



City of Westminster

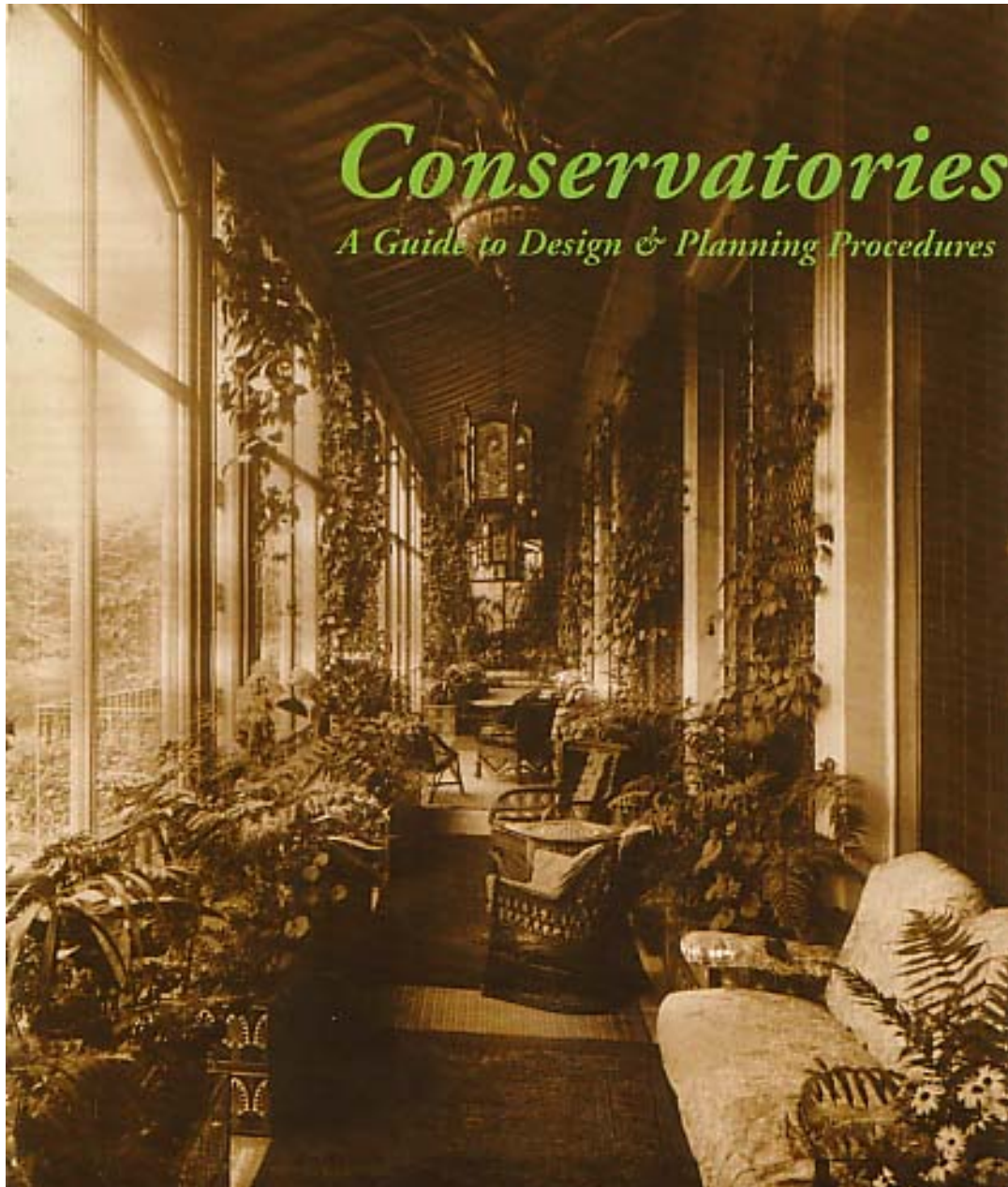
PLEASE NOTE

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.

CONSERVATORIES



A Guide to Design and Planning Procedures

This booklet is one of a series of Design Guides produced by the Department of Planning and City Development, which reflect the City Council's concerns for a high standard of design in Westminster. It gives advice to owners, architects, specialist designers and the general public, on general aspects of conservatory design and explains how the City's environment can benefit from the Council's relevant planning and design policies. The Council's officers will be pleased to give further information on this subject and to assist members of the public who wish to submit proposals for a new conservatory and an application for any necessary consents.

The City Council is fully aware of that good design cannot always be achieved through general advice, which can only explain general design principles. Success depends invariably on the designer's ability to apply such principles on specific buildings and areas. Applications for Planning Permission or Listed Buildings Consent for a conservatory are encouraged to seek advice from an architect or other specialist professional designer.

Conservatories: A Guide to Design and Planning Procedures

1. Introduction
2. Historical Background
3. Do You Need Consent?
4. Design Considerations
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Dudley House, Park Lane: Mid 19th century conservatory addition

Glazed extensions, contemporary or nearly contemporary with the buildings to which they belong, have been built in Westminster since the early 19th century. Many of those which survive today are valuable parts of Westminster's architectural heritage, and the City Council will seek their retention. However, even successful old conservatories will not be regarded by the City Council as precedents leading necessarily to approval of proposals for similar structures to be erected on similar existing buildings. Any such proposals will be considered by the Council on their own merits and in their specific architectural and planning context.

