

RE: Planning Application DC/17/103895 – 62 Sunderland Road, Forest Hill, SE23 2PY

Demolition of existing building and construction of a part two, part three storey building comprising 2 x 2 bedroom and 4 x 1 bedroom self-contained flats, together with associated landscaping and refuse and cycle storage at 62 Sunderland Road, SE23

I am writing on behalf of the Forest Hill Society to object to this planning application.

The Forest Hill Society is the local amenity society for the area covered by SE23 and have around 400 members. The society is keen to ensure that the area develops in a positive way that supports the economic, environmental and social well-being of the people that live and work in it. Generally we try to be positive about changes to the area and proposals for improvements, however in some cases it is necessary for us to raise concerns about proposals as part of the planning process.

There are a number of concerns we have with this application:

1. Historic Context

It has been suggested in the Design and Access statement that “*Adjacent mapping from 1906 and 1916 illustrate that the site was not developed until the end of 1916 whereas the row of notable Christmas Houses were constructed by 1906.*” We reject this interpretation.

It is our understanding that Christmas Houses are located across the entire block between Perry Vale and South Road. This includes all the pre-war houses on Gaynesford Road (on both sides of the road), houses on the even side of Sunderland Road from Perry Vale right up to South Road, as well as the houses on Perry Vale. Between 1906 and 1916 many houses were built by Ted Christmas on both sides of Gaynesford Road, including the listed Red House and the row of houses on Gaynesford Road, terminating at 62 Sunderland Road. The fact that this building appears in the 1916 maps at the same time as all the surrounding houses gives credence to the belief that this was built as part by Ted Christmas.



(Image from Design and Access Statement)

Wood carving around the door (a trade mark of Ted Christmas – who trained as a carpenter) and other external architectural features strongly suggest that this house was built between 1906 and 1916 rather than 1930s, as stated in the building condition survey.

While it is clear that windows and interiors have been altered substantially in this building, it still represents

a key location joining one row of Christmas houses to another in a prominent corner plot.

The Perry Vale area is not currently a conservation area and only the Red House has any form of listed status, however many other Christmas Houses in Forest Hill have been locally listed, many from a later period in Ted Christmas's work, this includes rows of houses on Round Hill and Thorpewood Avenue, these houses also form an important aspect of the Forest Hill conservation area.

A few years ago the council began a project to classify the area between Perry Vale and South Road as a new conservation area. Sadly, a lack of resources in the council planning department prevented this from progressing, but this should not take away from the importance of this area in terms of local historic architecture. Although 62 Sunderland Road is not one of the named Christmas Houses ('Ted Christmas', 'Laura', and 'Grace'), it remains an important part of this group of Christmas Houses.

We believe that consideration should be given to the long-term draft status of this conservation area and the intension behind this, and we would urge the council to pursue this conservation area status before we lose any other Christmas Houses. In the context of this application we believe it would be harmful to the conservation area if this house were to be demolished.

We would also refer to the case of 139 Sunderland Road, which is not a Christmas House, but is sited opposite some of the other Christmas Houses on Sunderland Road. Demolition of this house and conversion to flats was rejected both by the council and by the planning inspector. In Appeal Ref: APP/C5690/A/12/2186392 the inspector stated:

"The existing house [139 Sunderland Road] is at the end of a row of 4 detached villas built in the late 19th century by John Hodson. They are similar in appearance to the locally renown "Christmas" style houses. The front of the house appears to retain much of its original character and quality, as do two of the other 3 in the group.

The fourth house retains its original form and pattern of openings, but the original materials and detailing have been covered by stone cladding. I consider that the property is a heritage asset of some architectural and historic interest where there would be a policy presumption in favour of retention. This policy context is found in policies HSG4 & URB3 of the Lewisham Unitary Development Plan (2004) [the UDP] and in more recent provisions in the National Planning Policy Framework."

Unlike 139 Sunderland Road, we have already stated our case the 62 Sunderland Road was built by Ted Christmas. As such this building is an even greater heritage asset of architectural and historic interest where there would be a policy presumption in favour of retention. Even if further evidence were to be provided that cast doubt that 62 Sunderland Road is a Christmas House, there can be little disagreement that this building is very similar in appearance to the "Christmas" style houses (far more so than 139 Sunderland Road).

2. False Frontage

There is little doubt that the architects have provided an interesting proposal with an historic frontage matching houses on Gaynesford Road, and a more modern form on Sunderland Road. Previous drawings by the architect, viewed prior to the planning application being submitted, were even more interesting, but the ambition for the site has been scaled back. However, we have some concern regarding the false frontage on the Gaynesford Road side:

Our first concern is the confusion that may occur as people believe the front entrance is on Gaynesford Road. People delivering leaflets or just looking for house numbering to find their place on Gaynesford Road, may be confused by archways that look like front doors but are in fact bathroom windows, and bay windows that are actually back doors from two of the flats.

Our second concern is that the private amenity space for two of the flats is on this side of the property.

Effectively their private amenity space is facing onto the public highway, providing little privacy for residents.

Our third concern is that while this façade may fit with the Christmas Houses in Gaynesford Road (albeit not as Ted Christmas designed it to be), the continuation of Christmas Houses from Perry Vale to South Road is completely broken by the modern frontage to the proposed flats.

3. Internal Layout

We have some concerns about the internal layout of the units that we believe demonstrate a poor standard of design.

The suggested layout of the flats contains some problematic aspects these include:

1. Flat 1 and 3 appear to have very limited light to bedrooms where the only window faces the side of the adjacent property on Gaynesford Road
2. Flats 3 and 6 have a 70cm gap between the kitchen counter and the main access to the lounge and the rest of the flat, narrower than most doorways in the flats
3. Flats 4 and 5 have attic rooms which are accessed through a door perpendicular to the top of the stairs, making it difficult to move furniture.
4. Flats 2 and 5 show the dining tables with seating with little space between them and the hob/cooker, this would restrict sensible use of the kitchen and could easily be dangerous with young people around. Although this internal layout may be just one configuration, it is concerning that the shape of the flat lacks adequate space for better utilisation.

Although the room sizes appear to be generous - the usable space, the lack of light to bedrooms, and the difficult routes within the flats indicate the design of the building has not fully taken account of the needs of people living in these flats.

For the reasons stated above we hope that you will reject this planning application. We would also urge the council to continue in your appraisal of this area as a conservation area, including locally listing all the Christmas Houses on these roads.