

# Planning Guidelines and our Comments

July 2020 - Updated April 2023

NHENF's comments on planning applications will generally reflect the goals that emerged through consultations on our Neighbourhood Plan:

- To maintain the leafy/garden rich nature of our area, both at the fronts and the backs of our buildings.
- To maintain / restore the architectural heritage detail on the fronts of our buildings.
- To make the architecture at the backs of our buildings interesting, unimposing and environmentally friendly.

We can support thoughtful and sensitive expansion to our housing stock; we all want families to be able to stay in our area as they grow and understand that sometimes more space is required. We know that a modern healthy lifestyle might include sports equipment, and car-free travel might lead to bicycles requiring storage space. We also support improvements, because we understand that most of our houses are 170 +/- years old and might need renewal and restoration, and considering our current climate emergency, there are some changes that can make them more energy efficient.

Unfortunately, excessive or un-informed development can harm our buildings and our area and destroy some of those things that make it attractive and sustainable: historic architectural features, planted gardens, long views, sunlight and a habitat for birds and insects. So we have prepared the set of guidelines below to reflect our shared goals for the environment, healthy living and beautiful buildings. The drawings attached to these guidelines aren't meant to suggest designs, but instead, to stimulate your imagination and introduce limitations that will preserve the best qualities of our area. The aim is to allow development of our buildings - specifically our housing stock, in a way that won't cause harm. We'd like to know what you think.

## 1. Garden spaces

Our conservation area's beauty comes from its gardens as much as its buildings – both in the fronts of houses and in “green valleys” formed by the contiguous rear gardens behind our terraces. These planted garden spaces provide habitat and ecological stability, promote psychological well-being, reduce flooding risk and improve air quality. For this reason, we will object to applications for the complete paving over of front and/or rear gardens as this would not meet sustainable urban drainage goals nor contribute to the ecology, greening, clean air or beauty of our area. Where paving is absolutely necessary, when used over soil it should be permeable or of natural materials with planting in between. We do not support the use of our front gardens as car parks and would enthusiastically support their return to gardens.



We prefer that rear gardens be maintained at original garden levels which preserves the original garden walls and allows planting at that level to contribute positively to the views across the wider garden area. Where excavating is proposed to allow some continuous level from interior lower ground floor to garden area, we suggest that as large an area of original garden level as possible be retained. In particular, we can't support excavation around the perimeter because that would require the underpinning of garden walls and associated disruption to neighbours and would remove earth for planted screening where it might be needed. We also do not support raising rear garden levels that would require building up walls and screening in order to maintain neighbours' privacy. We request that gardens include planted areas at ground level as opposed to raised planter boxes. Plants in soil at ground level can dampen localised noise as well as assist with natural drainage.



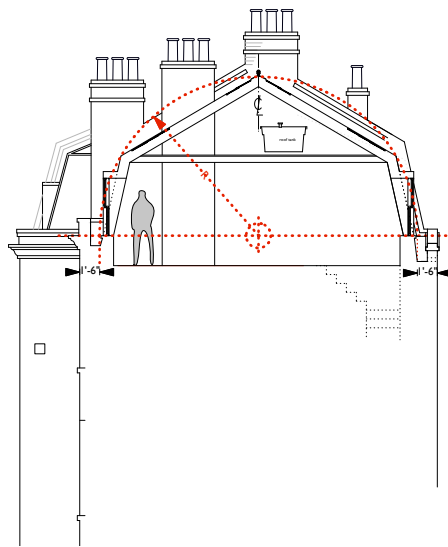
## 2. Facades and our streets

We encourage the reinstatement and repair of original architectural features on the facades of our buildings, and our planning committee is happy to advise on the proper historic details of these elements, or Westminster's conservation department can provide guidance.



