



City of Westminster

PLEASE NOTE

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies and planning, building control and other legislation and regulations referred to in the text of this guide were current at the time of publication. Because this guidance is an electronic version of the printed guidance as approved and adopted, these references have NOT been changed. For ease of contact; names, telephone numbers and locations have been regarded as non-material editorial changes and have been updated.

As UDP policies and government legislation may have changed over time, before carrying out any work, it is recommended that you consult the current UDP

<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/planningandlicensing/udp/index.cfm> for policy revisions and you may wish to check with planning and/or building control officers about your proposals.

MEWS - A GUIDE TO ALTERATIONS



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1. Introduction

This guide is designed to help owners who wish to alter or extend mews buildings in Westminster. It supersedes a previous document on the same subject, issued in March 1983.

The City Council regards mews as a valuable asset, the traditional character and appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced, by preventing insensitive alterations and needless demolition. Most works of alteration require consent from the City Council, but even where consent is not required owners are urged to follow the guidelines in this document as far as possible in the interests of preserving the traditional appearance of the mews.

The advice in these guidelines is based on the City Council's planning policies contained in Chapter 9 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan, (As Placed on Deposit, November 1991), and Central Government advice as set out in DoE Circular 8/87.

2. The Original Character of Mews

2.1 The first mews were built in the 17th and 18th centuries as stabling yards serving the principal terraces and squares of the Georgian City. The name 'mews' is said to derive from the use of one such back street near Charing Cross where the royal hawks were kept (the word 'muer' meaning 'to mould' in old French). The tradition of building mews continued throughout the 19th century, but over the last 75 years their function has changed. As households dwindled in size and carriages were replaced with motor cars, accommodation for grooms and coachmen was no longer needed and mews buildings became separate properties from the houses they originally served. Today, although some are still used for garaging, most have been converted into residential use and provide an important reservoir of small-scale houses.



Abercorn Place, NW8
(Photo, 1981)

Moreton Terrace Mews, SW1
(Photo, 1979)

Examples of mews buildings in almost their original form. Their simplicity of design and use of materials, small scale, uniformity, and the visual differentiation between the ground and the upper floors, are the essential characteristics which the Council will seek to preserve.

3. Examples of Different Types of Mews Buildings in Westminster



Queen's Grove, NW8: Mews building with residential accommodation and balcony on the first floor



Bakers Mews, W1: An excellent example of a group of three different types of mews buildings.



Kendall Place, W1: A mid/late 19th century mews building of 'quasi' classical appearance.



Weymouth Mews, W1: Early 20th century self contained larger mews house with external staircase to first floor entrance.



Devonshire Close, W1: Late 19th century example of a mews-house with double carriage space, and balcony on first floor.



Grosvenor Gardens Mews, SW1: An example of a mews-house in the Grosvenor area. The good quality brick and red-brick bands, motifs and other decoration, are characteristic of the late 19th century when mews buildings were developed as independent houses.

The examples shown above are intended to illustrate the variety of types and mews buildings in Westminster. Most of the photographs have been taken in the early 1980s and some even earlier, and they may not represent the condition of these buildings today. It is stressed here that **some of these examples include alterations which are not entirely desirable**, such as brick painting or, in some cases, unsuitable window replacements.

4. Some Important Characteristics of Mews

4.1 Contrast in Scale



Montagu Mews North, W1



Hays Mews North, W1 (Photo, 1986)

The original 'secondary' importance of mews (in comparison to the main streets and the main buildings which they used to serve), is reflected not only in the smaller size, but also in the smaller scale of these service streets and buildings. The Council's policy is to preserve both these important characteristics.

4.2 Enclosure



Montagu Mews, W1



Eaton Mews South, SW1

In the earlier times, when mews were purely service streets, effort was made to isolate them visually from main streets. An entrance through a narrow alleyway on the ground floor of a large terrace in the main street was a common type of access to mews in the early/mid 19th century and before, (see Craven Hill and Upbrook Mews above). Later, when mews buildings were separate and independent houses, access was provided through gates and arches which gave both privacy and a degree of grandeur (see Fosbury Mews Duke's Mews, and Eaton Mews).

