

CONSERVATION PLANNING



The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
15-17 Tavistock Place
London WC1
Heritage report
June 2024

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Heritage Report

15-17 Tavistock Place The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.0 Introduction	2
2.0 15-17 Tavistock Place: Architectural Interest	3
3.0 15-17 Tavistock Place: Significance	5
4.0 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area	6
5.0 Proposals	7
6.0 Assessment	8
7.0 Conclusions	15

Appendices

Appendix 1: CV Paddy Pugh

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15-17 Tavistock Place The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Heritage Report has been prepared in support of an application for planning permission made by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for the refurbishment of 15-17 Tavistock Place. The proposals are for the internal rearrangement of the building layout, minor external alterations, new building services plant at roof level incorporating a green roof and new staircase to provide access at roof level.
- 1.2 The building is not included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, (The Statutory List), but occupies a prominent position within The Bloomsbury Conservation Area and makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of that Area.
- 1.3 Conservation Planning has been asked to provide independent advice on the likely impacts of the proposals upon the architectural interest of the building and the character and appearance of the surrounding Conservation Area. This report sets out that advice and has been prepared by Paddy Pugh, Director of Conservation Planning, whose CV is attached at Appendix 1. In summary, Paddy Pugh has over 40 years' experience of managing change and development within the historic environment, including working with English Heritage, (now Historic England), for 27 years, the last seven as its Director of Planning and Conservation for London.
- 1.4 This report is intended to support the application for planning permission to carry out works which will help to safeguard the long term future of the building in educational use and the contribution that it makes to the street scene and this part of The Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Conservation Planning
June 2024

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2.0 15-17 Tavistock Place: Architectural Interest

- 2.1 Numbers 15-17 Tavistock Place were constructed in 1904 to the designs of architect Charles Fitzroy Doll as the headquarters for the Express Dairy Company. (Charles Doll also designed the close by Russell Hotel on the east side of Russell Square). Designed as a continuous terrace, the building stands on ground plus three upper floors above basements on the north side of the street. The ground floor is faced in terracotta tiles, the upper floors in red brickwork with dressed stone quoines above timber, sliding sash windows and an ashlar stone band running across the entire terrace above the second floor windows.
- 2.2 Doll's original drawings for the front elevation show a prominent pitched roof with dormer windows and pediments above the end bays. However, the current construction is a flat roof, hidden behind a low parapet wall and supporting a large number of building services and PV units. Neither the form of the roof as originally built or the date when it was replaced by the present structure is known.
- 2.3 There have been some minor alterations to the front elevation made to accommodate building services plant in the light wells, new entrance doors and pavement lights. However, these do not detract from the overall architectural quality and character of the elevation. Whilst 15-17 Tavistock Place is not a listed building, its front elevation is a handsome, well considered composition which makes a positive contribution to the street scene and this part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.
- 2.4 The building was acquired by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2008 and as part of its conversion to University use, planning permission was granted to extensively remodel the interior and add a new extension constructed across the rear. (Planning Ref: 2009/0067/P). Within the building, only principal structural elements and fragmentary remains of original plan form and surface finishes are now evident.
- 2.5 In 2017, a new extension was constructed to the rear of the building on an area previously occupied by a number of sheds of no architectural interest, (Planning Ref: 2015/3406/P). This part of the School is known as TP2 whilst the Tavistock Place building is known as TP1. Between the two structures is an open courtyard.
- 2.6 In summary, the architectural interest of 15-17 Tavistock Place is concentrated in its handsome front elevation which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The building's rear elevation is now formed by a modern extension and within the interior, there is little of interest beyond utilitarian elements of structure.