### 3. Roof extensions / Mansards

Roof extensions provide useful living space. Irrespective of what is adjacent, we encourage and support light timber-framed traditional double pitched roof extensions on our typical 3-4 storey terraced houses. Flat roofed mansards generally require steel construction, imposing extra loading on buildings, don't have the extra space for proper insulation or passive cooling, and are prone to leaking. Traditional double pitched mansards that use timber construction are quicker to build and have the space for proper insulation, water tank or other equipment, and with the taller volume, can be cooler in the summer. We support integral solar panels on these, and would support mansard walls that contained roof gardens. Whatever the proposal, we will only support roof extensions that fit within the semi-circle indicated by the dotted red line in the diagrams below.



#### Set Out:

Semi circular arc centre in line with top of cornice height and centred between front and rear walls of house.  
Diameter of arc is depth of victorian house less 3', or Arc starts 1'6" back from outside of house.

i.e.  
 $2R = \text{depth of victorian house} - 3'$

Chimney tops elevated and restored

Butterfly parapet retained & restored

An all slate roof requires a sloping upper pitch, this is the long established historic mansard construction, sometimes called the true mansard

**Example:** the height from the centre of the arc to the ridge is divided in half. The knee is located on the intersection

**Example:** the semi circle is divided into five equal parts. The knee is located on the lower intersection

**Example:** barrel vault roof is confined to the semi-circular arc set out as directed under the mansards.

All these constructions can be engineered entirely in timber.  
Upper slope ideal for solar tiles.

Windows in total may protrude by up to 5% of radial volume, windows should attempt to set out on centre line of windows below, and stair skylights or lanterns similarly.

### 4. Basements and underground development

It is important for all of us to remember that we are only temporary custodians of our properties, and so we encourage applicants to consider how underground developments will impact their neighbours and our landscape into the future.

Westminster has extensive policies and conditions controlling basement development and it is not an easy or inexpensive process. Basement construction can also be difficult on neighbours. This is NOT something we can affect. However, we will object to proposals for basement developments that occupy entire gardens, front and/or rear because the loss of deep garden space can interfere with the planting of trees and can cause problems for drainage in perpetuity; further, we will generally resist any underground development that is more than 50% of garden area in the front and 30% in the back. In front gardens, this 50% of deep garden space, as measured from the boundary wall will protect amenity planting for our area while still allowing some below-ground expansion for utility spaces and access to lower levels. Westminster will require that underground development have a minimum of 1.2 – 1.5 meters of soil above to provide drainage and an area for plants, and apart from paving required for circulation and seating, we will suggest that the remaining garden space is planted.

We suggest that applicants for basement developments include evidence in the application that freehold neighbours have been consulted.

## 5. Rear Extensions on our typical 3-4 storey terraced houses:

Nearby areas have large communal gardens; our area is unique for its contiguous front and rear gardens. We'd like to maintain and enhance these 'green valleys' between our houses, and at the back, encourage innovative and interesting architecture. Because current conservation policy generally requires that primary rear extensions match the material and fenestration of the host building, tall rectangular brick boxes with sash windows are proliferating behind our houses to the detriment of the spaces in between. We think that there are better solutions. We've laid out a set of design principles and a framework for extensions that we'd like to support in planning applications, and have illustrated some new concepts. We'd like to hear your views.



*Tall brick rear extensions in the "closet wing" location leave dark spaces between, create uninteresting views for neighbours and compromise the main rooms of the house. These effects are made worse by the paving over of rear gardens, amplifying sound and creating a landscape devoid of natural features.*

