Objection to amended designs for 6/2022/2714/HOUSE

This objection relates to the amended designs submitted on 26th January 2023.
This note expands and explains our objections, which we submitted in short form on 30th January 2023. Since then, we met the applicants and discussed possible remedies, but they have not offered any changes.

Key Points

- Both the original and revised proposals are fundamentally flawed.

- The revised plans still leave an open void, 2.5m deep, at the rear of the office. The configuration of the walls at the rear differs from the site plan and makes it impractical to seal this void with a gutter.

- Along other walls the proposed lead gutter will be inaccessible both from the ground and from the roof. There will be no way to repair defects in the gutter, its seal, or the surrounding brickwork of the boundary walls, short of demolishing the office.

- Five boundary walls are affected. Some are attached to historic buildings. They are old and have defects. The proximity of the new building to the walls will make it impossible to carry out repairs on them and will accelerate their deterioration.

- The height of the office has increased by 70cm (compared to the original proposals) to reach 4.4m above ground level. The orientation of the office has changed to present a blank brick wall less than 10m from our main windows. This creates an overbearing impact for us.

- The size of the building arises from the aim of incorporating five workstations and a w/c. This is not a typical home office.

- The proposal has not gone back to consultation despite substantial changes. Neighbours and consultees will be unaware of the changes in height, orientation and the proposals to attach gutters to the party walls.

Visual Amenity and Loss of Light

The proposed office would be due south and less than 10m from our windows including the two principal rooms – dining room and living room. This is very close. The proximity means that the revised plans have an overbearing impact.

Under the revised proposals it would project 95cm and 155cm above the two walls. It increases from 25cm to 95cm and from 85cm to 155cm. This is a very significant increase. Under the original proposals our view would be mainly of a ridge line of roof tiles some 15m distant. Under the revised proposals our view would be mainly of a blank brick wall less than 10m distant. This is unduly obtrusive.

Our garden is already shady. The additional loss of light from the south will significantly affect it.

The applicants intend to place solar panels on the roof of the new office. If we, at a future date and in line with evolving best practice, wish to place solar panels on our own outbuilding, they will be overshadowed.

Lead box gutters and voids between boundary and office walls.

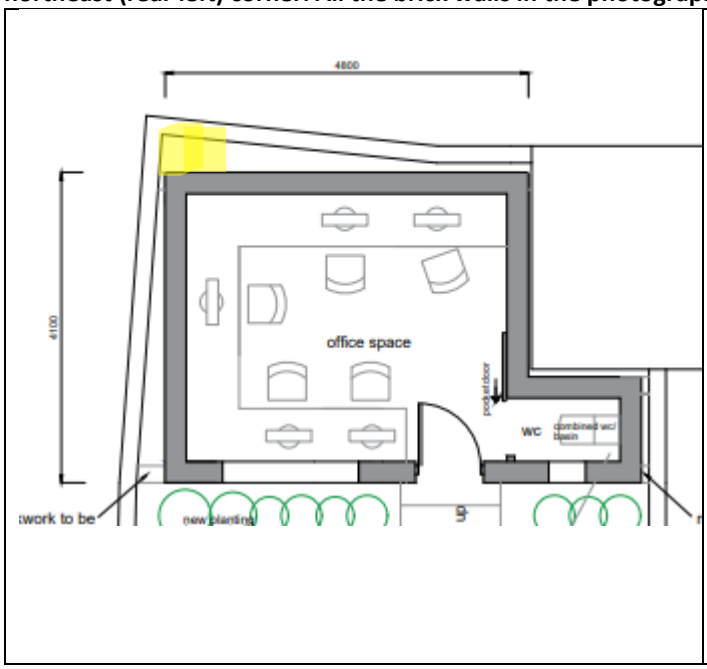
The impact on our walls, and other walls attached to historic buildings, is more complex. The new structure will be as close as possible to walls on three sides (although there are five walls) without touching them. We have pointed out that this would create voids which over time would fill up with detritus and bring damp up against the walls while making it impossible to repair or repoint without tearing down the new structure.

