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Mr Simon Glass
c/o Garden Flat
23 King Henry's Road
London
NW3 3QP

ref 0505
6 February 2007

by post and email simon.glass@gv100.com

Dear Simon

Alterations and repairs to Ground Floor Flat, 23 King Henry's Road, London NW3

Following our telephone conversation this morning and our various emails, I have yesterday been to the flat and had a look at the interior and the surrounding area, particularly at the rear.

For easy reference, we have put some photographs on the web for you to look at together with this correspondence - see www.austinwinkley.co.uk/23khrhome.htm. We have also put plans as existing and the sketch scheme we did from some time ago up on the web, all in pdf format.

In respect of the project itself, we note from looking at the other properties in the terrace that the extensions generally do not extend far into the garden, ie no further than the extensions either side of your property. Given that the size of the existing extensions is quite small, we suspect that this is because the planners have not given permission for larger ones. We also note that the well-known all-glass extension a few doors down does extend further into the garden, but this is because of its transparent nature which we understand was driven by the need to satisfy the planners in this regard. It is interesting to note that the strategy of inconspicuousness in relation to this extension is actually quite successful in practice – the photo we have posted on the web is looking straight at the glass box and you cannot see it at all. (When I was there, I could just about make it out.)

This of course needs to be discussed with the planners, and I have a call out to them at the moment which they promise to return. Whether I will learn anything from a discussion with them I do not know – often submitting a sketch and photos is necessary. However, I have a feeling that extending the property to the extent shown on the sketch plan which you already have (and which I have posted on the web), as well as the proposal for the building at the end of the garden, may be controversial.

Because of this, it may be helpful for us to speak to some planning consultants on your behalf to work out a strategy in relation to the issue. Let us see how it goes.

Regarding your brief, I note from previous emails from you the following requirements (or, at least, hopes):

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2 bathrooms
 3 bedrooms
 expansion of living/dining room
 bigger/better kitchen

A study is viewed as an extra – not so essential.

As we have previously said, this sort of project will not in our view be possible within a £100,000 total budget (including professional fees and VAT). [That is not to say that some people would not be able to do it within that budget; if you project-managed it yourself using tradespeople and subcontractors paid cash with minimal professional input, then it might be possible. However, the end result would be in our professional view substandard and you would have to have invested a lot of your time in the project.] We suggest that in order to achieve the above (assuming it is possible in planning terms) you set yourselves currently a £200,000 budget and keep this under review.

Obviously, our concern (as with all the projects we deal with) is to deliver best value to you, not to work up to a budget or suggest things which are not good value. If it becomes apparent that spending £200,000 is unwise in the circumstances, we will advise thus. This is part of the reason why we now charge almost exclusively on a time-charge basis, since percentage fees always leave clients thinking that the architect may increase the cost of the project in order to increase their fees.

One of the reasons why the cost will be this high is because of works or refurbishment inside the flat. You have asked that as many of the existing fittings and the flooring be kept, if possible; our advice, however, is that it may well not be possible to keep fittings and achieve what you want to achieve. The cost of attempting to keep them in place may be more than the cost of replacement. The existing fittings, made of painted mdf, are not of particular quality, and whilst the flooring remains in reasonable condition (see comments below) it is likely that in moving walls and partitions around internally, much or all of it will effectively need to be replaced because patching it will be either impossible or more expensive than starting afresh.

As you know, I have always been concerned about the quality of the original conversion works, and in particular the quality of the drainage installation and the method they have used of “dry-lining” the existing brick walls with plasterboard – a method which sometimes is used to cover a multitude of sins beneath. Our suspicions in this regard were confirmed yesterday when we tested the walls around the living room door and around the front door with a moisture meter, which indicated very high levels of dampness in the walls – sufficient to cause dry rot infestation in some circumstances. [Please note that we DID NOT do a thorough survey of moisture in the flat – we just looked at the most obviously defective locations.] These high moisture readings suggest that the damp proof course is either defective or has been spanned to allow moisture to get past it.

We have posted some photographs of the damp locations on the web. In respect of the area around the front door, this could be linked to the gully outside the front door, which we noticed had two grills on both of which were blocked; and also in the gully itself there was a large quantity of gravel and standing water, which suggests that it might be blocked. Further

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investigation is needed here. We do not have any comments to make about the dampness around the living room door. More investigation is needed in both locations and elsewhere in the flat.

As a result of the above points, our recommendation is that during the course of the works, the plasterboard be removed from the internal walls to establish what is going on underneath and to allow works of repair to occur. Without doing this it will not be possible to remove the cause of the dampness, and in the long term there is a significant risk that serious damage will occur (eg dry rot infestation). On the plus side, if the plasterboard is removed the rooms might end up being larger than they currently are, depending on what the gap is underneath and what method of repair is used. Obviously, this is another reason why we think that £100,000 is not adequate as a budget and why we think that it is unlikely that existing fittings can be kept in place.

