

Tower House
29 Melbury Road
London W14 8AB
1.5.15

Planning and Borough Development Department
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Hornton Street
London W8 7NX

FAO Cheryl Saverus

Dear Madam

Proposal for works to Woodland House, 31 Melbury Road, London W14 8AB – Planning reference no PP/15/01845 & LB/15/01846

I am the owner of 29 Melbury Road, also known as The Tower House, which I have occupied as a private house since 1972. I have written to the council about previous applications for proposed works to 31 Melbury Road and I was re-assured when these applications were withdrawn. However, I wish to **object** the current proposals due to concerns about the impact of the works on the Tower House and the surrounding area.

I have written to the council previously about the special characteristics of the Tower House and repeat my comments here for the sake of clarity. The Tower House was built in the 1870s by the eminent Victorian architect, William Burges, for his own use. Burges designed the house when he was at the height of his powers and it has been described by his biographer, J Mordaunt Crook, as *an extraordinary distillation of his artistic career*. As you will know, the Tower House is listed grade I and is thus architecturally and historically one of the most important buildings in the Borough. I believe the house was one of the first Victorian buildings in the country to be listed and was saved by John Betjeman and Evelyn Waugh who, amongst others, campaigned against the threat of its demolition in the early sixties. Having myself protected the Tower House for over forty years (most recently in the face of planning applications for both 27 and 31 Melbury Road), I am now having to fight a new threat to this precious and unique building.

Although relatively plain on the outside, the interior of The Tower House is richly decorated with a variety of finishes/techniques designed in a highly original manner. Many of these finishes and fittings are extremely delicate and, of course, irreplaceable and include stained glass, decorative plasterwork, painted ceramic tiling and painted frescoes. The interior is complete and unblemished without any significant damage or subsequent alterations. The garden to the rear of The Tower House was also laid out by Burges and, although this has evolved since his time, much of the structure and planting of his garden survives as well as the brick boundary wall dividing my property from Woodland House.

I believe during the period I have been fortunate to own the Tower House I have been a responsible custodian of Burges' masterpiece and my efforts in conserving the building have been described by English Heritage as 'exemplary'. I have recently commenced a programme of conservative repairs of external masonry which will continue in the near future.

The latest proposals for 31 Melbury Road include the following:

- Excavation of the existing slab in the lower ground floor level rooms and some associated localised underpinning of the walls of the house
- Demolition of the existing garage in the garden and construction of a new garage structure with pile foundations

I am extremely concerned about the level of vibration that may be caused and potential for structural movement and therefore damage to the Tower House as a result of these works. These concerns are based on the advice of a conservation structural engineer, David Evans, and conservation architect, Andrew Townsend, who have written clearly stating the threat to the Tower House if the proposals for Woodland House are permitted. Their letters are submitted (with my letter) to the council for your consideration and I would be very grateful if you could take the comments of these two consultants into account when deliberating on this application.

I have written previously about the effects of similar schemes in the area on the potential well-being of the Tower House. The work now proposed to Woodland House is much nearer than other similar major excavations and structural works carried out so far in the locality and the consequences for the building fabric and decorative finishes of The Tower House may well be catastrophic if this project is allowed to proceed.

As an example of development elsewhere giving rise to concerns about the proposals for Woodland House, recent exploratory works to 27 Melbury Road on the other side of The Tower House (which I understand were to investigate the ground conditions below the house in preparation for the planning application in 2014 for a basement development) caused an alarming level of vibration within the Tower House and led to the fall of dust/debris in several rooms on the *west* side of the house, even though these works were only of a preliminary nature.

In addition to the proposals for the main house, I would also like to comment on the design of the proposed new garage in the garden of Woodland House. I believe the proposed elevation of the garage on to Ilchester Place is extremely unfortunate in architectural terms and will detrimentally affect the setting of the grade II* house as well as this part of the conservation area and particularly the approach to Holland Park.

For the reasons given above, I strongly oppose the proposals and urge the council to **refuse** the application for the works to Woodland House.

