

Design and Access Statement
and Heritage Assessment

19 December 2023

The Glasshouse OmVed Gardens
Townsend Yard London N6

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Introduction

Smerin Architects have been appointed by the owners of OmVed Gardens to act as Architects for the re-building of the existing glasshouse together with some minor modifications to the entrance area of the site to help improve how the site works. The aim of the Clients is to address the various technical shortcomings that the existing glasshouse structure has to help ensure its continued use as a multipurpose events space for both OmVed Gardens and the wider community and to improve the arrangements for those visiting the site.



Aerial view

Background/Site History

The site is located at the north end of Townsend Yard, which runs off the northern side of Highgate High Street. It comprises an area of approximately 2,600 square metres or approximately three-quarters of an acre that drops by about seven metres from south to north. It is bounded to the west by the adjoining part of OmVed Gardens known as The Yard where a number of new buildings are being constructed to form a sustainability centre, to the south by the end of Townsend Yard which leads to the blocks of garages and parcels of land relating to the commercial properties facing Highgate High Street and to the east by an unused area of land currently occupied by a self-seeded sycamore woodland. The site sits within an area referred to as Highgate Bowl and forms part of the Highgate Conservation Area. It also forms part of Site Specific Allocation SA42: Highgate Bowl as defined within Haringey Council's 'Site Allocations DPD' document that was adopted in 2017. One of the key aspirations of the allocation is to protect Highgate Bowl as an open space and improve public access into it.

Historically it is an area of traditional back-land development that has evolved over time, with the original grazing and informal horticultural uses giving way to more formalised nursery and market gardening interspersed with storage yards and small scale industrial uses. Townsend Yard took its name from the Townshend family of builders who owned a house on the corner of the yard, which until the 1930's contained a string of ramshackle dwellings. Like Duke's Head Yard and White Lion Yard nearby, Townsend Yard has retained its role as an access route to the ad hoc developments to the rear

of the increasingly built up frontage of Highgate High Street. The areas around the site exhibit this mix with the Medieval grain of the buildings fronting the High Street to the south contrasting with a variety of nineteenth and twentieth century structures that back onto these. To the west the Victorian buildings of Highgate School and twentieth century additions segue into the small-scale overtly modernist terraced houses of Kingsley Place designed in the late 1960's and more conventional pseudo Arts and Crafts semi-detached houses on Cholmeley Crescent built in the 1930's to the north. To the east the largely Victorian buildings fronting the High Street as it drops towards Archway are punctuated by a number of more modern buildings including the serpentine form of the flat roofed Art Deco style blocks of Cholmeley Lodge and pioneering modernist house, The Studio in Duke's Head Yard, built in 1940.

The existing glasshouse on the site was built in 1982 by Chris Southwood to serve as a new shop for his Southwood's Village Nurseries, which was how the site as a whole was known from the 1970's onwards as it was slowly developed from a horticultural nursery into a retail garden centre. Although intended from the outset as a retail space the glasshouse utilised a standardised commercial glasshouse system set on a concrete base with blockwork retaining walls. When the business ceased trading in 2015 it had for many years been known as Highgate Garden Centre. Having been acquired by the Clients, the site became OmVed Gardens in 2018. As part of its transformation from a predominantly hard-surfaced retail complex to a carefully re-landscaped garden dedicated to promoting environmental awareness and growing food, the glasshouse was renovated and re-purposed as an events space. Since then it has hosted a wide variety of events ranging from exhibitions, musical performances, workshops, talks, cooking demonstrations and yoga classes to weddings and funeral services. Some of these form part of the annual programme of activities run by OmVed Gardens whilst others are put on by community groups and organisations who share OmVed Gardens' values and want to take advantage of the sites unique qualities for their own events.

