



## **BROOK HOUSE CONVERSION – CONSEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Application number 16/P3922  
November 2016**

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage takes an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green Conservation Area and its Environs. We are the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We have been closely involved in the development of the Borough Character Studies, the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and numerous development proposals in the area. We have worked with the London Borough of Merton and our local councillors to produce the Cricket Green Charter which establishes our approach to development and change in the area and has been acknowledged in finalising the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Cricket Green (<http://mitchamcricketgreen.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/cricket-green-charter.pdf>)

2. We have been closely involved in the recent conversion and development proposals at Brook House, including the prior notifications (14/P0273 & 15/P0671) and roof conversion (16/P0080). The process has been a troubling one because of the scope of the permitted development rights and the attitude of the developer in implementing the scheme. The developer has shown little respect for either the local community or the prominent location at the heart of Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area and fronting the oldest cricket ground in the world. A large substation has been erected without consent in the most prominent and unacceptable location, the historic Cold Blows footpath has been damaged, trees have been threatened, not least through the digging of destructive trenches that have been lined with metal, and the sensitive roots of mature trees being left exposed to frost. Spoil has been left and a floodlight erected. Much of this unauthorised activity has taken place on public land as well as that within the site curtilage. Evidence is provided in the photographs below:



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3. As this latest application confirms, the planning considerations raised by the conversion go much wider than the traffic, flooding and contamination issues which the Council was limited to addressing when considering the prior notification. It is unacceptable that we are now dealing with a planning application to regularise unauthorised development which has already taken place at Brook House and which should have been addressed at the time of the original consent. We hope Merton Council can do more to anticipate these issues in other future developments of this kind.

4. The application is for claimed "*minor works*" "*including*" a substation, bin store, access gate, railing and external lighting. Each of these is anything but minor given the location and has the potential to have a significant and negative impact on the Conservation Area where new development must "*preserve or enhance*" its character. Yet the information provided with the application provides next to no information on any of the different "*minor works*" cited or indeed any clarification on whether there are other "*minor works*" not listed. Instead we are provided with:

- A location plan which details the location of a "*proposed*" substation but provides no details of its appearance. This is all the more remarkable considering the substation already exists
- A series of poorly detailed existing and proposed elevations with no description of or justification for any differences between them, inviting respondents to "*spot the difference*"
- An application for railings with no information other than that they are "*low level black*" railings and no assessment of the suitability for this part of the Conservation Area or evidence of similar boundary treatments nearby
- An application for gates with no details of their height or appearance and we have had to make assumption that the "*gates*" are the same as the two "*access barriers*" in the site plan
- Proposals for external lighting with no information as to where it will be located, what will be illuminated, the proposed intensity of lighting or what impact it will have on the existing high quality nightscape of this part of the Conservation Area. The site plan includes reference to one "*standard*" security lamp which has already been erected without permission and this flies in the face of the longstanding efforts to avoid light pollution in the Conservation Area through muted external lighting
- Proposals for low evergreen hedging with no other information as to species or appearance or assessment of its suitability for this part of the Conservation Area or how it will be maintained

5. The application also fails to include details of the tree works that have been undertaken, without authorisation, on the site.

6. A further omission is the intrusive white street cabinet erected on green space in front of Brook House. This has been erected as a result of the residential demand which will result from Brook House's conversion. We are unaware of any prior notification for this cabinet or that permission has been given. It should be relocated to the rear of the building and more appropriately coloured – this is within Merton Council's power under the prior notification procedures.

7. The impact of these changes, including the proposed railings and hedge along with the unauthorised substation and the street cabinet which have both been erected is evident in this historic photo showing the clean lines of Brook House in its original use.



8. The information provided with this application falls well below the standard required, especially in a Conservation Area, and we believe the application is not fit to be determined. As a result the application should be refused unless further information is provided and the application is re-advertised.

9. Looking ahead, we acknowledge that this development will be proceeding and ask that the consequential development is presented as a package of measures in a design statement that explains the proposals, demonstrates the options that have been explored and shows how each element will meet the legal test of preserving or enhancing the Conservation Area. The statement should also provide details of the proposed materials and location for each of the different elements. This should:

- Respect the key frontage to Cricket Green
- Relocate the substation erected without permission in the most intrusive location facing Cricket Green to the rear of the site
- Relocate the street cabinet to the rear of the site
- Avoid anything but muted external lighting
- Provide boundary treatments that respect the open character of the existing frontage to Cricket Green
- Retain existing trees and ensure there is no further damage to them during construction and into the future
- Present a clear planting plan, specifying the species and location of plants and hedges and how they will be maintained in perpetuity

10. We ask that if this information is not forthcoming then permission should be refused and enforcement action taken against the development which has already occurred.