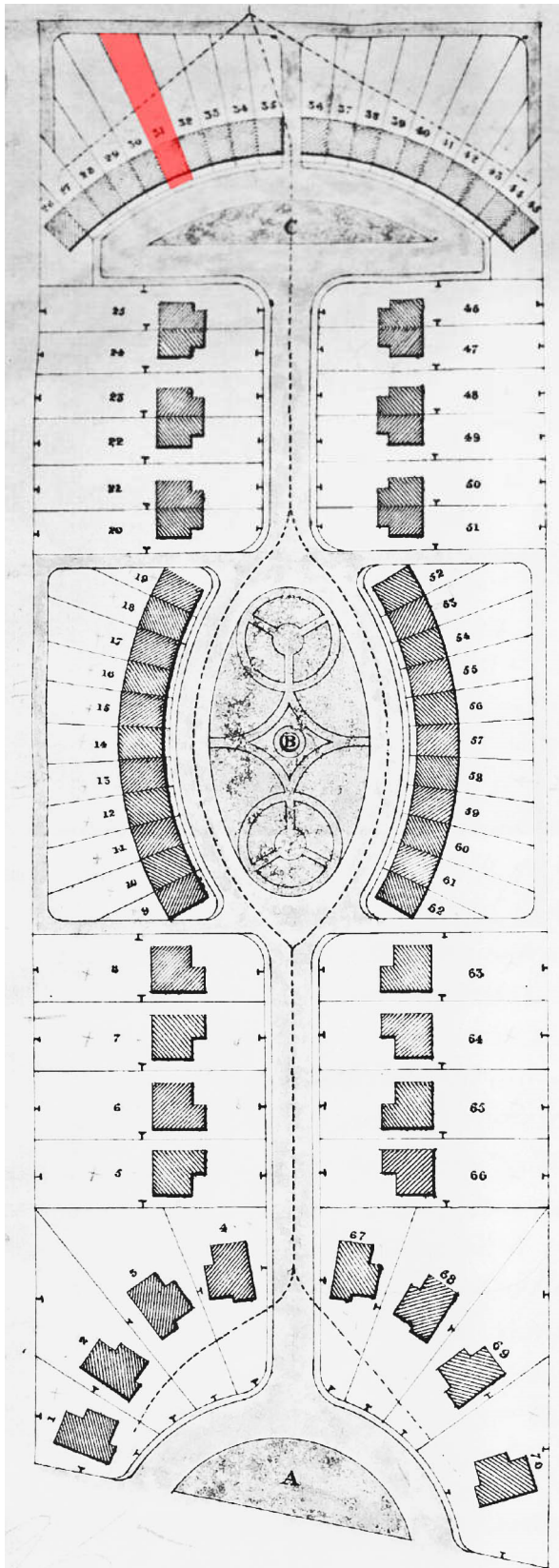
Outside the control and ownership of St John’s, Park Town was Samuel Lipscombe Seckham’s showpiece and its success encouraged the college to appoint him as their first supervising architect. Park Town is a cumulative picture of large Italianate villas, stone fronted classical crescents and smaller brick and stuccoed terraces packed into a compact 9-acre site, enhanced by a central formal garden. The villas are set in their own grounds, well planted each creating a statuesque image. To compensate for the lack of front gardens to the two crescents, the formal garden was built, surrounded by iron railings providing views through to the opposite crescent, the greenery effectively softens the built form and creates a focal point in the development”.

Extract from North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area Appraisal DRAFT. Oxford City Council.

2.2 Street Layout of Park Town

Park Town was designed by the architect Samuel Lipscomb Seckham and begun in 1853.

