

Statement of case in support of the proposed extension and alterations to 10 Norton Way North, Letchworth. Case No. 37467

Preamble

■■■ submitted ■■■ initial application for a proposed extension and alterations to 10 Norton Way North to both the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and North Herts District Council.

Letchworth Garden City is, arguably, the birthplace of modern town planning in the U.K., which is focused on land use, the design and placing of buildings and their relationships to each other. Below are extracts taken from the Letchworth Conservation Area pdf on the North Hertfordshire District Council's website.

“Within a conservation area the usual planning requirements apply. In addition, there are further restrictions designed to aid in the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the area.

The legislation is designed to provide for the management of change not its prevention. It is designed to allow areas to remain alive and prosperous yet ensuring that we do not sacrifice the quality of our environment and individual buildings for short-term gains.

Design Guidance for Residential Areas in Letchworth Garden City has been produced by The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation in conjunction with NHDC and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the District Council..... The Guidance is used by the District Council to help determine applications.”

Despite applying the jointly agreed criteria to decide the acceptability of ■■■ proposal, the Heritage foundation refused ■■■ application and the Council granted its permission. The Scheme of Management Clause 6 states that the consent of the Corporation shall not be unreasonably withheld. The contradictory decisions would indicate that there is some difference of opinion as to what is reasonable.

Deciding upon whether or not to grant permission to the proposed alteration is, essentially, a subjective judgment. It is worth looking at what Ebenezer Howard had to say on the subject in his seminal book, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. The passage narrates an imaginary walk through his proposed Garden City.

“Noticing the very varied architecture and design which the houses and groups of houses display – we learn that general observance of street line or harmonious departure from it are the chief points as to house building, over which the municipal authorities exercise control, for, though proper sanitary arrangements are strictly enforced, the fullest of individual taste and preference is encouraged.”

While ■■■ accept that the appearance of the built environment must be a matter of public concern and could not accept the *laissez faire* attitude taken by Howard towards aesthetic control, it is good to be reminded the importance of individual freedoms. It is not unreasonable to think that were a difference of aesthetic opinion to arise between two controlling authorities, perhaps the founding

father of Letchworth Garden City would have given the benefit of the doubt to the occupier of the property.

Introduction

■■■ believe that by extending the front of ■■■ house we will be:

- Reinstating the original aesthetic value of the terrace.
- Correcting flaws in the original design and providing additional positive features to 10 Norton Way North (10 NWN).
- Improving the spatial and formal relationship between the terrace and St George's Church, making a more coherent and legible entrance to Common View.

The benefits to ■■■ proposal are substantial, but the solution is perhaps counterintuitive to the natural instincts of the Heritage Foundation. ■■■ believe, therefore, that the Foundation's rejection of our proposal is due to ■■■ inadequate communication of it. Substantial arguments were made in the illustrated design statement, which was part of ■■■ initial submission. Consequently, this statement of case supplements ■■■ earlier statements, and it should be seen as a clarification and amplification of ■■■ original proposal, with some fresh points included that were previously omitted for brevity. Therefore, this statement should be read in addition to and not substituted for the earlier illustrated design statement.

1913 and the design of 10-14 Norton Way North (NWN).

To recap from ■■■ design statement, in 1913 the houses on the east side of NWN, 2,4,6, and 8, were set well back from the road, forming a large spacious area of front gardens coming down Norton Road to the junction of Common View. This was in keeping with the early Garden City ethos of creating a town with close links to nature and its rural surroundings. There was no indication that the building line set up by the above houses would not be extended across the vacant corner site now occupied by St George's Church. In 1915 a church hall (indicated in red) was built on the garden of 2 Common View behind the vacant corner plot shown on the 1910 plan of Letchworth. There was a plan to build a church attached to the hall when finances permitted. This indicates that if there had been plans earlier than 1913 to build a church on the site, it was in any case to be built at the rear of the extended site, paying some regard to the existing building line.



It had obviously been decided to create a new building line on the east side of NWN to reduce the size of the front gardens and enlarge the rear gardens south of Common View. The open area to the north of Common View and the ambition to bring forward the building line going south would have set the parameters for the design of the site upon which the 10-14 NWN terrace now stands. There are several detached and semi-detached houses in Norton Way North, but 10-14 NWN is the only terrace on the road. The terrace needed to be a prominent and attractive building as it was to close the vista coming down Norton Way North.

