

graham mitchell architects

Troupsmill Farm
Drumblade
Huntly
Aberdeenshire
AB54 6EU

t: 07711 503 165
w: gma-aberdeen.co.uk

Design & Planning Statement

11 Victoria Street

Aberdeen
AB10 1XB

Job number 2203

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Revised a: 18.06.24 Postscript added

Description of Existing Building

11 Victoria Street is an historic domestic property which has previously been converted into office space and extended to the rear to increase the commercial footprint. As is typical with such conversions, rooms have been sub-divided and new openings created in the historic envelope, ceilings lowered, and commercial lighting and wiring installed to suit the demands of office use. However, suspended ceilings are mostly absent, enabling the extent and style of original cornicing to be assessed.

The description of the existing building below is photographic in nature, as this is in this instance thought to be the simplest way to convey the nature and extent of the existing architectural features and their condition. Proposed changes to the exterior of the building forming part of the current applications are minimal, therefore the description is focussed on the interiors.

This is accompanied by a detailed written description of the proposals and (shown in blue text) the most recent proposed changes, where they differ from the consented scheme.

Recent Planning History

- Property originally constructed as a private dwelling house in the nineteenth century.
- Used as a commercial office from 1974 until 2019, with additional 2 storey office accommodation being added to rear of house in the 1987.
- In 2022 planning and listed building consent applications were lodged for change of use from office to form 2 residential dwellings. Applications reference; 220517/DPP & 220882/LBC. The application for Listed Building Consent was conditionally approved on 12.12.22. The planning application was refused on 18.04.23. Whilst the principal of the proposed change of use was deemed to be acceptable for the area, justification of the refusal was due to 'lack of amenity.' For the house fronting to Victoria Street this was stated as being due to a perceived lack of external amenity space, and for the rear house due to it being single aspect, lacking in sunlight, and having no street frontage.
- An appeal against this refusal was lodged and duly considered by the Local Review Body of Aberdeen City Council. Following consideration by panel members, the original decision was overturned by a unanimous 6-0 vote to approve on 03.07.23.
- Following a change of ownership of the property and a reconsideration of the priorities for each of the houses, some plan layout changes to the proposals are now proposed. A Section 64 (non-material-variation) for these was sought, with drawings being lodged on 07.11.23. These were considered by the appointed planning officer, and advice that the changes were considered 'material' was provided on 21.11.23. It was also noted at this time that there is no provision for 'variation' of a Listed Building Consent.
- Accordingly, new planning and listed building consent applications are now being lodged for the current revised proposals.

Proposals

It is proposed to return 11 Victoria Street from office use to its original function as residential accommodation with two dwellings being created. One three bedroom house in the original stone built front part of the building, and a second smaller one bedroom house within a twentieth century two story rear extension.

Front House

The front 2 ½ story part of the house is largely in its original condition both externally and internally. Recent historical changes are limited to a large ground floor slapping linking the front part of the building to a later twentieth century rear extension, and also at ground floor, a timber stud and plasterboard partition which subdivides the former drawing room fronting to Victoria Street.

Because the proposed use is compatible with the building type, only the most minor of changes would be required to the building fabric to facilitate the conversion.

These are summarised as follows:

Build up slappings at ground and first floors between front and rear parts of building

It is proposed to build up the twentieth century slappings linking the front part of the existing building to the later rear extension, since to facilitate the current proposals these openings are not required. Following conversion they would not be visible either internally or externally, and for the purposes of providing fire and acoustic separation, they would be constructed in blockwork and finished in timber stud framing, sheeted with plasterboard on both sides.

Remove lowered ceiling at ground floor rear room

This ceiling to this area is a late addition and is formed in plasterboard. It is proposed that this be taken down, with the existing plaster ceiling and cornice remaining at a higher level. The upper areas would be repaired where necessary, and would form ceilings to the new kitchen and shower room. Where required, new cornices would be run in profile to match the existing, providing complete margins to the ceiling areas in both rooms.

Replace existing 2nd floor timber casement window (at rear elevation)

The existing window at this location is in poor condition and is of little merit. It is proposed to remove it and replace it with a better quality timber casement window of design as shown on the drawings.

Services removal and replacement

The proposed conversion would precipitate a requirement to remove the existing electrical installations and re-wire the building to a standard suitable for domestic use. Also, drainage serving the existing toilets would be cut back and extended to the locations of the new kitchen and sanitary accommodation. Although this would lead to some modifications being required to the existing building structure, these are minor in nature and any existing finishes, including for example; flooring, plasterwork and decorative timber which are disrupted would be re-instated on completion.

Front House Amenity

The front part of the building naturally lends itself to re-instatement as a quality city centre private dwelling house.

It features a somewhat austere but not unattractive street elevation, imbued with quality through its use of simple materials, carefully wrought detailing and well understood proportions.

Windows are generous and internally individual rooms, and the house as a whole, experience good levels of daylight, ventilation, connection with the street, and views out.