Park Town has a distinctive street pattern with the development being roughly symmetrical about Park Town road. It is a long, narrow site which consists of large villas at the west end of the site fronting Banbury Road, a central area of two facing crescents of terraces, semi-detached villas and east end crescent terraces of relatively smaller houses. These houses formed a 'middle-class' estate, with communal gardens and planting in the central area. The landscaping is of particular note. It was laid out in 1854 by William Baxter Senior and is registered under the Historic



Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by English Heritage for its special historic interest. (List Entry No. 1001292, refer to appendix 4). Generally this area of North Oxford is noted for its leafy planting together with formal iron railings. More unusual is the small, central, formal garden containing a small pinetum with a variety of trees.

The application site is in the centre of the North part of the crescent at the end of Park Town. Interesting to note that the original plans show 10 No. terraces to each section. In actuality only 8 No. were constructed in each wing, with the outer 2 on each terrace apparently being omitted.

Plan for Park Town, Samuel Lipscomb Seckham, 1853 (Bodleian Library)

2.3 Listing of Park Town

Description: 1 -61, Parktown (See Details for Further Address Information)

Grade: II

Date Listed: 29 January 1968 English Heritage Building ID: 245731 OSGrid Reference:

SP5138407825

OSGrid Coordinates: 451384, 207825 Latitude/ Longitude: 51.7668, -1.2568 Location: Park Town,

Oxford OX2 6SJ Locality: Oxford

Local Authority: Oxford City Council County: Oxfordshire

Country: England Postcode: OX2 6SJ

Consists of four groups of houses laid out in 1853 by Samuel Lipscombe Seckham, architect.

1 On the West of the Crescent Nos 4 to 14 alternate on the South and Nos 1 to 9 alternate on the North. These are detached, 3-storeyed houses of the villa type with Welsh slate roofs and sash windows.

2 The Crescent. Nos 11-31 alternate on the North and Nos 16-34 alternate on the South. 3-storeyed stuccoed, in two curved rows of houses of the "terrace" type with an ornamental shrubbery in the centre. The ground floors are rusticated and there are basements and good iron railings. Above is a moulded cornice and a small balustraded parapet. In each floor are two sash windows with cills supported on consoles, those in the 2nd floor being of simpler design. In the ground floor each has a 3-light sash window and a recessed doorway up a flight of steps.

3 On the East of the Crescent. Nos 33-45 alternate on the North and Nos 36-44 alternate on the south. These are similar to (1).

4 The Terrace. At the East end of the group. Nos 47-61 alternate to North of central archway and Nos 48-64 alternate to South of same. 3-storeyed yellow brick with basements and a stuccoed, rusticated ground floor, the whole terrace being raised some 4 ft above the roadway. Each house has two 1st-floor sash windows and on the ground floor is one sash window and a recessed doorway up a flight of steps. The central stuccoed Archway is dated 1855.

All the listed buildings in Park Town form a group, with Nos 68 and 70 Banbury Road.

Listing NGR: SP5138407825

Source: English Heritage

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2.4 Building History Research

Landmark Mapping Research

The research includes maps from the following dates:

- 1876-1878
- 1899-1900
- 1921
- 1937-1939
- 1956-1957
- 1967-1974

Oxford City Council Building Control

- No records

Oxford City Planning Authority

- Refer to design and access statement for full known planning history.

Oxfordshire County Council Department of Museum Services

- No records

St Johns College Archive

- No records

Corpus Christi College Archive

- No records

Bodleian Library

- Park Town Trustees collection. 1no. drawing 1853 Samuel Lipscomb Seckham Plan for Park Town refer to Section 2.2 on previous page

Publications:

- North Oxford, Tanis Hinchcliffe, 1992, Yale University Press, New Haven & London Pages 10, 25-6, 29, 32-6, 38, 49, 53, 67-9, 71, 81, 94, 139, 209, 212
 - North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area Appraisal DRAFT. Oxford City Council.
<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Direct/78679NorthOxfordConservationAreaAppraisal.pdf>
- Oxoniensia, Volume XLI, 1976, Article on Samuel Lipscomb Seckham by Peter Howell, Pages 337 to 347

3.0 Site Analysis Immediate Surrounding Site

3.1 Buildings

The building masses and styles in Park Town range from the large, detached villas at the west end - closer to Banbury Road - to terraced housing at the east end. There is a mixture of terrace and semi-detached dwellings in between.