Each house within the 10-14 NWN terrace has its own unique floor plan and elevation. The overall footprint of the building is roughly symmetrical and there are elements of symmetry in the central section of the elevation. However, the end sections of the terrace are completely different in plan and elevation. It could easily have been contrived to mirror the plan of 14 NWN at the other end of the terrace, making minor adjustments to accommodate the doctor's surgery, and thus achieve an almost symmetrical balance to the elevation. Why did they reject this option?

It is doubtful whether total symmetry was sought. Much Arts and Crafts architecture achieves balance through asymmetrical design. If there was symmetry, it was often offset by a large feature to give a creative tension. A prime example of this is the Whitechapel Gallery designed by CH Townsend, who incidentally also built a notable house in Letchworth. The asymmetrically placed entrance arch contained within the rigidly symmetrical frame of the building gives a visual frisson of excitement. This visual charge is enhanced by the contrast between the different geometries – the curve of the arch set against the orthogonal geometry of the surrounding building.

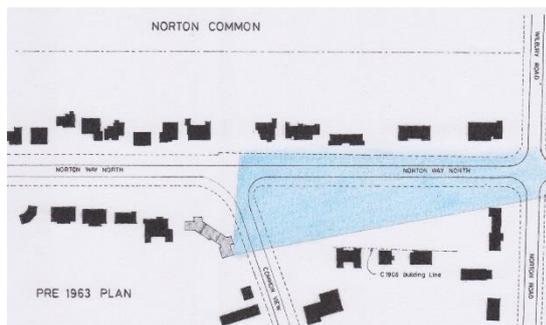


The first thing one notices about the front elevation of 10-14 NWN, as drawn, is the rhythm, scale, and mass of the four rendered gables set against and partly defined by the russet tiles which come down to the head of the ground floor windows. They form a framework for the composition.

Secondly, the eye is pulled to the left, towards the tapering end of the terrace. It is one side of a truncated fifth gable, which is effectively part of the roof, that reaches around and contains the end of the run of rendered gables. This gable is very unlike the other four. It is broader and, being tile-hung, contrasts with the others in texture and colour. It has subtle changes in pitch (undetected on the drawing), and simple elegant detailing, including sculptural projecting eaves. It stands in stark contrast to the plain white rendered gables. This large singular form is not counterposed by any other similar form on the front elevation. There is a tension created between the dominance of the rendered gables and the unique form of the tiled gable. The eye wanders between these two elements while picking up other asymmetrical features such as the eyebrow window, the ginnel, and the falling levels of fenestration and roof, which are all on the far side of the axis of symmetry. Without the tile-hung gable there would be no tension and the resulting, almost symmetrical, composition would appear to subside at one end.

An elevation is always an abstraction of reality, ignoring as it does all perspective effects. It is a much greater abstraction when such a complex facade as the front of the 10-14 NWN terrace is drawn as a flat elevation. The front elevation of the terrace has three sections, each facing a different direction and joined together with two prominent projecting gables. There is no indication of these complexities in Bennett and Bidwell's single drawing of the front elevation. The elevation was depicted in a single drawing because it was meant to be seen as a single entity, and the only way it could be seen in this way was sequentially. Gordon Cullen in his book *Townscape* describes how we experience a town through what he termed 'Serial Vision.' Below is how the journey down Norton Way North might have been seen during World War I.

Turning into NWN from the junction with Norton Road, the first view of the terrace would have been across the front gardens of 2,4,6 and 8 NWN. The overlapping tiled and rendered gables of 10 NWN at the head of the terrace would have directly faced the viewer, with an oblique view of the splayed central section trailing off behind it. This view would have persisted for a long way down the road, with the front door of 10 NWN being visible until somewhere between 5 and 7 NWN. As one drew closer to the front of 12 NWN, assuming the viewer was travelling at a constant speed, the view would start to change increasingly quickly as the central section became more dominant and the tiled gable less visible. As one continued, the view of the terrace would become increasingly peripheral and would, once the viewer was alongside the building, disappear very quickly.



The area shaded blue on the pre-1963 plan shows the extent of the area where a view or partial view of the tiled gable could have been seen. Due to the long period of time the viewer was exposed to a view of the tiled gable, it would have had a much bigger impact on them than that suggested by the relative area it occupies on the elevation.

1963 and the design of St George's Church.

St George's Church is a bold, innovative, sculptural building which created out of basic building materials, symbolic of Christ's poverty, a powerful and meaningful expression of Christianity. Fan seating is focused on the altar, behind which is suspended the tortured figure of Christ with outstretched arms, rising up to heaven. The whole tableaux is dramatically illuminated by the glazed gash in the roof, cut by the sharply pointed hollow spire, guiding the figure of Christ upwards. Occasionally at night, travelling up Norton Way North, one can see through the plate glass windows the suspended figure of Christ artificially lit against the background of the darkened church.