1. Introduction

Conservatories have long been popular as lightweight additions to properties in Westminster. These guidelines have been prepared to encourage a high standard in their design and relationship with the existing property, and to set out the factors which the City Council will take into account when considering applications for conservatories.



St. John's Lodge, Regent's Park: Originally by J. Raffield, 1819. The conservatory was demolished in the 1960's.

While this guide is not a statutory planning document, the advice it contains is based on the City Council's adopted planning policies as contained in Chapter 9 of the City of Westminster Unitary Development Plan and Central Government advice as set out in DoE Circular 8/87, which can be consulted for more detailed information. If you wish to discuss specific proposals for a conservatory before submitting an application, please contact the relevant Development Control or Building Control teams; their telephone numbers are given on the back of this guide.

2. Historical Background

The earliest 'conservatories' built in this country were probably the orangeries, constructed in the 16th and 17th centuries, mainly of brick, with large windows and a solid roof, to house plants imported from warmer countries. It was not possible to successfully build fully glazed conservatories until the end of the 18th century, when stronger glass, laminated timber and wrought iron (for the structural members) became available. From the early 19th century, architects and landscape architects such as Nash, Fowler, Burton, Loudon and Repton began to build conservatories as additions to houses. Building in glass came to wide attention in the form of the 'Crystal Palace' designed by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The mass production of standardised cast and wrought iron components and the extensive availability of system-built conservatories in the Victorian period, allowed the conservatory to become a far more common feature of domestic architecture and its popularity continued until the 1920s.

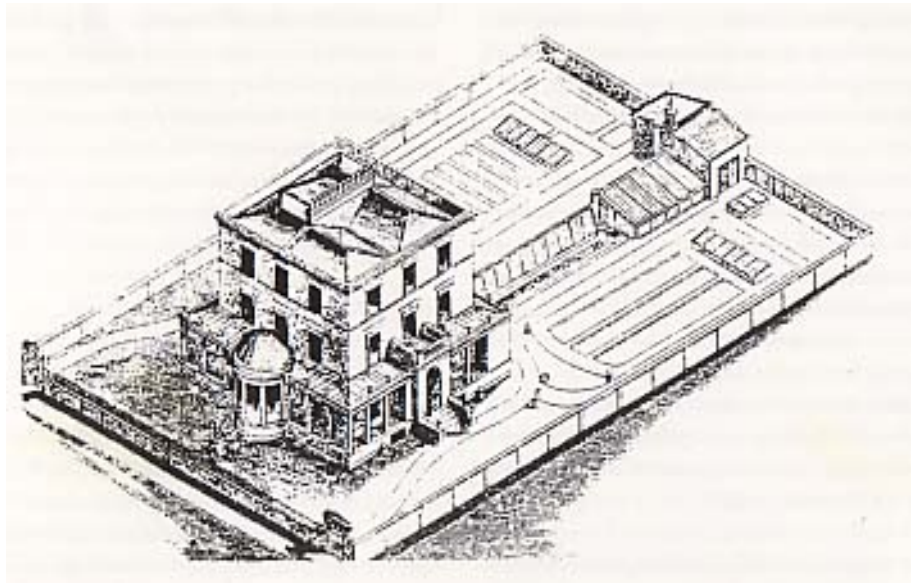
The development of aluminium and plastics and the introduction of heat efficient 'off-the-peg' double glazed conservatories in the 1970s, led to a revival in their popularity which has continued into the 1990s. The main concerns for the present day property owner in Westminster should be to ensure that a proposed conservatory respects the scale and appearance of the existing property, the street scene and the amenity enjoyed by their neighbours.



**Grove House, Regents Park:
Conservatory by D Burton,
1824.**

Nineteenth Century Conservatories in Westminster

**Nos. 3-5
Porchester
Terrace:
Axonometric
drawing of the
two semi-
detached
houses,
showing
conservatories
at the back and
glass domed
front
projection.
(Loudon,
1824).**



3. Do You Need Consent?

Planning Permission: Planning Permission will be needed for most new conservatories. However, if the house is a single dwelling house (this does not include blocks of flats or conservatories into flats) you may not need Planning Permission, depending on the size and position of the proposed conservatory. If you are not sure whether you need Permission, please write to Development Planning Services of the Planning and City Development Department giving details, scaled drawings of the existing and proposed buildings and, if possible, photographs. If you start work without the necessary Planning Permission, the City Council may take enforcement action to require the removal of the conservatory. Even if your conservatory does not need Planning Permission, please try to take account of the advice in this guide.

If your property is in a Conservation area (over 75% of Westminster is included in a Conservation Area) the design of a new conservatory should be of a high standard, as all proposals are considered in terms of whether they will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of that particular Conservation Area.

Conservation Area Consent: If the property is not listed but in a Conservation Area and you are proposing to demolish part of the existing property to make way for a conservatory, you may need Conservation Area Consent for the demolition, even if you are not going to be enlarging the property overall. Again, check with the Development Planning Services before you start work.