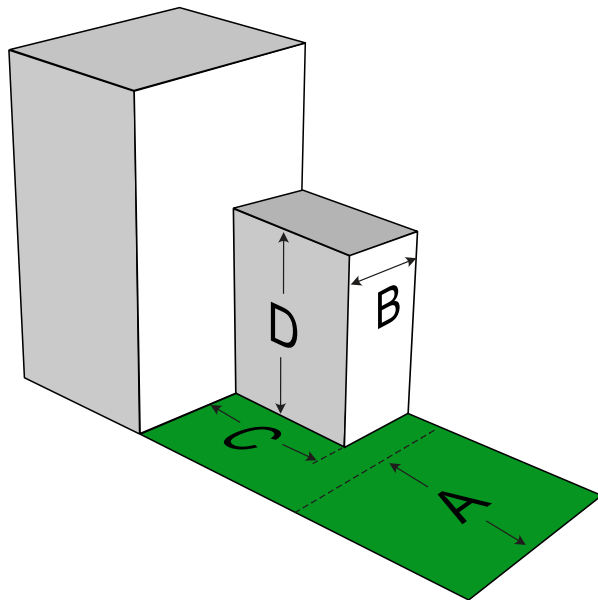
*Within certain limits, extensions can be designed to satisfy the needs of the owners and give us a play of heights and shapes. Provided they are built of high quality materials, these can provide a reflection of life in the 21st century and architecture worth conserving for the next generation.*



LEVEL OF GARDEN

Principle A - Where rear extensions in the typical “closet wing” location are proposed behind those of our houses that have smaller gardens, we will object to any extensions at ground level that leave less than a square of garden (length is equal to width of property) remaining. Anything less than at least a square will bring buildings into uncomfortable proximity to one another. Where there are longer gardens behind some Hereford Road, St. Stephen’s Gardens, Talbot Road, Courtnell Street and Westbourne Grove properties, we will suggest that at least a square and a half of garden remains.

Principle B - Provided the minimum garden remains, we will support rear “closet wing” extensions provided their **width** is generally two bricks (1'-6"/45 cm) less than half the width of the building, which leaves space for the down pipe and fixings. See *diagrams below*.



### Multi Storey Back Extension

**Principle A** relates to garden depth

**Principle B** relates to extension width

**Principle C** relates to extension depth

**Principle D** relates to extension height

Principle C - The maximum **projection** (above a single storey) we will support can be equal to, but preferably less than the width of the remaining main rear wall of the host building/house. (On a 5 meter wide house this remaining rear wall would be 2.5 m. plus space for down pipe, so extension would be limited to 2.95m.) This limit preserves the quality of the garden spaces between these extensions.

Principle D - We suggest that the **heights** of any extension with this projection is limited to 3 storeys and that the top storey be lighter and more skeletal structures, constructed of lightweight or more transparent materials, e.g. timber and glass/ set back, possibly with sloping roofs to further lessen their dominance. We suggest that the use of masonry is limited on this top floor. Using lighter weight materials shortens construction times, which limits the impacts on our environment, gardens and neighbours by requiring fewer skips and parking suspensions, creating less site noise, etc. Above this third storey, we would support a roof terrace, or a shallow extension / oriel window, if the **projection** is limited even more - maximum .8 metres.

These **length, height and width** restrictions and the use of lightweight materials, especially at higher levels, aim to prevent the dark tunnelling effect between extensions and the columns of overly dominant brick towers that are covering our gardens spaces and starting to accumulate along the backs of our buildings. These limits also confer advantages to the occupant from an interior perspective; the shallower a building is, the more natural light there will be inside, and the better the connection with the garden.