St George's is a spectacular building, particularly when viewed from its axis. The view up Norton Way North, where the entrance, the rising ridge and gleaming spire align, invites people to enter and join in the communal worship. Within its own terms, it is an extraordinarily successful building.

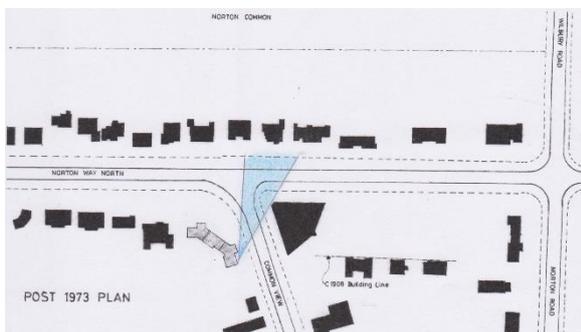
Having paid homage to the church as an isolated piece of architecture, it embodies urban design issues that I feel would be unacceptable today. They may have surfaced at the time of its construction but may have been overruled when weighed against the benefits of the scheme.

However, the 1960s was a very different era. The modernists of the 1960s wanted to champion new forms and utopian ideals, rejecting contextualism as an excuse for mediocrity. By ignoring context, they could create and experiment more with structures, shapes and materials, and freely position their buildings to the greatest effect.

It is necessary for a church, set in a low-rise residential area, to challenge the scale of its surroundings, as St George's does. It is also reasonable to use different materials, form, and style for a church, as St George's did, to differentiate itself from the secular realm. What is less reasonable is to ignore the spatial arrangements between the existing buildings, which the positioning of St George's also does.

The plan and form of the church is a result of the decision to break not only with the established building line of 2-8 NWN but any other building line one can find along NWN. The form of the church is a direct result of its positioning and it could not have been located elsewhere. However, the damage this caused to the urban environment is considerable.

The positioning of the church largely destroyed the public perception of the open space to the north of Common View, as it considerably shortened the formerly large open space. The view across the open space originally stretched across the front gardens of 2-8 NWN, the vacant church site, Common View, and finally our front garden, terminating with the view of the carefully composed elevation of our terrace. The same view now terminates directly after the front gardens of 2-8 NWN at the cliff like wall at the rear of the Church. This was to the disbenefit of the houses that faced the space and all who passed by it. The garden of 8 NWN is completely overshadowed by the church.



The tiled gable of 10 NWN was a key feature of the front façade of the terrace within the context of its original inception. This context could not have changed more dramatically than it did with the construction of St George's. As a result, the visibility of the tiled gable was reduced to a narrow oblique partial view from NWN (shaded blue on the post-1973 plan). The impact of the tiled gable at the head of the terrace has been

diminished, reducing the overall balance and impact of the whole terrace.

Had St George's been built at the rear of its site, as was originally envisaged in 1915, [redacted] house would still have been part of the Norton Way North community, albeit with a car park in front of the house. The potential vista from Norton Road to the terrace would, subject to trees, still be enjoyed. The occupants of the houses either side of NWN, to the north of Common View, would enjoy the open aspect of the space in front of them, as would travellers along the road and footpaths. Unfortunately, these aspects have been lost, but [redacted] proposal would enable 10 NWN to regain some of its visibility and presence within NWN, giving balance and legibility to the terrace.

Corrections to 10 NWN

Soon after moving to 10 NWN from London, [redacted] were aware that, despite being in a terrace, there was a disconnect between [redacted] house and its surroundings. [redacted] can snatch glimpses of the houses on the west side of busy NWN. [redacted] attached neighbours, 12 NWN, are out of sight around the corner. No. 1 Common View is at the end of [redacted] garden, which is largely to the side of the house. Diagonally opposite is the grey expanse of a car park, the other side of which is the distant profile of 8 NWN. To

the rear of the car park is the mock gothic church hall, while the dramatic jump in scale in the novel form of the church is directly in front of ■.

The front door is hidden from any view to the west of the rendered gable, and precise instructions must be given for newcomers to find ■. The two signs either side of ■ house, which themselves are ambiguous, try to explain the road naming and numbering. Are ■ in Norton Way North or Common View? It is not the naming or numbering of the streets that is the problem, it is the shape and mass of 10 NWN, together with the lack of a visible front door. To illustrate this problem, ■ have always had intermittent free newspaper deliveries as neither the Common View nor Norton Way North distributors recognise us as being on their round. The distributors work on road names paying no regard to numbers. A spatial confusion is created by the final bay of the terrace containing the front door of 10 NWN, receding further from the road. The front door not being visible from the main section of Norton Way North creates a lack of legibility in the terrace. This was not the scenario intended when the terrace was designed in 1913.