Listed Building Consent: Any alteration or addition to a listed building (including other buildings or structures within its grounds) or works of demolition to such a building, are likely to require Listed Building Consent, whether or not Planning Permission is needed. English Heritage as well as the City Council must approve the proposal, and a high standard of design, appropriate to the period, style and detailing of the building, will be necessary. If you are considering adding a conservatory to a listed building, you are advised to appoint an architect or specialist designer with acknowledged expertise in historic buildings, to undertake the work. It is a criminal offence to start work without having obtained Listed Building Consent in these cases.

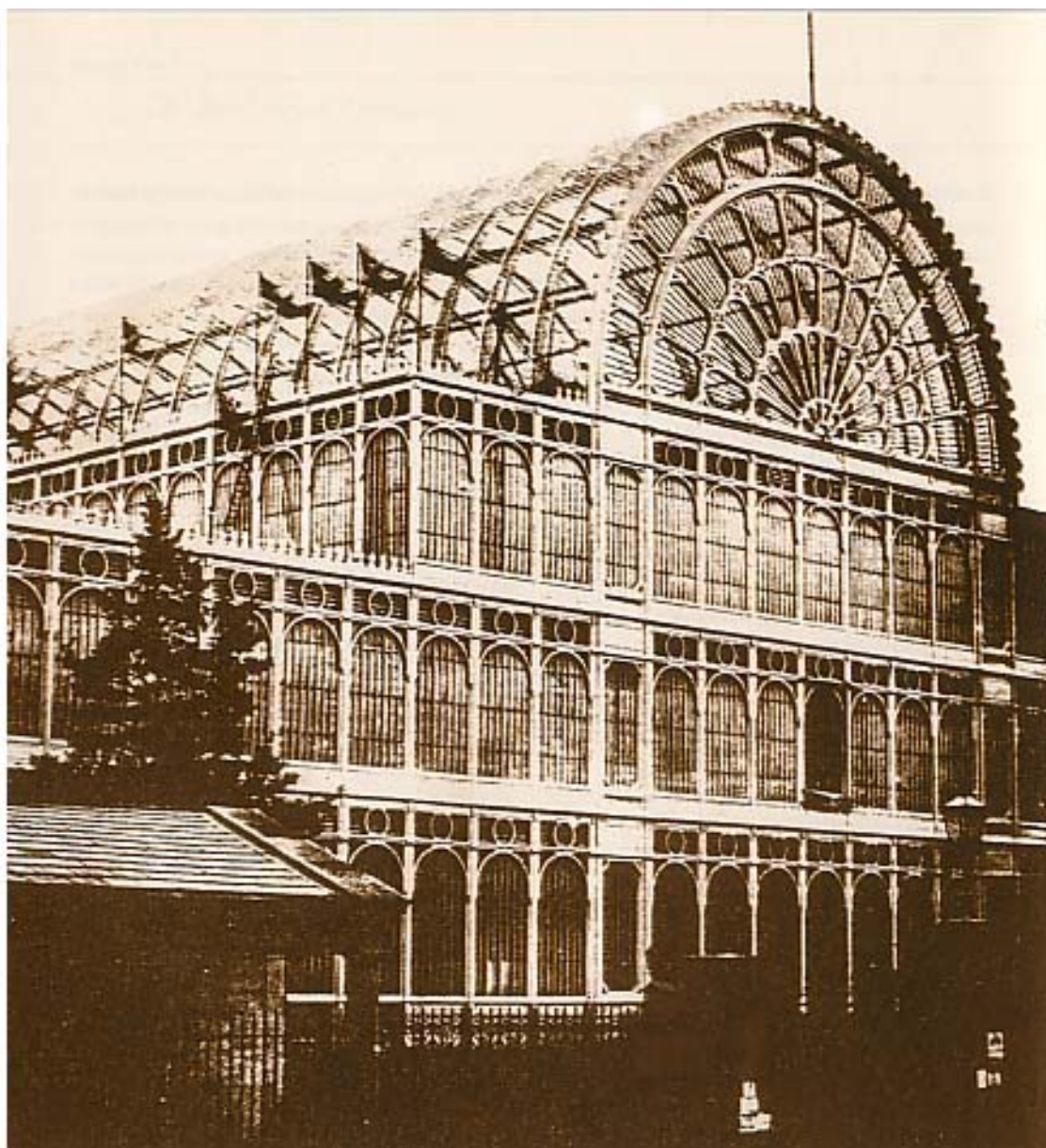
Protection of Trees: If you are considering building a conservatory in your garden and the proposals involve cutting down or pruning a tree, you should contact the City Council's Tree Section for advice. Many trees in Westminster are covered by special Tree Preservation Orders and, generally, all trees in Conservation Areas are protected against felling or pruning without the Council's knowledge (six weeks in advance) and agreement. In appropriate cases, the Council has the duty to ensure that Planning Permissions adequately secure the health, appearance and future of important trees. For specific advice on your property, please contact the City Council's tree officers whose telephone number is given at the end of this booklet.

Building Regulations Approval: Unless the proposed conservatory is at ground level and has a glass or translucent roof and is under 30 sq.m in area, it must comply with the 1985 Building Regulations. Where the conservatory is to be built onto or close to a party wall or window openings in adjacent residential units, those parts of the conservatory must be constructed of fire resistant materials.

To comply with Building Regulations, the conservatory should be separated from other parts of the building by solid construction (this includes doors and windows). The conservatory should not be heated, except for background heating of not greater than 50 watts/sq.m. Alternatively, adequate insulation must be provided, such as by the use of double glazing and/or insulating material in the roof.