4.3 'Turning the Corner': Visual Transition from the Main Street to the Mews



Kendall Place, W1

Typical narrowing of the space between the terraces on the main street, to form an entrance to the mews.



Jay Mews, SW7

An example of the side elevation of the corner mews-building finished in stucco, with rustications, cornices and other decoration, in character with the style and appearance of the main building.



Mid 19th century example of a classical arch facing the main street and forming an entrance to the mews.

Eaton Mews, SW1

4.4 Architectural Details: Doors and Windows



Portland Mews, W1



Abercorn Close, NW8

The wide ground floor timber coach-doors, usually with small-pane glazed lights at the top, and the upper floor split-level winch-doors, are some of the most characteristic features of mews buildings. The Council will seek to retain these features or to reinstate them where they have been lost. In cases where the retention of coach doors is totally impractical, it is recommended that they should be replaced with suitably designated 'panels' of timber doors and/or sash windows, to fill the original structural openings (see drawings pp. 19, 20, 21).

4.5 Architectural Details: Lanterns, Winch-brackets, Vents and Other Cast-iron Features



Duke's Mews, W1

In the small scale environment of mews, small features such as cast-iron lanterns, hopper-heads or boot-scrappers play an important role and add significantly to the character of buildings and streets. The Council will encourage owners to retain and maintain these features, and if possible, reinstate them, using replacements of authentic design and traditional materials.

4.6 Paving



Hamilton Close, NW8

The repaving of privately owned parts of mews -streets may require the Council's consent. In many cases the Council will insist on the use of traditional materials such as granite setts. The retention of central or side gutters and their special treatment in terms of layout of paving stones (see photograph, left), is considered essential.