Part of the proposal includes improving the front garden area which currently is laid out with granite stone chips and concrete paving slabs. Absent cast iron railings including an entrance gate would be re-instated, granite chips 'refreshed', and concrete slabs cleaned. The front door ironmongery would be replaced and the door itself re-painted gloss black. Granite stonework and existing windows are in good condition and would be retained. Existing rainwater gutters would be repainted black to match the new railings.

To animate the frontage and to emphasize the use of the building as residential, it is proposed to plant a single flowering cherry tree (*Prunus sp.*) centrally in the front garden. Although this garden is modest in size - extending to some 26m², it is suggested that it would significantly contribute to the amenity provided by the house as a whole.

To the rear it is proposed to divide the existing garden area between the two properties with the front house being provided with a car parking space (complete with EV charging facility), a drying green and small sitting out area of approximately 30m². Access to the rear garden and parking area would be via Victoria Street/Thistle Place and the existing private access lane. Privacy to this area would be enhanced by re-instatement of the existing south side garden wall, finished in wet dash rendered blockwork with a red brick cope to match the existing wall opposite.

The key change from the approved planning and listed building consents for this property is to remove internal access from the front house to the rear garden/parking area. Whilst it is accepted that occupants of this house would have to walk round the block to access the rear garden this is not without precedent in cities, and it's not very far - some 70m in total distance from front door to garden.

It is anticipated that the front garden would be used for sitting out in since it faces west and catches the afternoon and evening sun, and the rear garden for car parking and charging - it faces east. The front garden faces offices across Victoria Street, and the property is also neighboured on both sides by offices. Therefore, in evenings and at weekends and contrary to intuition, the front garden in addition to being sunny and having a good aspect, offers greater privacy than might be expected from its city centre location.

Rear House

The rear 2 story part of the building extending part way into the former rear garden is of late twentieth century construction and although different from the existing to the front, is imbued with its own more 'mews like' quality, and is nested privately within its dense urban setting.

In common with the front house its scale, both as whole and of openings within external walls is domestic in nature. It is also well suited to residential use, whilst being of a different character from the front house. The former being larger, urban and formal (internal area 144m²), and the latter smaller (internal area 74m²), less formal and less imposing.

It is envisaged that potential users of the front house would be individuals who may live and work in the city, possibly but not necessarily from home, and perhaps with a small but expanding family.

Victoria Street is in part residential and amply demonstrates just how fine city living can be, and the front house seeks to become part of that continuum. The house provides all the amenity that would be expected of a home in this location, and is well connected to shops, bars, schools, transport networks and local parks.

The rear house may well appeal to a similar demographic, but perhaps at an earlier or later stage of life or career. This house is smaller - an open plan kitchen/living space linked to patio and garden, a '1+1' bedroom with home-work area would suit individuals/couples, and perhaps those embarking on family life.

To make the most of the amenity offered by the site, living space is offered indoors and outdoors at ground floor level with sleeping, dressing, and work space above.

In common with the front house, few modifications to the fabric of the existing building would be required to adapt this part of the building to its new use. External form would be retained unaltered, with the only changes being the lowering of both ground and first floor window openings. In the former case, to provide better connection with and direct access to the garden. And in the latter, to enhance both the visual and perceived connection with the outdoor city space at first floor level.

To ensure that the first floor is light and bright, it is proposed to introduce four large roof windows in the existing slated pitched roof, shafted to ceiling level. One each over the first floor stair landing and internal shower room, and one in each side of the bedroom and dressing/work areas.

It has been noted that this property faces directly on to a granite gable across its garden and rear access lane - at a distance of some 16-17m. Reference to the attached photographs indicates that at this distance, the gable occupies a small proportion of the visibility splay of an observer from within the house, approximately 18% following analysis by drawing and measurement. Looking at this the other way round 82% of the view from the windows is not obscured by the gable. And this 82% is a fairly animated and interesting part of the city centre, including the fine stained glass window screen of the sanctuary at the rear of the Alford Place Church, and oblique views across the leafy rear gardens of properties fronting to Thistle Street and at Thistle Lane.

This is anything but a drab back-land, on the contrary it is a dense historic cityscape at its best.

Light quality of the first floor bedroom and work space would by virtue of the generous floor to door head height windows, exceed that of the front house - and more generally the majority of dwelling houses. The ground floor living space by contrast, would be more secluded but is linked to a private garden by French doors for morning coffee and papers, and evenings spent in the secluded light provided the surrounding townscape. Privacy is maintained by the proposed new garden wall to the south and ornamental tree planting and a timber fence to the rear.

More generally, the sections and plans of the building with the photographic images of the site which are submitted as part of this application, seek to convey the special sense of place which this proposal would create.

No car parking is proposed with the rear house, reflecting its modest size, location, and the excellent transport links, parkland and civic amenities which are all within easy walking/cycling distance. The omission of parking enables garden ground for the rear property to be maximised, with a 6.5 x 6.2m space being created giving some 40m² of useable area.

