

PLANNING DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT



IN RESPECT OF:

CONVERSION OF 196-197 PARROCK STREET GRAVESEND TO FIVE APARTMENTS

February 2022

Response to Pre-planning Application

The response to the pre-planning application has been taken into account. An additional window has been added to the basement flat. Two alternative layouts on the second and third floor are submitted, the attributes of each are covered later in this document.

A request was made that plans should show original and modern walls and staircases. All walls are judged to be original except to the store in the basement and bathroom on the first floor. These have been marked on the drawing.

The staircase to the basement may be original although it does not display any original features.

All other staircases are judged to be original.

The second floor landing has been tampered with, but it is not clear what the original layout would have been.

The Property

195 and 196 Parrock Street were built as a pair of houses, probably in the early nineteenth century. They currently sit in the town centre on the A226. The curved glass on the ground floor bay windows make them particularly distinguishable to anyone negotiating the corner of Milton Road to Parrock Street on the one way system.

Locality

The properties benefit from Saint John's Roman Catholic Church opposite. 194 Parrock Street to the north has been refurbished and is a positive visual contribution to the road. Properties to the south on both sides of the road are retail properties, fairly typical of urban one way systems. One or more are often vacant. The ground floor of the north wing of 196, is a commercial office with a large signboard which diverts attention from 196.

195 Parrock Street has been given planning permission to conversion to flats, and work is currently underway.

Curtilage

The curtilage extends approximately 5m to the front of the house. It is concrete paved and runs through to the pavement with no barrier or distinction of the boundary to users of the street.

There is parking for three vehicles to the rear.

History and Current Use

Although designed and built as a house, the building designation is Class B1. It has not been occupied for some years.

There is a bay window formed in the basement front wall, which has been bricked up, probably to avoid the window tax. The basement is below ground level and the open space which was presumably in front of the basement window has been filled.

The original layout is largely intact. Apparent changes being:

- 195 and 196 Parrock Street appear to have originally been mirror images of each other. Each has been extended laterally in different ways.
- Bricking up of basement window and basement entrance, which would have included filling the space in front of the basement window and removal of the boundary wall and railings;
- Blocking of basement entrance at the front ;
- Blocking off of door into the front room of the ground floor and removal of dividing wall to combine front and rear rooms on the ground floor;
- Division of the first floor front room on the south side into, lobby, w.c. and kitchen;
- Alteration of the second floor landing;
- Addition of a block at the rear to house w.c.'s on the landings;
- A dormer window in the attic at the front of the building.

Condition

From a visual point of view, the windows and stonework to the front would benefit from painting. There is deterioration to the render and buddleia growing between the coping stones.

The roof may have reached the end of its useful life.

Internally the condition varies between poor in the loft to very good in the ground floor reception room. Rain is penetrating through the roof to the front room on the third floor.

Original Features

The ground floor front and rear rooms have been combined and retain the ornate ceilings, cornices and skirtings.

The original front door remains. All of the interior doors and architraves and the back door have been replaced with fire doors and linings.

All of the original windows remain with the exception of :

- the ground floor rear window (upvc),
- 2nd floor side window has been removed and boarded up,
- 3rd floor side window (steel).

The dormer window does not appear to be original. It is not mirrored in 195 and is probably a later addition.

The staircase and banister from ground to 1st and 1st to 2nd floor, with mahogany banister appears to be original. The banister on the 2nd floor landing is oak and appears to be a replacement. Both will be retained.

There are no cornices or ornate skirtings on the upper floors.

Transport Facilities

Gravesend town centre is unusually fortunate with its high speed rail connections to London and the continent, direct trains to Luton Airport and London Bridge and all the links thereto. Bluewater Shopping complex and Darenth Valley Hospital are close and served by the Fastrack Bus Service. Buses to all neighbouring towns are also available.

Accordingly not all residential units need be provided with parking.

Proposed Use

The property has failed to sell as office accommodation, both through an estate agent and by auction. This is consistent with low demand for offices in most small towns.

Although originally a family house, it would not now be much desirable as such, due to its size (very large by modern urban standards) town centre location on the one way system, and lack of garden.