4.7 Retention of General Character



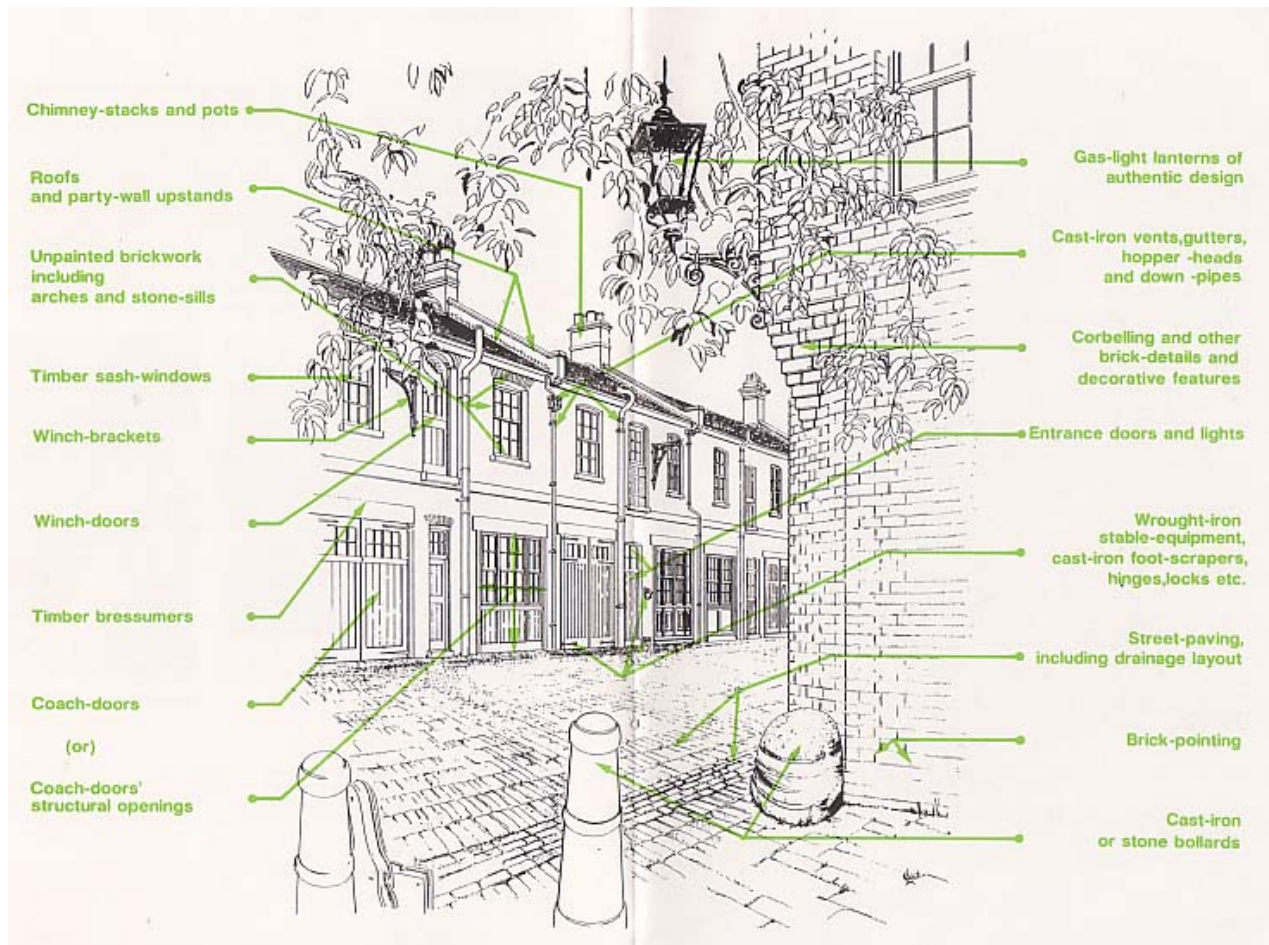
Bathurst Mews, W2



Converting a mews building to a house can be achieved without damaging its overall character. These examples illustrate conversions where most of the original character of the buildings has been preserved (with varying degrees of success) by retaining the materials, the original openings, the design of windows and doors, the roofs and chimney stacks, and as much as possible of the original ironwork and other external features, including the paving of the street.

Warwick Square Mews, SW1

Some Important Characteristics of Mews - a Summary



5. Will You Need Permission for Alterations?

5.1 Planning permission will be required from the City Council for most alterations to the outside of properties (except for routine works of repair and maintenance). Where a property is in two separate uses, e.g. the ground floor is let out separately as a garage or for industrial use, planning permission will also be required for creating a single residential dwelling in the whole building. If you are not sure whether planning permission is required, please write to the Development Planning Services (see Contacts at the end of this guide) enclosing details and, if possible, drawings and photographs. If you undertake work without the necessary consents, the City Council has the power to take enforcement action and the new work may have to be removed.

5.2 Listed building consent is necessary for any works which alter the character or appearance of either the inside or outside of listed properties. Before drawing up plans you should check whether the property is listed. If a building is listed, only very limited alteration is likely to be allowed. To undertake works to a listed building without listed building consent is a criminal offence.

5.3 Most of the City's mews are within conservation areas, and **conservation area consent** is necessary for demolition or for the removal of parts of a building such as the removal or enlargement of door or window openings. The Council's policy is to retain buildings which contribute to the character or appearance of conservation areas. Only in exceptional circumstances will total redevelopment be allowed, and then only if the proposed replacement is appropriate to its setting. In these cases the Council will normally require either a faithful reproduction of the original form of a mews building in traditional materials, or a design which preserves or enhances the established mews character and is sympathetic in scale and design to neighbouring buildings.

5.4 Demolition and reconstruction behind the facade of an unlisted mews property within a conservation area will be allowed only where the structural stability and architectural integrity of the building and adjacent buildings can be protected. Proposals which are likely to harm the character or appearance of the building or mews will not be approved.

5.5 **Building Regulations** approval will also be necessary for most new building works affecting the structure of the property. Advice can be obtained from the District Surveyor's Services (see Contacts at the end of this guide).

