

Waterhouse Square: proposed Building 3 plant screen - heritage and townscape commentary

Introduction

- 1 This note has been prepared by KMHeritage on behalf of Prudential Assurance to support a planning application for the installation of a new acoustic plant screen to facilitate the upgrading and relocation of central plant equipment serving the Waterhouse Square Campus. The note comments on the heritage and townscape effect of the proposal.

Heritage and townscape context

- 2 The 'Prudential Assurance Building, 142, Holborn Bars' - Waterhouse Square - is listed Grade II*. The site is located in the south western corner of the Hatton Garden Conservation Area. The Chancery Lane Conservation Area in the City of London lies to the south of Holborn. The nearest listed buildings are the Grade II St Alban's Clergy House and the Grade II* St Alban's Church), and the character and appearance of the Hatton Garden Conservation Area. The Royal Fusiliers War Memorial on Holborn is listed Grade: II*. Staple Inn and adjacent buildings are listed Grade I and II*. The site has the potential to affect three London View Management Framework Protected Vistas (all London Panoramas): 4A.1 Primrose Hill (Viewing Corridor plus Wider Setting Consultation Area), 5A.2 Greenwich Park (Wider Setting Consultation Area only), and 6A.1 Blackheath Park (Wider Setting Consultation Area only).

Heritage and townscape significance

- 3 The heritage and townscape significance of the Waterhouse Square complex derives principally from its association with the Waterhouse family and the architectural legacy that the site now contains. The alterations and redevelopment at the site made in the 1980s and 1990s are a useful illustration of how development involving the loss of historic buildings and urban grain that was considered acceptable then seems inappropriate now. Also, while the restoration and retention of some of the Waterhouse/Joseph work was commendable, the design of the new development, to the north and west of the site, is clumsy and generic, even for its time. While significant interest in and designation of post-Modern buildings from the period has occurred in recent years, the new work of the 80s and 90s at Waterhouse merely represents a plodding and unintelligent copying of a style that was better implemented elsewhere. These recent parts of the

site now look dated and awkward, and sit uncomfortably alongside the older buildings of high heritage significance.

- 4 The part of Building 3 at Waterhouse Square affected by the plant screen proposal (along Brooke Street) dates from the 1990s. The sole elements that survive from the original or early era of the site are the external façade facing the internal central courtyard and surviving glazed brick elements within the internal atrium area. The 1990s fabric and design have no heritage and townscape significance. No part of the more intact historic elements of the site facing High Holborn are affected by the plant screen proposal.

The proposal

- 5 The plant screen proposal is illustrated in the drawings and Design & Access Statement prepared by Orms Architects. To mitigate the visual as well as acoustic effect of plant installation in this part of Building 3, an acoustic screen is proposed to be erected. In combination with the acoustic attenuation of the units themselves, the screen minimises the visual impact of the proposal on neighbouring buildings, the surrounding townscape and Waterhouse Square itself.

The effect of the proposal on heritage and townscape significance

- 6 It is clear from the architects' material that the visual, townscape and heritage effects of the plant screen proposal will be minimal at most, and no effect will be caused when the site is viewed from a number of directions. The screen will not be visible from within the Waterhouse Square complex at ground level. The screen, when visible in certain limited views beyond what can be seen of the roof at present, will be neutral and recessive in its appearance. Notwithstanding a marginal increase in height over existing roof top equipment, the proposal will, in fact, enhance the present situation by providing a cleaner, simpler and more cohesive appearance at the top of the 1990s building - when it is seen. This is evident from the three townscape views provided in the Design & Access Statement.

Conclusion

- 7 It is clear that the plant screen proposal for Building 3 would preserve the special architectural or historic interest of the Grade II* Waterhouse buildings, the setting of nearby listed buildings (notably the Grade II St Alban's Clergy House and the Grade II* St Alban's Church), and the character and appearance of the Hatton Garden Conservation Area. The townscape impact will be, effectively, nil.

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