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Campaigners are pushing to end the need for planning permission for mansard roofs. *Hugh Graham reports*



PHOTOGRAPHY FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

► Keval Khuroya would like to add a mansard roof to his terraced house in Islington, right, similar to ones in nearby streets, below right



Settlington Road, on eight dwellings on Shorrolds Road and on 24 homes in Marville Road. Tower Hamlets planners are permissive of mansards because they add density and reduce the housing shortage. Loss of light is an issue, however. In 2017 the novelist Joanna Trollope won a planning battle to prevent her neighbours from erecting mansard extensions on their street in Chelsea, southwest London. In rejecting the application the planner cited loss of light as a factor. Samuel Hughes, the author of the Create Streets report, insists it won't be an issue. "Most period terraces have reasonably wide streets and long gardens, and in those rare cases where loss of light was an issue, you could apply for a modified mansard with a lower pitch. In the rare cases where loss of light does occur, we propose that the affected neighbour should be able to claim compensation." Hughes is confident London's streets will soon be adorned with mansards. "We have a housing shortage. You have to make the best use of the space we have got. Adding mansards is a no-brainer."

PITCHED PERFECT

Brits love their terraced houses, but many are forced to move when they run out of space. If you are desperate for an extra bedroom, however, a partial solution to a very British dilemma may come from the streets of Paris: the mansard roof. You have seen mansards, even if you don't know the word: they are the steeply sloped grey-tiled roofs on many Georgian and Victorian terraces, with dormer windows; they have a pitch of 70 degrees, versus 37.5 degrees for a standard London roof. They originated in Paris in the 16th century and characterise Haussmann's boulevards. In Britain the Georgians and Victorians could add mansard extensions to their roofs without permission, either to add an extra bedroom or increase the roof height in the attic. But in postwar Britain

councils started banning the practice in a bid to push people out of inner cities and into the suburbs. And they are still refusing them. They say that unless all homeowners build them they create a jagged sawtooth roofline and leave unsightly gaps in period streets. That may be about to change. Create Streets, a think tank, is campaigning to make it easy once again to add mansard roofs as part of the government's planning bill, which goes before parliament this autumn. Under its proposals, outlined in its report Living Tradition, planning rules would favour mansards where at least one house on the street already has one. And on streets with no mansard roofs, planners would permit them as long as more than 50 per cent of the homeowners on the street voted for them. In both cases the mansards would have to adhere to design codes. There is good precedent. In 2011 the residents of Fitzroy Road in Primrose Hill, north London, applied to add mansard extensions – and a fifth storey – to their townhouses. They argued that one of the 12 townhouses already had a mansard from before the planning rules changed. Camden council said it would grant permission only if all 11 homeowners agreed to build them at the same time, use the same builder and match the first mansard so the street looked uniform. "Most people said that it would be impossible to get 11 freeholders to agree on anything, but we did – it was remarkable," says Bernard Hunt, a local resident and architect whose firm, HTA Design, helped the campaign. "I am very interested in community collaboration. There is a potential to find solutions when people feel they have a stake in things. The financial case was

extremely good. Houses on this street are worth £4 million to £5 million and adding an extra storey adds a lot of value." According to the Create Streets report, mansards add about 30 sq m (322 sq ft) to a house and about £225,000 in value if inner-London floor space is valued at £7,500 per sq m. Hunt estimates that they added about £500,000 to the value of the homes on Fitzroy Road and reckons they cost less than £50,000 each to build; these days, however, adding a mansard extension would cost from £100,000, according to Matt Ryder, director of Ash Island Lofts. The gain is not only financial: mansards allow families to stay in walkable city neighbourhoods rather than move out to car-reliant suburbs, thereby helping sustainability. Hunt's daughter, Susie, lives in the townhouse next door and used the mansard extension to

add a master suite to the top floor. "It transformed the way we live. We have a haven upstairs; we can close the door and have peace away from the mayhem of the children, and it has freed up space for our growing girls to each have a room of their own and for us to have friends come and stay. It has kept us sane," she says. Keval Khuroya badly needs an extra bedroom. For seven years the 39-year-old has lived in a two-bedroom Victorian terraced house in Wilton Square, part of a conservation area in Islington, north London. He loves the area and would like to bring up a family there one day. But there is no room to do so: he says that in the past three years five out of 31 residents have sold up because the houses are too small for families. Khuroya has been advised he would not be granted permission for a mansard; nor would he be allowed to add an extra storey under the government's new permitted development rules, because those don't cover buildings built before 1948. Councils may not like mansards but the people seem to: Khuroya surveyed 45 neighbours on the Nextdoor app and 78 per cent thought terraced houses look better with mansards than without. He points out that if planning laws changed to allow mansards, eventually all homeowners would do it, thus avoiding the sawtooth-gapped rooflines the councils are worried about. And he argues that if councils are so worried about appearances, they have a strange way of showing it: they have no problem blighting street views with ugly tower blocks to create more housing, but are nimbys when it comes to adding one discreet storey. More councils are coming around to mansards. Over the past ten years Hammersmith & Fulham council has granted joint permission for mansards to be built on 21 houses on

▲ Top, above and left: Susie Hunt, her family and their neighbours on Fitzroy Road, north London, had to file a joint planning application and use one builder so they could put mansard roofs on all 11 houses

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