The applicants have recognised this issue and have revised their plans to seal the roof to some of the walls with a non-standard gutter system using lead box guttering.
However, the revised plans do not show any gutter at the rear (east) side of the new structure. The applicants have stated they intend to seal this remaining void, but we doubt this can be achieved in a satisfactory manner.

The solution at the rear (east) side of the new office is particularly challenging because the plans submitted, including the red lined site plan, do not reflect the reality of the boundary walls. In fact there is a rectangular inset or recess in the boundary wall. (80cm wide and 50cm deep). The proposals do not give any solution for this. It is not possible to seal this with a box gutter.

We have provided more detail on this point on the following page.

Plan highlighting the rear (east) side of the new office. In reality there is a rectangular inset in the wall in the northeast (rear left) corner. All the brick walls in the photograph are boundary walls.



Once the building is complete, it will be impossible to repair the gutter and significant sections of the boundary walls. Normally a gutter can be accessed either from the ground via a ladder or from the roof. The setting of the office inside high boundary walls and with a steep pitch for the roof makes it impossible to do either. If the mortar/cement which attaches the lead gutter to our wall should develop any defect, this will allow water etc to enter the void. It will not be possible to repair this without removing at least the roof of the office.

We assume the construction process will be i) erect the 2.5m walls of the office ii) affix the lead gutter iii) erect the roof which rises to 4m above the existing patio or 4.4m above ground level. At the north and south sides of the new office, the roof will be some 1.5m above the gutter. It should be possible to climb onto the roof and use a suction hose to clear out the gutter. It will not be possible to repair any defect. If, during construction of the roof, anything should be dropped into the gutter or against the wall, it will not be possible to repair the damage to the gutter or brickwork (without removing the roof).

Part of the boundary wall is also the wall of our own outbuilding. This building will be at risk of irreparable damage from the construction of this office. The same point applies to our neighbours' outbuildings and to walls attached to historic properties.

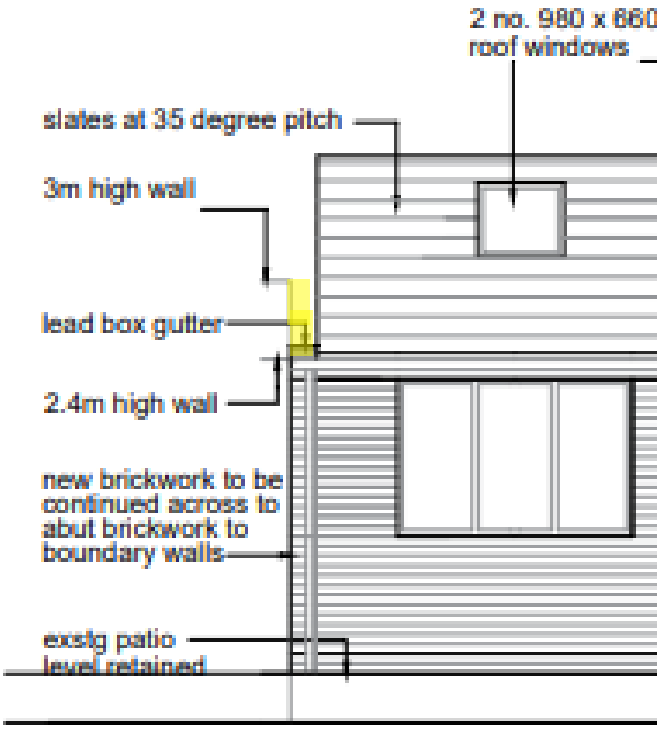
The boundary walls are not in perfect condition. They date back at the minimum to the 1960s. They have been affected by frost damage and some of the bricks are moist and soft. There are two bricks missing from the top course and developing cracks in some walls. Water could penetrate into the voids from the other sides (from any or all of the neighbouring properties). At some point, extensive repair work will be needed. It will not be possible to carry this out without demolition of the office or removal of its roof.