Accordingly the most feasible uses to make retention and maintenance of the building economically viable are division into flats or conversion to a House of Multiple Occupation. Of the two, a house of Multiple Occupation offers the most financially rewarding prospect (and the wc's on the landings lend themselves to this use) but is also the least rational if the objective is to make it appealing to owners or tenants who will appreciate and cherish it.

On the other hand, its attractive landmark effecting features would serve to make it appealing to flat owners and occupiers. The town centre location and lack of outdoor space, dictate the target occupants to be single persons or couples with up to one young child, making single bedroom flats the optimum size.

Impact on Local Surroundings

There are residential units to the rear (west) and side (north) of the building, a church opposite and commercial to the south and east. Residential use will have little impact on the character of the locality.

Bringing a disused building back into use, and reinstating the basement bay window, boundary wall and railings will enhance the area and provide encouragement for other property owners to upgrade their buildings.

In the wider context, rejuvenation of the town centre and conversion of redundant premises to residential will alleviate pressure to build in the green belt to meet housing requirements and be in compliance with the Local Development Plan.

Proposed Layout

Division of houses into flats is rarely straightforward. The layout of the building suggests one unit per floor and one bedroom per unit if the concerns discussed below can be satisfactorily addressed.

The basement has a floor area of 49m², quite large enough for a one bedroom flat. However, it has no windows. There is no evidence that there ever were windows to the rear, however the front wall has taken the line of a curved bay window, now filled in. The brick nib walls under the ground floor hallway suggest that there was previously a basement entrance.

It is proposed to remove the fill to the front of the property, reinstate the basement bay window, boundary wall and wrought iron railings. The boundary wall and railings will distinguish the property from the pavement. See enclosed three dimensional colour illustration.

Preliminary discussions with Building Control indicate that the dividing north-south wall between the main rooms could be retained to allow a living area to the front with bay window and sleeping area to the rear, provided the doorway be kept open or closed only by a swing door.

A very comfortable basement studio flat can then be built with its own entrance, and although a studio, will have clearly defined living and sleeping areas.

In response to the concern raised in the pre-planning application response, it is proposed to add a window to the rear.

The ground floor has the advantage of a rear door, but also the disadvantage of the lowest useable floor area due to the constraints of the hall and stairs. The front and rear rooms, currently combined, with the curved glass bay window and ornate ceilings are the most pleasing in the building and of greatest heritage value, and are clearly a priority from a conservation point of view.

The floor area of 24m² is large enough for a studio flat, but insertion of a shower room and w.c. would destroy the proportions and character of the most elegant room in the building. By reinstating the original door to the basement front room and blocking off the stairs to the basement, it would be possible to locate the shower and w.c. on the ground floor under the stairs and realize an attractive studio with no detriment to the architectural features.

The stairs to the basement have no banister or original features and it is suggested that their removal will not be detrimental to the character of the building.

The first floor is the largest floor and already has the layout of a spacious two bedroom flat which will be retained. One of the parking places will be reserved for this flat, as it is the most likely to attract a family unit with children.

Second and Third Floors Three Options are submitted. Each will incur consideration by the Planning Officer, the Conservation Officer and Building Control (in respect of fire escape routes). The developers will accept whichever choice is made.

Option Two. (As submitted on the Pre-Planning Application). The second floor will serve as a single bedroom flat subject to the bathroom constraints discussed below.

The space under the stair will be converted to a wardrobe, a meaningful benefit to the smallest unit. The flat will also have the benefit of a utility/store room off the communal staircase.

The third floor will also serve as a single bedroom flat subject to similar bathroom constraints discussed below.

Loft: despite the dormer window, it is not evident that the loft ever had a useful purpose. The useable loft space is too small for a unit, or even a separate bedroom, but could house a work station and w.c. to the living area on the second floor below; fire regulations permitting. Although the additional useful space is limited, it is considered worthwhile as it will greatly enhance the living space.

Option One

Option one also has a separate flat on each of the second and third floors. In response to the concerns of the Conservation Officer, an alternative layout which preserves the landing and has less impact on the dimensions of the rear room is submitted. It does require an alteration to the stair, and may not be acceptable to Building Control for fire safety reasons. It does provide a higher standard of accommodation than the original submission.

