

## HGY/2022/4309: 20A BISHOPSWOOD ROAD

The Architectural Review (AR) dated August 1971 has a section on recently completed houses which covers two Stout and Litchfield houses with which they keep eminent company and all of which except one receive high praise:

- House at Horsmonden, Kent by Michael Manser
- House at Kingston, Surrey by Vernon Gibberd Associates
- House at Prestwood, Bucks by Peter Aldington
- House at Holland Park by Aldington and Craig. Partner-in-Charge: Aldington
- House at Regents Park by Stout & Litchfield
- House on Campden Hill, London by Gollins Melvin Ward about which the author is critical
- House at Highgate by Stout & Litchfield

Although each house is very different from the others, what the critics appear to be intrigued by in each case is how well the structure, plan forms and sections as well as materials come together as a creative whole and respond to the clients' briefs.

In the case of 20A Bishopswood Road the married couple who had no children wanted a house with *'interconnecting kitchen/dining, living and studio areas, allowing work to be carried on in various parts of the house without a sense of isolation'*. The critic expands: *"Both these houses by Stout & Litchfield have as their starting point a theme developed from the geometry of a selected plan form. Variations of this are then played in the vertical section to evolve the different spaces they feel necessary to fulfil the physical and emotional needs of their clients. Such abstractions are the meat of architectural thought.....The plan at Highgate has emerged from an initial choice of a simple rectangle bisected by a raking cut across its width. The two parts have then been slid laterally and vertically on each other to produce a more complex envelope, with more windows and an entrance near its centre. Outside, the cross-wall vocabulary is still retained. In section and on a complementary raking line, the levels of the two parts have also been staggered, and the half levels of the staircase are at right angles to the raking line. In consequence the staircase appears to have generated the whole organisation of the house.*

*The justification for this complexity of form is evident in the fluid quality of the volumes of the living room and the studio. Both reach up into the roof shape on the top two levels of the building, and the raking cut logically affects the roof pitches.....Externally, it is at roof level where the plan shape has most effect. There the architects have allowed the tilting planes to be cut to trapezoidal shapes, confidently detailed and related to the main timber beams of the house. But some awkwardness is evident, particularly where these angles beams sit on the cross walls leaving an unexplained triangle missing in its bearing."* As for the setting next to a large Victorian house the author suggests *"As it is, it holds its own scale even though it is a slightly disrespectful youngster."*

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee therefore believe that this house deserves to be approached with a great deal of respect. However it does need to be recognised that that all the windows and spandrels appear to have been replaced with uPVC elements, much altering the appearance of the house.

The planning issues we have considered are:

- enclosing the front first floor balcony and creating a new balcony beyond that new line
- creating an overhang over the first floor balcony contiguous with a porch roof and relocated front door
- the impact on the design of extending the roof pitch at the rear
- the design, materials colour of the proposed windows and doors
- internal alterations which may impact on the fluidity of the spaces
- the implications for neighbours of a new balcony at the rear further back than the existing balcony
- impact on neighbours of the changed arrangement from a spiral stair to a flight of steps to provide access to the rear garden
- impact on neighbours of the rearrangement of the external steps up to the relocated front door
- high fence and gates to pavement preventing a view of the house from the street, not consistent with boundary treatments adjacent and locally
- loss of a single garage replaced with on site parking for two cars at street level
- bins, bikes, scooters
- sustainability

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee objects to these aspects of the proposals as follows:

1. We consider the approach to the alterations should be faithful to the original design concept because it has recognised merit. The AR Critic refers to the unperforated external walls running from front to back as 'lateral walls' which we think is misleading. We will refer to those walls as the side walls to the house.

2. Enclosing the front first floor balcony and creating a new balcony beyond that new line

Extending the front rooms at Ground Floor level presents certain problems. At basement level the proposed plan shows the side walls to the house being extended at the front and rear, presumably in matching brickwork with white-painted fair faced blockwork internally as described by the critic in AR. This needs to be clarified. At the ground floor level (bedroom) the proposed extension in the position of the existing balcony is shown as being enclosed on each side with a stud wall approximately 200mm thick with the outer face contiguous with the outside face of the side wall. As proposed the detail would be very unlikely to achieve Building Regulations Part L approval. As a redesign would be required it would be much preferable to face this construction problem now rather than via a so-called Non Material Amendment. In this context, in whatever way this detail needs to be changed, it would have a material effect on the front elevation and a revision to the application should be made now.