Your proposals should be discussed with the District Surveyor Services (telephone numbers are given at the end of this guide) before applications for Planning Permission or Listed Building Consent are submitted.

Further Advice on Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings: For more details on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas in Westminster, you are advised to consult the relevant City Council publication, and to contact the officers whose telephone numbers are given at the end of this booklet.



Crystal Palace, by Sir Joseph Paxton, first erected in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition in 1851. One of the best known glazed structures in the world, this magnificent building has inspired many designers in the past.

In recent years, this historic structure has unfortunately been misused as an 'inspiration' for the design of various ready-made domestic conservatories. The results in most cases are seriously inadequate, as inevitably they lack the monumental scale, the visual independence in space and, often the skilful use of materials and detailing of this historic building.

4. Design Considerations and Requirements

Notwithstanding their transparent appearance and lightweight structure, conservatories must comply with the City Council's design policies for all extensions to buildings, as set out in the Unitary Development Plan. They should normally be confined to the rear or least important facades and should respect the plan form, period, architectural characteristics and detailing of the original building.

Position on the Property: Conservatories at roof level will not normally be permitted. They should be confined to the ground and lower floors and to the rear or least important facades, unless the design can be closely integrated into the existing building. For example, in parts of Mayfair, Belgravia, Pimlico and Knightsbridge, conservatories have historically been built at first floor level. It should be borne in mind however, that above ground floor level, problems of amenity (see page 14) become more acute.

Relationship with the Existing Property: The design of the conservatory, in terms of its scale, general character and detailing in relation to those of the existing building, is important. The conservatory should not be dominant in scale, and consideration should be given to echoing the proportions and details of elements of the existing building. For properties within the Conservation Areas and certainly for listed buildings, it should not be assumed that the standard designs of conservatory manufacturers will be acceptable to the City Council. These mass-produced conservatories often lack the refinement in detail which is particularly important for listed buildings and for buildings in Conservation Areas.

Attention should also be given to the means by which the conservatory is linked to the original property and the detrimental effect of any alterations to the original building such as the blocking up of windows, the dropping or raising of sills and the removal of sections of walls. In Conservation Areas, and especially on listed buildings, consent will not be given for proposals which harm their character or appearance.

Materials: Glass, wrought and cast iron and timber are considered the most appropriate materials for the majority of properties within Westminster, especially where a traditional conservatory is proposed. However, it has proved possible in some cases to combine modern materials, such as laminated glass and aluminium, with traditional forms. Where aluminium glazing bars are permitted, the City Council may require them to be painted or finished to match existing materials rather than retain their natural bright metal colour. It should also be noted that the reflectivity of glass, especially of double glazing, can, in some instances, detract from the appearance of a building.

The use of powder coated aluminium glazing bars to the roof, can be an effective way of reducing maintenance costs.

Brick work and other details such as windows and rain water pipes should normally match those of the original house.

Interior Features: Attention should be given to the interior features of conservatories, especially as they might appear from the outside at night. Careful consideration should be given to the type of lighting, and fluorescent strips should be avoided. The impact of blinds or curtains should be considered as well as the case of cleaning the glass on both sides.

Listed Buildings: A particularly high standard of design and quality of materials is expected for conservatories which affect the appearance or character of a listed building. The City Council will need to be satisfied that all aspects of a proposal are carefully thought out and are in no way detrimental to the architectural or historic integrity and detailing of the existing building.

For a listed building, it must not be assumed that a consent to erect a conservatory includes also consent to render or otherwise treat the part of the external wall which is enclosed by the conservatory.

Conservation Areas: Proposals within Conservation Areas will also be expected to be of a high quality and to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This requirement will apply equally to conservatories which cannot be seen from the street.

Amenity: The amenity of adjoining occupiers may be affected in a number of ways by the erection of a conservatory. Before drawing up plans, you are advised to discuss the project with your neighbours and to consider the impact of the conservatory upon their properties. The amenity issues which the City Council will take into consideration when determining planning applications are principally the following:

(i) Overlooking: Conservatories at basement or ground floor level will rarely cause any problems of overlooking or loss of privacy to adjoining occupants; above this level however, these problems can increase. If a conservatory is likely to significantly increase overlooking into another residential property or, to a lesser extent, its garden, Planning Permission is unlikely to be granted. Overlooking from a conservatory is likely to be greater than from a roof terrace in the same position because of its greater potential use throughout the year, and thus permission may not be given for a conservatory even where a roof terrace already exists.

Ways of reducing potential overlooking, include the use of obscured glass or solid walls, and the setting the conservatory wall back from adjoining properties.

(ii) Light: A new conservatory must not reduce, to an unacceptable level, the amount of daylight or sunlight received by adjoining properties. This will be judged in terms of the amount of light currently enjoyed, and the lighting conditions in the event of the conservatory being built. Even with a high proportion of glazing, a conservatory can block out a considerable amount of light, especially when it is full of plants or when the glass is covered by blinds or is dirty. Solid walls will obviously exacerbate daylighting problems to adjoining properties.

Again, conservatories should be placed as close to ground level as possible, unless they can be set back by a sufficient distance from the boundary to minimise this potential problem. One of the best locations for a conservatory to avoid lighting and other amenity problems is often at basement or ground floor level, between an existing rear extension and the boundary wall. However if there are basement or ground floor windows nearby, especially if they belong to a separate residential unit, a conservatory even in these locations can be unacceptable.