Subject to the approval of Building Control, it is the Option preferred by the developers. The floor space is 35m² (including the understairs cupboard, but excluding the chimney breasts) which is slightly below the recommended minimum of 37m². However, it is nonetheless a very pleasing space with three good sized windows, and, it is suggested, will be more pleasant to inhabit and provide better workability than some flats which do meet the recommended minimum. It would also have the benefit of a utility room off the landing (not included in the area) which would serve to separate washing from the living area, or could simply be used for storage.

Option Three Option Three combines the second and third floors into one flat as suggested in the response to the Pre-planning application.

It does entail boarding off the staircase at first floor level with loss of light to the entrance and stairwell. This would be unfortunate since the staircase is an original and attractive feature of the property and it is obviously desirable that it be enjoyed by as many of the residents as possible.

Additionally, If the two floors were combined into a single flat as in Option 3, the top front room would be a bedroom, and the added benefit of a gallery to a bedroom would not warrant the expense or the work.

The dormer window would therefore open into the ceiling void and effectively be redundant.

But, our main concern about a single flat spanning the top two floors is the limited range of tenants or owners to whom it would appeal. In our experience as developers, second floor flats of two or more bedrooms in buildings without a lift, do not appeal to first time buyers starting a family and tend to be purchased by landlords.

As landlords ourselves we have experience of owning such a flat, also in a town centre listed building with no outdoor space. The current Benefits System provides tenants with enhanced cash flow if they live in properties with less than the prescribed number of rooms for their family size. We find that we need to ensure that we do not end up with large families that have in the past put beds in the living room, caused discord with buggies etc left about in communal areas, obstructed fire exits and generally detracted from the appeal to other tenants - as well as placing greater stress on our listed building. We would guard against owning a similar flat in the future.

Building Footprint and Internal Layout.

No changes to the footprint of the building and no fundamental or irreversible changes to the structure or layout are proposed.

Not all the above is necessary to meet minimum design standards: for example the loft gallery and own door to the basement; however it is considered that the ongoing care and maintenance of the building will best be served by maximising the attraction and desirability of the units.

Bathrooms: Victorian buildings and older did not have running water or sewage, so bathrooms did not exist in the sense that we know them today. But bathrooms are fundamental to comfortable, indeed acceptable, 21st century living. This creates inevitable tension between creation of appealing residences which will attract people who are likely to appreciate and cherish listed buildings and preservation of original layouts.

The plans deal with this as follows:

Basement: the store room to the rear is large enough to accommodate a shower room. A bathroom would be more likely to attract a family unit but this would require demolition of the store room and in any case, the basement is small for a family unit so a shower room is proposed.

Ground floor: it is possible to fit a w.c. and shower in the hall and under the stairs – a bit cramped so not ideal, but this is the only solution which preserves the main room, which is the jewel of the building.

First floor: the changes already been made are sufficient, indeed, well suited to a two bedroom flat. The front room on the south side has been split into a w.c., kitchen and lobby. Most of the original cornices are still in place showing how the room has been divided. The space allocated to the w.c. will comfortably accommodate a full bathroom. No further changes to the layout are required.

Second Floor: In response to the concerns of the Conservation Officer, an alternative layout which preserves the landing and has less impact on the dimensions of the rear room is submitted. It does require an alteration to the stair to the third floor, and may not be acceptable to Building Control for fire safety reasons. It does provide a higher standard of accommodation than the original submission.

If the original submission is favoured, detail showing how the fire protection would be constructed so as not to damage the balustrade is shown (the balustrade on the second floor is not original, although the spindles could be).

Third Floor and Loft: With the provision of a paddle stair, the loft will be accessible in a gallery format, large enough for a w.c. and workstation. Our intention is that this will add some cache to the flat and make it unique and desirable.

Summary

We are committed to making this a development we can be proud of. We have conducted an in-depth exploration of all possible options for the use of the building; and believe that the removal of the staircase to the basement, and division of the rear rooms on the 2nd and 3rd floors, without any irreversible or structural alterations, are more than compensated by the reinstatement of the basement bay window, wall and wrought iron railings to the front.

We are confident that our proposals will achieve, not only the best possible use and layout within the constraints of the building, but also a valuable and permanent contribution to the character of Gravesend.

We look forward to your response.