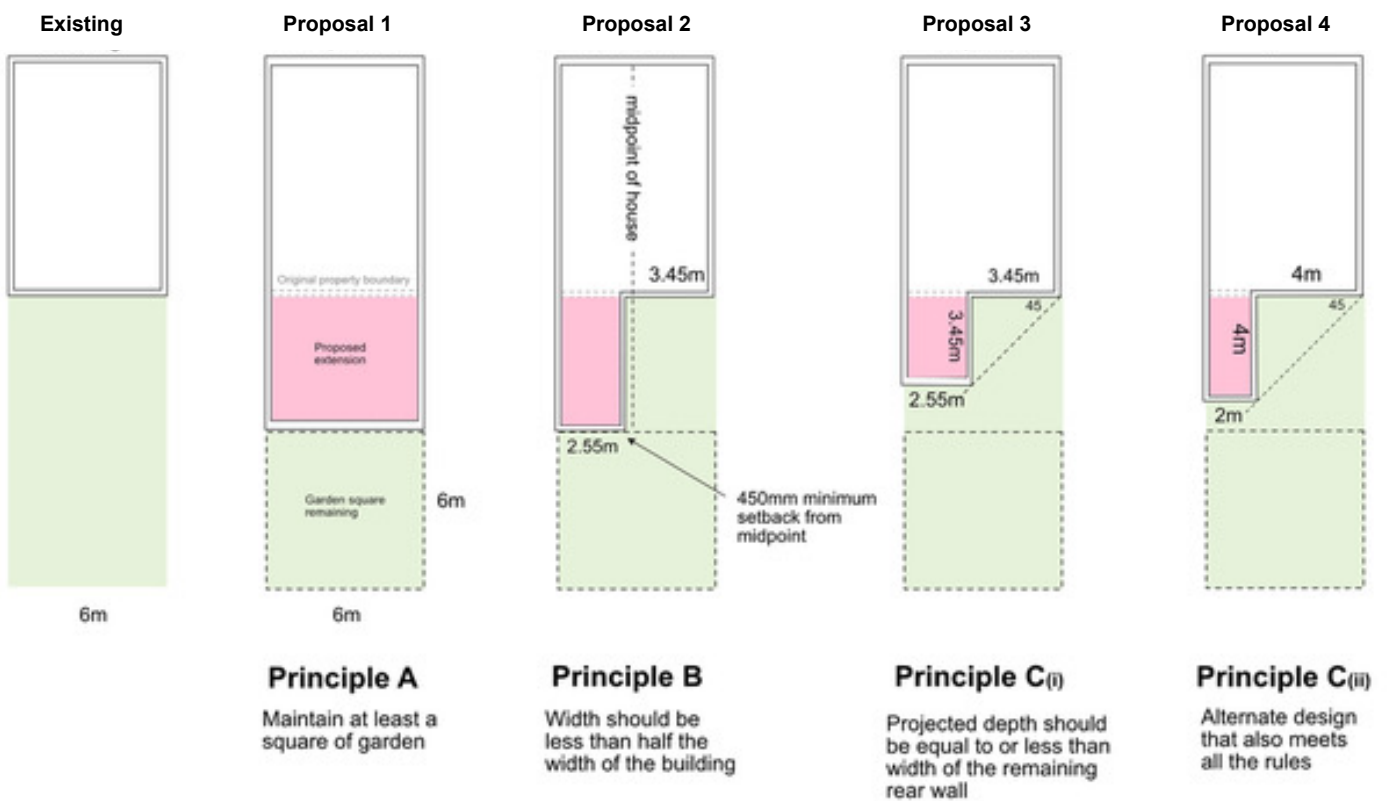
From an energy standpoint, while the terraced house typically exposes just two walls - the back and front, and the roof, outward rear extensions that extend into the private gardens behind have long exposed flank elevations and typically large flat roofs which present a major challenge in energy efficiency. This is

another reason why we encourage smaller, shallower extensions that reduce the surface area of the walls, and new designs, methods and materials that will allow quicker construction and aim towards carbon neutrality.

We will support extensions of good design; the variety of eclectic styles and periods currently represented have added to the charm of our area.

In the exceptionally long gardens behind a few of our terraces and where garden shapes are irregular, proposals for longer or more unconventional single storey extensions could be considered.

Principles illustrated below:



Example of principle A, B and C applied to a rear extension proposal above. All three must be satisfied for us to support an application.

Principles A, B and C in relation to extension depth and width:

Principle A shows the proposed extension depth relative to garden retention, principle B shows the extension width based on house proportions, and principle C shows extension depth based on house proportions. All three principles are applied when evaluating the suitability of a **multi-storey** proposal. In this example proposal 1 would not be supported, as it fails to satisfy principles B & C. Proposal 2 would not be supported, as it fails to satisfy principle C. Proposals 3 & 4 are both acceptable.