6. Alterations and Extensions at Roof Level



Moreton Terrace Mews, SW1

6.1 Planning permission is required in all cases where an additional floor is proposed and an existing roof line is to be raised, or any alteration to the roof of a building in a conservation area is intended, including the insertion of roof lights or dormer windows. Such alterations and extensions can have a significant impact on the established mews character. They can also spoil a building's proportions and general appearance, and affect the amount of sun and daylight received by neighbouring properties or the amount of overlooking or sense of enclosure experienced by neighbours. Any of these factors can be important in a particular case, and the Council will have careful regard to them in considering planning applications.

6.2 Where a mews has either few or no roof extensions, the Council may consider that to protect the character of the mews it is desirable to prevent such additions. Certain mews, such as Ennismore Gardens Mews, SW7, have already been identified in this way and the City Council may in the future designate certain other mews where roof extensions will not normally be permitted. Owners are advised to check with Development Planning Services whether their property is in one of these mews.

6.3 Many mews, however, already have a number of roof extensions and these often differ greatly from one property to the next. The Council nevertheless considers that future extensions should normally be in the form of a mansard unless an existing different and appropriate style predominates. A new mansard

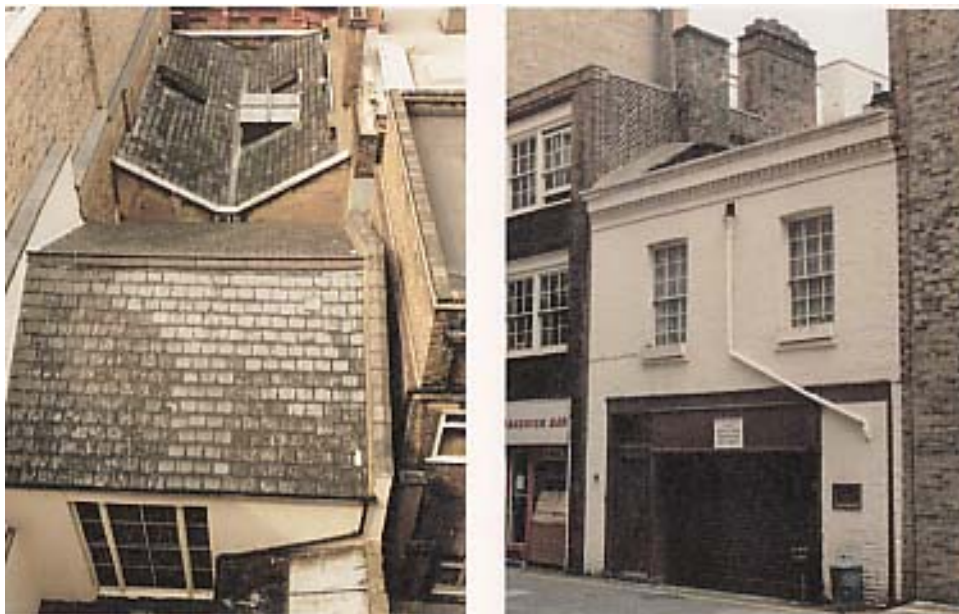
may be 'flat-topped' (Figure 2a) or 'double-pitched' (Figure 2b). The style chosen will depend on other existing roof extensions in the mews, or on adjoining properties. Roofs should normally be covered in natural slate and dormer windows constructed in timber and covered with rolled lead.

6.4 Guidelines for individual mews may be established in due course by the Council on the basis of the characteristics of the existing buildings and roof extensions. The City Council has already published guidelines for Ennismore Gardens Mews, SW7, Relton Mews and Wilton Row, and Old Barrack Yard, SW1.

6.5 The elevations of mews buildings are usually in the form of sheer walls front and rear, normally at the same height along the mews. The parapet line is important to the street-scene and should not be disturbed. The typical sections in Figure 2a and 2b show features which are important to ensure that a roof extension (subject to other design considerations) does not have a disruptive visual effect. There are no rigid rules for the positioning of dormer windows on the front; however, a symmetrical arrangement of dormers with double-hung sliding sashes, the size and proportions of which are related to that of the windows on the first floor, is a good general guide (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). Most flexibility is usually permissible in the appearance of the windows at the rear, but dormer windows are generally preferable, unless overlooking is likely to result, in which case skylights may be appropriate. However, each case will be considered on its merits and the implications for adjoining properties will be considered.

