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HERITAGE, PLANNING, DESIGN and ACCESS STATEMENT
53 Northchurch Road London N1 4EE

Planning and Listed Building Consent submission

This statement relates to proposals for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the south and east side of the roof at 53 Northchurch Road. It is to be read in conjunction with the drawings of the existing and proposed situations submitted as part of the application.

The proposals are a revision of the Listed Building and Planning applications made in November 2022 (2022/2894 and 2022/2965) which were refused by Hackney Council (decision dated 24th January 2023). The revision proposes a more discreet layout of the solar panels on the south elevation.

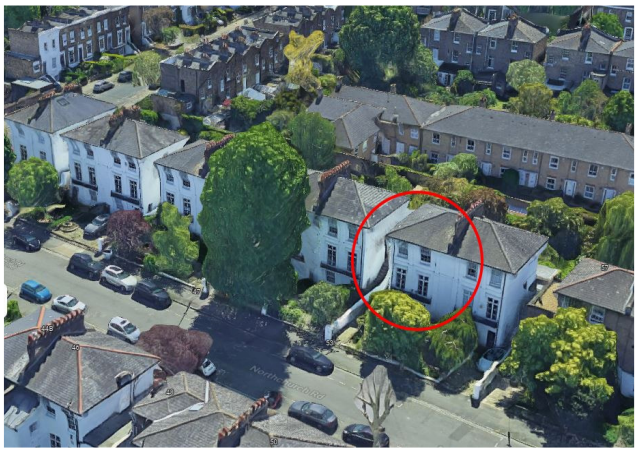
This statement demonstrates that the panels and associated cabling cannot be seen from any public street, that they do not compromise the architectural integrity or fabric of the building, or its setting, and that the installation is easily reversible at the end of the panels' life span. In consequence, the proposal causes no substantial harm to the significance of this heritage asset. The proposals respond to the Climate Emergency declaration and commitment to net zero in Hackney and are calculated to provide an output equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of the house.
The application poses an important test of the Council's commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency, and balancing preservation of the historic environment with creation of a sustainable environment. For this reason, we request that the matter be referred to the Planning Sub-Committee for decision.

1. THE PROPERTY

1.1 CONTEXT and HERITAGE

53 Northchurch Road is an early/mid-19th century single-family dwelling on the south side of the road linking De Beauvoir Square to Southgate Road. The building is located in the De Beauvoir Conservation Area, and Listed Grade II.
The building is part of a terrace of 8 stuccoed houses linked in pairs, nos.41-55 Northchurch Road characterised by 3-storey buildings (basement + 2 floors) linked in pairs with 2-storey (basement + 1) entrance volumes set back from the street elevation.

Please refer to the aerial views on pages 384TP601 and 602 and 2, figures 1-5



Aerial view from North (Google earth)

1.2 HOUSE AND GARDEN

The building was listed on the 4th of February 1975, under the Historic England List entry number 1235227. The official list entry details point to the grouping and to the front elevation external details rather than the individual buildings.

2. *Four early-mid C19 linked pairs, each house 2 storeys and full height basement, 2 windows with narrow set back entrance link having door up long flight of steps on return. Extra front doors have been added to basement storey. Stucco with low pitched hipped slate roofs. Banded rusticated basement, forming voussoirs to windows with vermiculate keys, and ground floor to 1st floor band on which rest Ionic pilasters rising to eaves. Moulded architraves to 1st floor sash windows with glazing bars. Console bracketed cornices and ornamental cast iron guards to ground floor windows.*
Nos 37 to 63 (odd) form a group.

The Conservation Area Appraisal (1997) mentions the terrace and dates it from 1844/1847, and focuses on the 'group value' of the terrace rather than the individual properties. The terrace of stuccoed houses is characterised by deep front gardens, and relatively narrow recesses (single storey side volume) leading via external steps to the entrance landing at upper ground floor.
The roofs have projecting eaves and shallow pitches.

Rear elevation (North) and garden

The rear elevation is brick, with the same projecting cornice at roof level. The roof slope being shallow, it is not visible from the rear garden.

1.3 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE ASSETS

Applications for Listed Building Consent are judged according to whether a proposal leads to 'substantial' or 'less than substantial' harm (as to which, see 3.1 below) to the 'significance' of a designated heritage asset.

Significance is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as *"the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic, or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting."*

As noted above, the highest level of the property's significance is 'architectural and historic', and is derived from its front elevation, its belonging in the grouping of 41-55 and by virtue of its contribution to the character of that section of Northchurch Road. The architectural composition, massing, plan-form and historic fabric contribute to the architectural interest. The terrace makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. By contrast to the uniformity of the front, the rear elevations display a certain amount of variation, including stucco render (see photograph above), velux and dormer windows and satellite dishes.