Extension height:

The maximum height of all rear extensions should normally not exceed 3 storeys, but principles B & C only apply to extensions greater than 1 storey. This means a full-width **single storey** extension can be supported, provided principle A is maintained, so diagram 1 would be supported if the extension is single storey only.

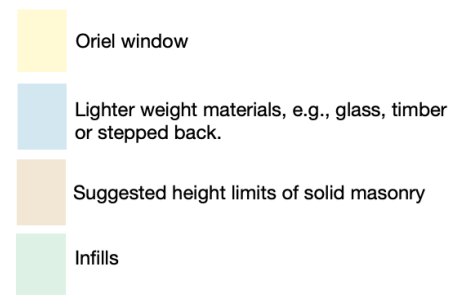


Houses that start at ground level

Houses that start at lower ground level

Larger 5, 6 and 7 storey houses with deep back gardens

Shown above are top storeys of rear extensions with reduced mass, e.g. stepping back, constructed of lighter more skeletal materials like timber and glass, and/or having a sloping or pitched roof. Any masonry extended upwards on this level should only be a small proportion of the overall enclosure. If flat, the roof should be a green roof, or a roof terrace could be supported provided it meets the conditions elaborated on in our Neighbourhood Plan draft. Oriel window shown at right, providing useful extra space for upper level flats.



Principle E - Infill extensions between the more solid rear “closet wing” extensions will be supported up to one storey in height where properties start at ground level. Up to two storeys in height can normally be supported where properties start at lower ground level. Generally, these should be primarily transparent (glazed) facing the garden and set back from the more dominant solid extension. This setback should also preserve the square of garden at a minimum, even if an existing rear extension already projects into this square.

We will support infills that are part of a continuous projection at the lower ground floor (not set back) **provided the minimum garden sizes specified above remain**, and when the fenestration and materials are consistent across the elevation, e.g. a steel and glass door system or matching pairs of French doors. Similarly, should someone wish to have only a single storey extension across the entire width of their house, these will be supported, again provided the minimum garden sizes remain. (See illustration on following page.) Any additions above these single storey extensions at a later date can only be supported if they are within the width, projection and height limits outlined above.

End of terraces will be considered separately because of their impact on rear gardens and windows that are perpendicular.

We suggest that neighbours discuss trellising and plantings if privacy is a concern, and we encourage an increase in planting in general to offset any increase in noise resulting from the additional hard surfaces.

Any steps from upper infills or upper ground floors to garden level should be offset from garden walls and/or screened with plantings to restrict views down into neighbours’ gardens.



*Continuous projections with uniform fenestration at lower ground or ground floors can be supported, provided minimum garden spaces remain.*

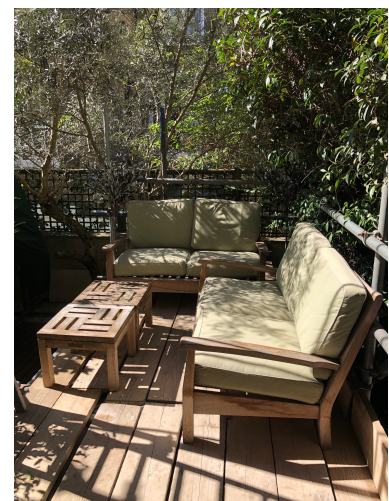
Principle F - We will support planted flat roofs (helpful in insulating and working towards carbon capture) and greened and screened roof terraces and upper level balconies and belvederes, especially in housing units with no outdoor space. If the 2020 pandemic showed us anything, it is that **all** residents should have access to some outdoor space. Historically, roof terraces and upper level conservatories existed across London, creating gardens in the sky, providing green roofs rather than grey ones to look down on. Generally, the infrequent users of roof terraces are seated, and low-level trellising and plantings can provide adequate privacy for the surrounding areas. Planting trees and climbers can provide additional privacy for those with concerns at ground level, (*see below right*) so we encourage tree planting in our rear gardens, provided it is of a species and size that won't cause nuisance to neighbours or damage to their buildings in the future. Tree planting should always be discussed with neighbours.