As part of the re-landscaping works to create OmVed Gardens, new steps and a ramp were introduced to provide access from the upper part of the site, just beyond the entrance gates, down the hillside to the lower levels where the glasshouse is entered. These are linked by the serpentine pathway running out into the gardens that has become a distinctive feature of OmVed Gardens. Whilst the site boundaries have been replaced with new fencing, hedging and tree planting, the entrance gates to the site however remain from the era of the garden centre.



Site photographs

Current Condition And Justification For Demolition

The building of the existing glasshouse is documented in a film entitled 'Southwood's Village Nurseries Construction of New Shop 1982' that is available to view online on youtube.com. This shows not only the erection of the aluminium and steel framework of the glasshouse by a commercial glasshouse supplier but also the construction of the rudimentary concrete slab and blockwork retaining walls on which the structure sits. All these elements were retained when the glasshouse was renovated and re-purposed as an events space in 2018 when the glazing was repaired, new entrance doors were installed and a plywood panel based series of ramps and stepped walkways was introduced to facilitate level access and create flat floor areas over the uneven concrete floors beneath. New lighting was also introduced and an open-plan kitchen area installed in the centre of the building together with a large planter to enable trees to be grown within.

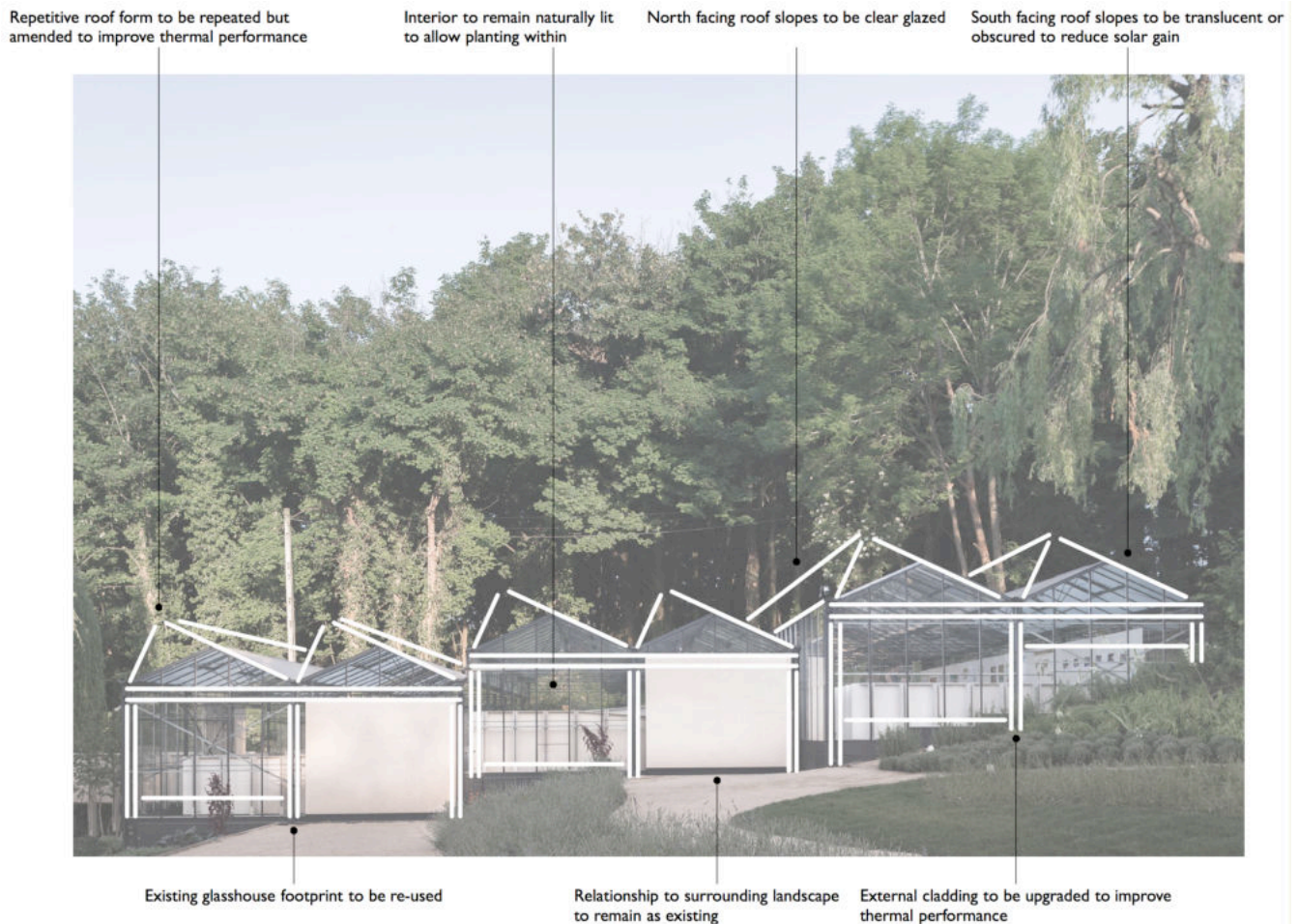
In the years since OmVed Gardens opened, the glasshouse has become a key component in its success hosting a wide variety of events both as part of the annual programme of activities run by OmVed Gardens and by community groups and organisations who share OmVed Gardens' values. As a multi-purpose events space the technical shortcomings of the existing glasshouse structure have however become apparent and now threaten its long-term viability. The problems result in part from the fragile state of the forty year old structure that is at the end of its design life and the widely variable environmental conditions within the building that its thin single-glazed covering produces. Events in the building have regularly been interrupted by leaks through the glazing and damage caused during high winds. High heat gain when the sun shines and rapid temperature drops on cooler days also adversely affects events taking place and prevents many types of event that the building would ideally be able to host. A number of technical studies have been undertaken to explore ways of mitigating these issues but ultimately the fragile nature of the structure rules out any options to re-glaze or otherwise cover the roof and walls of the building. Without being able to physically secure the external envelope of the building and significantly upgrade its thermal performance, introducing heating, cooling and ventilation equipment to temper the internal conditions is neither economic nor environmentally sustainable. As a result the only viable strategy is to demolish the existing glasshouse structure and replace it with a new structure of the appropriate standard to support the activities within.

