

# Northview

Northview Residents' Association's response to planning application no P092219

Existing



Proposed



# Why Northview needs protection

## Why we are objecting to proposal no P092219

Northview is a unique example of small-scale 1930s domestic architecture. We know of nothing like it in this area. Its physical design, with low-rise blocks and clear boundaries, give a cohesive feel, creating a community corner. Although it is between two main roads, it provides a restful enclave, with green areas and mature trees.

What is proposed – the addition of an overbearing and graceless storey in glass and dull grey metal – would cause irretrievable damage to it and can only be described as a piece of badly thought out architectural vandalism.

It is also in contravention of numerous Islington council policies.

Northview Residents' Association is objecting to the proposals for several reasons, including:

- The design is overbearing, unoriginal and already looks dated;
- The design is unsympathetic, detracting from the visual amenity;
- The materials – cheerless areas of zinc and large expanses of glass – are inappropriate;
- It will blot out all sunlight to at least one flat in front block – its effect on homes that will lie in its shadow has been omitted from the design statement;
- The drawings are misleading and, in one case, show a layout that has not existed for years;
- The applicant has ignored the design of the existing block; or the designer is unfamiliar with the block or has likewise ignored it;
- The overdevelopment will compromise safety and security;
- The applicant has failed to consult everyone materially affected;
- Some council policies – such as those pertaining to security, sustainable transport and lifetime homes – have not been addressed adequately but treated merely as a box to be ticked.

Back in 1948, an application to build a Nissen hut on one corner of Northview next to back block was rejected on the grounds that it would be “detrimental to the amenities of the adjacent buildings”. The same more than applies now and we hope the council will adopt the same position.

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Joint secretary  
Northview Residents' Association

20 December 2009

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# Consultation and community

## Consultation

Only five leaseholders were notified of the proposals by the applicant. There are 19 leaseholders on the estate.

We understand that applicant has informed the council that it told everyone with a leasehold interest of at least seven years to run about the proposed works.

Everyone on the estate will be affected, not just five people. We all use the car park, the bin store and the main and back gates. Front block residents have a direct view of the back block.

The applicant failed to consult the other leaseholders, who only received formal notification from the council, even though many are materially affected.

One resident of front block was horrified to discover that a development that would block direct sunlight to her flat was being planned (see Loss of Light, p4). Yet the first formal notification she received was from the council on 4 December, by a letter dated 2 December and sent second class.

Likewise, there has been no consultation over parking and sustainable transport (see Parking and Cycling, right).

## Community safety

The statement says in 3.03 (iii) that “existing security arrangements will be assessed and any appropriate updating will be installed”.

It appears that this is another instance of a “tick box”, as with parking, and that existing security arrangements have not even been considered.

There is, for example, no mention of criminal activity near the fire escape or the security of either gate. The site has been recorded by the police as a site of repeated attempted burglaries. The lack of a gate lock means that anyone can drive into the estate.

Safety is becoming increasingly compromised by a high turnover of tenants on the estate – there are many unfamiliar faces. Islington's own figures show turnover is very high in the private rented sector – two thirds of these households have lived in their current home for less than two years.

The Nag's Head town centre strategy mentions “[encouraging] a sense of community identity and welfare”. With this very contrasting upper floor let to short-term tenants, this addition will do the opposite and reduce community cohesion.

## Parking and cycling

While the statement says that no more cars will be parked on the estate (3.02 (vii)), it accepts that more vehicles will be driving in and out of the car park and says this will not cause a material hazard. Where is the evidence for this?

A bike rack with space for nine bicycles is proposed. The applicant has not provided any evidence or policy to support the provision of one space per flat. Will the people in the three-bedroom flat have to get one of those three-person bikes like The Goodies had?

It appears that, making its assumptions, the applicant has merely ticked the “sustainable transport” box in much the same way as it has ticked the boxes for security and accessibility (below left and below).

Had the applicant wished to support sustainable transport, they would have consulted with residents or given the bike/car parking figures in the context of anticipated car/bike use.

There is no indication of how parking controls will be enforced. There is little to stop new residents from parking on the estate.

The enforcement of residents' parking has been woeful for a long time. Cars with no connection to residents park here. The lock on the car park gate has been broken for some time and the company responsible for enforcing local parking has left the main gate open.

Nowhere in its statement does the applicant say how it will ensure that new residents will not be allowed to have council parking permits.

## Accessibility

Lifetime homes standards appear to have been blithely rejected.

A two- and three-bedroom flat on the third floor is unlikely to attract families with small children, or anyone with mobility problems.