(iii) Sense of enclosure: An extension may result in an increased undesirable sense of enclosure to adjoining properties or gardens. This, in itself, may constitute sufficient grounds for the City Council to justify refusal of an application. In areas such as Westminster, where few residential properties enjoy maximum daylight or total privacy, an increased sense of enclosure can be very detrimental to residents' quality of life. Similarly possible solutions should be considered in cases of loss of light, as described above.

General Character: As a light secondary structure, a conservatory should complement the character and appearance of the main building and rarely become a dominant feature.

It is generally appropriate to keep the height of a proposed conservatory not higher than that of one floor of the building. It is also advisable that the conservatory normally covers only part of the total width of the property (preferably following an existing sub-division such as an existing half-width extension of the space between rear extensions of adjacent buildings). The depth of the conservatory should generally follow the depth of existing rear extensions; however, if an extension is very deep, the conservatory may need to be limited to only part of that depth.

It is normally appropriate for conservatories to have fully glazed roofs of simple design and construction. Where possible, and subject to the other considerations outlined in this Guide, a mono-pitched 'lean-to' type or a simple double-pitched glazed roof is preferred. If the conservatory is very deep or wide and the resulting maximum height of these two types of roof is excessive or obscures any windows or architectural features, then the roof may be subdivided to include two or more double-pitched or hipped smaller roofs or a mono-pitched and a flat part.

Arched, semi-cylindrical or domed roofs as well as complex combinations of roofing systems, are normally incompatible with the character of a light secondary structure such as a conservatory, and designers are advised to use them only if there are very special visual or structural reasons. For the same reason it is suggested that cupolas, elaborate finials and crestings and other bold decorative features, are used very sparingly and only if there is adequate architectural or historic justification.

In order to complement the character of the main building or terrace, a conservatory is normally expected to have windows and doors of the same type as those on the building and the terrace. On unlisted Georgian or Victorian residential terraces for example conservatory windows may need to be in timber with subdividing glazing bars in character with the buildings; for listed properties of the same period this would normally be considered as necessary.

Elaborate entrance and porches from the rear garden to the conservatory are generally inappropriate; it is normally advisable for such entrances to have timber doors of traditional design, usually four-panelled, often with the top panels glazed.

The area below the windows is normally appropriate to be solid, of traditional materials such as bricks or stucco to match the main building, or timber panels of traditional design and construction.

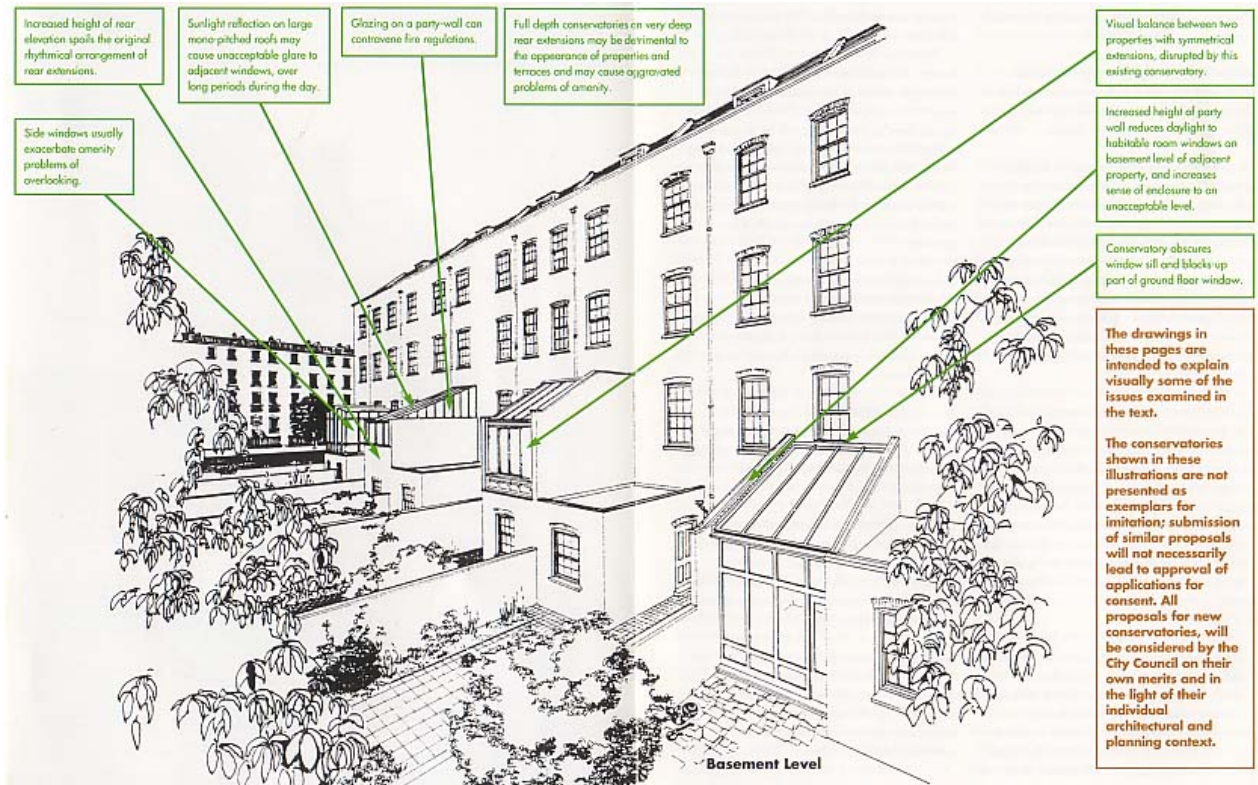
On listed buildings and in Conservation Areas, designers are normally expected to use traditionally detailed structural elements such as timber transoms, mullions, fascia boards, glazing bars etc., in character with corresponding elements of the main building where applicable.