When the terrace was designed there was an open vista in front of 10 NWN up to the junction with Norton Road. The building of St George's Church in 1963 cut off the spacious open aspect, vista, and presence of 10 NWN within the street scene of Norton Way North. This drastically changed the context for which the house and terrace was designed. ■ proposal aims to aid the legibility, and the cohesion between the terrace and the house by restoring some presence and visibility to a crucial element of 10 NWN, the tile-hung gable.

The detrimental consequences of the construction of St George's to 10 NWN added to an earlier fault that has marred 10 NWN since its inception.

Bennett and Bidwell were talented and prolific architects, producing some of Letchworth's most notable buildings. A personal favourite is Howgills, Letchworth's listed Friends Meeting House. However, their designs were not immune from flaws.

■ believe an error was made positioning the bathrooms on the front of the house, resulting in privacy issues, obscure glass, split windows, and exposed foul drainage on what was to be a prominent front elevation.

Any doubts as to whether the foul drainage immediately adjacent to the front door was a substantial issue were dispelled by a video ■ recently watched concerning the restoration of a Baillie Scott house in Scotland ("Restoration House: Sandford House."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWQhpD5NF54> – 14 minutes in). Kieran Long, Director of ArkDes (the Swedish National Centre for Architecture and Design) and a Keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum stated

"There is nothing that messes up a beautifully composed facade more than a pipeful of human waste coming out of a bathroom somewhere. Well, it is an absolute disgrace that this facade has been disfigured by this thing."

The drain in the above quote was not adjacent to the main entrance, as it is at 10 NWN.

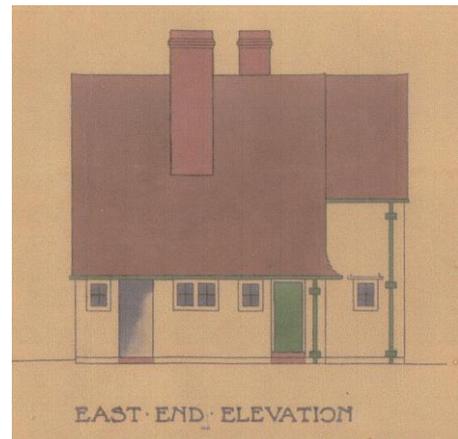
This observation runs contrary to the comment given to us on our first approach to the Heritage Foundation in November 2015. A letter dated 23rd November stated:

"Your pre-application drawings are supported by a Design Statement. You comment about the use of a split window providing lighting to individual rooms, in this case bathrooms, and the need for plumbing and drainage pipes on the front of the building. This is a common

characteristic that runs through the house designs of this period and as such feel that these are important features that should be retained."



Bennett and Bidwell bashfully showed the offending soil pipe in a very discrete way on the extended front elevation tucked almost imperceptibly into the corner next to the entrance door. However, despite showing the two smaller diameter rainwater pipes they omitted to show



the larger soil and vent pipe with its WC branch pipe on the east end elevation where it would have been far more conspicuous, both on the drawing and coming down Common View. One senses that they must have felt uncomfortable about inflicting this important feature on the elevation.

Bathrooms on the front elevation necessitate the use of unattractive obscure glass which itself attracts attention and differentiates it from other rooms. Obscure glass can only go so far in providing privacy, as casting silhouettes, would be a concern for some people. Being on the front elevation, the desire for privacy also restricts the opening of windows to provide ventilation, consequently causing issues with condensation.

A major aesthetic element of the house and the entire terrace is the tile-hung gable. have focused here on the gable and how it functions as an element in its immediate context. are conflicted in our appreciation of it, as love it and loath it simultaneously. love the idea of the tile-hung gable with a central window and splayed bell-shaped curve at the base forming a protective soffit above the wall below. The bonnet hip detail and subtle changes in pitch give it a delicacy and elegance, which is enhanced by its simplicity and absence of decorative tile courses. The whole gable relies on its elemental sculptural quality. However, there is something disturbing about the abrupt truncation of this gable, which seems a brutal contrast to its elegance and delicacy.

Having set up the symmetry of this gable and truncating it with the rendered gable, the architects may have been aiming at what Colin Rowe has later termed 'phenomenal transparency.' This phenomenon occurs where two volumes overlap and apparently share a single space. A prerequisite of this phenomenon is that there must be an absence of pretence. In this case nobody could believe that there would be a wedge of eaves buried inside the house, the tile-hung gable clearly stops at the junction with the rendered wall. This unconvincing ambiguity together with the duality of the bathroom window discussed in the illustrated design statement gives the impression of a falsity like a piece of set design. The analogy is given some credence by the insubstantial nature of the timber construction of this gable.

