

Heritage Statement

West Hampstead fire station, 325 West End Lane, London NW6 1RR
Reconfiguration of firefighter accommodation on ground, first & second floors



Photograph 1: north-east elevation viewed from street [London Fire Brigade image]

Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of London Fire Brigade's application for Listed Building Consent for the above proposal.

Listed status of building

West Hampstead fire station was first listed as grade II on 14th May 1974, under List Entry Number 1379177. The listing description is as follows:

GV II Fire station, 1901, by the Fire Brigade Branch of the London County Council Architects Department, job architect W A Scott.

MATERIALS: Brick with roughcast rendered walls with glazed brick to part of rear elevation. Hipped slate roof with tall brick chimney-stacks. **EXTERIOR:** Elevation to West End Lane has two bays of part-glazed engine shed manually-operated doors, not the originals but probably installed in the 1920s, and a polygonal bow window of stone with transom and mullion casements. The upper two floors have bands of five-light casements to the outer bays flanking central three-light bands; all the windows have small leaded panes. Affixed to the elevation, in metal, is attractive period capital lettering which reads: LCC / Fire Brigade Station / A.D 1901. The striking, tall roughcast watch tower rises from ground floor level to appear above the roof; this has a wooden belvedere with copper pyramidal roof. The return to the south has further casement windows plus a bay window with stone mullions. To the rear is a double gabled wing with a polygonal bow window on the right hand bay and three-light casements to each floor above. To the left is the rear access to the appliance room, with replaced doors, above which is a first floor balcony bounded by iron railings. The vast majority of the original windows survive.

INTERIOR: The plan form is largely unaltered, aside from some removal of a small number of partitions, and contributes to the special interest as a bespoke solution to the constraints of the site and the decision to employ a domestic style. Other features which contribute to the special interest include:

the stairwell, corridors and landings lined with russet glazed brick; original metal staircase handrail and balustrade; ground floor mess room with half-height panelling, large segmental arches to window alcoves, bracketed mantle-shelf and a segmental-arched panelled door (the fireplace surround has been removed); watch room with similar large arches to the bay window alcove; segmental arched doorways, some in glazed brick and the original timber doors; the simple fireplaces and other joinery on the upper floors; the Jacobs ladder inside the watchtower. HISTORY: West Hampstead Station was constructed during the period when the Brigade's most characterful buildings were built. At this time, the Fire Brigade was part of London County Council and from 1896 new stations were designed by a group of architects led by Owen Fleming and Charles Canning Winmill, both formerly of the LCC Housing Department. They brought the avant-garde approach which had evolved for new social housing to the Fire Brigade Division, as the department was called from 1899. While some stations were built to standardised plans, others were highly experimental, sensitive to local context, and designed to a bespoke plan. The exemplars are Perry Vale, Euston, East Greenwich and West Hampstead. Like Perry Vale, West Hampstead has clean simple lines that speak of modernity, traditional materials of stone and brick, and vernacular forms such as canted bays, leaded casement windows within stone mullions, and flared eaves. The job architect, W A Scott, designed the station to fit a constrained site in a suburban location, rejecting the standardised plan of a multi-storey municipal building with firemen's accommodation on the upper floors in favour of a three storey domestic-style station supplemented by four firemen's cottages to the rear (qv).

The foundation stone for West Hampstead Station was laid on the 24 June 1901 by the Chairman of the Fire Brigade Committee of the LCC, J D Gilbert. The area had formerly been served by stations at St John's Wood (of 1870) and Hampstead village (of 1874) but the suburbanisation of the area necessitated further provision. As described by The Fireman journal in August 1901, West Hampstead was a 'district which until quite recently was open fields, but which is now almost entirely built over, and will, it is estimated, before many years have a population of 200,000'. The station originally housed horse-drawn engines and had stabling for four horses, probably situated at the back of the appliance room, and accommodation for a station officer, nine firemen and two coachmen and their families.

Within the listing, the "Reason for designation" is as follows:

West Hampstead Fire Station is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * of special architectural interest as one of a remarkable series of fire stations built by the LCC between 1896-1914, each executed to a bespoke design, which are widely admired as being among the most accomplished achievements of this exceptionally rich and prolific period of LCC civic architecture;
- * a clever interpretation of an Arts and Crafts-style house, with deep eaves, rough-cast walls and projecting stone mullion bay windows, which are harmoniously combined with the signage, appliance bays and striking watch tower that identify the building's municipal purpose; * excellent level of survival of original exterior, interior plan and features;
- * it exhibits the quality of materials and attention to detail which are the hallmarks of LCC design;
- * group value with the listed firemen's cottages to the rear.

The building remains in use as a fully operational fire station and the proposed works, which are the subject of this application, are to support the continuation of this existing use.