While Northview leases specify that flats are for “a high-class residence for the occupation of one family only”, the lack of accessibility is sure to lead to the proposed flats being let out in multiple occupation, with the implication for security from having a high turnover of tenants (see Community Safety, left).

Council policy CS20 says “the council will seek to exceed the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the relevant building regulations. All new housing should be built to lifetime home standards”.

# Light, privacy and overdevelopment

## Loss of light

The proposed development will block all direct sunlight to at least one flat in front block and make it dull and gloomy.

The statement says the development will not affect light to properties to its south, east and west, while not mentioning homes that will lie directly in its shadow. This omission is extraordinary.

The statement in 3.02 (vii) says "there will be no material loss of daylight or sunlight to the surrounding property". This is incorrect. At least one – flat 6 – will lose a substantial amount of natural light.

The sunlight to the kitchen will be blocked off by a dull, grey metal sheet just a few yards away, and become dismal and depressing. It's not a galley kitchen – it is used to eat in. Likewise, the bathroom will become gloomy. It will be a considerable loss of visual amenity.

As with a lot of 1930s architecture, quite a bit of thought has gone into natural light within these flats. While the block faces due north, south-facing windows and doors are aligned to maximise daylight. Sunlight floods into north-facing front rooms from windows at the rear.

The sunlight also has a considerable warming effect. The bathroom heater in flat 6 has never been used, even though the property does not have double glazing.

The resultant increase in energy consumption for artificial lighting and heating will make some homes in this block less sustainable and more expensive to live in.

This loss of light will not be mitigated by light from the south west because of the new build at Holbrooke Court.

Many flats in front block have their main balconies to the rear and a "well" effect could be created for lower floors, making them dingy.

Right to access to light is explicit within leases.

From old maps and photographs, it is clear that these windows have had uninterrupted light since the block was built – well over the 20 years needed for a right to light to develop. Photographs taken in the early 1970s show this.

## Privacy

Has the effect of the new storey overlooking the proposed new-build at Holbrooke Court been considered?



Kitchen and bathroom windows of flat 6, showing flank wall of back block on rainy day. Building another storey will block all direct sunlight to the flat



## Layout and quiet enjoyment

In contravention of Islington's council's policy on conversions, the living/dining/kitchen space of at least one proposed flat is directly above the bedroom of the flat below.

## Overdevelopment

There has already been housing development adjacent to the east and south of Northview (see Height, p7, for an example), and new homes are to be built on the west side.

There are also new homes to be built across the road to the north of the site. Beyond this, on the other side of the Odeon, a large housing development is in progress. So new homes are going up on all sides of Northview, as well as proposals for more on top.

Looking ahead, the *London Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Housing Capacity Study 2009* identifies sites in and around Holloway where more than 2,000 homes will be built. Schemes under construction or with consent expected to deliver 7,242 homes in Islington over the next five years. Islington's housing supply has exceeded London Plan targets since 2005-06 and is expected to do so until 2011-12.

Concerns about overdevelopment – including a fear of new slums on overcrowded sites – have been well documented in local media.

Adding nine flats will make little difference to overall housing provision in the local area while coming at a great cost to the small community provided by the physical structure of Northview, destroying its unique character.

# Design

## Drawings

The drawings are less than accurate and are misleading, giving the effect of a mean, uninviting block.

Policy D2 says "the Council will require all planning applications for new development to include appropriate, clear and accurate drawings and a supporting design statement."

## Misleading appearance

The heavy black window frames in the drawing appear designed to make the block look heavy and uninviting. The tall windows that rise over several floors look pinched, unlike the original airy design.

The windows over the stairwell appear smaller than in real life, and the decorative feature near the top, echoed above the windows does not look as it appears in reality.

The drawings of the back of the flats make it look like a factory. It doesn't.

Sections of white rendering with columns of windows between them create visual columns to give the block height. The proposed drawing W09 shows the render around the windows rather than between them. The rendering between the windows appears heavy and straight in the drawings. Curved detailing on the rendering (see photo, above right) has been omitted from the drawings.

These combine to make the existing building look boring and ugly. We can only assume that this is to support the applicant's comments about the flats being "plain and uninspiring".

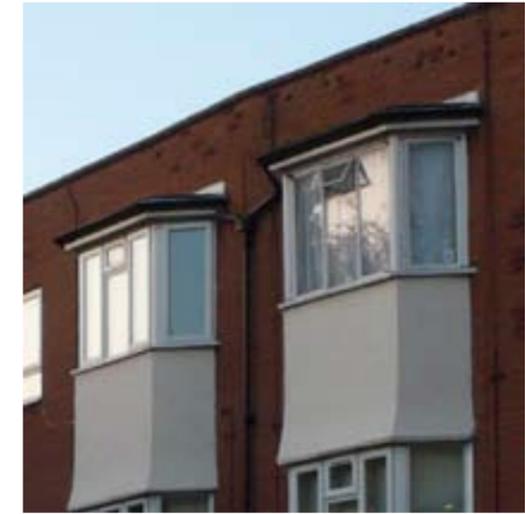
The existing drawings fail to show tanks on roof of back block or flues in the cross-section.

