

45 HOLLOWAY ROAD



23/4/2017

Discussion paper: The problems associated with the entrance plinth and adjacent area

This review of the condition of entrance plinth and adjacent hard landscaping aims to define the problems and begin to explore options for a solution

45 Holloway Road

DISCUSSION PAPER: THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ENTRANCE PLINTH AND ADJACENT AREA

Why the Board is acting now

The condition of the entrance area to the Pad is of concern to residents and lessees. Specifically, the signage “plinth” has become the focus of anti-social behaviour.

In September 2016 the Board discussed the issue and proposed a solution – the demolition of the plinth. However, following feedback from lessees the work was not carried out.

The problems surrounding the entrance area remain. Nevertheless, the process begun by the Board last year has led to a strengthening of the Board (four new directors have been appointed to join the existing three) and the creation of a website to help with the communication of issues affecting lessees.

On 30th March 2017 the Board agreed to begin a new process of discussion and, subject to the proposals and comments, decide upon and implement a solution as soon as practically possible.

The problem and its solutions

While the plinth is the focus of the antisocial behaviour the problem has wider dimensions.

A successful outcome would:

- Tackle the antisocial behaviour currently encouraged and shielded by the plinth
- Look to discourage loitering and littering in the area
- Help create definition for the entrance to the Pad and demarcation for the public area, the entrance to Court Gardens and the area belonging to the magistrates

The current state of the plinth and entrance area

The plinth was intended to provide visual indication of and definition to the entrance to the residential block (given that the perhaps more obvious place for an entrance was compromised by the need to accommodate the building’s retail partner).

The plinth carries the building number and the garden behind it separates the entrance to the Pad from the path leading to the Court Gardens.

The plinth has suffered damage over the years. It is chipped on the corners facing the motorbike parking, perhaps from collisions with motorbikes (which park next to it on the magistrates' side.)



- The flat top of the plinth creates a tendency for it to be used as a shelf for litter.
- The height of the plinth lends it to being used as a screening device and encourages its use as a lavatory.
- The garden area immediately behind the plinth is now denuded of plants, has lost most of its slate chippings and attracts rubbish.
- As well as the unsavoury nature of what happens behind the plinth, the area has become potentially dangerous. Residents and others have been confronted by people concealed by the plinth, and syringes have been found among the debris.
- The plants directly behind the plinth have died. Previous attempts to plant low shrubs against the plinth to deter people urinating weren't successful.
- The area is smelly and possibly a health hazard – especially to children.



Rubbish is regularly found behind the plinth

Surrounding Area

The garden area is neglected. The plants further back from the plinth are poorly maintained and unremarkable – unfortunately they don't provide complete ground cover.

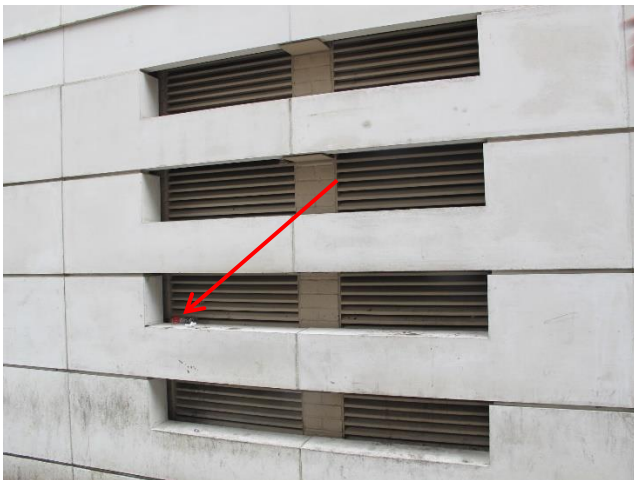
Parts of this area are now barren and the area at the back is also prone to being littered.

The paving is in places uneven and broken up.

The whole area, both the part closest to the Pad and the area shared with the Magistrates Court and the Court Gardens entrance, is tatty and uncared for. Officially or not, it has become a parking place for motorcycles. It has also become a smoking and congregational area. Aspects of the design of the facade of the Pad may exacerbate this problem – the ventilation inlets are used as shelves for drinks and litter.



