

REPORT FOR INDEPENDENT INSPECTOR

10 Norton Way North



Clutterbuck c1920s



“Bennett and Bidwell seemed to have got everything right here”

1. Matter for Consideration

- 1.1 The applicant subject of this appeal sought - Two storey front extension, dormer window and new external chimney to side elevation.

2. Background

- 2.1 The subject property is a freehold property. The surrounding area is designated as **Heritage Character Area**.
- 2.2 The property forms the end of a terrace of three houses designed by Bennett and Bidwell and is a Home of Special Interest-

Nos. 10-14. Architects: Bennett and Bidwell (1913). This excellent block turns the corner from Common View into Norton Way North. It consists of a centre, with twin gables, set diagonally across the road junction, with flanking wings, again gabled, at an angle in line with the two roads. The design reflects the principles of site planning set out by Unwin in Town Planning in Practice, and also the influence of Baillie Scott, whose comparable block at the junction of Meadway and Hampstead Way in Hampstead Garden Suburb (now appropriately designated 'Baillie Scott Corner') fulfils a similar townscape function, but is more intricately designed. Bennett and Bidwell seemed to have got everything right here, and there are even surviving original gates to complete the picture. Roughcast walls, multiple projecting gables, the setback end facing Common View is tile hung, with a flare-out over the original front door, brick panel with semicircular arch forms recessed porch for No. 12. Roof sweeps down low on No. 14, which has attractive eyebrow dormer. Dark red plain tiles, original chimneys with corbelled projections and variety of original clay pots. Two of these houses retain their original windows, and the UPVC in No. 14 is not too disruptive. Two original sturdy timber gates survive on the street boundary, together with the original brick retaining wall, albeit affected by settlement. Building of Local Merit, for individual and value as focal point.

- 2.3 The property has been the subject of the most recent applications:

Nature of Works	Outcome
10454 – External staircase to existing garage	Approved 2001
20413 – Replacement windows	Approved 2009

- 2.4 Planning Permission was granted from North Hertfordshire Council on 27th July 2021 reference 21/01735/FPH
- 2.5 The pre-application advice letter is available in **Appendix A**.
- 2.6 Photographs, 1918 Estate Plan and the 1913 House plan are available in **Appendix B**
- 2.7 All other supporting documents can be viewed on the website

3. Application

- 3.1 The proposal is to erect a two-storey front extension to the property as well as a dormer and new chimney stack to the side elevation. The proposals are well designed and reference the host building; however, it is felt that such a dramatic alteration to the front of the property does not accord with the Design Principles which actively do not encourage front extensions. The proposal would also have a negative impact on the terrace which has been built as a set piece with an unaltered front elevation.
- 3.2 Pre-application advice was provided in November 2015 on a set of plans similar to those submitted. The letter established the view of the team that a front extension would not be supported due to the architectural importance of the terrace and its contribution to the development of Letchworth Garden City.
- 3.3 A request for the Independent Inspector was received on 28th February 2022.

4. Scheme of Management and the Design Principles

- 4.1 The Scheme of Management under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 in the covenants section at point 6 states:

Restriction on further development

6. Any owner shall not carry out any development redevelopment or alteration materially affecting external appearance of the enfranchised property or of any building or structure thereon save with the written consent of the Corporation (which shall not be unreasonably withheld) and in accordance with plans drawings and specifications previously submitted to and approved by the Corporation. Any such development redevelopment or alteration shall be made in accordance with the approved plans drawings and specifications and shall be carried out in a good substantial and workmanlike manner with sound and proper materials.

- 4.2 *The Design Principles for the Heritage Character Area states for front extensions that:*

Homes of Special Interest –

The Heritage Character Area includes the oldest and most historically important homes in the town; particularly (but not exclusively) those built between 1903 and 1930, which played a pivotal role in defining the early character of the Garden City.

The area includes the very first homes to be built following the creation of Letchworth Garden City in 1903, plus all those constructed as part of the 1905 and 1907 cottage exhibitions.

Homes in the Heritage Area vary greatly in design; but are united through the high quality of materials, workmanship and architectural features with strong influence from the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Careful consideration of any application within this area will be necessary to ensure important characteristics are protected and the quality of the setting preserved.

Directly linked to the Garden City ethos of ‘the best of town and country’, many Heritage Area houses were set back from the road, with spacious front gardens. The green character continues across the street scene, hedged frontages, broad grass verges and numerous trees.

These homes are of significant historical importance, and as such, protected. The quality of the original design of these houses contributes to a special Letchworth Garden City street scene.