6.6 Before making a planning application, you should find out whether a secondary means of escape in case of fire, will be required from the new top floor. External escape stairs are not normally acceptable and therefore it is essential to give early consideration to providing an internal fire escape. Advice can be obtained from the District Surveyor's Services (see 'Contacts' below). Please also consult the City of Westminster's Guide to Roof Alterations and Extensions (1989).

6.7 Any water tank or other plant should be contained within the roof profile, for 'double-pitched' and 'flat-topped' extensions.



23 Brooks Mews, W1 (Photo, 1985). Left, View of the Original Valley-roof (top of the photograph). Right, Front Elevation



Fig. 1: Mews buildings in their Original Condition



Fig. 1A: Possible Alterations to Front Elevation for the Conversion of a Mews-building to a House, without a Roof Extension. The Council will encourage conversions which retain the form of the original roof, subject to local considerations in individual cases.

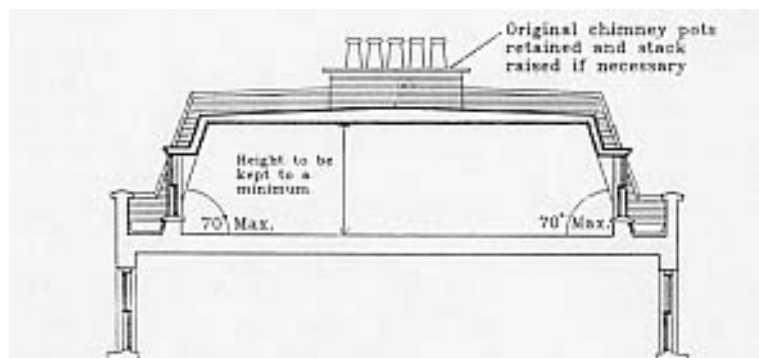


Fig. 2A: Flat-topped Roof Extension, Diagrammatic Section.

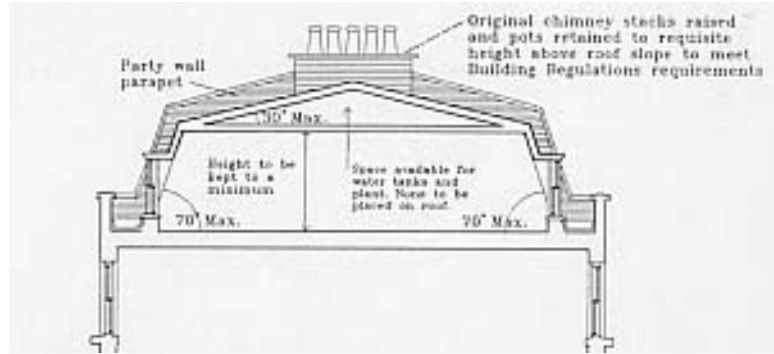


Fig. 2B: Double-pitched Roof Extension, Diagrammatic Section.

Figs. 3, 4 and 5: Possible Alterations which may be given Consent by the Council.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

7. Alterations to Facades

7.1 Most mews consist of small, simple buildings whose character relies on well-proportioned and detailed elements including doors to former haylofts and stables, windows, and more unusually, external stairs and access balconies. Decorative brickwork and ironwork, including cast-iron drain pipes with lead hoppers, door-hinges, foot-scrapers etc. are also important. All these features add to the architectural and historic qualities of the mews, and their loss or insensitive alteration should be avoided. For example, the character of certain mews-buildings would be destroyed if their access stairs or balconies were removed or filled in.

7.2 When it is necessary to replace doors or windows, the materials and design of the replacements should be carefully chosen to match the originals, and the opportunity taken to restore the original appearance where earlier inappropriate alterations have taken place. It is most important to give careful attention to details; for example the materials, the pattern and size of glazing bars, the depth of window reveals, and the type of window sills. Where hayloft doorways still exist on the first floor, an interesting link with the past is kept by retaining them. If necessary they can be sensitively adapted to suit the first floor accommodation. Suitable timber windows of appropriate design, with timber panels below the sill are shown in Figures 3 and 4, and a pair of 'French' doors with flush railings are shown in Figure 5.