On a superficial level, taking the elevation as a textured surface, it seems perverse to set up a unique, beautifully detailed feature with implied symmetry but not display it in its full glory. It seems akin to capturing a rare and beautiful moth but then cutting off part of a wing before mounting it. However, there were good reasons for the use of the tile-hung gable, which we will discuss later.

■■■ proposal would eliminate the front facing bathrooms and the problems they present, provide a visible, fitting pedestrian entrance porch addressing Norton Way North within a solid three-dimensional extension to the tile-hung gable. This would simultaneously signal that it was a corner house and the end of the terrace, restoring legibility and balance to the terrace.

The design guide, front extensions, and a rejection letter.

The Garden City Heritage Foundation refused our application, giving the reason **“front extensions are discouraged.”**

This policy is aimed at preserving the original character of buildings along with their immediate environments. Unfortunately, the authorities at the time St George’s Church was built failed to preserve the open spacious character of the environment in which 10 NWN played such a key role. The construction of St George’s Church in 1963 completely disrupted the existing spatial structure of Norton Way North, with damaging consequences for 10 NWN and its relationship with the rest of the terrace and Norton Way North. Our proposal should be seen as an evolution in spatial realignment in response to the disruptive spatial rearrangement that occurred when St George’s Church was built.

Front extensions may be discouraged but they are not subject to an absolute ban. Indeed, the guide describes the conditions that exceptions must meet. ■■■ will look at these conditions to see how our proposals satisfy them.

“Adding elements, including extensions to these facades can have an impact on this attractive street scene, particularly on terraced and semi-detached houses. These proposals will therefore be carefully considered as they can detract from the architectural value of the original and alter the relationships within a group of houses by:

Creating an unsightly or unduly prominent form of development.”

■■■ do not believe our proposal to be unsightly. On the contrary, ■■■ believe it takes the concept of the original tile-hung gable with its elegant detailing and, by completing its symmetry, improves the appearance of the building, particularly as it removes the bathrooms and foul drainage from the front elevation.

■■■ cannot deny that the extension is more prominent than the existing arrangement. However, it is not unduly so, as it follows the building line of 1 and 3 Common View. It is exactly the point of the proposal to create a more prominent tiled gable, as it is a key feature of the original design which has since been obscured by St Georges Church. The proposal has been designed to repair and improve the street scene.

“Disrupting the uniformity of the front building line.”

As pointed out above, the proposal follows the building line of 1 and 3 Common View, which ■■■ section of Norton Way North aligns with. Ironically, ■■■ proposal is required because the design of St George’s Church did not respect the building line of Norton Way North.

“Disrupting the coherence of a group of semi-detached or terraced houses.”

Improving coherency is one of the issues ■■■ proposal aims to achieve. Many first visitors to ■■■ house believe it to be detached, as the remainder of the terrace is largely hidden behind the projecting rendered gable. Bringing the linking line of the roof eaves at window head height to the

front of the projecting gable will enhance the coherence of the terrace. A clear and visible entrance route to the house will define 10 NWN as an autonomous unit within the whole terrace.

“Diluting the ‘group value’ of a run or cluster of houses.”

The group value of the terrace was seriously diminished by St George’s Church obscuring a major balancing feature of the group, the tile-hung gable. ■■■ proposal will restore the visibility of this feature and thus restore the group value of the terrace.

“This is particularly the case with first floor extensions, which can have a serious impact on the original character of the house and the street scene.”

In ■■■ case a single storey extension would make no sense and would be wholly inappropriate to the character of the building.

“It is preferable for extensions to be on the rear of the property as these normally have a reduced impact on the character of the property and its context; therefore, rear additions should be explored in the first instance.”

The shape of the house and its plot does not sensibly allow for a rear extension. ■■■ need for a front extension is to add mass to the front of the house, specifically the tiled gable, and restore its presence in the terrace. This will benefit the urban design of its immediate environment.

“Proposals for front additions will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that they will not cause harm to the appearance of the existing property or its group. In the rare circumstance that this type of extension is permitted, the following principles will apply:

Front extensions should be consistent with the character of the original house, utilising the detailing and matching materials, and have balanced proportions and scale;”

By pulling forward the gestalt image of the tiled gable we will be maintaining the essential character of the house. All details will be recorded and replicated. All materials will be reused/reclaimed, or purpose made to match the originals.