Where a glazed roof abuts on a brick wall designers are advised to use lead flashings, stepped on sloping abutments. Visible rainwater equipment may need to be in cast iron, of an appropriate type and colour established in a particular property or terrace.

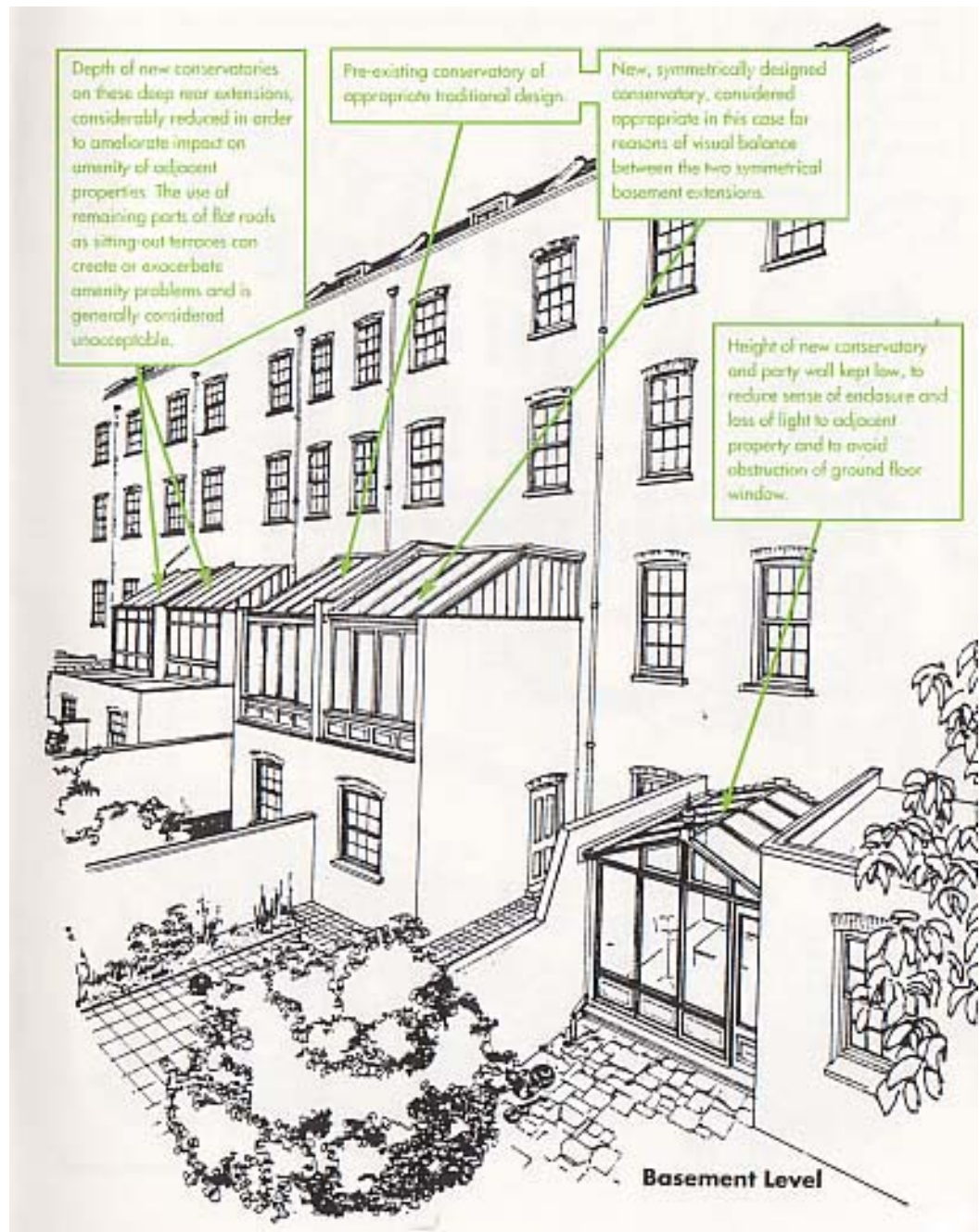


Park Lane:
Group of mid 18th century houses with 19th and early 20th century glazed verandas. Although this type of conservatory-like structure would, in principle, be discouraged today, the example shows how glazed structures purpose designed for individual properties and terraces, have in certain cases, added to the architectural and townscape merits of a group of buildings.