Tesco trolleys are stored and smokers congregate in the entrance area



Deep shelves of the façade directly to the ventilated inlets often become a littering spot, paving is broken up and uneven

Options for resolving the problems

This section looks at some ideas for resolving the problem. It considers possibilities based on repair and renewal of the existing structures and options for a more radical change.

These are starting points for discussion. For a solution to be implemented, options would have to be worked up in to fuller, costed plans. In deciding, the Board would need to factor:

- Cost of the proposal (both in preparation and implementation)
- Planning – some options may require planning consultation or consent. (Generally, local authorities are now keen to see suggestions to address anti-social behavior and the local police community team have already been positive about the fact that we want to take action on this)
- Timing – the Board is likely to want to implement a change without undue delay

SCENARIO 1: Repair, restoration of existing plinth and zealous ongoing maintenance

The concierge is tasked to do clean the area daily but it is proving challenging because of the nature of the fouling and as the area extends to the adjacent court building and court garden entrances.

In other contexts, programmes of regular and zealous maintenance have helped discourage anti-social behaviour, such as repeated graffiti attacks and petty vandalism. The plinth could be repaired, the garden replanted and the slate chippings re-laid, and a programme of maintenance put into effect.

To achieve this either the concierge would have to devote more time to maintenance, or a contractor would have to be employed to help with cleaning and planting.

Pros

- Does not require any remodelling of plinth
- Would quickly improve the look and feel of the area
- Doesn't preclude taking a different approach in the future

Cons

- Requires determined, constant action
- Relatively high ongoing maintenance costs as well as initial outlay
- Existing problem of plinth being used as screening is not eradicated
- Past efforts at replanting proved ineffective

SCENARIO 2: Demolish the plinth, replant and add new signage

Removing the plinth entirely would immediately take away the focus for the problem. The garden area could then be tidied up and replanted (at the front, in place of the plinth, with dense, low-lying plants). Options of planting need to be considered with care; with the plinth removed, the trees currently behind it may become the next target for anti-social activity.

New signage could be added to the side of the building, either as a standalone post, fixed to the façade front on or to the side for easier identification from the main road. (See **addendum one** below for examples of building signage.)

Pros

- Relatively cheap
- Does not require major remodelling
- Could quickly improve the look and feel of the area
- Unlikely to require planning permission (the simplest option would not)

Cons

- Might not solve the problem completely - if trees or bushes remain the area might still be the focus for anti-social behaviour
- Requires consideration of landscaping and signage once the plinth is removed
- Some on-going maintenance costs
- Care would need to be taken to ensure planting acts as a physical barrier between the entrance to the Court Gardens and the Pad



An indication of how signage might work with the plinth removed.

A note on partially removing or reducing the height of plinth

From initial observation, the plinth is either made of concrete with steel rebar reinforcement, or lightweight steel sub-frame with render finishes. Partially removing or reducing height is not considered appropriate because the sub frame or rebar will have to be cut short with partial supporting structure being destroyed. To make good the finishes and make the sub frame structurally sound would prove costlier than demolishing it altogether. Also, the problem of having a wide depth of plinth does not eradicate it being used as a litter shelf.

SCENARIO 3: Repair, restore existing plinth, renew garden and introduce railings to area

Railing off the garden from both edges of the plinth, back towards to court house gardens at the rear would prevent access to the area behind the plinth. A lockable gate could allow access for maintenance, tending of the plants and clearing of any litter thrown into the area.

Pros

- Relatively simple
- Does not require major re-modelling.
- Signage remains as is
- Railings could be blunt topped and contemporary in style
- Could quickly improve the look and feel of the area
- Would allow the garden area to develop into dense planting without offering cover for undesirable activities/people

Cons

- Might need planning permission and discussion with council on design
- Visually not welcoming
- Might be more complicated than it looks - it could involve adding supporting foundation stones for the railings
- The plinth might still be used as a shelf for litter
- Could be expensive including professional costs to engage with council, drawing submission, erecting the railing
- Some on-going maintenance costs in the long term

SCENARIO 4: Repair, restore existing plinth, renew garden and introduce railings to define area IN FRONT of the plinth

The picture below is indicative of a solution that attempts to go further and introduce new features to regenerate the entrance area. In the solution imagined below, railings extend to create a defined entrance area which could include a lockable entrance gate.

A worked-up version along these lines would need input from planners and others.