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Front elevation, looking east along Tavistock Place as existing



Front elevation, existing main entrance, Tavistock Place

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3.0 15-17 Tavistock Place: Significance

- 3.1 Since the publication of Conservation Principles in April 2008, Historic England, (previously English Heritage), has advocated a values-based approach to describing and understanding the significance of an historic building or place. The aim is to provide a more rounded understanding of why a building or place is important by introducing the concept of cultural heritage defined by a set of values which go beyond special architectural or historic interest.
- 3.2 That approach has been enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework, (the NPPF), December 2023, which sets out the Government's planning policies and how they are to be applied. The NPPF consistently uses the concept of significance as a measure for describing the importance of a heritage asset and the appropriateness of proposals for change or development within the historic environment. The principal judgement to be made in determining an application for planning permission, (or listed building consent), is, would any harm be caused to the significance of any heritage asset which would be affected by the proposals.
- 3.3 The terms *significance* or *values* are not found in primary legislation, nor do they replace the criteria for inclusion on the Statutory List. The concept sits alongside the statutory system to offer a wider understanding of importance that may go beyond special architectural or historic interest. Historic England has suggested that the significance of an historic building or place might be understood through one or several of the following values:

Evidential Value: The potential of a place to yield primary evidence about past human activity.

Historical Value: The ways in which the present can be connected to past people, events and aspects of life.

Aesthetic Value: The ways in which people derive sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Communal Value: The meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, and whose collective memory it holds.

- 3.4 If test against the values suggested by Historic England, 15-17 Tavistock Place would be assessed as having high *aesthetic value* for the architectural quality and character of its front elevation and the positive contribution made to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. As part of the University of London since 2010, The School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is also of *communal value* for the collective memories it holds of staff and students over the past 13 years.

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4.0 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area

- 4.1 Numbers 15-17 Tavistock Place stand within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area which was first designated in 1968 but benefits from a Conservation Area Appraisal adopted by Camden Council in April 2011. The Area extends to some 160 hectares and is noted for its formally planned arrangement of streets and garden squares.
- 4.2 Development began in the 1660s with the construction of Bloomsbury Square and continued through to the 20th and early 21st centuries. The 18th and early 19th centuries saw the most rapid expansion of development, mainly fashionable residential areas and Garden Squares. Reconstruction following war time bomb damage and the growth of London University have added buildings of a “*new scale and aesthetic*” as noted by Nikolaus Pevsner in The Buildings of England, London 4: North
- 4.3 The Appraisal notes that “*The quintessential character of the Conservation Area drives from the grid of streets enclosed by mainly three and four storey development which has a distinctly urban character of broad streets interspersed by formal squares which provide landscape dominated focal points.*” (para 3.8) Within that overall character, there is a rich variety of phases of development, building types, facing materials, uses and landscaped spaces. As a consequence of the Area’s size and complexity, the Appraisal defines 14 sub-areas in which to assess character and appearance.
- 4.4 Tavistock Place lies within sub-area 13, Cartwright Gardens/Argle Square. The Appraisal summarises the character and appearance of the sub-area in the following terms:
- “The interest of this sub-area derives from the formal early 19th century street pattern layout of open spaces, and the relatively intact surviving terraces of houses. Developed mainly by James Burton, it was one of the later areas of Bloomsbury to be completed, and its early 19th century parts retains a remarkably uniform streetscape. The mature trees to be found in the large formal gardens soften the urban area and provide a foil for the built environment in the summer months.”* (para 5.225).
- 4.5 Tavistock Place is described in the Appraisal as “*a busier wider street that is more mixed in character with a larger proportion of buildings dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The height and articulation of the early 19th century four storey townhouses on the south side, built by Burton to his own designs, is echoed in the larger scale but continuous block on the north side at No 15. Elsewhere there is a predominance of red brick and ornate detailing, as found in the larger scale mansion blocks of the later 19th century. Of special architectural interest is the former Mary Ward Settlement building, which is grade I listed. It was built in an advance Arts and Crafts manner by Alan Dunbar Smith and Cecil Brewer,*” (para 5.238).

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- 4.6 Alongside the Mary Ward Settlement building is the Grade II listed Mary Ward Centre, (also designed by Dunbar Smith and Brewer in 1903 as the School for Handicapped Children).
- 4.7 15-17 Tavistock Place continues the terrace and was constructed in 1904 to the designs of Charles Fitzroy Doll. It is not listed but is identified in the Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 4.8 The Appraisal notes that *“Although the area is strongly influenced by a formal pattern of streets and spaces it was not planned to create distinctive formal vistas to architectural set pieces such as churches, other than the view to the Foundling Hospital, (demolished 1926).”* (para 3.14).
- 4.9 Whilst there are a few notable views to landmarks within and outside the Conservation Area, Tavistock Place is not one of them. However, the relatively generous width of the street and its straight alignment, affords good views of the terraces on both sides including of the School of Hygiene at 15-17.