Front extensions

The quality of the original design of these houses contributes to a special Letchworth Garden City street scene.

Adding elements, including extensions, to these façades 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 relationship within a group of houses by:

- *Creating an unsightly or unduly prominent form of development;*
- *Disrupting the uniformity of the front building line;*
- *Disrupting the coherence of a group of semi-detached or terraced houses;*
- *Diluting the ‘group value’ of a run or cluster of houses.*

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.

Front extensions are discouraged

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.

5. Issues

- 5.1 Built in 1913, in the early years of the Garden City by one of the most prolific and well recognised architectural practices of Robert Bennett and Benjamin Wilson Bidwell, its importance cannot be overstated. This is a set piece which Mervyn Miller in his Homes of Special Interest describes as –

This excellent block turns the corner from Common View into Norton Way NorthThe design reflects the principles of site planning set out by Unwin in Town Planning in Practice, and also the influence of Baillie Scott, whose comparable block at the junction of Meadway and Hampstead Way in Hampstead Garden Suburb (now appropriately designated 'Baillie Scott Corner') fulfils a similar townscape function, but is more intricately designed. Bennett and Bidwell seemed to have got everything right here,

- 5.2 Bennett and Bidwell's importance and input to the formation of the Garden City is undeniable and this set piece has been recognised by the Heritage Foundation as a Home of Special Interest to ensure that only sensitive alterations are allowed, and important characteristics are not lost.
- 5.3 As the composition is so successful and embodies the principles of site planning, it is very difficult to see how a front extension would cause anything but harm to the building.
- 5.4 The Heritage Foundation is fortunate in that it holds an archive of the development of the Garden City which includes an extensive collection of plans. The original plans as such provides an excellent starting point for discussion of the proposals at hand.
- 5.5. The terrace originally provided two residential units as well as a Doctor's surgery as part of the living accommodation of the third unit. The plan and elevations reflect these different uses as part of the design. No.10 was the Doctor's surgery and home and the cat slide tile hung bay allowed for additional ground floor accommodation to house the surgery and waiting room whilst still providing a scullery, kitchen and sitting room.
- 5.6 The uniformity of the terrace is pulled together by the strong two storey flank gable elements that stand proud of the main elevation and are mirrored in the main elevation where they punctuate the entrance to the central unit. The strength of the gables cannot be denied, and it is these elements that ensure the overall cohesiveness of the group.
- 5.7 The tile hung sweeping gable is an important backdrop feature to the design, providing an important but subservient role to the white rendered gable.
- 5.8 As an architectural gem of the early 20th Century development of Letchworth Garden City, the disruption to the front elevation cannot be supported.
- 5.9 An assessment of the proposals against the Design Principles for Front Extensions is provided below.

Creating an unsightly or unduly prominent form of development:

The proposal cannot be described as unsightly as it references the original building, however it can be described as an unduly prominent form of development. The wide sweeping tile hung roof envelops the gable end and completely alters the appearance and plan form of No.10 and the terrace.

5.10 *Disrupting the uniformity of the front building line:*

The proposal engulfs the original front elevation at ground and first floor thus losing the uniformity of the original building line to No.10 and this unsettles its relationship with No.12 and 14. The Architect argues that this proposal overcomes the poor relationship between the two elements of the tile hung gable alongside the white rendered gable but the alternative put forward diminishes the importance of the rendered gable so the perceived (by the applicant) unbalance remains in an alternate form. The rendered gable is a constant theme throughout the group which is more important than the tile hung element.

5.11 *Disrupting the coherence of a group of semi-detached or terraced houses:*

The original plan shows that the terrace was well designed and balanced. The plan shows the importance of the flanking gables to the balance of the overall design. The rendered gable blocks punctuate the design as a common theme with the end sections playing a subservient role. This would be diluted by the front elevation being brought forward, encompassing the gable and destroying the balance.

5.12 *Diluting the 'group value' of a run or cluster of houses.*

The group value of this set piece designed by Bennett and Bidwell is undeniable. As Mervyn Miller states _

Bennett and Bidwell seemed to have got everything right here

As custodians of the Letchworth Garden City, it would be a dereliction of our duties to compromise such an important and effective example of early town planning and Arts and Crafts design.

6. Applicant's Design Statement

6.1 The application submission included a Design Statement to support the proposals. Please see my comments below:

6.2 **Flaw in the diamond**

The proposed design cannot be considered to be exceptional as it cuts through and diminishes the importance of the gable end which was designed to be an important punctuation point in the terrace. The Architect argues that this proposal overcomes the poor relationship between the two elements of the tile hung gable alongside the white rendered gable, but the alternative put forward diminishes the importance of the rendered gable, so the perceived unbalance (by the applicant) remains but in an alternate and arguably weaker form.