The existing architecture of the immediate surrounding area (east end of Park Town) consists of large, detached, residential properties, 3-storeys in height with basements, leading to the 'end' curved terrace. The end terrace is again 3 storey's plus a semi basement (lower ground floor). The curved terrace is split into 2 No equal halves with a central open passage connecting to the rear.

The frontage of the terraces are raised to create the front pavement walkway. To the rear of the properties the ground is retained at the lower level allowing the lower ground floor direct access to the rear gardens.



Terrace frontage



No.53 Park Town

3.2 Street Scene

The east end of Park Town steps back from the large detached villa's and terminates with the curved terraced town houses. These are split into 2 No equal halves with an open passage in the centre. The Terraces are set at a higher level than the surrounds, created by a false pavement level that means the lower most floor becomes a lower ground floor (semi basement) at the front (street face) with direct access to the rear gardens.

The raised frontage means that the ground floor has a view over the road and into the common gardens opposite.

The lower parts of the terrace (lower ground floor and ground) are finished with a stucco render in beige, with buff brickwork above on the upper 2 storeys. Windows and door surrounds are also provided in stucco.

The roofline of the terrace is punctuated with chimneys (brick) showing the division of the town houses.

3.3 53 Park Town Site Analysis

The application site is a narrow, flat 0.024 hectare (243m²) plot located within the residential setting of the east end of Park Town on the northern side of the road. No.53. Is in the centre of the terrace. The town houses on the terrace are for the most part identical when facing the road.

To the rear, the town houses are fairly consistent in that they have mostly all had rear 'extensions' forming bathrooms/bedrooms. These 'extensions' may have been original and occupy approximately half of the width of the rear façade. In addition to the older 'original' extensions a large number of the townhouses have been extended further – mostly by infilling the gaps between the original extensions. These additional extensions are mostly lower ground and ground floor in location.

No.53 has been extended previously to create an overhanging balcony at ground floor and recessed terrace at lower ground. At ground floor the newer extension has a large window/door arrangement leading onto the balcony. The balcony has metal railings and stairs leading down to the garden.

The rear gardens are mostly flat, narrow and long, with a number having mature and semi mature trees along the rear boundary. Some plots have small garages (No.53 being one of them) accessing onto Dragon Lane. The garden to No.53 is mostly laid to lawn.

Gardens are separated by red brick walls (approx. 1.5m height) with rounded brick cappings, running the length of the garden demise.



No.53. Rear elevation and garden



Existing infill extension

4.0 53 Park Town Building Analysis

Both the brickwork and render would benefit from cleaning due to a build-up of staining over time. There are some cracks and blistering in the stucco that require repair.

The pitched roof appears to be in reasonably good condition. The chimneys may require some localized repointing to preserve their stability and appearance.

At the rear the brickwork to the main building requires some repointing and general cleaning/maintenance but is in fairly good condition. The walls to the garden, however are in relatively poor condition and could do with repointing and in places, replacement, especially nearest the main building.

The existing windows are timber single glazed sashes. Other than redecoration, no works are proposed to them.

The terrace has been the subject of a number of planning applications including proposals similar to these, but No.53 does not show any specific planning applications. Applications and approvals records exist for No's. 50, 51, 54, 55, 57 amongst others.

Please refer to Design and Access Statement for planning history.

4.1 West, Front Elevation

There are no particular works proposed to the front (West) elevation. There may be opportunities taken to repair and repoint localised damage, but this would be more akin to routine maintenance than specific works.

Opportunities to repaint and repair windows and metalwork will be taken. All in colours to match existing.

4.2 East, Rear Elevation

The east elevation comprises of the original rear face of the townhouse sandwiched between the 'original extensions' serving the rear of the properties. These extensions are likely to have been bathrooms and small bedrooms.