5.0 **Proposals**

- 5.1 15-17 Tavistock Place was acquired by the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2008 and reopened in 2010 as part of the University of London with a new extension across the rear of the building. In 2017, an extension known as TP2 was constructed to the rear containing a medical research laboratory and higher education teaching facilities.
- 5.2 The Tavistock Place building, known as TP1, contains a limited amount of teaching space but is mainly in ancillary office use. The School now wishes to create a centralised teaching and learning facility for post-graduate students within the building.
- 5.3 The proposals are illustrated in drawings and a Design and Access Statement prepared by architects Rivington Street Studio. The main elements are as follows:
- All 5 floors would be remodelled to provide teaching, breakout and welfare facilities.
 - New roof top building services plant incorporating a green roof would be provided.
 - The cladding system on the rear, courtyard elevation of TP1 is failing and would be replaced.
 - The street elevation would be enhanced by improved signage and planters. Building services plant, visible within the front basement area, would be removed.

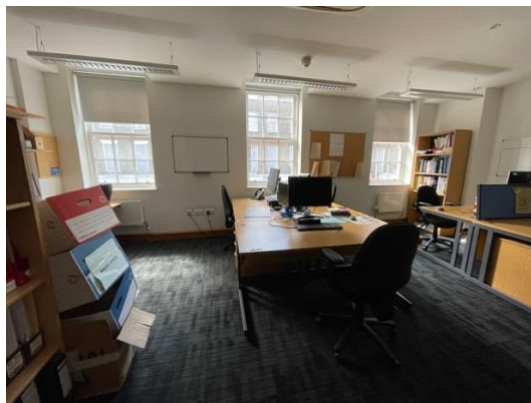
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6.0 Assessment

6.1 Internal Remodelling

15-17 Tavistock Place was constructed in 1904 as headquarters and offices for the Express Diary Company and subsequently used as offices for the British Transport Police. In 2010 it was comprehensively refurbished and extended as part of its conversion to university use. Very little original plan form or finishes survive from what was very likely a functional, administrative building. As a result, the interior is characterised by a series of plain, unremarkable office spaces.

6.2 The architectural interest of the building resides entirely in its handsome street elevation which undoubtedly makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Similarly, the significance of the building is most evident in the aesthetic value of the street elevation. As a part of London University, the building is also of some communal value for the collective memories that it holds. Remodelling the interior to create additional teaching and learning spaces would not have any impact on the architectural interest of the street elevation or contribution made to the Conservation Area. Neither would any harm be caused to the aesthetic value or significance of the building. Increasing and consolidating teaching and learning facilities would reinforce and enhance the communal value and significance of the building.



First floor front interior: office space



Ground floor front interior: teaching space

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6.3 Roof Top Building Services Plant

The existing flat roof currently accommodates a large amount of building services plant and PVs behind a low, unbroken parapet wall. From street level, the plant is invisible apart from a short section of safety rail which can be just glimpsed above the western end of the building from the corner of Herbrand Street.



Existing flat roof with building services plant and PV units

- 6.4 The creation of additional teaching and learning space would generate an overall increase in occupancy rate and higher concentrations of people in specific spaces for set periods of time. The proposed solution is to provide a mechanical ventilation system through a series of Air Handling Units and Air Source Heat Pumps siting on the flat roof. These would sit towards the rear of the roof and the PV units would be rearranged around the new plant.
- 6.5 Verified Views have demonstrated that in front of the school, at the junction with Marchmont Street and further east at the junction with Kenton Street, the plant would not be visible. Importantly, the parapet wall would continue to provide a clean, unbroken top to the building.

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Proposed view close to the junction with Marchmont Street



Proposed view further east, close to the junction with Kenton Street

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6.6 From the west, at the Herbrand Street junction, and towards Woburn Place, there would be limited glimpsed views of the plant.