I had a discussion with the sales reps in John D Wood about sale costs in Primrose Hill. In your location, the sale value of a garden flat is £750-800/ft², ie (in our terms, since we work in metric) c £8000 - 8500/m². From what the agent said, it does not matter much what the interior quality of the flat is – he does not think that in terms of sale value, for instance, that it would be worthwhile spending say £50,000 on the interior of the flat as is currently stands because you would not get that amount back on it. You asked me about the condition of the flat: it did not look too bad yesterday, and if you were simply thinking of carrying on using it for the purposes of rental income then a quick repaint in white, some minor cosmetic repairs and a repolishing of the floor should be adequate, I would have thought. However, you should ask John D Wood further about this since they are the experts on what is necessary to maximise income on rental property. The only difficulty with such a strategy is that the damp issue is then not addressed, which leaves you open to the risk of more significant damage to the property in the future.

Unfortunately, I get the feeling that solving the damp issue would not be a cost which you could recover within the sale value (ie sale value as is + cost of repairing damp issue > sale value after repair). This is, I think, because of the culture of how properties are sold in this country – they retain their value even when there are defects such as the dampness.

On the plus side, it should be possible to extend the property somewhat within an outturn cost of £8,000/m² (including fees and VAT), even with quite an elaborate extension, which means that any extension is, as it were, self-financing.

I note that the current area of the flat appears to be around 63m², giving a sale value of c£500,000 at the lower of the per-square-metre costs indicated above. The sketch scheme already drawn up is c84m², ie sale cost of £714,000 at the higher of the per-sq-metre costs indicated above. I guess that this doesn't fit too badly with a budget of £200,000, but that is just my judgement – you may feel differently!

Coming back to what we said in paragraphs 2 and 3 at the beginning of this letter, we note that if the extension was made full width and the same depth as on the adjacent properties (ie c 3m deep), then the total floor area would be roughly the same as on the drawn scheme – ie 84m². On the drawn scheme, this breaks down roughly as follows:

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Living room 20m²
 Kitchen/dining (continuous with living room) 17.5m²
 Bedroom 1 16.6m² (including the indicated built-in storage)
 Ensuite to the same 2m²
 Bedroom 2 8m²
 Bedroom 3 6.2m²
 Bathroom 4.3m²
 Hall 4.3m²

Looking at these figures, the two smaller bedrooms are still a bit small – ideally they should be 10sq m for the larger one and say 8sq m for the small single one. In addition, the main bathroom is small, and the en suite is tiny. By re-jigging the plan, it may be possible to increase these room sizes by reducing the size of the kitchen, dining room, living room and/or bedroom1; or we can try for a slightly larger extension. There is not much scope for reducing the circulation space area. These comments relate not to much to the for use as a rented property and more to its possible use as a home for two parents and two children.

We should clarify that we do not recommend using the space under the front steps as a habitable room (including as a bathroom, a doubly difficult use for the space since you have damp attacking from both inside and outside in all directions), since such spaces are generally impossible to make water proof (unless you take them down completely and rebuild from scratch).

You have asked what our fees will be for the initial stages of the project. This is very difficult to be precise upon, partly because it depends on what you want us to do, how many services additional to the standard architect's services you ask us to get involved in, the balance between your requirements and those of the planners, and many other variables. What is easier to predict is that of the overall £200,000 budget, you will need to budget 20-25% of it for professional and other fees, a good proportion of which will relate to us, particularly if we are doing the cost control on the project (which we generally do). We would suggest that we bill you monthly for our services (unless little has been done) so that you can keep a close eye on things.

On a few other points:

- we can confirm that the flat still appears to be lived in. There are personal belongings there, and the heating was on
- the garden was in reasonable condition (see photos on web)
- we strongly recommend that you look at your lease as soon as possible and see what provisions there are for you to obtain landlord's consent for the works. We would also advise that the landlord be approached early on in the project to advise him of what you are hoping to achieve and obtain any comments he may have. We have had experience of severe delays being caused to projects because of this issue. You should also check that there are no other legal constraints on the project, such as any restrictive covenants on the property. Please send us any information on this topic, including if

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possible a copy of the lease or, failing that, the wording of any relevant clauses in the lease, so that we may take these issues into account when advising you

Simon – apologies for this long letter, but there are a lot of issues to summarise and run through. I hope this gives you enough information to begin with – of course, much depends on what the planners say, and we will come back to you when we have an indication of this.

Do email or call to discuss.

With best wishes to you, Simone and family.

Yours sincerely

Tim Gough
for Austin Winkley & Associates

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