Yours faithfully

J. Page

HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANTS

MARLBOROUGH HOUSE 2 BROMSGROVE FARINGDON OXON SN7 7JQ

www.infoandrewtownsend.co.uk

Mr J Page
The Tower House
29 Melbury Road
London
W14 8AB

AT/HW/843/ClI

1st May 2015

Dear Mr Page

Proposed works to Woodland House, Melbury Road, W14 8AB ref PP/15/01845 & LB/15/01846

I am writing to you regarding the potential effects on The Tower House of the proposed works to Woodland House (31 Melbury Road) as set out in the above applications. I confirm the following:

- i) The interior decoration of The Tower House is a magnificent *tour-de-force* and is strikingly complete. It is the culmination of the life's work of the highly original and influential architect, William Burges. It has been compared favourably by contemporary and more modern commentators with other iconic private houses, such as William Morris' Red House in Bexleyheath, and is one of the most important houses built in this country in the nineteenth century. You have clearly cared for the house and maintain it admirably in its original configuration and with original finishes and fittings. I noted on a previous visit to the house you have recently carried out repairs to external masonry using conservative methods and following the principles of SPAB. I understand this is part of a programme of more extensive repairs you are planning for other areas of the external fabric as part of your long-term stewardship of The Tower House.
- ii) Early in 2015, I inspected the condition of the house concentrating on the interior of the rooms on the east side ie nearest to 31 Melbury Road. The ground, first and second floor rooms contain a wealth of complex and often fragile detail. Although most of the rooms in the house have surface decoration in abundance, of particular note are the painted decorative surfaces in the drawing room and the hall and the extensive use of decorative glass in the large east window in the hall. Many rooms on the east side of the house, including the drawing room, have magnificent and highly decorative fireplaces.
- iii) There are signs of previous structural movement in the walls on the east side of the house, manifest in several cracks to decorative internal finishes, particularly in the hall. As a consequence, some of the finishes are likely to be slightly unstable, especially the decorative work to the walls and ceiling of the hall. Although these areas may remain perfectly satisfactory under current static conditions, vibration from building works to the adjoining property could have disastrous effects on these decorative finishes. It has been noted that the materials used in the construction of the Tower House are those developed during the nineteenth century and are of a

relatively rigid and brittle nature (as opposed to the more ‘flexible’ lime-based technology of earlier buildings) and the surface finishes are therefore particularly sensitive to movement due to external forces.

- iv) Information is provided with the current application for Woodland House on the proposed structural work in the form of a structural engineer’s *design statement* and drawings and includes reducing floor levels in the lower ground floor area of the house. The engineer’s *design statement* makes reference to preliminary investigation work carried out to date, including trials of breaking out concrete slabs, which they claim was executed ‘without causing any damage to the Tower House’. Similarly, the engineer’s *design statement* states that ‘in order to ensure that no damage of any sort is caused to the Tower House it is proposed to carry out precautionary vibration monitoring to the Tower House... ..while the basement slab is broken out [during the main part of the works]’. We understand you have not been consulted about monitoring the Tower House either prior to the preliminary trial works or (in the event permissions are granted) for the main works to Woodland House. It is regrettable no attempt has been made by the applicants or their agents to discuss with you the possibility of monitoring equipment being installed to assess the effects of the (now past) preliminary investigations or any future works at Woodland House on the structure and fabric of the Tower House.
- v) The proposed works include the demolition and re-building of the garage in the garden of Woodland House which appears to include the provision of piled foundations. There is no reference in the engineer’s *design statement* to the proposed work to the garage or the potential effects of this work on the Tower House.
- vi) In conclusion, there is no firm evidence in the documents submitted with the planning application that structural and/or cosmetic damage will not occur to The Tower House during the proposed works. The engineer’s *design statement* provides no detail of precise measures to be taken to ensure that damage will not occur to The Tower House and is conditional upon monitoring of your house which has not yet been raised with you. If permitted, there must therefore be serious and very real concern that major vibrations will be transferred to the building fabric of The Tower House during the proposed works to Woodland House and re-construction of the garage, thus creating the potential for damage to your property and especially to the decorative finishes in the rooms on the east side of the house.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Townsend
Principal Architect

Clive Hudson Associates

Consulting Structural and Civil Engineers

Chiltern Chambers, 37 St. Peters Avenue, Caversham, Reading. RG4 7DH



our ref: 123978/Melbury Road – 150430 Rev A
your ref:

30th April 2015

Mr J Page
The Tower House
No. 29, Melbury Road
London
W14 8AB

Dear Mr Page,

Re: 31 Melbury Road planning ref pp/15/01845 & lb/15/01846

Following our recent correspondence with Andrew Townsend, we are writing to inform you of our concerns regarding the structural implications of the proposed development at No. 31 on your property – the Grade I-listed, Tower House (No. 29 Melbury Road).