“Roof pitches can have a substantial impact on the appearance of a building and the street scene. Therefore, all proposed roof pitches and design of the roof and roof line should be consistent with the original roof design of the house.”

All ridge heights and roof pitches will be as the original house.

“The area and volume of the proposed extension shall be subservient to and in proportion with the host building, plot and street scene.”

The area and volume of the extension is subservient to and in proportion to the original house and plot. Currently the house is almost invisible in the street scene as an autonomous unit within the terrace. Any increase in its visibility will be overpowered by both St George’s and the massive synergy created by the terrace’s four rendered gables.

“The design of front extensions shall relate well with the original and neighbouring houses and their context.”

The design of ■■■ proposal comes directly from an existing form within the original house and re-establishes a balanced relationship with the remainder of the terrace. It also aids the integration of St George’s into the urban fabric.

“Front extensions will not normally be acceptable if the existing frontage is less than 6 metres deep.”

The tiled gable is currently 7.5m from the boundary wall.

“Extensions should respect the balance and symmetry of a pair or group of houses.”

█ proposal aims to restore visibility to the tiled gable, which will restore a balance to the asymmetries on the southern end of the terrace.

“Semi-detached dwellings: extensions that upset the balance or symmetry of a pair or group of houses are unlikely to be acceptable.”

“Terraced dwellings: front extensions will not normally be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not damage the group value of the existing terrace and its overall context.”

The projecting gables and their appended sections are not symmetrical as they are on different levels. Further, the end sections of the terrace, which are outside of the projecting gables, differ from each other compositionally. The end sections break back from those gables away from their respective roads, giving the terrace a loose ‘C’-shaped form. However, █ house faced onto an open aspect within its original context. █ end of terrace now fronts onto a minor road while the other end of the terrace faces onto a major distributor road, making a loose ‘Z’-shaped form more appropriate. The overall balance of the terrace is unaffected by this change, except that it allows the restated tiled gable to visibly counter the major asymmetrical imbalances at the other end of the terrace.



The above are the prerequisite conditions that the Garden City Heritage Foundation applies to exceptional cases. The positioning of St George’s Church was extremely damaging to 10 NWN and indirectly to the 10-14 NWN terrace. There can be few cases that are more worthy of being granted exceptional status than █ proposal to improve the urban texture of █ immediate environment, while restoring Bennett and Bidwell’s design intentions for the terrace.



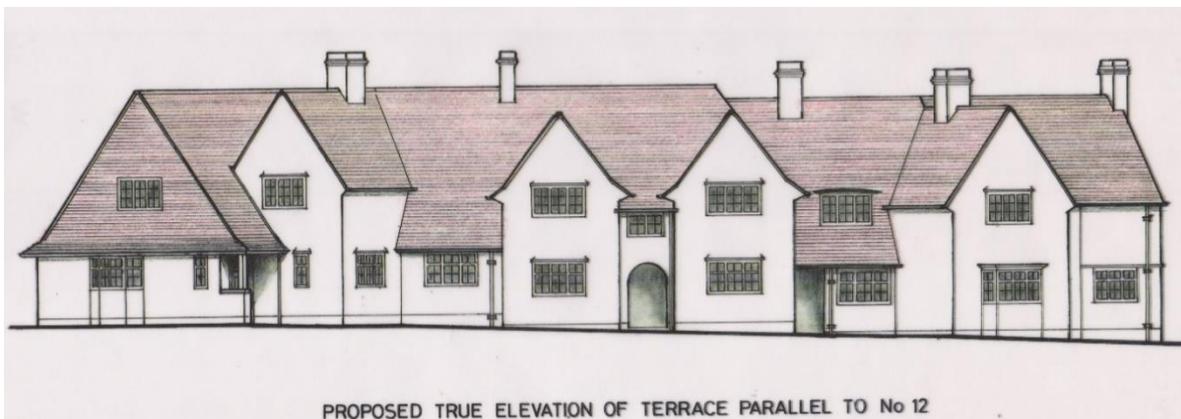
The above panoramic photograph shows the view from the bathroom window within the tiled gable. To the left 11 NWN is visible on the western side of the street, and the white gable of 8 NWN can be seen behind the church car park on the eastern side of NWN. Between the two is the powerful form of St George's. Prior to its construction in 1963, the view from the tiled gable would have been open as far as the junction with Norton Road.

10 NWN was visually and spatially a prominent and inclusive part of Norton Way North.

The letter informing us of the heritage Foundations refusal stated:

"... it is the loss of the principal elevation that cannot be supported."