Whilst the proposed new glasshouse will replicate the current footprint of the building thereby enabling the existing garden landscaping around to remain unaffected, the original entrance gates and small security hut are to be replaced as part of the proposals which also include a small electrical sub-station required by UK Power Networks to provide power for the site and surrounding area. Once constructed on site this will then enable the current sub-station on the corner of Townsend Yard opposite the entrance gates to be decommissioned and removed helping improve the appearance of that part of Townsend Yard and easing vehicle movements in the vicinity.

During demolition the existing glazing will be removed and sent to the appropriate recycling facility. Similarly the aluminium and steel elements from the framework and the plywood panelling will be dismantled and sent for recycling.

Massing Strategy

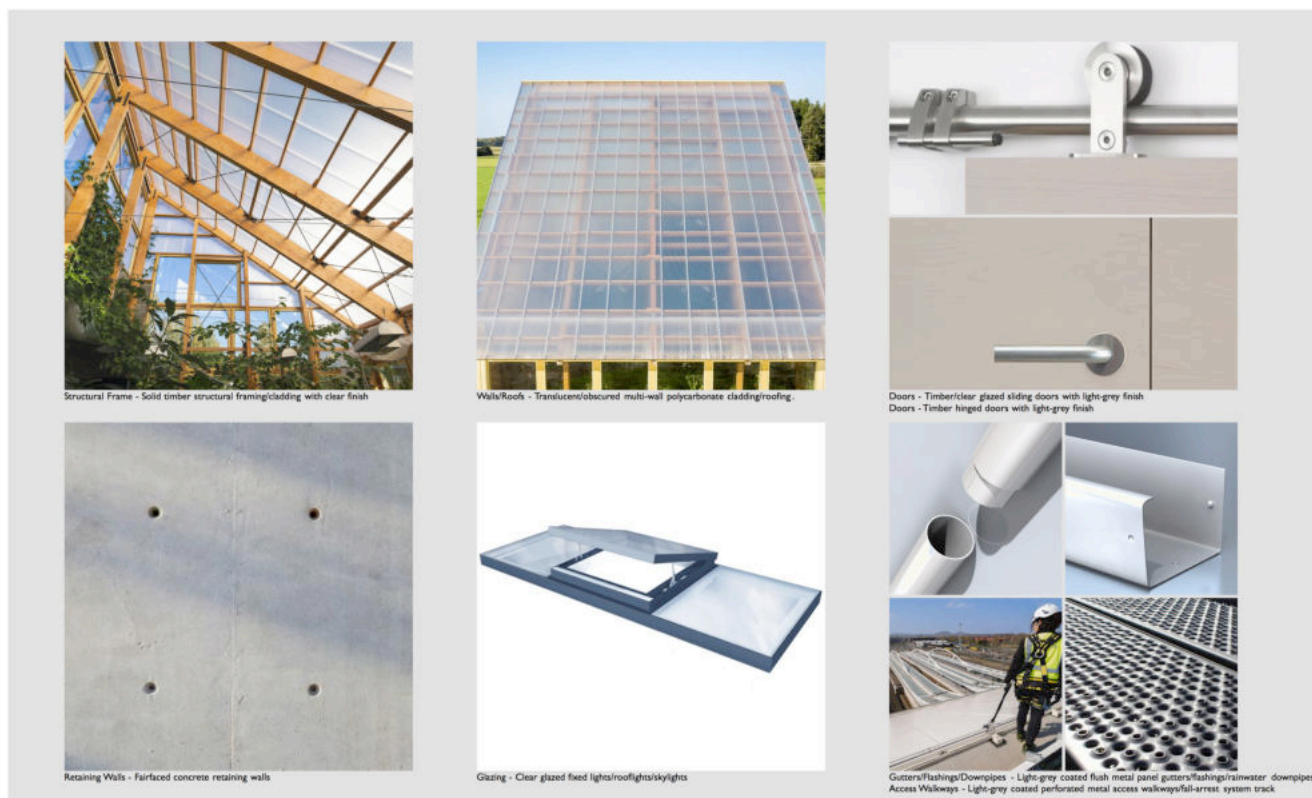
The massing and form of the proposed new glasshouse follows that of the existing building closely. The footprint of the new building is identical to that of the existing and it has the same six bays with pitched roofs over arranged in pairs that vary in level as the site drops from south to north. As with the existing building the upper pair of bays are set below the entrance level to the site to the south so that the building is initially seen from above whilst the surrounding ground level drops away from the lower pair of bays at the northern end of the building. The repeating arrangement of the pairs of pitched roofs is seen from the access road running down the eastern side of the building and across the rest of OmVed Gardens to the west where the main entrances to the building are. The only slight change to the form of the new building relative to the existing is that the roof pitches have been adjusted from symmetrical to asymmetric so that the longer roof slopes face southwards towards the sun with the shorter slopes facing north. This enables differing types of glazing to be used to help deal with the existing problem of excessive solar gain during much of the year. To the north end of the new building the existing pergola structure is to be retained and re-used to provide a similar semi-open space surrounded by planting. With the footprint area and massing of the new building following that of the existing it should ensure that the proposed new glasshouse does not detract from the predominantly open character of the area in which the building is set as required by Haringey Council's 'Site Allocations DPD' document.