7.3 The simplicity of these mews houses is one of their great attractions. It should not be marred by adding projecting balconies, sun blinds, canopies or porches. Such features are unacceptable, as are attempts (rarely successful) to alter facades to mimic small-scale Georgian town houses by the addition of bow windows or 'classical' style front doors.

7.4 The former stables and coach-houses at ground floor are now mainly used as garages, workshops and stores, or have already been altered for habitation. When considering planning applications to convert mews dwellings to entirely residential use, the Council will seek the retention of garage parking space for at least one car per dwelling with a traditional timber door, ideally the original. If the original cobblestones remain in the 'garage' area, every effort should be made to retain them.

7.5 Where the original structural members over the door openings exist (usually either brick arches or timber bressumer beams which carry the wall above) they should be retained even if they need concealed reinforcement. These features are characteristic of mews and their removal can damage the original character of a building and disrupt the pattern of similar features. Where the original openings have been lost every effort should be made to reinstate their original form when further alterations are planned.

7.6 Different ways of providing windows and doors in these original ground floor openings are shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5. They use materials traditional in this context, i.e. timber frames, timber boards and panelling rather than brickwork. The use of metal or PVC is not considered appropriate. These illustrations show alternative garage doors and front doors which fit into the overall design, and also show how different requirements can be accommodated. Many variations are possible, and the use of traditional materials within a simple existing framework can produce well-proportioned designs. Altered in this way, mews adapt well to modern use while retaining their character and coherence.

7.7 Brickwork should not usually be painted, rendered or covered with cladding material. As well as damaging the original architectural character of the mews and requiring continuing maintenance, painted brickwork becomes grimy and dull, whereas the surface of good natural brickwork improves with age. Particularly unfortunate are instances where brickwork details, such as arches, string courses and window surrounds, have been painted. Such work usually spoils the appearance of any building or group of buildings, for the sake of a short-term 'face-lift' of no merit. In a rare case of extreme decay, repair and careful cleaning of brickwork may be necessary. Where original details have been lost they should be restored; where they have deteriorated they should be repaired by means of traditional materials to match the original. The use of modern materials such as fibre-glass, reinforced plastic or concrete is not appropriate.

7.8 Where the mews building has an exposed rear elevation with door or window openings the City Council will expect them to be retained in their original form. Any alterations should seek to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the rear of the property, especially in conservation areas.

7.9 Where the public highway extends up to the front of a mews building, as occurs in many cases, planning permission will be required for any structure over-hanging the highway. Satellite dishes should not be fixed to the front elevation. If, for technical reasons, a satellite dish has to be placed on the front of the building, it will only be acceptable if it cannot be seen from the street. A position on the lower part of the roof, immediately below the parapet wall, may be the best location. This will minimise its visibility from street level but still allow a strong signal to be received. Satellite dishes should not be fixed to chimneys or party wall upstands.

8. The Street Surfaces

8.1 Mews are often characterised by the absence of raised footways, with the roadway running up to the facades. In some mews, however, there is a strip of private forecourt in front of the buildings. These areas are best kept at their original level and surfaced in traditional materials, such as flagstones, granite setts or paving bricks. When these areas are resurfaced in contrasting materials, such as concrete or ceramic tiles, or if they are raised behind a kerb, one of the basic characteristics of the layout of the mews is lost. Forecourts should not be cluttered with dustbins or built-in planting boxes. Please contact the Council's Highway Strategy and Forward Planning Team, Environment and Leisure Department (see Contacts), for advice on keeping forecourts clear.

8.2 The Council has a programme of repairing and reinstating granite-sett paving, and careful thought should be given to the use of appropriate materials on private forecourts.

Contacts

All owners considering alterations or extensions to their mews buildings are encouraged to telephone or write to Development Planning Services, Department of Planning and City Development for advice on planning permission, listed building consent or conservation area consent.

CLICK HERE FOR LINK TO
WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL
CONTACTS LIST

Department of Planning and City Development, Development Planning Services, March 1992