The proposed 3D view is misleading. The ground looks dark, the brick is shown in a very dark red and the existing windows are gloomy, with black frames. The proposed floor is shown in pale tones to give it a light and airy contrast.

Both north-facing windows and walls have a darker tone than the north-facing windows and walls of front block. Under the same conditions, they should appear the same.

## Old layout

The drawing of the existing ground floor layout and the location plan are based on an old layout. They show how Northview used to look before the car park was put in and when there



Detail of windows, showing frames and curves in the white rendering

were pram sheds by the garages. We have very similar drawings dated 1973 and 1957.

That no one seems to have noticed that the basic layout is wrong shows an appalling lack of attention.

The up-to-date layout is shown in the drawing of the proposed layout. The proposed 3D view amalgamates both, with the former green area superimposed over the parking bays. This is misleading as it gives the impression that the extent of green is considerably larger than it is.

Unfamiliarity with the block is evident at a more detailed level (see below).

## Cover illustrations

In light of the above, the drawing of the proposals has been amalgamated with a recent picture of back block.

The drawing was done by cutting out a photograph of the flats, superimposing it on the proposed design, shading the proposed metal areas in grey and filling the window space with glazing from a local window in a similar style.

The glazing colour was taken from a photograph of the upper floor of McDonald's on Seven Sisters Road. This was chosen because it is the nearest example of what is proposed, having large glass panes in a modern upper storey, where the windows are clean and the building in use.

The composite shows it to be unsympathetic and detracting from the visual amenity. The scale and context are not fitting. The materials

– zinc and large areas of glass – are inappropriate. Dull grey zinc and expanses of glass look dated already.

The proposed building does not create “a positive and appropriate relationship with surrounding buildings” (policy D4) and is not sympathetic to the building nor to its surroundings.

## Distinctive estate

Northview is not a well-known or high-profile scheme. Most of it is not on a street front. However, there is nothing like it in the area and it would be a disgrace if such a unique estate were damaged to such an extent.

The buildings have pleasing proportions with a restful rhythm, provided by the tall windows lighting the stairwells and the detailed, curved rendering between windows.

Council policy is in favour of protecting distinctive character (CS10).

The proposals themselves acknowledge that the estate is an enclave (1.02). The drawings and statement do not do it justice. Its very appeal as an enclave is being threatened.

The owner of flat 6 discovered that the front block at least had some kind of cultural designation when it changed hands in 2006.

There is an unusual consistency in 1930s architecture at this end of Tufnell Park Road. The view from front of 1-12 is of a magnificent deco cinema, while the view to the rear gives a different look of the same period with a different feeling. When 02 used images of the Odeon for an advertising campaign, they all had Northview in the background – it wasn’t substituted or Photoshopped out.

Islington’s policies support maintaining local distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of Northview and its feel of an enclave will be destroyed by this extra storey. It will just look crowded and overdeveloped. The council’s policies state that “a high standard of design” includes context as a key issue.

The 1930s architecture in the area tends to be large blocks of flats, houses, rather grand shops (eg Marks & Spencer) or spectacular cinema buildings (the Odeon opposite and the Coronet). We know of no other small estate.

While small scale, Northview is unique and certainly of local architectural interest, and deserves to be preserved.

## Questionable items

Paragraph 3.02 (vii) says there will be no material loss of daylight or sunlight to the surrounding property – yet direct sunlight to the front block will be blocked off (see Loss of Light, p4).

The same paragraph states that blocks in



Compare and contrast three buildings with glass set back above brick (left): top storey in keeping with rest of building, from Islington council’s *Urban Design Guide*; (right): two examples where glass upper storeys are more in contrast with lower floors – Woodlands Manor in Belfast (right) and the Orion Building in Birmingham (far right)

Holbrooke court have only their end elevations, which contain no windows, facing the site. New build is proposed on the garages of Holbrooke Court that will face the site. A block of flats is to be built next to front block the end of which could also face part of this new floor.

Paragraph 2.02 says that staircases will be “generally the same style and construction with only minimal brickwork”. Existing staircases are concrete, without visible brickwork, with steel balusters with a papyrus motif. Is the applicant aware of this?

