

REPORT FOR INDEPENDENT INSPECTOR

Comments on the Appellant's Statement of Case

10 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City

1. Preamble

- 1.1 Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation are charged with the estate management for Letchworth Garden City. The Housing Reform Act 1967 established the Section 19 towns and their protection under the Scheme of Management. Covenant 6 of which requires freeholders to gain written consent to carry out any external alterations to their property. This is supported by a well-developed and appropriate set of procedures and Design Principles have been put in place to assist and advise the applicant.
- 1.2 The decision reached by NHC falls under the Town and Country Planning Acts. The Scheme of Management is governed by different legislation and requires us to consider the external impact of alterations to the properties within the Scheme area. Whilst we always try to work with the Council, there are inevitably cases where we do not reach the same overall decision. This does not diminish the importance of either organisation.
- 1.3 The application has been thoroughly considered at pre-application stage, by the Case Officer, HAS team, AMC and HAC.

2. Comments on overall statement

- 2.1 **Introduction and 1913 and the design of 10-14 Norton Way North (NWN), 1963 and the design of Saint George's Church**
The Statement of Case develops the central arguments of the original submission that this is an exceptional case because it: -
 - reinstates the original aesthetic value of the terrace.
 - corrects the perceived flaws in the original building design
 - improves its relationship with St George's Church
- 2.2 Whilst a detailed submission has been made to try and justify the dramatic alterations to this Home of Special Interest, the arguments do not address the importance of this building in its original form to the development and history of the Garden City nor its impact on the development of town planning and its importance as a set piece.
- 2.3 Great weight to the argument is placed on the importance of the tile hung element and that a front extension mimicking this element of the design would overcome a selection of perceived problems.
- 2.4 It is interesting that the applicant acknowledges the importance of the rendered gables which "*form a framework for the composition*". The

applicant also acknowledges the importance of the tension between the tile hung gable and the rendered gable. The tile hung element acts as a foil to the rendered gable and has an important supporting role to play.

2.5 The Heritage Foundation however place great importance on the story of Letchworth and on the character and appearance of the existing building which is an excellent example of early modern Arts and Crafts design, intrinsic to the overall character and development of Letchworth Garden City.

2.6 Whilst the tiled hung gable is important to the overall composition of this set piece, as outlined in the HF's Statement of Case, its main purpose is to end the terrace with a subservient yet beautiful end stop.

2.7 **Corrections to 10 NWN**

The arguments are centred around the belief that Bennett and Bidwell did not successfully resolve issues around foul drainage; bathrooms being sited at the front of the property as well as concerns over the difficulties in finding the front door.

2.8 In terms of the issues over foul drainage and bathrooms, as there are no controls over the internal layout of these properties, the bathroom facilities could be moved to the rear of the property with minimum disruption to the external appearance of No. 10.

2.9 The further commentary on the location of the door is a tenuous and somewhat tortuous argument that the property is deficient due to the siting of the front door and the lack of visibility. There are many houses within Letchworth that have the main entrance on the side elevation but accept this as part of the design. Once in front of the property, the door is easily spotted.

2.10 **The design guide, front extensions and a rejection letter**

Front extensions are discouraged exactly to preserve the original character of the building. The siting of St George's is irrelevant to the concerns over the dramatic alterations to facilitate a perceived more comfortable relationship with the church.

2.11 The applicant comments on the key points of the Design Principles for front extensions. The concerns over the failure of the proposals to overcome these key principles are outlined in the HF's Statement of Case and do not need to be further developed. Other aspects of the Design Principles have also been touched on but there is no exceptional argument put forward to override the Design Principle preventing front extensions.

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

The applicant's fixation on the relationship between the terrace and St George's is simply not considered to be an exceptional circumstance to allow such an act of harm to the original Bennett and Bidwell property.

- 2.13 The insistence that the re-siting of the tiled hung gable will resolve the perceived problem is not supported and the tiled hung gable importance lies in its subservient role to the front projected gable and its use as an end stop to the terrace.
- 2.14 The applicant again relies on arguments addressing his perceived concerns over the relationship with St Georges Church. These are considered to be irrelevant and are outside of the remit of the Scheme of Management.
- 2.15 **Conclusion**
The argument that the siting of St George's has weakened the success of the terrace and only a dramatic front extension will allow No 10 to return to its formal status is tenuous. The tile hung gable was designed as a back drop to the rendered gable and this composition needs to be maintained.
- 2.16 There is very little further substance added to the existing arguments to justify the remodelling of the host building and the drastic alterations to the front extension.
- 2.17 The tile hung section is significant and important to the composition of the terrace, but its role is to be a subservient element in a supportive role to the rendered gable.
- 2.18 This is not a "relatively small intervention", these proposals will dramatically alter No.10 and the terrace it forms part of.
- 2.19 The key issue which the applicant has not grasped is that of the importance of the set piece and its design being retained outweigh all the arguments put forward. Whilst the tile hung gable has a role to play in the composition, it is a subservient and supporting role.
- 2.20 This was the design that Bennett and Bidwell chose for this site and was signed off by First Garden City Ltd. This is an important set piece which needs to be respected.
- 2.21 The arguments submitted do not overcome the presumption that front elevations are discouraged.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The application has proceeded through pre-application advice, Case Officer, HAS team, AMC and HAC with all bodies in agreement that the front extension would be detrimental to the overall appearance and character of the host building and the terrace. No further evidence has been submitted to overturn this decision.