A sequence of views from the street (standing height) is attached on Page 384-TP-603 – figures 6 -13. Critically for the present proposals, there is very limited, if any, visibility of the roof plane from street level. The east-facing roof with its shallow slope, is not visible and – unlike the front elevation and projecting cornice, is not a key contributor to the appearance of the building or its setting.

2. PROPOSAL: general description

The proposal is to install solar panels (photovoltaic) (PVs) on the east- and south-facing slopes of the hipped roof. The proposed installation is part of the London-wide Solar Together joint purchasing scheme promoted by, among others, Hackney Council and the Mayor of London. It is a response to the critical worldwide need to reduce carbon emissions: reducing the use of gas boilers, reducing reliance on the electricity grid, switching to sustainably generated electricity (including, where appropriate, exporting it to the grid) and in general reducing energy consumption in dwellings, are all part of that effort towards environmental sustainability.
This effort is backed by numerous local and national policies, such as the National Policy Framework, the London Plan 2021, the Hackney Green New Deal and the Hackney (draft) Climate Action Plan, as well as The Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and commitment to net Zero by 2030. https://hackney.gov.uk/climate-emergency-declaration

Externally, no alteration or work is proposed to any elevation.

Internally, the necessary electric cable will follow the existing (invisible) route between the electrical services from loft (where the batteries and inverter will be housed) and the fuse board at lower-ground level (see plans).

3. SUSTAINABILITY and ENERGY: Policy context

There are 3 levels of consistent planning guidance related to the installation of renewables: national policy, local policy (London & Hackney), and Historic England's guidance on heritage buildings.

3.1 **The National Policy Framework 2021** sets out principles under which the Planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Chapter 14, dealing with planning for climate change, states in paragraphs 152:

The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, (…) It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

Furthermore, in paragraph 155:
To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should:
a) provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);
b) consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and
c) identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers. (emphasis added)

And paragraph in 158
When determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon development, local planning authorities should: a) not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy, and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. (emphasis added)

Heritage is also considered in the Policy Framework and dealt with in Chapter 16: Consideration has to be given to the impact and potential harm to a heritage asset, and to balancing the harm of a PV installation against their sustainability benefits.

It is formulated with the assessment of what comes under the expression 'substantial harm' (*paragraph 200 - only in exceptional cases*) and 'less than substantial harm' (*paragraph 202 - weigh any harm against public benefit*).

Paragraph 202 states:
Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

The refusal of the previous application, while recognising the 'less than substantial harm' caused by the proposals, effectively allowed preservation of the historic

environment to override protection of the present and future environment in a climate emergency. In effect, the decision meant that *any* harm, however minor (as in this case), must require planning permission to be refused. That is not the correct approach.

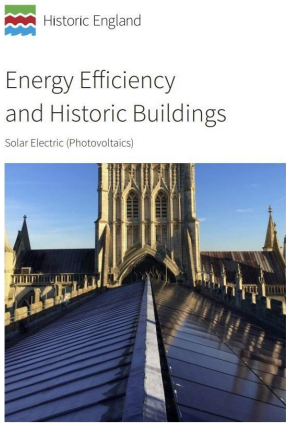
3.2 **Hackney** Draft Climate Action Plan currently out for consultation.
For many years now, the borough has been active at establishing policies to create a more sustainable environment, with support for reduced transport pollution, for home insulation, and in general sustainable alternatives. The draft Climate Action Plan seeks to fulfil the administration's pledge, made in 2018, to "build a more sustainable borough, setting out a plan to tackle pollution, transition to renewable energy, encourage walking and cycling, and increase recycling" (see the Green New Deal page, 41).

The Hackney Policy on energy and sustainability identifies Key Themes of the Hackney Climate Action Plan, and ambitious goals have been set for 2030, in particular for buildings, involving '*removing gas boilers, adding solar panels, and decreasing energy use in our buildings'.*
Hackney states as objectives:
-'Increase the deployment of solar panels across private buildings'
-'E*ncourage retrofits in conservation areas and heritage buildings where appropriate.*

3.2 **London Plan 2021**

The London Plan policies support the introduction of renewable energy production on site to reduce carbon emissions- see for instance paragraphs 9.2.3 and 9.3.8

3.3 **Historic England** Guidance on Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings



Historic England also has issued guidance on the installation of PV's on Historic Buildings, with emphasis on careful consideration for location and context, and reversibility of the installation. Our proposals used the guidance as reference.