6.3 The tile hung sweeping section is important but should not take precedence over the original intended design.

6.4 Any design can create unintended maintenance issues, but this is insufficient reason to justify the extent of alterations submitted.

- 6.5 The bathroom arrangement with the shared window is an Arts and Crafts detail inherent to many buildings within Letchworth and should not be used as a reason to dramatically alter the building.
- 6.6 The original tile hanging can be carefully removed, and insulation can be provided behind this which could easily overcome this issue.
- 6.7 The original design does not have a porch, but the building should not be so dramatically altered to facilitate this.

6.8 **Contextual Change**

The views expressed about the townscape elements whilst interesting cannot be utilised as a reason for supporting the works to the building. The positioning of the Church does not diminish the importance of the grouping and the historical references to good town planning. This is a dangerous argument which could justify the loss of many good quality buildings for no good reason.

- 6.9 The 1918 Estate plans shows the 10-14 Norton Way North and the Church site annotated to the opposite corner to Common View. The intention from very early on in the formation of the Estate was for these two elements to co-exist.
- 6.10 The HSI report was prepared circa 2010, almost 50 years after the construction of the Church. If the damage from the siting of the Church was so detrimental to the group, it would not have been included in the report.
- 6.11 Appendix B includes photographs which show the relationship of No.10 to Nos. 12 to 14 and the impact and importance that the gable ends provide to the overall composition. It also shows its existing relationship with the Church which is not considered to be harmful to either structure. This building is too important to the story of Letchworth to be undermined by unnecessary additions.
- 6.12 The commentary on the effectiveness of improving the spatial qualities of the Church are irrelevant and should not be the focus of works to the Home of Special Interest. The two buildings co-exist without harm to either.
- 6.13 The repairs to the gate would be welcomed

6.14 **The Benefits of the Proposal**

These need to be balanced against the loss of the original front elevation and the intentions of the original architect. Repairs to the front wall and gate would be welcomed but the other proposals are considered to not carry sufficient weight to justify the dramatic and unnecessary alterations to the front alignment nor the damage to the gable and its prominence within the terraced grouping.

6.15 **The Proposals and the Architecture of the Terrace**

The applicant accepts that the works would cause damage to the grouping although considers this to be a pessimistic view point. When wanting to retain and respect an original untouched building with huge importance to the story of Letchworth Garden City and of Planning itself, the concerns over such destruction of the original front façade has to outweigh any perceived benefits to the applicant.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Heritage Foundation appreciate the desire of the appellant to re-design this Home of Special Interest but remain concerned about the impact of the extensions and the precedent this may set.
- 7.2 Overall, it is our view that the application represents a clear breach of the Design Principles, which have been carefully formulated to avoid this type of alteration. The application fails to preserve the character and appearance of the existing property and the Heritage Character Area.
- 7.3 It is therefore respectfully requested that this appeal is dismissed.

Appendix A – Pre-application letter

Our Ref:

Date: 23rd November 2015

10 Norton Way North
Letchworth Garden City
Herts
SG6 1BX

Dear

**RE: 10 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City
Proposed Front Extension**

I refer to our meeting of 17th November to consider plans for a two storey front extension to the above house. Thank you for providing plans and a Design Statement for the proposals.

10 Norton Way North is located in the Heritage Character Area of Letchworth which forms the earliest development of the Garden City. Nos 10-14 Norton Way North forms a terrace of houses which wraps around the corner of Norton Way North and Common View. Designed by Bennet and Bidwell in 1913, the building is also considered to be a Home of Special Interest as it is an important example of early Garden City architecture.

The Design Principles for the Heritage Area state on front extensions that "Front extensions are discouraged". Although the proposal reflects the Arts and Crafts movement architecturally, utilising design elements from other examples within Letchworth, it is the loss of the principal elevation that cannot be supported. 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.

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 I feel that these are important features that should be retained.

The gable is constructed of a timber frame which by modern standards has little if any insulation. Insulation however can be installed to the existing frame either internally or externally tucked behind the tile hanging. There are other concerns over the orientation of the building and your view that the existing design is clumsy

in the design of the tile hanging. On balance I do not consider there to be sufficient justification to overcome the principle of no front extensions and I cannot support such a drastic alteration to the house.

If you have any comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Claire Pudney
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