■ recognise the loss of the principal elevation, and that loss is caused by the obliterating effect of St George's Church on a small section of that elevation. ■ proposed intervention will, among other things, increase the visibility of the redeeming tiled gable, benefiting not just that section but the whole terrace.



The Foundations letter goes on to say

“The terrace is balanced throughout by the strength of the simple rendered gable projections and the proposal would challenge this balanced design, unsettling the whole.”

■■■ believe that the tiled gable is not a random piece of decoration to be forgotten behind a gable in a side road but a key element of the terrace’s design, which deserves to be refreshed and given prominence to fulfil its function. ■■■ believe Raymond Unwin was influential in the design of 10 NWN and we speculate below how the feature may have developed.

The terrace was to redefine the building line of NWN going south and to create a focal point for the open space to the north; critical pieces of town planning. A symmetrical form was chosen as it could create a powerful image, a generic template for which can be found in Unwin’s book *Town Planning in Practice*. However, symmetry on a sloping site is problematic, and Bennett and Bidwell adopted several strategies to try to give the appearance of the terrace being level.

At the top of the slope the ground was excavated around the eastern end of 10 NWN to get its ground floor as low as possible. This is indicated by a dotted line on the elevation.

Despite the ground floor levels of 12 NWN being considerably lower than 10 NWN, the ridge of the roof continues level across all 10 NWN and most of 12 NWN.

The floor level dropped again from 12 NWN to 14 NWN. The width of 14 NWN, and the span of the roof was increased by 18 inches, which increased the height of the main ridge while maintaining a constant pitch. Incidentally, the increased width of the rooms meant that a fourth bedroom could be created by inserting an eyebrow window into the mansard section of the roof over the ginnel.

Unfortunately, symmetry dictated that the projecting front gable had to be the same width as its counterpart on 10 NWN. Consequently, the ridge of this gable is lower than the main ridge and at a similar level to the ridges of the smaller gables flanking the entrance of 12 NWN.

Visual strategies were employed to ‘prop up’ the southern end of the terrace. The window above the entrance arch of 14 NWN was raised to match the level of its counterpart window above the arch of 12 NWN. The eaves were raised from the top of the ground floor window heads to the heads of the half-landing windows of both 12 and 14 NWN.



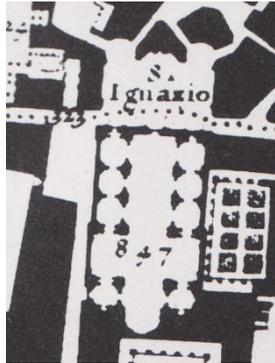
■■■ have detailed the above to show the extent of Bennett and Bidwell’s desperate efforts to minimise the effects of the slope on the terrace. Despite these strategies, a significant break in the main roof was inevitable. The result was not just a blip along the ridge line but a distinct three-dimensional fault line on the right of the central axis, emphasised by the eyebrow window and the ginnel. This, together with the drop in the ridge height of the projecting rendered gable, would have made the composition appear unstable. ■■■ know from his writings that Unwin found the “restlessness” at street corners was “due to breaks in the roof line” and he would have been uncomfortable with the arrangement, particularly on a key building in this developing area.

The creative and attractive solution to counterbalance the gradually declining fenestration and breaks in the roof line at the other end of the terrace was to introduce a major asymmetry, the tile-hung gable, in keeping with the Arts and Crafts style. A completely symmetrical building might have

been formal and impressive but lacking in charm and character. This arrangement was evidently satisfactory to Raymond Unwin as he signed off on the scheme in January 1913.

Without a clear view of the tiled gable, the remainder of the elevation appears unbalanced, giving the impression of gently subsiding down the hill. ■■■ proposal will give visibility to the asymmetry of the tiled gable, thus restoring the balance of the whole terrace.

Enhancements to the massing and spatial relationships between the terrace and St Georges Church.



Buildings in towns and cities will always have relationships between each other and with the spaces between them. These relationships, rather than the qualities of an individual building, will usually define the character of an area. Sometimes these relationships can be conflicting and discordant, but the urban designer will aim to create harmonious relationships between the spaces and buildings. An extreme urban example of a successful relationship between a church and its neighbouring buildings is the Church of St Ignazio and its piazza in Rome, where the rhythms and volumes of the church's internal spaces are echoed in the spaces created by the buildings around the piazza.

St George's Church is a spectacular, innovative building, but it could be seen to defy its setting, having ignored the old spatial context of the road with its modulating building line. It imposed a new spatial order on the junction to the direct disbenefit of 10 NWN and changed the openness of the area. ■■■ believe ■■■ proposal will correct some of this disbenefit and, at the same time, improve the relationship with the church in the following ways.

