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31 SOUTHAMPTON ROW – TEMPORARY WORKS APPLICATION

This letter is supplied to accompany an application for Listed Building Consent for the proposed changes to Project 7 of the Holborn Links Estate, namely 31 Southampton Row London, WC1A 2DB (henceforth 'the Site') on behalf of Hogarth Properties ('the Applicant')

a. Introduction

Sicilian Avenue is a shop lined pedestrian thoroughfare that links Southampton Row and Vernon Place. It consists of two large blocks of Edwardian buildings that line each side of Sicilian Avenue and then the northern block returns northwards along Southampton Row returning on Vernon Place. The group of buildings, which is the subject of this study, is known as Project 7 of the Holborn Links Estate, namely 31 Southampton Row.

31 Southampton Row, Sicilian Avenue and Vernon and Sicilian Houses are all contemporaneous and were constructed between 1906 and 1910 to the designs of R J Worley for the Bedford Estate, the ground landlord. Worley was a successful commercial architect who is probably best known for his blocks of flats and his combination of brick and terracotta that he used on his buildings that can be seen on Sicilian Avenue and also in some of his other properties in the West End, such as 23 Albemarle Street, 27 New Bond St and 31-35 Bury Street. His architecture can be best described as "eclectic with a historical twist" and for its date of 1906-1910, the Site is decidedly old fashioned.

The Site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is Grade II Listed.

Description of the Proposed Development

The Proposed Development seeks to temporarily install new partition walls, site toilets, and a tea point on the first floor for the purposes of creating a temporary Site Office. The proposals have been carefully designed to avoid interference with historic fabric; the works utilise existing drainage stacks and details have been provided in accompanying drawings showing the minimal intrusion required by the proposed suspended ceiling and partition walls. Furthermore, the Proposals will cause no visual impact on appreciation of the building from street level. These proposed changes are internal only, with no external manifestations. Therefore, due to the temporary and reversible nature of the works, the Proposals are judged to cause no harm to the significance of the Grade II listed building or the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

b. Heritage Impact Assessment

Summary of Historic Development

The buildings at 31 Southampton Row, Sicilian Avenue, and Vernon/Sicilian Houses were constructed between 1906 and 1910 by architect R J Worley for the Bedford Estate. Originally, the upper floors of the building were originally designed as residential units, accessible from a central corridor with the option for larger units through interconnecting doors. Chimney stacks were situated between units

along Vernon Place and Sicilian Avenue, while on the Southampton Row side, they were positioned between rooms and the corridor. Communal bathrooms were located near the lightwell, and the primary stair was open to the corridor, possibly with a lift in the centre of the spiral stair.

In the 1950s, surviving floorplans show the general arrangement remained with some changes to partitioning walls, mainly affecting the location of doorways. A secondary staircase was added in the centre of the plan during this time. In the latter half of the 20th century, the usage of the upper floors transitioned from residential to office space.

Currently, most spine and partitioning walls have been removed, leaving an open plan floor with discernible room and corridor locations marked by retained nibs and columns. Chimney stacks have been mostly removed, and the primary staircase has been partitioned off, losing its openness. Lifts were added into the lightwell, which was infilled to create circulation space for the open floor levels.

Planning History

The Holborn Links Estate has been the subject of discussion with the London Borough of Camden with applications granted across a number of projects. In association with the implementation of these permissions a temporary works site is required within the Estate.

31 Southampton Row has been internally stripped out in agreement with the London Borough of Camden. The site is currently subject to pre-application discussions and whilst a scheme is being developed, is considered to be the most suitable location for the temporary works site.

Significance

The Site positively contributes to the historical and architectural significance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, through its bold design with terracotta and brick, surviving shopfronts, and classical detailing such as the Corinthian columns. However, the building has undergone alterations, including poor-quality repairs to the terracotta with hard cement mortar, resulting in damage.

While the building is historically significant, it has experienced significant change, including an additional floor in the form of a mansard roof. Internally, alterations have removed much of the historic fabric, with changes to partitions, ceilings, and the loss of internal cornices. Despite these changes, some elements, such as windows, remain unaltered.

The evidential value survives in the exterior and some interior features, including the historic solid stair, decorative handrail, joinery, ironmongery, skirting, and fragments of the cornice. Historically, the building's architecture and usage, combining retail on the ground floor and offices on upper floors, contribute to its importance. The communal value lies in its connection with Sicilian Avenue and other nearby buildings, enhancing the wider area. Aesthetic value is attributed to its decorative nature, harmony with neighbouring structures, and contribution to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area's overall character.

Therefore, the Grade II listed Site is considered to hold moderate significance on account of its historical and architectural interest, as well as its group value with neighbouring developments within the Holborn Links Estate. Furthermore, architecturally, the Site makes a positive contribution to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Thus, the primary significance of the Site derives from its external facades and their complementary relationship with the surrounding townscape, while the surviving internal features contribute to this significance, the extensive internal alterations mean these internal spaces hold less weight.

Potential Heritage Impacts

As outline above, the proposed changes are intended as temporary works to install a Site Office with associated WCs and a Kitchenette on the first floor. Works will include laying carpet in office spaces, and vinyl flooring in the toilets and at the tea point.

As identified the upper levels of Sicilian and Vernon House were originally designed as flats, but were converted into office use in the 1970s, resulting in the loss of much of the historic plan form. Specifically the north-eastern side of the building, fronting Sicilian Avenue, is open plan, having had the internal walls removed. The cellular plan still remains towards the rear elevation however it contains little to no features of historic or architectural interest. As such the impact on the special interest is considered to be limited.

Fabric has historically been lost and the plan form eroded. Therefore, the special interest of the Site is now primarily found the architecture of the building as a whole, with the interior having a limited contribution.

In line with the overall approach to the Site, which priorities preserving historic fabric and minimising interventions, these proposed works will be fully reversible and will utilise the present form and layout of the Site including picking up on existing drainage stacks and retained walls and corridors. The proposed works include installation of suspended ceilings with soffit fixings, the existing ceilings are not considered to hold heritage value. However, they will be preserved underneath thus could be revealed again upon removal. Similarly, partition walls have been proposed with minimally invasive fixings, walls will only be erected where necessary and will be removed once the Site Office is no longer required.

c. Conclusion

The Proposals are considered to be in line with the requirements of Section 16 of the 1990 Act; NPPF Chapter 16; and Local Plan Policies on the Historic Environment; in that the significance of all identified heritage assets would be preserved and/or enhanced. As such the application should be considered favourably by the Local Planning Authority.

Should the Council consider that any further details are required to determine this application, please do not hesitate to contact Rebecca Mason at 07776 530 771 or rmason@iceniprojects.com.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Iceni Projects Ltd." in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Iceni Projects Ltd.