*Sedum roof at left - bare roofs at right.*



*Some exiting roof terraces.*



*Planting for privacy*



## 6. Environmental Pollution - lighting and cooling

Where roof lights, roof lanterns or glass roofs are proposed, we request that interior lighting be in a downward direction to avoid light pollution affecting adjoining neighbours. In general, where there is an increase in glass, we request that lighting be designed sensitively.

Light through frosted or laminated obscure glass in windows can create an uncomfortable glare towards adjacent properties in the evenings. If proposing frosted glass, again, we request that interior lighting is chosen carefully.

We are in favour of environmentally positive solutions to heating and cooling and generally prefer passive cooling over mechanical air conditioning.



*Bright interior lighting through translucent materials can create strong glare.*

## 7. Listed Buildings

As described on Historic England's website, a building might be listed because it has cultural, evidential, historical, aesthetic, social or communal value. Making changes to these buildings can diminish this value, so Westminster will normally evaluate proposals based on whether they are contributing new value. This could come from the restoration and reinstatement of original or missing elements - contributing historic value, or the introduction of something of outstanding design and architectural merit - contributing aesthetic value.

Planning policy on listed buildings accepts that buildings must evolve and adapt to modern use and acknowledges the importance of private investment in historic heritage, but due to the recognised importance of listed buildings, any adaptations should be adding a new layer of value for future generations. Usually, light, meaning either minimal or transparent interventions can be supported, as can those related to energy efficiency, provided they meet certain design criteria.

On any proposals for the removal of historical material, Westminster will normally require documentation of this material in measured drawings and photographs. The principle behind this is to create a record so these changes can be reversed in the future should someone wish to restore the building to its original state.

We have a number of listed buildings in our area: 13 houses on Sutherland Place, the white terraces on both sides of Hereford Road, the two pairs of houses opposite one another on Needham Road, and the terraces on both sides of Chepstow Road between Westbourne Grove and Talbot Road. Because proposals for listed buildings are carefully reviewed by Westminster's listed building officers and in some cases

Historic England, NHENF's comments will generally focus on exterior elements that affect the amenity of our area and neighbours, or ones that rely on local knowledge (like ironwork details). In time, NHENF hopes to include street-by-street design guides on our website, prepared with oversight from WCC's conservation officers, and including photographs of the original historic details on our buildings, both listed and unlisted.

If you are the owner of a listed building or considering buying one, we recommend reviewing this section from Historic England's website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/making-changes-your-property/>. In addition, there are two links on our website to these PDF guides:

City of Westminster - *Repairs and Alterations to Listed Buildings*  
Historic England - *A Guide for Owners of Listed Buildings*

Because failure to get the proper consent to make any changes to listed buildings, interior or exterior, is a criminal offence, it is always important to seek advice beforehand. Getting professional guidance from an architect or planning consultant is helpful, or Westminster's conservation department can be contacted. Failure to take heed of the strict requirements of listed building alteration can be catastrophic, financially and emotionally, and can take a long time to remedy, so we can't overstate the importance of caution when thinking about making changes to a listed building.

**FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON ALL OF  
THE ABOVE, PLEASE REFER TO OUR  
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN DRAFT ON OUR  
WEBSITE.**

## Appendix

Key to our illustration of Backs principles:



*Key to illustrations above. These houses start at lower ground level. (see numbers above mansard roofs)*

- 1. Shows three storey rear extension with sloping roof, no infill.*
- 2. Shows rear roof terrace, an upper level shallow extension, and no extensions at ground level, maximising garden space.*
- 3. Shows two storey rear extension with roof terrace/garden, and single storey infill with roof light.*
- 4. Shows three storey rear extension with vaulted ceiling and single storey infill with green roof.*
- 5. Shows three storey rear extension with sloping roof and single storey infill with roof terrace.*
- 6. Shows three storey rear extension with green roof and two storey infill with planted roof.*
- 7. Shows two storey masonry rear extension and no infill.*