Proposed view close to the junction with Herbrand Street



Proposed view further west towards Woburn Place

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- 6.7 The proposed building services plant would not have any impact on the architectural interest of 15-17 Tavistock Place. It would be sufficiently set back on the flat roof as to be almost undetectable and not have any disrupting effect on the front elevation which would continue to be terminated by the line of a clean, unbroken parapet wall. Similarly, no harm would be caused to the aesthetic, or communal values or significance of the building. Rather, its communal value and significance would be reinforced by supporting the provision of high quality teaching and learning spaces.
- 6.8 There would be limited, glimpsed views of the plant when seen at street level just beyond the corner with Herbrand Street but the impact on the character or appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area would be negligible. Specifically, there would be no impact on the characteristics and interest of sub-area 13 which the Appraisal identifies as deriving from *“the formal early 19th century street pattern and layout of open spaces, and relatively intact surviving terraces of houses”* Nor would the proposed plant have any impact upon the appraisal’s description of Tavistock Place as *“The height and articulation of the early 19th century four-storey townhouses on the south side, built by Burton to his own designs is echoed in the larger scale but continuous block on the north side at No 15. Elsewhere there is a predominance of red brick and ornate detailing, as found in the larger scale mansion blocks of the later 19th Century.”* No harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area for which it is so highly regarded. The impact upon those attributes would be de-minimus.



Existing Street View, looking east from towards Woburn Place

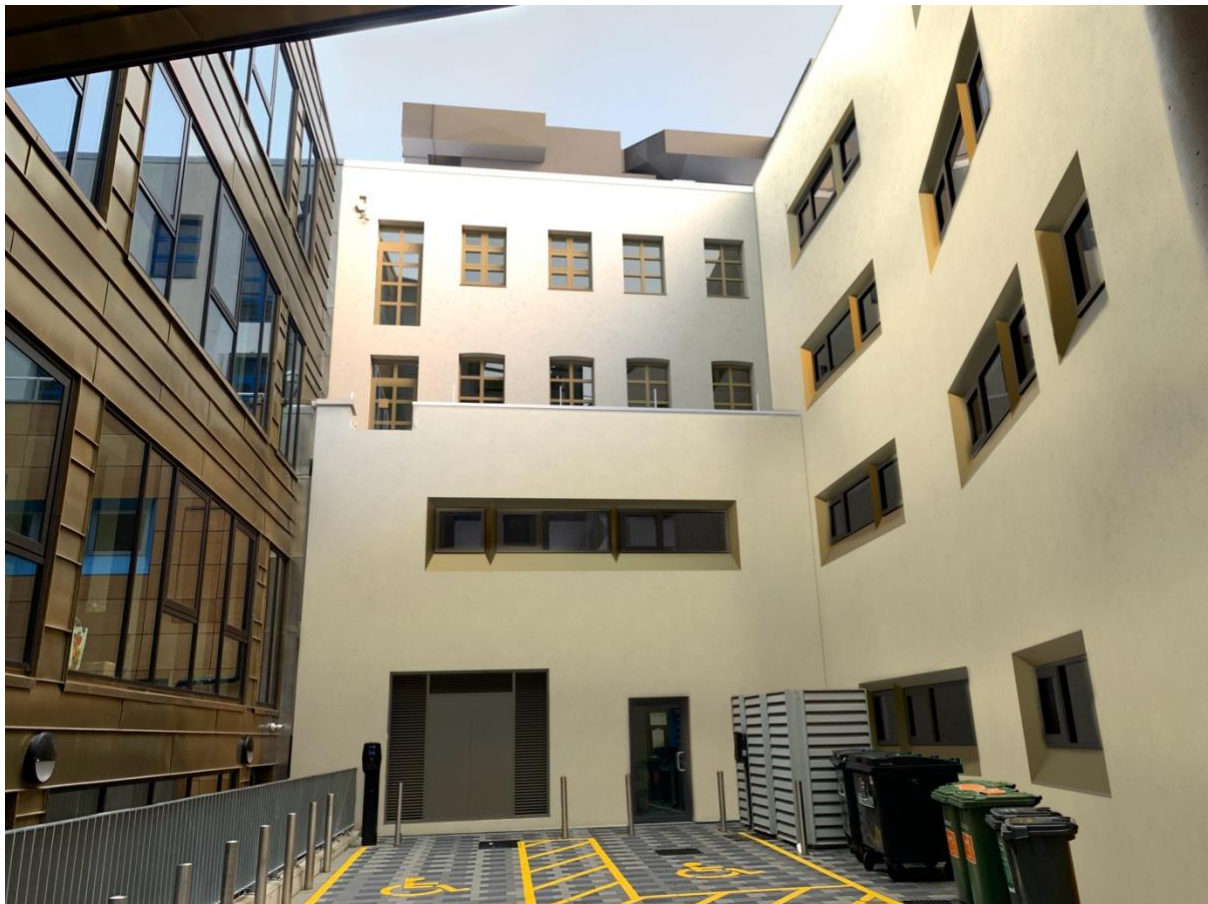
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6.9 Recladding The Courtyard Elevation