Strategy

External Appearance

Whilst the footprint area and massing of the new building follows that of the existing, the construction and materials is subtly different. In place of the aluminium and steel framework of the existing, the new building will have a frame comprised of solid timber sections. This gives the structure a greater degree of robustness, makes detailing how the external cladding is fixed easier and helps minimise the embodied carbon in the structure. In place of the existing thin single-glazed covering, the roofs and walls will be clad with a mixture of translucent and obscured multi-wall polycarbonate panels and clear double-glazed units depending on their orientation. This will ensure that the new building continues to have the look and feel of a glasshouse whilst enabling a greater degree of control over both heat gain and heat loss. Where walls are needed to retain the ground around these will be concrete with a fairfaced finish. Gutters, flashings and rainwater downpipes will be metal with a uniform finish in place of the existing mix of materials. Floor areas will have a polished concrete finish to provide a more durable surface than the existing stained plywood panels used over the rough concrete screed. As well as helping ensure that the new glasshouse retains the essential characteristics of the existing, the materials used also relate closely to those used on the adjoining part of OmVed Gardens known as The Yard where a number of new buildings are being constructed to form a sustainability centre.



External materials/finishes

Landscape Strategy

The strategy for the landscape is a key aspect of the proposals and has been developed in conjunction with del Buono Gazerwitz Landscape Architecture, who were responsible for the rejuvenation of the landscape at OmVed Gardens. As noted above although the proposed new glasshouse will replicate the current footprint of the building thereby enabling the existing garden landscaping around to remain unaffected, the original entrance gates and small security hut are to be replaced as part of the proposals which also include a small electrical sub-station required by UK Power Networks to provide power for the site and surrounding area. Detailed proposals are contained in their Landscape Proposals document included with the application

With regard to tree matters, arboricultural consultants Arbortrack Systems have been retained to provide advice across the site but there are no mature trees in the immediate vicinity of the glasshouse that would be affected by the proposals. The large willow tree that used to grow close to the southwest corner of the building died some years ago during a period of prolonged drought with only the stump now remaining.

Heritage Assessment

Paragraph 194 in Section 16 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' of 'National Planning Policy Framework' requires the significance of any heritage assets that are affected by a planning application to be assessed and the potential impact of the proposal on their significance to be understood. In this instance the heritage asset is the Highgate Conservation Area in which OmVed Gardens sits. As set out above, the proposed new glasshouse replaces the existing one in the same position on the site and will serve the same purpose as the existing building. It will also be similar in appearance to the existing. As such the contribution being made by the usage of the site from a historical and community point of view is being respected. The existing building and entrance gates that are being replaced date from 1982 and are not of architectural significance. Views of the proposed building and site entrance from within and outside the Conservation Area will remain unaffected by the proposals. Taken together the proposals are intended to result in a new

building and entrance to the site that is a high quality piece of design that is a positive addition to the Conservation Area and that will not be detrimental to its character or appearance.

Environmental Strategy/Sustainability

The organisation and proposed construction of the new glasshouse also addresses the Clients desire to build a building that as well as being architecturally considered is as environmentally sustainable and responsive as practically possible. This will enable the new glasshouse to provide comfortable conditions for the wide variety of people using it. With regard to the design strategy of the new building this manifests itself in a number of ways ranging from the passive aspects of the layout, construction and materials used in the building to the choice of active environmental services systems incorporated into it. The asymmetrical form of the new roof with the longer roof slopes facing southwards towards the sun clad with a mixture of translucent and obscured multiwall polycarbonate panels and the shorter slopes facing north with clear double-glazed units will help deal with the existing problem of excessive solar gain during much of the year. The use of a heavyweight concrete structure to the ground floor slab will allow it to act as a temperature stabiliser moderating temperature fluctuations by slowing down heat gain in the summer and limiting heat loss in the winter. The use of concrete as a structure to some areas, when sourced from a local plant that utilises a proportion of recycled material or blast-furnace waste, helps minimise the embodied energy in the envelope of the building. The structural frame comprised of solid timber sections is inherently carbon neutral with minimal amounts used for fabrication, delivery and erection of the frame. Other materials specified would be carefully audited to ensure they have zero ozone depletion potential and where possible are environmentally passive in manufacture and use. Natural materials utilised would be specified from sustainable sources and suppliers with the appropriate accreditation such as the Forest Stewardship Council. External glazing units would be double or triple glazed and have a low emissivity thermal coating to the inside of the cavity to assist in reducing their U-Value. All elements of the external envelope of the building would be detailed and the execution monitored on site to help ensure that air leakage and hence heat loss is kept to a minimum.