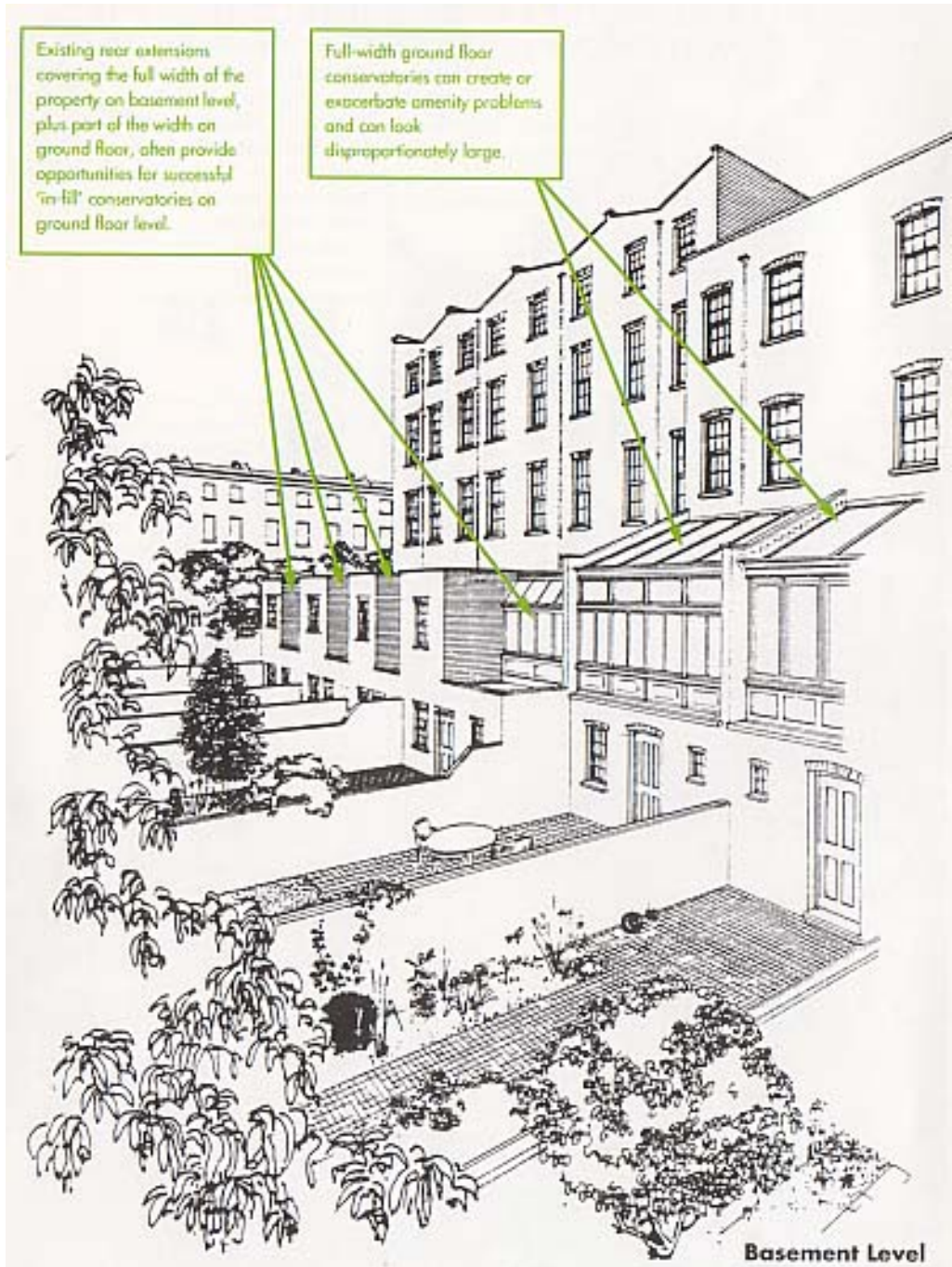
EXAMPLES OF AMENITY AND VISUAL PROBLEMS OFTEN CREATED BY CONSERVATORY EXTENSIONS



EXAMPLES OF A CO-ORDINATED ATTEMPT TO SOLVE OR AMELIORATE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE HYPOTHETICAL TERRACE ILLUSTRATED ABOVE