The rear, courtyard elevation of 15-17 Tavistock Place is clad in a rainscreen board material with a timber effect finish. The panels show signs of water penetration, the level of fire stopping is unknown and thermal insulation does not meet modern standards. In addition, the panels have a poor visual relationship to the metal standing seam system used on the adjoining, recently constructed TP2 extension.

6.10 The existing boarding would be removed and replaced with an insulated render system in a white colour. Some of the existing windows would be recoated whilst others would be replaced by windows of the same size and in the same position as the existing. All windows would be coloured to match those on TP2.

6.11 The rear elevation of the building, part of the 2010 extension, is formed in an unremarkable cladding system which is now showing signs of significant deterioration. It makes no contribution to the architectural interest of 15-17 Tavistock Place which is concentrated in its street elevation. The internal courtyard cannot be seen from any public area and makes no contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Replacing the cladding system in a white rendered finish would match other external walled areas within the School and provide an improved relationship with the appearance of the TP2 extension.



New insulated render system on TP1 within rear courtyard

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6.12 Enhancements To the Street Elevation

Improved signage and providing new planters at the entrance would create a more welcoming and open entrance to the School than currently exists. It would also provide some animation to the street scene.

Removing the building services plant from the front basement area, where it is visible from the public footway, would be a modest but worthwhile improvement to the appearance of the School. Removal of these services would also offer some enhancement to the appearance of this part of the Conservation Area.



Proposed entrance doors, signage and planters



Existing building services plant within front basement area

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7.0 Conclusions

- 7.2 The architectural interest of 15-17 Tavistock Place rests in its handsome front elevation and positive contribution made to the character and appearance of this part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The significance of the building is most evident in the aesthetic value of its front elevation but it is also of some communal value and significance for the collective memories it holds as a part of London University. The proposed creation of a high quality teaching and learning facility for post-graduate students would sustain and reinforce those values and the significance of the building.
- 7.3 Internally, very little survives from the original plan form and finishes. Remodelling the interior would not cause any harm to the building's architectural interest, aesthetic value or significance. The addition of high quality teaching and learning space would reinforce its communal value and significance.
- 7.4 The proposed building services plant would sit towards the rear of a flat roof structure of no architectural or historic interest. From street level along Tavistock Place, the plant would be almost invisible. Only limited views of the plant would be glimpsed beyond the corner with Herbrand Street. The parapet wall would continue to provide a clean, unbroken termination to the building's front elevation and the impact of the plant would be almost undetectable. The impact on the appearance of the Conservation Area from glimpsed views would be de-minimus. No harm would be caused to the attributes of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area that make it special.
- 7.5 The boarded cladding on the rear elevation of the building is not of any architectural or technical interest. Nor can it be seen from any public space. Replacing it with a white rendered cladding would not have any impact on the architectural interest of the building which is concentrated in its front elevation. Nor would there be any impact upon the character or appearance of the Conservation Area or the attributes that make it special.
- 7.6 New signage and planters on the front elevation would signal the School's presence and make a positive contribution to the street scene and this part of the Conservation Area. Removing visible building services plant from the front basement areas would be a worthwhile improvement to the appearance of the building and Conservation Area.
- 7.7 Historic England's Planning Policy Note 2, Managing significance in decision taking in the Historic Environment, emphasises that *change to a historic asset is inevitable but is only harmful when significance is damaged*. That is not the case here and there are no sound conservation related reasons why planning permission should not be granted for the application made by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and illustrated in the drawings and Design and Access Statement prepared by architects Rivington Street Studio.