As well as passive design measures that seek to reduce temperature fluctuations and the energy consumption of the building and hence its contribution to carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, through its layout and construction, it is intended that the building will also incorporate a number of active energy saving systems to further minimise its consumption of energy and water. A ventilation system with a heat recovery unit would be used to capture heat from the warm waste air in the building and return it to the incoming fresh air if appropriate. Internally a fast response airborne heating system fed by air source heat pumps would be used in conjunction with the areas of thermal mass in the building to maintain comfortable conditions with minimised energy usage. A rainwater harvesting system to collect rainwater run-off from the roof for irrigation of the garden areas would also be included. The layout of the building is such that all areas benefit from good levels of natural light that will reduce the need for artificial lighting during daylight hours. Artificial lighting will be designed to use of low energy fittings with LED lamps where possible. External lighting will generally not be used to avoid creating excessive light levels or light disturbance to neighbouring properties. All lighting will be linked to a central lighting control system which can be programmed with a variety of lighting patterns for use throughout the day and night to help minimise artificial lighting whilst maintaining comfortable conditions. The lighting control system can in turn be linked to a simple building management system that will bring together all the active systems in the building. The building management system monitors environmental conditions via sensors internally and externally and activates the appropriate system in response to changes within the building or the external conditions.

Accessibility

The design of the new glasshouse will ensure people with restricted mobility can enjoy all parts of the new building. Wheelchair access into the building is available directly from the surrounding garden areas to the western side and access road to the eastern side and to the various floors of the building via the shallow ramps linking each level within the building. Disabled WC's are also provided to both the public and staff areas within the building.

Long-term Maintenance

As well as auditing materials and finishes for their environmental properties, it is the intention that the new glasshouse will be constructed from materials with a long inherent maintenance free life. Timber is clear-finished and needs virtually no maintenance. Glazing and metalwork items would be self-finished or factory coated and apart from periodic cleaning should have a maintenance free life in excess of 30 years. Safe access to the roof slopes and gutters for cleaning and maintenance purposes will be provided via purpose-made walkways running along each valley with a fall-arrest system track along each ridge to secure personnel using the walkways. As a practice we give all Clients of newly completed projects a manual setting out maintenance recommendations for all elements internally and externally. Coupled with record drawings of a project this is available to be passed to any future owners.

Parking/Vehicular Issues

Access to the new glasshouse for pedestrians and vehicles remains as at present along Townsend Yard from Highgate High Street. The existing off-street parking spaces remain in their current location with the addition of designated spaces for bicycles.

Foul And Surface Water Drainage Strategy/Flood Risk

The site is served by a foul water drainage run to the centre of OmVed Gardens connecting into the mains drainage in the vicinity. The proposals may involve some changes to the below ground drainage and surface water drainage arrangements and the appropriate approvals from Thames Water will, if required, be sought in due course. The new glasshouse will also be provided with a suitably sized rainwater harvesting tank that will collect rainwater from each roof area to provide water for irrigation purposes. This will considerably reduce the surface water run-off from the site and hence the overall level of flood risk to the area within which the site is set in accordance with Haringey Council's Policy DM26.