Proposed works

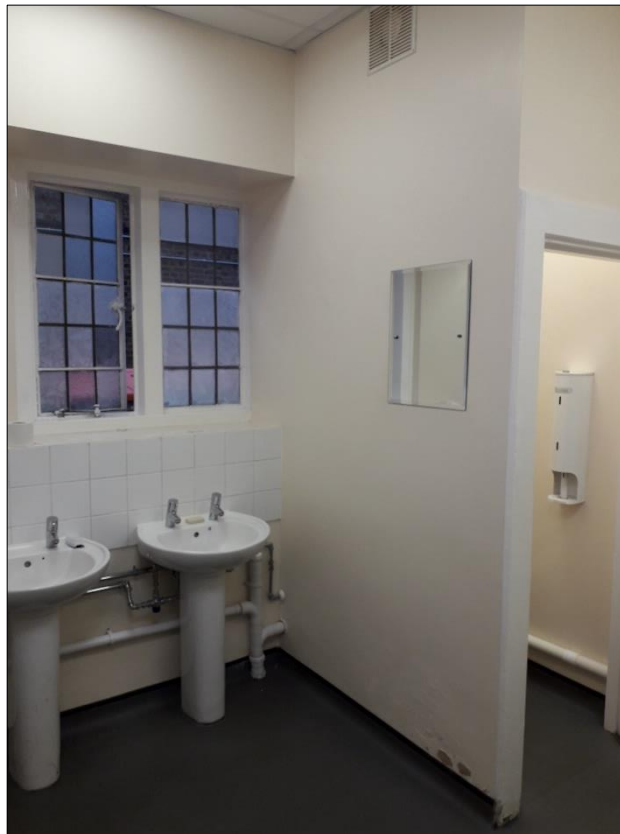
London Fire Brigade is proposing to form single occupancy resting and changing rooms on the first and second floors of West Hampstead fire station for use by individual firefighters, together with reconfigured shower and toilet facilities on the ground, first and second floors, as indicated on the "existing" and "proposed" floorplans that accompany this application.

Within the Watch Room on the ground floor, it is proposed to reduce the size of the damaged fireplace hearth by carefully cutting it back to a width of a single tile. Around the perimeter of the Watch Room, the fillet detail to the skirting board is to be retained when the floor covering is renewed.

Overall, the proposed works, which entail limited alteration of existing fabric, will directly contribute to LFB's ongoing project to provide single use resting and changing rooms for operational firefighters, to address increasing levels of diversity and enhanced aspirations for individual privacy.

The new partitions to form the resting and changing rooms would be painted finish plasterboard over stud wall construction. Doors, skirting boards, architraves, and other details would be to match existing. There would be minimal associated removal or alteration of original walls, floors, ceilings, as necessary to achieve the required room configurations. There are no changes proposed to the windows or other elements of the external elevations.

The photographs below are representative images of the existing fabric of the building.



Photograph 2: room 0G-009 showing existing arrangement and partition to WC [29.08.2023]



Photograph 3: room OG-009, showing existing doorway which is being retained [29.08.2023]



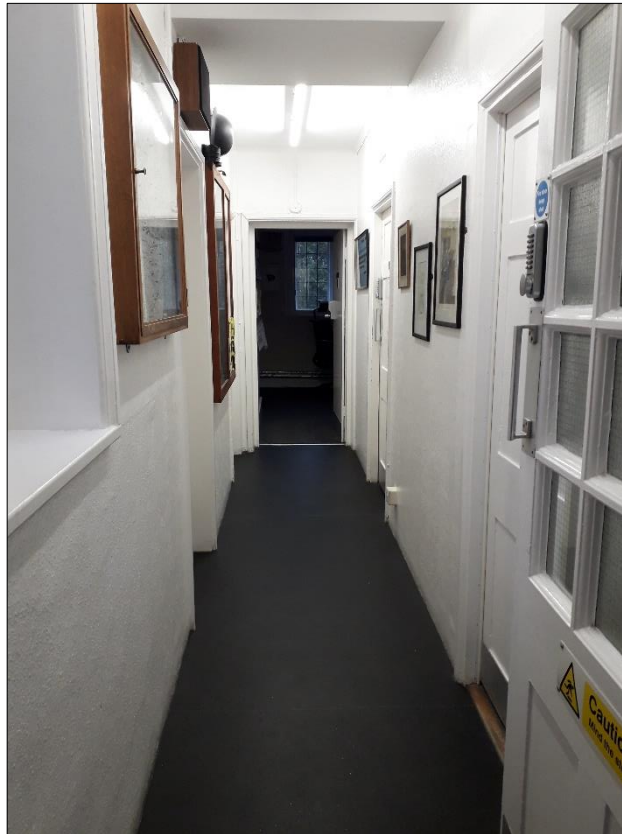
Photograph 4: room 01-104, showing general arrangement, looking towards door to room 01-103 [29.08.2023]