The very narrow and deep gullies created by the new office immediately above the lead gutter will in themselves increase the dampness of the bricks and the amount of moss that can survive on them. This will accelerate the rate of decay.

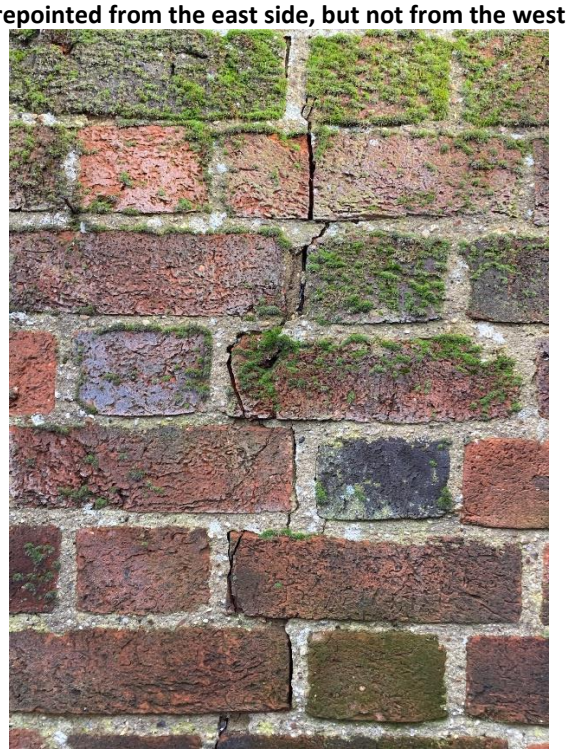
We question whether the voids should be completely sealed, even if that is actually achievable. Clearly there will be damp present in the voids. It might be better to have air bricks or some other form of ventilation.

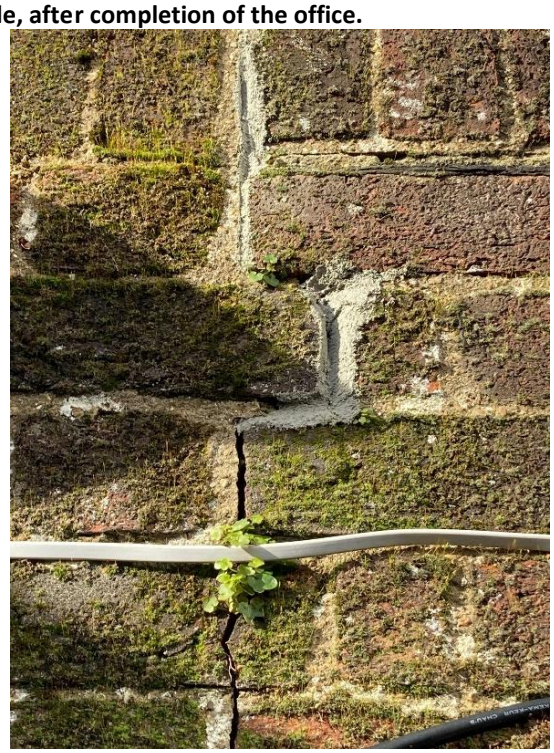
There should be a structural survey of all five boundary walls and a report on the impacts of of sealing them to the new building. If the office is built, then all existing defects in the boundary walls should be made good prior to the work commencing.

Section to illustrate how the roof rises 1.5m above the gutter. There is restricted access from the other side of the boundary wall due to the configuration of the outbuildings which are against the wall. A ladder cannot be used, and the gutter is still 0.5m below the top of the wall. If someone were to perch on the wall, they would need to repoint / repair a narrow gulley 0.5m below their feet.



Developing cracks on the east side of the east boundary wall. The office and lead gutter would be attached to the other side of this wall. However water could still penetrate into the void. This wall could be repointed from the east side, but not from the west side, after completion of the office.





Existing boundary walls have been affected by frost damage and some of the bricks are moist and soft. The new office will create narrow gullies above the lead gutter, and these will accelerate the deterioration of the brickwork. This will also affect neighbouring outbuildings.