3. Creating an overhang over the first floor balcony contiguous with a porch roof

We consider the proposal to form an enormous overhang or 'canopy' (not shown dotted on the plan) and which is contiguous with the porch roof is an element so contrary to the original design concept that this must be the main ground for refusal of this application. It

demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of Stout & Litchfield's concept for this house.

#### 4. The impact on the design of extending the roof pitch at the rear

Dwg. No. 0222 1 GA 103 P1 (proposed first floor plan) misleadingly shows no windows or doors out onto the new balcony. The proposal involves extending the roof pitch downwards at the rear although not reducing the height of the doors to the rear top floor space. Whilst this is a 'faithful' approach to the roof form, it could significantly alter and affect the quality of the internal space.

#### 5. The design, materials and colour of the proposed windows and doors

We note from photographs in the Architectural Review article that the windows and spandrels were considerably lighter in touch than the unfortunate uPVC replacements. They appeared to have been thin aluminium sections set in a narrow white frame, presumably timber. To front and rear there were pairs of identical windows or glazed doors; at the rear the windows had small fanlights, two per window below. The band of windows to the second floor of the front elevation were less deep than the existing windows so the cills would not clash with the kitchen units as now proposed. The top floor on the front elevation was set slightly forward of the side walls, thus casting a shadow on the front face of the side walls. There was what was probably a blind box over these windows, also creating a shadow, all adding liveliness to the elevation, now lost.

The proposed ubiquitous grey windows would not be faithful to the original concept.

#### 6. Internal alterations which may impact on the fluidity of the spaces

Any internal alterations which have already or would as proposed impact on the essential character of this house derived by manipulation of the plans and sections so well described by the AR critic's Appraisal should be removed or, if proposed, should be capable of being removed in the future without causing damage. We anticipate that this house if restored with care and understanding would, in time as 20th century gems are lost, be nationally listed and will be included in the upcoming review of the Local List of buildings of Merit.

#### 7. Implications on neighbours, amenities

- the implications for neighbours of a new balcony at the rear further back than the existing balcony
- impact on neighbours of the changed arrangement from a spiral stair to a flight of steps to provide access to the rear garden
- impact on neighbours of the rearrangement of the external steps up to the relocated front door

We expect that the Case Officer will consider very carefully any potential adverse impacts on neighbours

#### 8. High fence and gates to pavement not consistent with adjacent boundary treatments

There are any number of ways of dealing with potential threats but the high fence and high gates as proposed are not typical in the Highgate Conservation Area. The properties on either side have low brick boundaries with low hedges behind and the same arrangement should be provided for this property.



9. Loss of a single garage replaced with on site parking for two cars at street level

We suggest that the profile of a largish vehicle should be shown on dwg no. 0222 3 GA 302 P1 to illustrate the impact on the basement office and bedroom off it of two vehicles parked where indicated on the ground floor plan. However the existing arrangement of raised beds set in white painted rendered low walls provide an appropriate setting for this house.

10. Bins, bikes, scooters, garden equipment, etc

We note that the outdoor shed between no. 20A and no. 23 at the rear garden level would be lost, replaced with a wardrobe and lightwell to a bathroom at that level. There is no indication on the plans on where the bins, bicycles, etc would be kept.

11. Sustainability

We note that the whole plot would be covered with what appear to be impervious building materials. We have not found any reference to reducing carbon emissions but if we have missed them we apologise. We consider the landscaping at the front of the property would improve it's setting if planting were carefully selected.

Taking all of the above points into account Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee objects strongly to this application as it would cause harm to this special house and to the Highgate Conservation Area.

It is worth noting that Stout & Litchfield's New House at Shipton-upon-Wychwood, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire is listed Grade II\* as is the garden which is separately listed. Their 50 - 56 Ferry Street is listed Grade II:



The C20th Society has been asked to be copied in to our response given their interest in the work of this architectural practice.