

H1993 - Alterations at 32 Fore Street, Hatfield
For
Mr & Mrs T Ryan

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
OFFICE COPY

- 1 OCT 2010

2010/2189

1. ASSESSMENT

1.1 Description

Fore Street, Hatfield is a street of mixed styles of house. Most have in the past served Hatfield House, whose service gateway is at the top of the street.

No.32 appears as part of a row of small early 19c houses with a front door opening directly off the street and sash windows on each side of the door. This is misleading, as most of the house behind the 19c façade is oak framed construction around a typical large brick fireplace. Judging by the size of the timber framing the house dates back to the 16c but it has been considerably altered through the years. The front door opens into a neat 'parlour' with the principal fireplace and chimney facing the front entrance. The door on each side of the fireplace leads through to a rear living/ dining area. It is this area which includes the modern steel stair and the 19c brick extension to the original chimney. This is the only area affected by the proposed alterations.

To the left of the parlour (described above) is a smaller room from which access is obtained to a passage through to the living/dining area and to the bathroom. A very steep stair leads up to bedrooms above but the second stair (in the living/dining room) is required to access other bedrooms. Otherwise some bedrooms would have to be entered from other bedrooms – an unsatisfactory situation from both a privacy view and fire safety. A lean-to kitchen runs across the back of the house, with open access from the living/dining area.

There is a cellar under the front of the house with access from the passage near the bathroom.

1.2 Structural analysis

Only two elements are considered for alteration. Firstly, the staircase from the living/dining area up to the principal bedroom and one other small bedroom.

The staircase is located in an original opening in the first floor. The trimming rafters and beam are oak, jointed and pegged. They are not as old as the oldest parts of the house but are clearly part of very early alterations to the house. No structural alteration is necessary. The original stair probably comprised a series of solid oak blocks on oak stringers, rising steeply in a straight run to the first floor and probably concealed in a cupboard. This (or similar) has been replaced by a steel structure around a steel round post; 5 of the oak steps have survived and are fixed to the steel stringers. The remaining steps including winders, are constructed of steel chequer plate. The whole of the steel is bright metal finish. There is no balustrade. Ignoring the aesthetic

question, the fact is that the owners of the house find the stairs unsafe and are concerned for their use by the elderly or unstable.

Secondly, the original large brick fireplace has been extended unnecessarily by a more modern fireplace, which is no longer used and obtrudes into the living space. Removal of the modern brickwork could restore the back of the original chimney and add considerably to space in the room without further extension to the house.

1.3 Social and Economic Context

The proposed alterations are internal and have no effect upon the outside of the property. There is no Party Wall issue and neighbours are not affected.

Upon asking for a pre-application discussion (appendix A – Letter to Welwyn and Hatfield – 24 August 2010) we were advised one would not be necessary and a application should be made direct.

2. DESIGN

By careful re-design it has been possible to produce a stair which complies with the Building Regulation requirements. Oak is preferred as a material which matches with the general house structure. The original oak blocks are retained but turned over to use the better step proportions of their sides. A tread board is introduced to protect the surface. A matching block is to be cut to make up the number of steps. The remainder of the work is traditional joinery.

The space between stairs and ceiling is filled in with glass for safety reasons and to show the interesting textures of the old block stairs.

The removal of the fireplace has no actual design effects other than the improvement to the room.

3. ACCESS

There are no public questions of access. The stairs improve both convenience and safety.

4. HERITAGE STATEMENT

The House, as described in para 1.1 has been subject to regular alteration throughout its history. Although the house has been generally sensitively modernised, the existing staircase is the only feature which appears as intrusively modern. Notwithstanding the principal quoted by some architects that alterations to old buildings should always look “modern”, the present stair is not an attractive feature dominating the living room. In addition, as described it is unsafe.

A copy of the listing is attached. This only refers to the front elevation and does not describe the interesting timber framing internally, forming most the house,

which sets the context of proposed alterations. As an internal alteration the work has no impact upon the townscape of Fore Street and, apart from the general duty of careful design, respecting the historical context, PPG15 is hardly relevant.

5. CONCLUSION

The proposed alterations are minor in character. The new staircase improves the appearance and character of the interior of the house and makes it more convenient. The removal of the fireplace enhances the room space without damaging the original fabric of the house.

D C Kirby
September 2010