4. PROPOSAL: details

4.1 Energy

As per the Historic England guidance, the installation of PVs has to be part of a 'whole building' approach to the energy efficiency of a building: heat loss / building fabric, and energy use to provide hot water, heating or for cooking come into consideration.

53 Northchurch Road has had in 2010 some alterations and upgrades in terms of services and some of the windows. The potential for further insulation of the fabric, however, is limited:

-External insulation is not desirable on such a building, as it would lead to loss of detail or loss of brick finish at the rear.
-Internal insulation is not desirable as it would hide or remove details such as cornicing, architraves and other historic details
-Windows are traditional sashes, which cannot be altered without affecting the appearance of the building.

The switch to a renewable energy form, using the southern (and eastern) elevations of the building at the rear is a way of reducing the use of centrally (and unsustainably) generated electricity and gas, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

The estimated annual output of the 10 panels proposed is 3,606 KWh. The current annual electricity statement shows consumption of 3578 KWh; the panels proposed would generate electricity equivalent to the household's consumption. In that sense, the installation of photovoltaic panels brings a public benefit as it contributes to the general effort to reduce carbon emission

4.2 Visibility and impact on the Conservation area

The visibility of proposed panels is the most important aspect in terms of impact on the building and the context. The visibility has been considered from Northchurch Road, and the wider area:

The panels have been arranged on the roof in a regular pattern, aligned to keep a visually 'tidy' arrangement. The proposals have been revised to avoid any perceived projection of the panels from the roof ridges.

-<u>From Northchurch Road,</u> - *please refer to page 384-TP-603, figures 6 to 13*
No panels are proposed on the north side, i.e. the main elevation (direction from which the property is most commonly viewed).
The visibility of the panels on the east-facing slope is very slight (if at all) in winter due to the shallow angle of the roof, the projecting cornice, and the proximity of the adjacent building. Between April and November, the view of the east-facing roof is totally obscured by tall mature lime trees in the front gardens of numbers 49 and 51(*see page 384-TP-604, figs.6 and 7)*

-<u>From Ufton Road (to the east)</u>, the eastern slope of the roof of number 53 is not visible due to the close arrangement of semi-detached houses on the Northchurch Road terrace (*see page 384-TP-604, fig.22)*

-From the rear (south side), the roof is not visible when standing in the garden (*see photos on page 384-TP-604).*

The panels on the south side will be visible from at most 5 houses in Deacon Mews, a private cul-de-sac not open to the public situated on the south side of the rear garden and accessible to residents of, and visitors to, the mews from Southgate Road (reduced for most of the year by the foliage of the weeping willow and African magnolia trees in the rear gardens of 55 and 57 Northchurch Road). A 4-metre high wall separates the rear garden from Deacon Mews (*see page 384-TP-604, fig. 14 to 21).* No objections to the original application were received from the residents of Deacon Mews.

-From Southgate Road (to the West), From Southgate Road, the cornice and chimneys of the rear of the first 2 houses on the south side of Northchurch Road are visible above the low volume at the end of the row of shops, but the roof of number 53 is not visible. (*see page 384-TP-604, fig.23)*

The conclusion is that the property is uniquely well placed such that the panels are barely visible (if at all) from any aspect, and the level of visibility is less intrusive or harmful than, for example, a burglar alarm box or small satellite dish. The proposed panel type are uniform and black, without the silver elements present in older type of panels, making them less visible.

4.3 Fixing and reversibility

The most common method for the installation solar PV panels uses 'Limpet' roof hooks. That method requires drilling through the slates, which goes against the guidance from Historic England.

The proposed method of installation is to remove (and store) the slates to which Limpet fixings would be applied, and replace them with composite slates to receive the fixings. These composites will sit underneath the panels, such that they will not be visible. The stored slates will be replaced at the end of the panels' life.

Not only does this avoid altering the fabric of the building (for example by cutting slates and introducing lead flashing), but it also allows reversibility. The panels will probably have a shorter life span than the roof itself, such that reversibility is desirable.

See attached documentation on the proposed PV panels.

SUMMARY

Supported by policy and the need to reduce carbon emissions, the installation of photovoltaic panels brings a public benefit.

It has been shown that through careful consideration of the location and installation method, it is possible to install PV's at 53 Northchurch Road without causing substantial (or irreversible) harm to the Listed Building or to the character of the conservation area; the panels will provide renewable energy, cost savings and sustainability benefits without unreasonable conflict with planning policies relating to conservation or sustainability.

Other Planning matters:

REFUSE
There is no change proposed to the current arrangements.

TREES
No trees are proposed to be felled in the proposals, nor are root protection areas affected.

ACCESS
Parking
Not applicable on this site or for this application

Hackney, 25 April 2023