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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 April 2014

**by John L Gray DipArch MSc Registered Architect**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**

**Decision date: 14 May 2014**

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## **Appeal Ref. APP/V5570/E/13/2209252**

### **Flat 60, Imperial Hall, 104-122 City Road, London, EC1V 2NR**

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against the grant of listed building consent subject to conditions.
  - The appeal is made by Miss Anna Fargher against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Islington.
  - Listed building consent ref. P2013/1682/LBC was granted on 2 August 2013 subject to conditions.
  - The works proposed are "alterations within the attic room / dome structure, relocation of kitchen to rear reception room involving installation of an external extract flue".
  - The condition in dispute is no. 4, which states that, "Notwithstanding the plans hereby approved, no consent is granted to the removal of the four supporting timber struts to the roof truss in the dome".
  - The reason for the condition is, "In order to safeguard the special architectural or historic interest of the heritage asset in accordance with policy 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, policy D24 of the Islington Unitary Development Plan 2002 and policy CS9A of the Islington Core Strategy 2011".
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### **Decision**

1. The appeal is allowed. Listed building consent ref. P2013/1682/LBC for alterations within the attic room / dome structure and relocation of the kitchen to the rear reception room involving installation of an external extract flue, granted on 2 August 2013 by the Council of the London Borough of Islington is varied by deleting condition no. 4 and substituting for it the following condition:
  - 4) works for the removal of the four struts and installation of the raised floor shall not begin before the precise location and fixing of the struts has been recorded in a manner approved in writing by the local planning authority and a methodology for their removal and safe storage has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The works shall be carried out as approved.

### **Main Issue**

2. The main issue is the effect removal of the four timber struts would have on the special architectural and historic interest of Imperial Hall.

### **Reasons**

3. Imperial Hall was built in 1901-06 in a High Edwardian style, Gothic-inspired and with Art Nouveau influences. It was formerly the headquarters of the Leysian Mission and was converted to residential use (comprising over 60 flats) in 1996. The interior of the dome is now an upper or attic room in Flat 60.

4. The octagonal dome structure was originally designed as eight timber trusses to be erected at an angle of about 52°, meeting at the apex of the dome but with no other supporting members. It appears that this design was altered, probably during construction, and perhaps by the builder rather than the architect. A timber central post was introduced, along with two cross-members, each comprising a pair of timber joists, and four diagonal timber struts, on the line of the cross members, from the central post to the mid-point of four of the trusses. None of these is part of the original design.
5. The application proposed removing the diagonal struts and installing a new floor above the upper of the cross-members; in that way, the dome would become an integral and usable part of Flat 60.
6. It is true that the removal of the struts would mean the loss of historic fabric. However, it would be the loss of fabric that was not intended to be there in the first place and which calculations submitted with the application show to be structurally unnecessary. Indeed, the sizes of the members in the trusses suggest visually that the struts are unnecessary, as does the fact that they offer support for only four of the eight trusses. There may be some structural merit in the central post, because it must carry some (though not much) of the load from the eight trusses; also, the cross-members almost certainly have a useful function in restraining the horizontal forces imparted by the trusses – but both the post and the cross-members would remain.
7. There would be no effect whatsoever on the external appearance of the listed building – the dome would remain as it is, an important and integral part of the overall design. Whatever internal function the dome may have had in the original use of the building (and the nature of the structure suggests none), it is a wasted resource in its present use. It is part of Flat 60, accessible by a circular staircase, but cannot be used effectively because of the raised cross-members and the diagonal struts. Even with a raised floor, the struts would impede easy movement between the four quarters of the dome and thus its use as a single room.
8. To sum up, removal of the struts would, technically, mean the loss of historic fabric. However, the harm arising is diminished because the structure would actually become nearer to what was originally intended. Moreover, if the dome had (as it seems) no internal role, then its importance lies in its contribution to the appearance of the building externally. Accordingly, in terms of para. 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the harm to the significance of the listed building would be negligible. On the other side of the balance, removal of the struts gives the opportunity to use the space within the dome as an integral part of Flat 60; the effective use thus afforded must contribute, if only in a small way, towards a more secure future for the structure. That is a public benefit to be set against only a very small amount of harm.
9. On that basis, the proposal does not conflict with what is sought either by the NPPF or by Unitary Development Plan Policy D24 and Core Strategy Policy CS9A. That said, it is still appropriate, in deleting condition no. 4 attached to listed building consent ref. P2013/1682/LBC, to add a new condition to secure a precise record of the struts as they are and to secure their retention should the circumstances arise in which they might be replaced.

*John L Gray*

Inspector

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