

The Brixton Society

Understanding the Past, Looking to the Future

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Please reply to:
Alan Piper, RIBA,



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7th May 2021

For attention of:
Felicia Onabanjo,
FOnabanjo@lambeth.gov.uk

Your ref:
21/00122/RG3

MEATH HOUSE, Dulwich Road, SE24 – Proposed Alterations:

Dear Miss Onabanjo,

Residents have recently drawn our attention to the above application, and I must record our disappointment that you did not notify us directly when the application was validated.

This is a prominent site opposite Brockwell Lido, and the Society's main concerns are as follows:

1. Replacement of Windows:

The applicants have provided no evidence of the need to replace the existing aluminium windows. The benefits appear to be confined to the manufacturers, installers and consultants, and not to residents.

The selection of a upvc window system inevitably results in chunkier window frames which will reduce the actual glazed area and adversely alter the external appearance. There has also been long-standing environmental concern over the widespread use of plastics such as upvc.

We are concerned too about the fire performance of upvc window frames where they abut access balconies, as explained further in para. 4 below.

The proposals therefore fail to meet Lambeth Local Plan policies EN4, Q5b, Q5c, Q8b, and Q11a. They also fail to comply with policy D11(para A) of the adopted London Plan.

2. Replacement of Spandrel Panels:

The applicants have failed to demonstrate that the existing panels are sub-standard, while their proposed replacement is a crude solution whose installation will be far more intrusive than necessary.

Any solution should offer an improvement in thermal insulation, with fire resistant outer and inner faces, while minimising the loss of internal floorspace.

The proposals therefore fail to meet Lambeth Local Plan policies EN4 and EN7a.

3. External Insulation System:

Replacement of the existing insulation needs to show clear benefits to residents of the block, in terms of improved fire safety and thermal insulation. Pellings have failed to take account of the integral reinforced concrete balconies on front and rear elevations, which already provide effective horizontal fire separation between the maisonettes.

Therefore, a case for general replacement of the cladding could only be made for the end walls of the block. Even then, the Design & Access Statement fails to convince.

Proposals appear to have been made before a thorough investigation of the existing cladding, including the fixings and whether there is any fire-resistant separation or subdivision between the maisonettes at different levels. It is disappointing that their survey report has not been included in the application documents.

Although expanded polystyrene (EPS) panels can be combustible if left exposed, in this case they appear to have been fixed direct to the external walls without any void or airspace to act as a flue in case of fire. EPS insulation behind a sound mineral-faced coating/ render system is generally considered to be a robust solution. It may be that it is only necessary to repair small sections of damaged render at exposed points.

The proposals therefore fail to meet Lambeth Local Plan policies Q3a(iii), Q5c, Q8 and Q11a.

Consideration should have been given also to the scarcity of resources for capital repairs to Council housing, and therefore the need for refurbishment to provide value for money, without needless disruption to residents.

4. Replacement Entrance Doors:

The Design & Access Statement is inconsistent. The sole reason advanced for replacing the front doors is uncertainty over whether the existing doors will meet the current FD30 standard of fire resistance. These doors open onto exposed access balconies.

At the same time, the applicants propose to replace the existing metal windows, some of which also line the access balconies, with upvc windows which will soften and lose their integrity when exposed to fire, so that there is still a risk of smoke and flames obstructing escape routes! This is expensive stupidity which replaces one slight risk by a greater one. Nothing appears to have been learned from the Lakanal House fire in Southwark.

In addition, the replacement of front doors to maisonettes will potentially affect the external appearance and character, because they open onto exposed access balconies, rather than internal lobbies.

Some patterns within the Gerda range are more suited to Edwardian or Neo-Georgian apartment blocks. Acceptable patterns from this range would be Kennard Glazed 1, Quinlan Glazed or Burchard Glazed.

As far as possible, the style should be consistent with the original, to conform to Lambeth Local Plan policies Q5b, Q7(iv) and Q8b.

5. Impact on nearby Conservation Area:

The block is sited directly opposite Brockwell Lido, a listed building which lies within the Brockwell Park Conservation Area. Meath House is a prominent background building to the Lido in protected views out from the Park towards the City of London.

Fundamental changes in its appearance should be resisted, such as changes in the fenestration pattern or cladding materials.

The proposals therefore fail to meet Lambeth Local Plan policies Q11a, Q22 and Q25.

6. Inadequate Survey:

Defects in the proposals arise from an inadequate survey which failed to analyse the problems before wastefully offering inappropriate solutions.

The Design & Access Statement is riddled with errors, some of which have already been highlighted by residents.

In para 1.2, the date of construction is wrong – Meath House was built by the London County Council in 1958-59, providing 44 maisonettes, rather than a mix of flats and maisonettes as claimed.

In conclusion therefore, we must **object** to this application in its present form.

Yours sincerely,



Hon. Secretary