These concerns are based on the documents uploaded onto the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea's planning website (<http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning/>) and my limited inspection of your house in 2014.

As you know the Tower House was designed by William Burges, one of the greatest architects of the 19th century, as his home and contains original and irreplaceable interiors. These unparalleled interiors are of national significance and, we believe, are at risk if the applicant's proposals (as they currently stand) are accepted.

The proposal includes the demolition of the existing garage in the north-east corner of the garden and the construction of a new garage with new foundations and floor structure. From the documents submitted we do not believe the applicant's agents have given this aspect appropriate consideration in their application to categorically demonstrate that there will be no damage whatsoever to the finishes, fittings or structure of the Tower House during its construction. The only structural reference to the new sub-structure and ground-floor slab is shown on Halstead Associates' drawing 15871/11 "GA GARAGE PLAN" which indicates the new garage will have a bored-pile foundation with a suspended, reinforced-concrete floor slab. However this drawing is marked "NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION", which indicates the design is liable to change should the application be permitted. Given the fragile and historically important nature of the Tower House's interior, we would not consider it unreasonable, in the circumstances, for the applicant's agents to have assessed and presented this in more detail and to have provided an updated ground investigation report. This should include a detailed ground movement assessment for the installation of the piles and its effect of the Tower House.

In addition the applicant's agents have not provided information on how the existing garage structure will be demolished and broken up. Again, given the un-paralleled nature of the Tower House's interior, we would not consider it unreasonable for the method of demolition to have been discussed and included as part of the Planning application.

Directors: Eur Ing. Clive N.W. Hudson B.Sc.(Civ Eng) C.Eng.M.I.Struct.E.
Consultants: Michael B.Gover C.Eng.M.I.Struct.E.

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While not a structural issue, it would appear the construction of the garage floor-slab and its edge detail (indicated on Halstead Associates' drawing 15874/11 section A-A) could have a detrimental effect on the roots of the London Plane tree T24 with an approximate 600mm deep excavation required on the west and south elevations to enable the installation of the Cellcore (anti-heave protection) and the construction of the 225mm deep reinforced concrete "toe".

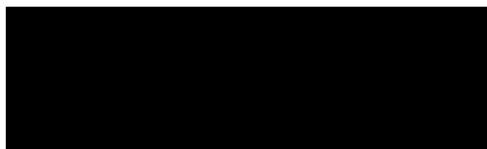
The Structural Engineer's Design Statement (Halstead Associate's Reference 15871 dated March 2015) makes reference to exploratory works being undertaken to Woodland House (trial pits and breaking up of existing concrete in March 2015). This has also been our first opportunity to review the Site Analytical Services' (the applicant's Geotechnical Consultant) "Ground Investigation report" (Ref 14/22011 dated June 2014). We assume this was commissioned for the withdrawn proposal for the two-storey basement development but was not submitted / uploaded onto the council's website previously. Site Analytical Services' make reference to two rotary percussive boreholes being undertaken in April 2014. We understand you were not consulted about either of these exploratory works; which is regrettable as it could have provided both the applicant and yourself the opportunity to monitor the Tower House for signs of potential movement.

Should the application be permitted we would also recommend:

- I. regular (un-announced) visits are undertaken by an independent party to ensure that no percussive tools are being used, beyond those specified in the demolition and construction method statements, and that these are being adhered to throughout the refurbishment project.
- II. any hardcore is rolled rather than compacted into place.

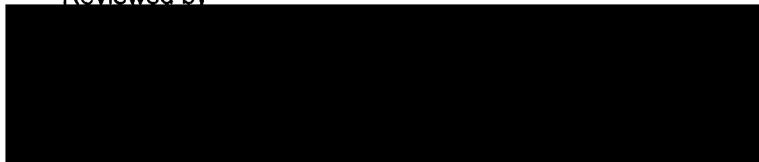
Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,



David Evans BEng (Hons) MSc (Historic Conservation) SPAB Lethaby Scholar 2008 I.H.B.C.
Senior Engineer

Reviewed by



Eur Ing. Clive N.W. Hudson B.Sc.(Civ.Eng.) C.Eng. M.I.Struct.E.
Director

On behalf of Clive Hudson Associates Limited.