The key change from the approved planning and listed building consents for this property, is the removal of the internal access corridor linking the front house to the rear garden/parking area. In the earlier planning refusal, it was noted that this house in particular suffered from poor amenity. By removing the access corridor, a significant additional amount of floor area is provided, which is felt would proportionally provide a greater enhancement to its amenity than is lost by removing the access from the front house to the rear car parking and garden areas. This would enable the rear house to have a private rear garden across the whole width of its frontage, private (as opposed to shared) main front door access, and an approximately 25% increase in its ground floor area.

With internal re-planning this provides the opportunity for a spacious open plan kitchen/dining/living space on the ground floor, and a light filled first floor with bedroom/dressing and potential home work area. To this end and 4 number large Velux roof windows would be provided. A glazed principal entrance door is also now proposed along with a glazed internal vestibule which would both enhance the light and spatial quality of the ground floor open plan space. And also as previously, this space would be linked to a private garden by new French doors.

Also, and not unimportantly, by placing the principal living spaces to this house on the ground floor, improved barrier free access for all potential building users is more readily provided.

Summary

As previously two houses are therefore created, different in nature but both unique and contributing to the special dense and historic urban character of this part of the city.

Both are afforded with quality internal and external spaces, privacy, ready access to facilities, excellent daylight and ventilation, and ample and differing views of the surrounding historic cityscape.

It is felt by the applicants that these revised proposals address the negative comments made regarding the shortfall of amenity afforded by the previous approved scheme, and in sum provide a significantly enhanced amenity for the development, when considered as a whole.

Postscript - at 18th July 2024

Due to the protracted timescale unfolding for the current planning application, a decision was taken to request that it be considered by The Local Review Panel. The applicant has in addition to the changes between the previously approved proposals and those which are currently proposed - which are noted in blue above, asked that the following key matters be emphasised:

- By separating access to each house, both would benefit through increased privacy and amenity. Each access only would serve the house it relates to. By removing a shared corridor, acoustic separation would be enhanced, and the rear house would not have those accessing the front house from the rear garden, pass immediately adjacent to sleeping accommodation.
- The current proposal inverts the sleeping and living accommodation at the rear house to the more traditional arrangement – ie living at GF and sleeping at FF. This has the benefit of giving a better link between the main living space and the garden. Light quality at the GF would be enhanced by a glazed entrance door, glazed internal vestibule, and a wider and better internal space resulting from the omission of the shared access corridor.
- Access to the car parking/charging, cycle storage and outdoor amenity space at the rear for the front house would be external, i.e. by walking 70m round the block. As opposed to internally via a shared corridor. This is not without precedent in cities, and indeed is far from unusual. And it is more than offset by the greater privacy afforded to both houses. Pedestrian access to and security at these areas is to be enhanced by provision of additional lighting within the confines of the application site adjacent to the path.

After careful consideration by the new owner and the design team, it is felt that the current proposal improves on the previously consented scheme.

It is for this reason alone that planning permission is being sought.



Photographic Study

Ground Floor

Entrance lobby to Victoria Street showing original tiling and panel door. To be retained.



Ground floor window to Victoria Street; existing sliding sash casement window with timber panelled ingoes – original shutters – and moulded architrave and skirting. All to be retained.



Ground floor linen press, with additional boxing in and face-plates. Additions to be removed and made good. Generous skirtings and picture rail to be maintained.



Ground floor skirtings, cornice, picture rail and timber panelling all to be retained



Later partition walls and lowered ceiling to the ground floor internal room to be removed, thus reinstating the form of the original drawing room. It is expected that the original ceiling and plaster cornice will be present and in a good or repairable state. If not then those to the front of the property will be used as templates for the recreation and reinstatement of the same.



Stairwell ground to first floor; dado rails, handrail and balusters to be maintained, carpet and commercial style nosing's to be removed. Stair to be either stripped back to bare timber, or re-carpeted in a more appropriate domestic style – risers and goings to be inspected for evidence of historic anchoring – carpet rods etcetera.



First Floor

Original skirtings, timber panelling, shutters and plaster cornice all to be retained. Office light fittings and overlay timber floor to be removed.



Existing doors to be retained with where required glazed panels being replaced in solid timber



Second Floor

Rear dormer form to be retained externally and internally, with window replaced with high quality casement window, detailed to match those at front of house.



Note: typically less ornament at second floor. Timber dado and skirting board to be retained as currently

Rear House Roof

Unightly vents and flue to be removed to make way for new roof windows to provide light and ventilation to stairwell and shower room





Rear Aspect (SE)

Stone gable opposite on left (note windows are to bathrooms), with Alford Place Church Sanctuary in foreground, and cityscape in rear ground including the Silver Fin building



Rear Aspect (NE)

Existing stone garden wall with brick cope in foreground and rear gardens to Thistle Street properties in rear-ground. A pleasant and remarkably private locale