Pros

- Defines the Pad's entrance and creates a sense of private space
- Signage remains as is
- Railings could be blunt topped and contemporary in style
- Would allow the garden area to develop into dense planting without offering cover for undesirable activities/people

Cons

- Would need planning permission and discussion with council on design
- Might need support of neighbours – magistrates, Court Gardens etc
- Could be expensive including professional costs to engage with council, drawing submission, erecting the railing
- Some on-going maintenance costs in the long term



An indication of railings could be used to define an extended space and introduce a gate.

SECENARIO 5: Demolish the plinth and replace the garden with raised beds with plants

There is a desire for a physical barrier between the entrance to the Court Gardens and the Pad (those entering the bike/refuse areas feel vulnerable to being followed). Creating a raised garden area would maintain a physical barrier.

With the plinth removed, signage could be still be placed on the Holloway Road facing side of the raised bed. It is unlikely that a raised bed would be as attractive or as convenient as a "lavatory".

The raised bed could be a very simple structure or could be worked up into a more design-led feature. Below are some indications of what a solution along these lines could feel like. (See **addendum two** for examples of planters.)

Pros

- Could be an attractive new feature and help improve the area
- Maintains a physical barrier
- Garden area could be versatile and even planned to be re-schemed from time to time or to reflect the seasons
- Could be tied into work on the Pad's interior garden

Cons

- If the height was wrong or the plants were not appropriately chosen, it could become a seating area and attract more litter
- Involves demolition of existing garden, making good and rebuilding
- Might need planning permission
- Would require a robust gardening and maintenance plan



An indication of a simple planter design approach.



Low-level planter with more sculptural, stepped design



An approach incorporating the simple planting area with an additional planting, railings and gate

ADENDUM ONE:
TYPES OF SIGNAGE THAT COULD INCREASE STREET LEVEL VISIBILITY

This collection of images is for reference and to give an idea of approaches to signage

Type A - Large build up Metal signage



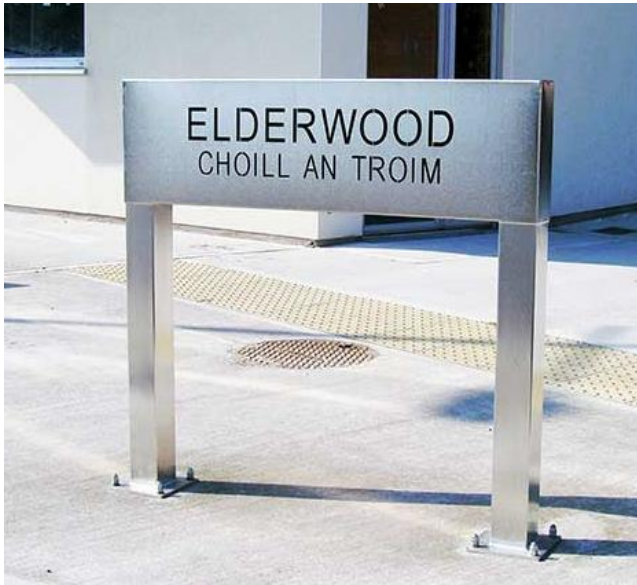
- Could replace plinth with large metal numbers and increase street level visibility
- Contemporary design, suitable for apartment block
- Could be costly
- Can consider smaller scale design to suit our block

Type B – Metal signage, back lit



- Fixed to masonry façade
- Back lit for visibility
- Contemporary design
- May use in conjunction with Type A to increase visibility

Type C – Stainless Steel signage on a post



- Could replace plinth with stainless steel signage on post
- Visually open so hopefully deter people using it as screening device for anti-social behaviour.

Type D – Fabricated signage hung from façade



- Fixed to masonry façade

ADDENDUM TWO: LANDSCAPING PRECEDENTS

This collection of images is for reference and to give an idea of approaches to planters and sculptural barriers

Sculptural elements to replace plinth and certain planting

- Visual openness
- Physical barrier
- Apartment block identity and signage incorporated



Low level planters

- Planters can create physical barrier with pleasant aesthetics
- Free standing, easy installation, well-built planters that resist vandalism
- Low level planting to remove screening and deter antisocial behaviour
- Fully planted and no edges for seating or littering.





Above, planting at the junction of Ronalds Road and Highbury Crescent