Sunlight/Daylight And Privacy/Light Impact

As noted above, the organisation of the new glasshouse and arrangement of glazed openings is such that all areas benefit from good levels of natural light that will reduce the need for artificial lighting during daylight hours. Planting within the surrounding gardens areas is also sited and sized so as to avoid unduly overshadowing glazed openings. The proposal is not considered to have any potential adverse impact on the current levels of sunlight or daylighting enjoyed by neighbouring properties. The areas of glazing in the new building are reduced compared to the existing building and will have retractable louvres or blinds to help control daylight and light spillage from them at night. Views into and out of the building from beyond the site are also heavily screened by the existing trees on the site and in the surrounding areas. External floodlighting of the new building or garden areas is not proposed. The Institution of Lighting Professionals 'Guidance Notes For The Reduction Of Obtrusive Light' identifies four main causes of obtrusive light; back light, upward reflected light, spill light and direct upward light. These all generally emanate from externally mounted lighting particularly at high level that is not included in any part of the proposed new glasshouse and garden areas. As such light impact on neighbouring properties or the wider area via light intrusion, glare, sky glow or any other kind of obtrusive light as identified by the Institution of Lighting Professionals and likely to be visible beyond the boundary of the site is not considered to result from the proposals.

Substructure Construction

The proposed new glasshouse remains a single-storey structure like the existing building set at approximately the same levels on the site thereby enabling the existing garden landscaping around to remain unaffected. The construction systems and method of working have been chosen so as to avoid the need for any mechanical plant to be sited beyond the line of the footprint of the existing building thereby avoiding interfering with the existing landscaping around. Helical steel needle

piles will be used to support the new concrete ground floor slab that are inserted by a machine sited within the footprint of the building with an articulated arm able to reach the required position for the piles. Where walls are needed to retain the ground around these will be constructed from reinforced concrete with a fairfaced finish as will the walls at the northern end of the building where the surrounding ground level drops away.

Waste Management Plan

The proposed new glasshouse includes appropriate storage space for food waste, separated recyclable waste and non-recyclable waste for collection as under the existing arrangements. The surrounding garden area includes facilities for the composting of any garden waste produced.

Safety And Security

Opportunities for crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime have been, where possible, minimised in the proposals in accordance with the Secured by Design initiative standards. Access to the glasshouse remains along Townsend Yard from Highgate High Street as at present and the pedestrian approach to the entrances to the new glasshouse through the landscaped garden areas remain direct and visually open as at present. The proposed new security hut will enable better monitoring of the entrance area whilst also providing information about the site and helping orientate visitors. All doors, windows and other openings within and around the new buildings would incorporate locking and access control systems certified to meet the Secured by Design initiative standards and glazing to windows and doors would similarly meet the required standards as would construction of the new entrance gates. Mail delivery and storage arrangements would similarly comply with the same standards.

Summary

Given that the existing glasshouse on the site is not of architectural significance, that the technical shortcomings of the existing glasshouse structure threaten its long-term viability as a multi-purpose events space and that studies undertaken to explore ways of mitigating these issues have been unsuccessful, the only viable strategy is to demolish the existing glasshouse and replace it with a new structure of the appropriate standard to support the activities within. With the footprint area and massing of the new building following that of the existing it should ensure that the proposed new glasshouse does not detract from the predominantly open character of the area in which the building is set as required by Haringey Council's 'Site Allocations DPD' document. Although subtly different, the construction and materials will ensure that the new glasshouse retains the essential characteristics of the existing. The organisation and proposed construction of the new glasshouse also addresses the Clients desire to build a building that as well as being architecturally considered is as environmentally sustainable and responsive as practically possible. This will enable the new glasshouse to provide comfortable conditions for the wide variety of people using it and meets the Clients aim to address the various technical shortcomings that the existing glasshouse structure has to help ensure its continued use as a multipurpose events space for both OmVed Gardens and the wider community and to improve the arrangements for those visiting the site. Taken together the proposals are intended to result in a new building and entrance to the site that is a high quality piece of design that is a positive addition to the Conservation Area and that will not be detrimental to its character or appearance.