Photograph 5: room 01-103, showing door to room 01-102 within accommodation area [29.08.2023]



Photograph 6: room 01-102, general view [29.08.2023]



Photograph 7: corridor 02-211, looking towards room 02-213 [29.08.2023]



Photograph 8: corridor 02-211, looking towards proposed new doorway to 02-214 [29.08.2023]



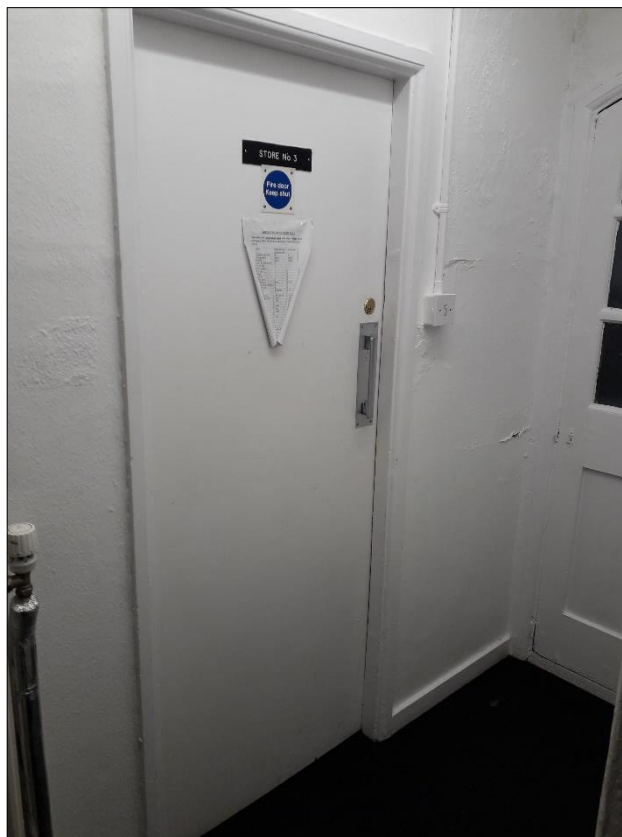
Photograph 9: room 02-213, looking towards existing doorway to room 02-214 [03.04.2023]



Photograph 10: room 02-214, general view [29.08.2023]



Photograph 11: room 02-214, looking towards location of proposed new door opening [29.08.2023]



Photograph 12: corridor 02-204, looking towards existing doorway to room 02-203 [29.08.2023]

Heritage context

The need for historic buildings to accommodate some degree of change was acknowledged by Martin Cherry (English Heritage, Head of Listings, at time of writing), in "Listing twentieth-century buildings: the present situation", (p.5), Ch 2 of "Modern Matters, Principles & Practice in Conserving Recent Architecture". Susan Macdonald (Ed), English Heritage & Donhead Publications, 1996:

Listing is not designed to fossilize buildings for all time whatever the cost. It provides the opportunity to explore all possible means of maintaining an historic building in viable use without compromising its historical and architectural character. With care, resources and imagination this can normally be achieved, although some change is likely if a building is to continue serving the needs of its occupants.

Reference has also been made to "London's historic fire stations, EH and LFB Joint Guidance, March 2010" in which it is pointed out that:

The history of the [fire] service and its buildings has been a story of constant change as the complexities of the city have evolved. New equipment, new ways of working and new responsibilities mean that fire stations are subject to constant pressure for adaptation. Often built to meet the particular requirements of their time, adaptation of fire stations presents challenges, but if they are to continue to be in effective use there has to be recognition that change is necessary.

The Joint Guidance goes on to say, in "5.1 Plan Form", that:

These spaces have often accommodated alterations historically, and future alterations should be (where possible) designed in previously compromised spaces, leaving historically intact spaces as they are.

It is apparent that the relevant areas of the ground, first and second floors, where these changes are proposed, have been "previously compromised" through the removal of previous partitions and associated alterations. Therefore, undertaking such changes here will have substantially less impact on the building's significance than might similar works elsewhere.

Archive drawings included with the application show that the floorplans of the ground, first and second floors have all been subject to incremental adaption and alteration over the years, enabling the building to maintain its intended use as a fully operational fire station.

Conclusion

Under the listing process, change is permissible as long it is properly considered. London Fire Brigade consider that this proposal has been put together with the appropriate level of care and attention to detail, with the intention of minimising its impact on the historic fabric and architectural interest of the building.

In this context, it is submitted that the current proposal for subdivision and associated alterations at West Hampstead fire station is not liable to have a material effect on the architectural or historic interest of the building and, moreover, will contribute to the longer-term viability of the building by enabling it to continue in beneficial use for its intended purpose.

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
27 November 2023
[updated 25 January 2024]