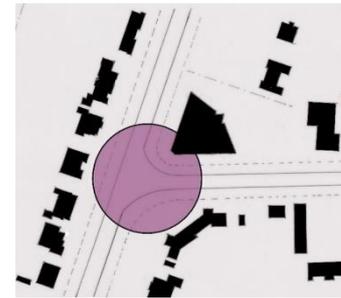
■■■ original design statement described how the proposal would aid the sense of enclosure to the entrance of the church and help to differentiate the spaces at the road junction from the car park at the rear. ■■■ will not rehearse those arguments, but merely remind the reader of those benefits.

In addition ■■■ believe the elevation of 10 NWN which breaks back into the space in front of the tiled gable is detrimental to the cohesion between the terrace and the church. The current arrangement may have suited the open context for which it was intended, but ■■■ proposal will form a better relationship between 10 NWN and the side of St George's. The slightly enlarged tiled gable will be longer and closer to the south flank of the church and, in engineering terms, provide a better 'mating' surface against St George's. The projecting base of the proposed tiled gable will, being on a similar level, echo the long line of the junction between the glazing and the brickwork of St George's on the opposite side of the road.

Nikolaus Pevsner commented that the roof of St George's "continues the vernacular spirit of the early houses." The closer proximity of a complete tiled gable will reflect and amplify that vernacular theme back to the church and create a better cohesion between the two buildings.

The new entrance steps, piers and gate of [REDACTED] proposal will be reflective of the entrance and steps of St George's on the opposite corner, emphasising the shared topography of this junction.

There is an existing relationship between the terrace and St George's, as demonstrated in Figure 11 of the design statement. This will complement the relationship created between [REDACTED] proposal and the church to form a more complete relationship between the whole terrace and St George's Church.



St Ignazio in Rome may be far removed from St George's on Norton Way North in time, distance and mindset, but [REDACTED] proposal provides an opportunity to absorb the novel form of St George's deeper into the warp and weft of the Letchworth Conservation Area.

Conclusion

[REDACTED] believe [REDACTED] relatively small intervention will bestow significant architectural and urban design benefits to the junction of Norton Way North and Common View. These benefits include the following.

An elegant full tile-hung gable with details copied from the original, overlapping the rendered gable and incorporating an early Garden City-style porch facing NWN under its eaves. It will also eliminate all bathrooms from the front elevation together with the associated foul drainage and obscure glass. It will clearly define 10 NWN as a corner house, giving it a clearer identity and presence on Norton Way North.

The extended tiled gable will compensate for the lack of visibility of the original tiled gable caused by the positioning of St George's Church. This will bring an enlivening and restorative balance to the asymmetries at the southern end of the terrace. The prominent tiling line above the ground floor window head on the proposed tiled gable and porch will enhance the cohesiveness of the terrace while giving legibility to 10 NWN.

[REDACTED] proposal will aid the sense of enclosure to the space in front of the entrance to St George's Church. It will also help to differentiate and define the spaces in front of and behind the church. The revised gable will also provide the terrace with a closer and tighter fit to St George's, aiding the integration of its novel form into the urban landscape.

[REDACTED] understand the desire to discourage front extensions, and [REDACTED] proposal has been denied three times already. However, the design guidelines do give conditions and qualities that exceptions must comply with, and [REDACTED] have demonstrated how [REDACTED] have met those conditions and qualities. [REDACTED] have also demonstrated that the positioning of St George's has had a severely detrimental impact on [REDACTED] house and, consequently, the terrace. [REDACTED] believe this makes [REDACTED] proposal an exceptional case.

[REDACTED] understand the default decision is 'no,' and there would be a reluctance to set a precedent, but [REDACTED] do believe that our intervention would bring substantial benefits to the house, the terrace, and St George's, rectifying problems brought about by a unique set of damaging circumstances.

[REDACTED] suspect that, had they been alive today, Raymond Unwin, Robert Bennett and Wilson Bidwell would be dismayed by how their plans for the area were overturned. [REDACTED] believe they would be in support of [REDACTED] sympathetic and rational proposal to make sense of this confused and confusing junction, adding their voices to those of Ebenezer Howard and North Herts District Council.

The position of St George's may have been controversial, but it will likely be there for a great many years to come. 10 NWN has suffered because of St George's positioning and deserves to have a 'right of reply.' ■■■ proposal will give 10 NWN a new purpose. It will cease to be a redundant focal point for a long-gone vista and will join 12 and 14 NWN in giving architectural support and framing to St George's, giving a new lease of life to the terrace.