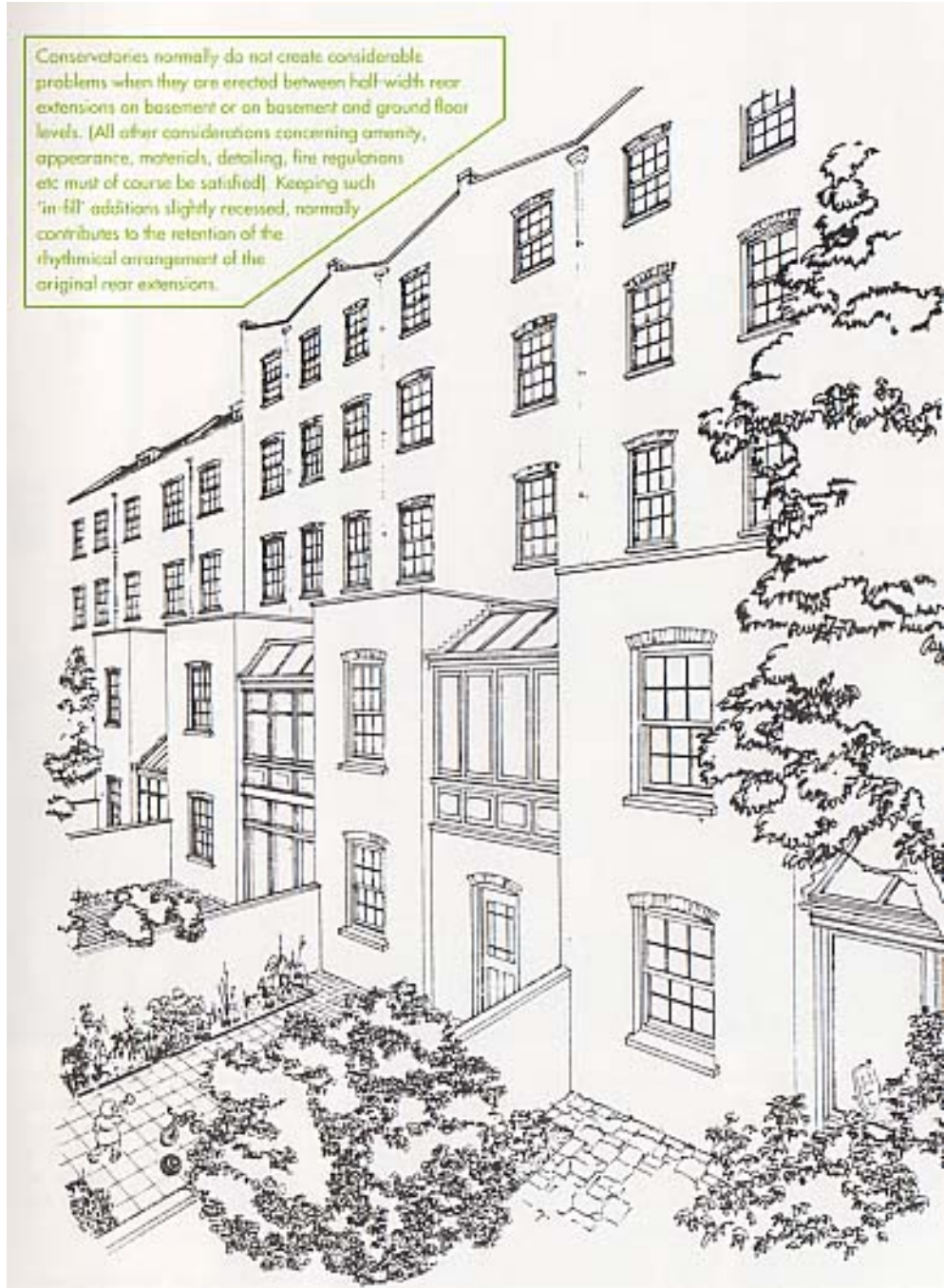


FULL-WIDTH AND 'IN-FILL' CONSERVATORIES



'IN-FILL' CONSERVATORIES

Conservatories normally do not create considerable problems when they are erected between half-width rear extensions on basement or on basement and ground floor levels. (All other considerations concerning amenity, appearance, materials, detailing, fire regulations etc must of course be satisfied). Keeping such 'in-fill' additions slightly recessed, normally contributes to the retention of the rhythmical arrangement of the original rear extensions.





Sometimes even old glazed extensions do not relate successfully to the buildings to which they are attached.

Above and Below: *Two examples of old glazed additions which, despite some merits such as use of the right materials and style, are generally unsuccessful. The example above displays an overall character of a heavy structure. This, together with its over-ornate cast-ironwork and its position on first floor level, makes it a dominant heavy extension, inconsistent with the delicate and subordinate character which is normally appropriate for a light glazed structure. The conservatory in the opposite page, despite its apparent conforming appearance, distorts the original proportion between the entrance porch and the main building and obscures important parts of the facade.*

Conservatories above ground floor level or clashing with the character of the building or 'over-designed', will normally be refused consent.



5. Additional Considerations

Conservatories must be designed and built in such a way as to avoid creating one or more of the following problems, which, are often overlooked.

Maintenance or Other Works to the Main Building: Sooner or later such works will have to be done. Builders cannot rest their ladders on a glazed roof to reach upper parts of the building, and the conservatory may even make the erection of scaffolding difficult.

Services: A conservatory, like a built extension, must not hinder the function of existing air-bricks, damp-proof courses, gulleys etc. For information on these aspects, please contact the Building Control Division, Department of Planning and Environment.

Fire-fighting: In the case of fire in the main building, the size, shape and location of a conservatory may create problems to the work of the Fire Brigade, and it is advisable to check on potential problems of this kind.

Storm Damage: Light structures, especially conservatories, can easily be damaged or blown away by strong wind, and flying broken glass is particularly dangerous. For your safety and that of other people draw the attention of your consultants to matters of foundations, anchorage, thickness and quality of the glass, etc. and if necessary consult the Building Control Division.

Security: Contrary to popular belief, a conservatory does not always improve the security of any windows or external doors to the original house, which are enclosed in it. Security measures on such windows and doors must be taken always just as before the conservatory was built.

6. Contacts

CLICK HERE FOR LINK TO
WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL
CONTACTS LIST

For additional specialist advice on legislation and on architectural, historic and technical aspects;

English Heritage
London Region
23 Savile Row
London W1X 1AB
Tel: (020) 7973 3000

Department of Planning and City Development, Development Planning Services, January 1994