

Hackney Planning Service
2 Hillman Street
London
E8 1FB

Planning application: 2014/0323

Site Address: 48-76 Dalston Lane E8 3AH

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you with regard to the above planning application and especially concerning the structural condition appraisal by Peter Dann Ltd (June 2013). Having read the condition appraisal carefully, I am alarmed at the lack of knowledge about historic buildings and London stockbricks displayed within it which leads to the recommendation of complete demolition of the terrace. The following points only address some of the more grave problems with the report and are not exhaustive.

1. The report highlights the fact that the inner and outer leaf of the façade are only intermittently bonded through and therefore of poor quality (3.3). Any study of Georgian building methods, however brief, will show that this was common practice and many of the grand squares in central London are built in exactly this fashion^a. I hope Peter Dann does not consider them beyond redemption. Very few Georgian houses are strictly speaking of sound construction and any scheme involving rehabilitation of these houses will have to take this into consideration from the beginning.

2. The report stresses that the internal bricks are of poor quality and low compressive strength, unsuitable for supporting loads. Again, this was a regrettable but common practice in Georgian buildings and is well documented. These bricks are generally 'place bricks' not stock bricks and there are numerous records of complaints about their shocking quality^b. Yet they have generally

managed to carry the roof load even through periods of serious neglect, so caution should be exercised when assessing these buildings and the temptation to judge them by modern building standards should be resisted.

3. The 2 reports by Sandberg Testing & Consulting Engineers on the compressive strength and water absorption of a sample of bricks are quoted in support of the application for demolition. I am currently writing my dissertation on London stockbricks and therefore feel in a position to comment on this particular point in some detail.

The first report (October 2011) tested the internal bricks which were unsurprisingly found wanting, as noted above.

The second report (April 2013) tested the facing bricks which are London stocks^c. BS 3921 (now superseded) required a minimum strength of 5 N/mm² for common clay bricks, i.e. not engineering bricks. The current BS EN 771-1 gives no minimum requirements for common bricks. It has been suggested^d that the compressive strength of London stocks averages between 5 and 25 N/mm²; the test results by Sandberg (5.5 - 23.4 N/mm²) are consistent with this.

The waterabsorption rate is a little misleading and does not indicate the conclusions drawn by Peter Dann. Far from being a defect, the porosity is in fact one of the great qualities of the London stock brick. Extensive tests by Bonnell and Butterworth^e established that it is the open pore structure of the brick that allows it to absorb and extrude water readily, thereby protecting it from frost damage.

Comparing the results of the Sandberg tests with the advertised properties of some of the modern bricks commonly used as 'London stocks', one finds that the figures are not startlingly different. The rationale for not re-using the existing bricks is therefore questionable. Additionally, it is worth pointing out that most of the modern bricks, especially from the larger brickmakers, are not only the wrong size (i.e. metric rather than imperial) but also aesthetically very poor.

Brick	Compressive Strength	Waterabsorption
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London stockbrick Dalston Lane Terrace (Sandberg test)	5.5 - 23.4 N/mm ²	Average 24% (20.7 - 29.9 %)
London Yellow Multistock (Ibstock)	>=20 N/mm ²	< = 20%
Smeed Dean Greenwich Yellow Multi Rustica (Wienerberger)	15 N/mm ²	22% Max
Dapple Light (Hanson)	≥ 25 N/mm ²	≤ 23%

4. Under point 3.3 the report states that the brickwork could not withstand the required cleaning process of sand blasting, water jetting and chemical cleaning... nor should it have to! The desire to comprehensively clean old buildings has no place in conservation^f and again the question has to be asked whether the consultant (or the developer, or indeed the architect) has any experience or understanding of historic buildings. I know that these buildings are not statutorily listed, but that should not preclude the application of established conservation principles.

5. The first Sandberg report (2011) notes under 3.16 that lime mortars should be used with caution, as they are not covered by clear specifications and there are too few craftsmen with the knowledge to use them properly. I can't see any basis for these assertions. I have worked as a stonemason on listed buildings in London for 13 years^g and lime mortars (mainly hydraulic) have been specified on all of them. The note of caution about 'continental' limes (St.Astier, perhaps?) is justified, but there is a variety of British NHL 2 and 3.5 available to cater for any project. As for the craftsmen who know about lime mortars - they might not be working for Murphy Construction, but they exist and do so in healthy numbers.

In conclusion, the structural condition appraisal by Peter Dann Ltd (June 2013) does not display a great deal of knowledge about Georgian buildings or the London stockbrick. The proposed works, and the rationale for the proposed works, appear to stem more from a desire to facilitate a cost-effective property development with a heritage aspect for marketing purposes, than a 'conservation-led' rehabilitation of a Georgian terrace. It might well be that the years of neglect and

the current phases of demolition have de-stabilised the façades of the terrace beyond redemption. The proffered report in support of demolition does not, however, prove this point at all. It would be sad to think that a prominent part of Hackney history should fall to the bulldozers on such poor advice. I hope this letter provides some help in deciding this planning application in an informed manner.

A little note at the end, should the façade need to be demolished, would it not be better to strive for some modern high-quality design than a pastiche of the lost Georgian terrace?

Yours faithfully

Ulrike Wahl

^a Cruickshank, D. and Wyld, P., 1977. *London: the Art of Georgian Building*. London: The Architectural Press

Byrne, A., 1986. *London's Georgian Houses*. London: The Georgian Press.

^b For example: Yeomans, D., 1987. The Quality of London Bricks in the Early Eighteenth Century. *BBS Information*, 42, pp. 13 – 15.

^c For a brief introduction see: Cox, A., 1997. A Vital Component: Stock Bricks in Georgian London. *Construction History Vol. 13*, Construction History Society, pp. 57-66. [online] Available at <http://www.constructionhistory.co.uk/journal.php>

^d CPI Mortars Ltd, 2014. *Learning Text Part 5 Brick and Block Production*. [online] Available at: <http://www.euromix.com/download-library.asp>

^e Bonnell, D. and Butterworth, B., 1950. *Clay Building Bricks of the United Kingdom. Ministry of Works. National Brick Advisory Council. Paper Five*. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office.

^f As I am sure you are aware, two of best reference books on cleaning in this context are *Cleaning Historic Buildings Volume 1* by Ashurst and *Conservation of Brick* by Warren. It is worth noting that neither of them advocates sand-blasting.

^g For example: St. Luke's, Old Street; The British Museum; St. Pancras Station; St. Martin-in-the-Fields; Brixton Windmill