Between the original extensions, at lower ground and ground floor amendments have already been made to the building to form a ground floor extension and projecting balcony oversailing the original location of the rear garden access door.

This newer extension extends the ground floor living space and provides a small, elevated terrace area. This area is finished with a white painted metal railing system and has a metal stairs leading to the garden. Beneath this balcony there is a small terrace with full width steps leading up to the garden level. Most of the services for the building are located in this area.

On the original extension to No.53, at garden level there has been a shortened boiler house/store door inserted, facing the garden.

The rear of the town houses are primarily red brick with curved soldier coursed arches to the window heads and stone (or stone coloured concrete) cills.



Neighbouring extensions, crumbling garden wall



Existing rear undercroft and access

4.3 Internal

4.3.1 Lower Ground Floor

The lower ground floor can only be accessed from the rear garden or internally by the main (only) staircase. It comprises a main largely open plan area.

There is a small cellar to the front, sitting under the access steps and running under the pavement level. To the rear -off the stairs- is a small store, WC and utility room that backs onto the boiler store.

Due to the interventions over the years, original features have been damaged or removed, such as where corner boxing for new services runs up to the ceiling or where openings have been enlarged and doors removed. There are no cornices or mouldings to the walls in the main spaces. Skirtings, architraves and timberwork generally appear to be original.

There are signs of damp and mould in unventilated areas (eg cellar). Flooring is a mix of timber boarding (not original) and ceramic tiling to the wet areas. Existing walls are finished in lime plaster applied to brickwork or timber lath. Windows appear to be original pattern sashes.



Lower Ground Floor looking towards front

4.3.2 Ground Floor

The ground floor retains much of its original layout, with a reception room to the front, a larger reception room to the rear, and a small room off the stair core. The balcony is served from the rear reception room. The front reception room is currently used as the kitchen.

The main (front) entrance to the house is on this level with the door in a stepped recess. There is no internal storm door or lobby.

At the rear of the stair core the small room in the original extension is currently a bathroom.

There are a number of original features still present on this floor including cornices, mouldings and timberwork. The windows to the front appear to be original pattern sashes but to the rear they are more modern sash replacements.

4.3.3 First Floor

The first floor also retains much of its original layout with a large room to the front (full width) and a smaller bedroom to the rear. Again off the stair core is a smaller room (at half landing level) that contains another bathroom. This bathroom serves both first and second floors.

Some original features remain such as the timberwork, but there are no mouldings or cornices present. Windows appear to be original pattern sashes.

4.3.4 Second Floor

The second floor also retains much of its original layout with two rooms to the front and a bedroom to the rear. On the stair landing is the ceiling hatch leading to a shallow ceiling void (due to the low pitch of the roof).

Some original features remain such as the timberwork, but there are no mouldings or cornices present. Windows appear to be original pattern sashes.



Typical second Floor bedroom

5.0 The Proposal

5.1 Design Concept for the Proposed Development

The proposal has been developed to repair and update the layout of the existing townhouse to allow it to operate as a modern family dwelling, upgrading the thermal efficiency of the house and its operation, while maintaining and preserving the character of the property.

The changes proposed allow the house to be more usable and enjoyable, with improved access to the rear garden. On the lower ground floor the changes also allow more natural light and ventilation to this area, assisting to reduce the potential for mould/damp ingress.

On the upper floors the changes are primarily to bathrooms and the creation of a shower room to better serve the bedroom layouts. Interventions are relatively minor and consist of mainly new door openings or blocking up doorways.

Where new walls are required these are to be done in lightweight studwork so the impact on the structure is minimized.

Externally the changes are limited to the rear of the property, with the creation of the replacement infill extension, balcony and new lower terrace. The front of the building is unchanged by the proposals. The rear garden is to be tidied and cleared but largely remains the same. 1No. tree has to be felled (see separate tree report) as it is de-stabilising the existing garden wall, is very close to the townhouse and affects the exit from the rear of the house.