## Unfamiliarity

Unfamiliarity with the building – and of 1930s domestic architecture in general – is evident as the designs take no account of flues or water tanks on the roofs. Correspondence of 1937 sets out the type of brickwork to be used for flues and fire recesses.

The water tanks can be clearly seen, and are shown on photographs in the council’s possession. Where are they on the drawings?

Anyone familiar with homes of this age will be aware that living rooms and main bedrooms would be heated with fires requiring flues. The proposals assume that there are no flues. Blocking them with a floor above would put residents in danger of carbon monoxide poisoning. The plans could be, literally, lethal.

A drawing of the cross-section of the floor of the proposed storeys shows an “existing concrete floor”. That at least part the roof is wooden with asphalt on top was evident when the bathroom ceiling to one flat in back block caved in to show daylight. If this was replaced with a concrete roof, we are unaware of this.

Correspondence about the block in 1937 states that: “The roof covering shall be bedded solidly in cement mortar on the top of the party walls”. It does not specify that the roof shall be made of concrete.



Crack in flank wall of back block



A large crack runs down the chimney breast, from the top to just over half way down the flank wall of back block (pictured opposite, p6).

The application seems to show no sign of a structural engineer’s report to show that the building can take the weight.

## Unoriginal proposal

The proposed design is described in the statement as “imaginative and innovative” (3.04). That this is not true is evidenced by similar designs elsewhere.

The proposed flats look like offices or flats much beloved of buy-to-let investors targeting inner cities a few years ago. The design already looks dated and in uninspiring. It will also destroy the cohesive feel of the estate.

The statement says there is precedent for the proposals at paragraph 2.2.5 of the *Islington Urban Design Guide*. This is misleading. While the exact picture is not identified in the application, there is one example of a brick building with a glass and metal roof set back in the guide (pictured opposite, p6, top). It does not have a “contrasting” design, which the statement is discussing and promoting – the top floors are very much in keeping with the rest of the building. This has been designed to look bold and assertive, unlike the Northview block, which appears calm and welcoming, in keeping with a domestic enclave.

Two examples that appear more like the proposals are:

(i) Woodlands Manor in Belfast, where bold glass upper floors are set back above a brick structure, with white rendering around the windows; and

(ii) the Orion Building in Birmingham, where glass storeys are set back above a predominantly brick structure. This was granted consent in 2001 – an estate agent’s website was advertising flats in the front, curved part of it shortly afterwards.



These two buildings were shortlisted by readers of *Building Design* magazine for the Carbuncle Cup. This is “architecture’s only prize for sheer, downright ugliness”, which is “awarded to the building that shows how bad architecture and bad planning can combine to produce something truly awful”.

The proposals appear to be in conflict with Islington’s policy CS11 that “it will refuse planning permission for schemes that do not achieve a high standard of design”.

## Height

The existing block is designed and works as a complete structure – it is not several rows of flats just plonked on top of one another. The proposed storey will detract from its appearance more than make it fit its surrounds.

A fourth storey was recently added to Tufnell Park Mansions. The photograph below shows how its excessive size for the setting has not been relieved by pale yellow paint. The proposed works will exacerbate this and make the place look crowded and overdeveloped.

Interestingly, the addition here was roughly in keeping with the existing structure, in contrast to what is proposed in Northview.

There is already uninspiring architecture in the area – look at the large block in the gap between Tufnell Park Mansions and back block in the photo below. We don’t need any more.



# Summary

## Why planning application number P092219 should be rejected

The proposed floor will be seriously detrimental to Northview both socially and architecturally.

Northview is a distinctive enclave of 1930s domestic architecture – there is nothing similar in the area. Council policies support maintaining local distinctiveness but the proposed changes will destroy this.

The design, in harsh glass and dreary grey metal, is overbearing, unsympathetic to its setting, unimaginative and dated. It is neither innovative nor imaginative.

Northview is designed as an entity, its architectural design and layout acting physically to provide a natural community. This, along with its restful, welcoming feel, could be irretrievably damaged.

The proposals will compromise residents' safety and security.

The new storey will cut natural light to front block, blocking all direct sunlight to at least one flat there.

The proposed layout, with a kitchen/living area over a bedroom, will result in noise nuisance.

The drawings are misleading and inaccurate, making our homes look unattractive and unwelcoming.

There is an appalling lack of attention in this application. Some structures have been omitted, and a plan showing a layout that has not existed for years has been used.

Parking, sustainable transport and security are hardly addressed – a "tick box" attitude has been adopted. Proposed flats do not meet lifetime homes standards. Several council planning policies are contravened.

The area is already heavily developed, with new or proposed housing on all sides of Northview. Adding this extra storey will add little to Islington's housing stock while causing architectural vandalism at great cost to the existing community.