The new extension to the rear will be constructed to match the architectural style of the existing house ensuring that the proposed works are sympathetic to the existing building.



FRONT ELEVATION (incl Lower GF windows)



REAR ELEVATION (incl Lower GF windows)

Proposed elevations

5.2 Proposed External Appearance & Street Scene.

There is no change to the street scene or external appearance of the house to the front-facing Park Town.

To the rear the lower ground floor is brought forward to the face of the original extension. This lower section is in brickwork to match the existing, with a large window/door opening spreading across the width of the building. The lowered glazing provides a balance to the rear façade by providing a visual base for the building to sit on.

Due to the nature and orientation of the townhouses, the lower ground floor extension will be largely unseen.

5.3 Landscape

The importance of landscaping within the Park Town is recognised by its Grade II listing. It is important that the landscaping of the property respects the importance of this setting and contributes positively to the street scene.

There are no proposals to change anything on the building frontage and therefore no effect on the Park Town street scene.

The rear garden is to have 1No. tree removed – that is currently too close to the main house, but the gardens will not appear materially different as a result.

The new lower terrace area serving the lower ground floor will not be readily visible from outside the property and therefore cannot be said to affect the overall appearance of the area. There will be some digging out and adjustment of the garden levels to create the lowered terrace. The shape and location of the terrace is designed to minimise impact on the RPA of the retained trees.

5.4 External Alterations and Repairs to the Existing Building: General Items

The existing brickwork and stone work will be repointed where necessary with a lime based mortar using colour and aggregate mix to match existing mortar. Sample areas will be produced before implemented.

The existing roof is to be insulated. However this will be done at ceiling level from the inside and should not affect the appearance of the building.

The Stucco render is to be repaired locally and repainted in a colour to match the existing.

Existing leadwork flashings and soakers will be examined and repaired where required - especially around chimney breasts and wall/roof junctions.

The existing garden walls will have to be partially replaced where the tree is to be removed. This will most likely mean new foundations (for stability). New brickwork will match the existing adjacent, and the wall detailed to match with rounded head cappings.

All cornices, picture rails, architraves and skirting are to be retained, and made good or replicated where necessary in the same style and material of the original. Where openings are to be formed within existing walls, a substantial amount of the wall above the opening will be kept intact to allow the cornice (where applicable) to be retained. Suitably sized nibs either side of new openings will be retained. This allows certain rooms to be opened up to accommodate modern open plan living whilst retaining the character and detail of the original space.

It is presumed that the existing plaster will be lime and sand based. All repairs made to the plasterwork of the original building will match the existing adjacent material.

All existing doors will be retained for re-use where possible. Where fire doors are required, new solid fire doors will be made to match the original joinery details. Where any original door openings are blocked up, the door, frame and architrave are to be carefully removed for reuse. Where new door openings are formed matching architraves and door details are to be used. New door leaves, frames and architraves will match the pattern of the original ground floor doors.

5.4 Lower Ground Floor

The lower ground floor is where the majority of the work is intended. The idea is to relocate the kitchen to the lower level -at the rear where the existing services are located - and to improve the access to the rear garden. This improvement will allow better use of the rear garden as it is more connected with the house.

To facilitate this, the existing boiler house area and utility room will have to be dug out and the floor lowered to match the main house. The existing side walls to the original extension are to be removed with replacement steel beams utilised to support the building. There may be a requirement to underpin sections of the walls to improve support in these areas.

The existing lower terrace area and steps are to be removed as well as a section of the main existing rear wall. All of this opens up the rear of the building to the garden, allowing better light and ventilation into this part of the dwelling.

The proposal also seeks to open up the front part of the lower ground floor by removing the masonry separating wall enclosing the stairs. A new beam arrangement will again be introduced to facilitate this.

Where new beams involved drop down sections of wall above, the new sections will be finished and detailed to match the existing adjacent.

There is no proposal to replace or adjust the existing floor (level or finish).

The cellar at the front will be turned into a new utility room and will be repaired to suit.

5.5 Ground Floor

The alterations to the ground floor are for the most part cosmetic, other than the removal and replacement of the existing rear extension at this level.

The existing kitchen and services are to be removed and relocated to the lower ground floor. The front room will be returned to a reception room. The existing door and access arrangement to the rear reception (living) room is retained.

The existing rear flat roof extension to the rear is to be removed and replaced with the new flat roof extension. This is a masonry extension with the outer face in matching brickwork. The new rear doors are full height (as opposed to split partial height currently) and the new roof has a rooflight set within it to allow as much light into the rear reception room as possible. As this is North East facing there is little opportunity for overheating, but good natural morning light will be allowed into the heart of the building.

The rear bathroom on the half landing will be converted into a study. There is little impact on the fabric of the building as a result of this as the work will mostly be making good where pipework and services are removed.

5.6 First Floor

The alterations on the first floor are very limited. The existing rear bedroom is to be turned to a large en-suite dressing room. The existing bedroom currently has a sink and service within this area so these will be modified to suit. The only physical alteration is to create a new door opening from the master bedroom to the front. This door opening is to be centralised on the wall within the en-suite and finished with matching timberwork detailing.

The work to the existing bathroom on the half landing is merely replacement and re-setting out of the sanitaryware.

5.8 Second Floor

The second floor changes are limited to providing a shower room on this level to serve the 3 bedrooms.

This is achieved by forming a door opening in the existing wall between the front and rear bedrooms, and then adding new studwork walls to create the shower room enclosure. The interventions are minor as there is little original detailing on walls and ceiling at that level. All new timberwork will be to match existing in detail and size.

5.9 Energy Efficiency

There are ever growing concerns with regards to the energy efficiency of buildings. Buildings of this age are not energy efficient, however there are limitations on what can be done to such buildings without compromising the original design or integrity of the building.

- With this in mind we have implemented a series of measures that we believe retain the character of the building whilst also enhancing the efficiency:
- The existing lower ground floor – where over ventilated subfloors - will be insulated via the introduction of insulation between the floor joists.
- Where new windows and doors are to be introduced to the rear of the building, these will be high performance 'Crittall style' metal framed units, meeting current building regulations requirements.
- The new extension to the rear will be high levels of insulation to the walls and roof.
- All new (and where practical) existing pipework will be lagged and insulated.
- Insulation will be added to the ceiling at second floor - between the existing joists.
- It is not currently intended to replace the heating system/boiler, but amend the existing to suit the new layouts. Any new radiators will be appropriately sized.

6.0 Conclusion

We believe that the proposed works are sympathetic to and enhance the original listed building.

Most of the work proposed is internal and in areas that are of low quality detailing and shorn of original features – for example the lower ground floor.

By the removal of the existing unsightly additions and the provision of a more cohesive replacement extension the rear of the existing townhouse is improved visually, although it should be said that the rear elevation is not easily seen from anywhere outside the site and its immediate neighbours.

The external elevations will be repaired and maintained as part of the works, thus additionally preserving the building. External extensions and alterations to the rear are made to resolve existing poor quality design and compositional inadequacies.

The proposals provide an upgrade and modernisation to the townhouse that more closely reflects the way people currently live. In this respect alone, by making the dwelling more usable and flexible, it helps prolong the use of the dwelling as a family house.

Internally the new alterations are designed to have minimum impact on original fabric whilst allowing the house to respond to the norms of modern family living.

Alterations to the original building are made using traditional techniques ensuring that historic quality both aesthetic and technical are not eroded or lost.

There are significant benefits to the listed building and its setting provided by the proposal. By allowing better direct access to the rear garden, and by having more structured living space at the lower level and immediately outside, the garden will be more usable, and therefore better maintained.

Overall, the proposals do not unduly affect the appearance and character of the listed terrace, and they are also very similar to other approvals that have been constructed along the terrace.

We consequently ask for your support for the approval of this application.