

**49-51 Gordon Square – Fire Alarm System Replacement
Heritage Assessment**

Introduction

1. On behalf of UCL, Gerald Eve has prepared a Heritage Assessment to accompany the listed building consent application for internal works relating to replacement fire alarm systems at 49-51 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0PD.
2. The Heritage Assessment identifies the significance of those parts of the buildings where the proposed works are taking place and assesses how the proposals would affect the heritage significance of the listed buildings. The assessment also considers the effect of the proposed works on the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Statutory Framework

3. Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that in considering whether to grant listed building consent, special regard shall be paid to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
4. Section 72 of the same Act states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Planning Policy Context

5. Under paragraph 200 of the NPPF, in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting.
6. Paragraph 203 states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
 - The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
 - The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic viability; and
 - The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

7. Paragraph 208 states that where a development proposal will lead to a less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.
8. Policy D1 of the Camden Local Plan sets out that the Council will seek to secure high quality design that, amongst other things, respects local context and character and preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets.
9. Policy D2 of the Camden Local Plan sets out that the Council will seek to preserve and where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, especially the conservation areas and listed buildings. To maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character or appearance of the area. The Council will also resist development that would cause harm to the significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting or would cause harm to its special architectural and historical interest.

Assessment of Significance

49-51 Gordon Square

10. 49-51 Gordon Square form part of a Grade II listed terrace row that is located in the London Borough of Camden.
11. The terrace row was listed in 1969 (List Entry: 1113034) with the following list description:

"TQ2982SE GORDON SQUARE 798-1/94/595 (East side) 03/04/69 Nos.47-53 (Consecutive) and attached railings to areas and wall to No.45 Tavistock Square GV II

Includes: Screen wall linking No.53 Gordon Square & No.45 Tavistock Square TAVISTOCK SQUARE. Terrace of 7 houses. Mid C19. Yellow stock brick with alternating rusticated and plain stucco ground floors. Rusticated stucco quoins. EXTERIOR: 5 storeys and basements. 3 windows each and 3-window right hand return (1 blind) forming entrance to No.53. Symmetrical composition in Italianate style with projecting central (No.50) and end bays (Nos 47 & 53). Nos 47, 52 & 53 with Doric prostyle porticoes with balustraded parapets. Square-headed, recessed doorways with fanlights and panelled doors. Architraved 1st floor sash windows, Nos 47, 50 & 53 with pediments and continuous balustraded balconies on large brackets. Nos 48, 49, 51 & 52 with cornices and continuous cast-iron balconies. Remaining windows architraved sashes, the 2nd floors of Nos 47, 50 & 53 with cornices. Moulded stucco 4th floor sill band. Projecting, bracketed stucco cornice. Slab chimney above No.53 with similar, scaled down cornice. Attached cast-iron railings with pineapple and foliated finials to areas. INTERIORS: retain good features and moulded ceilings. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached wall from return of No.53 to

No.45 Tavistock Square (qv) forming a balanced composition; stucco, divided into 7 bays by pilasters. HISTORICAL NOTE: No.51 was the home of Lytton Strachey, critic and biographer (GLC plaque).”

12. The proposed works are located internally on all floors throughout 49, 50 and 51 Gordon Square. Minor external works in the form of cabling and fire alarm beacons are also proposed.
13. Internally, many rooms have been subject to significant alterations over the years including the addition of partition walls, boxing, suspended ceilings, new flooring and a variety of modern fixtures and fittings. However, a number of the rooms do retain their original moulded ceilings, which are identified in the listing description as contributing the significance of the buildings.
14. The Site is also located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area covers an area of approximately 160 hectares extending from Euston Road in the north to High Holborn and Lincoln’s Inn Fields in the south and from Tottenham Court Road in the west to King’s Cross Road in the east.
15. The Site falls within Sub-Area 2 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The sub-area covers Gordon Square, Woburn Square and Byng Place.
16. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal (2011) sets out that the predominant building type in Bloomsbury are terraces which tend to adhere to a pattern of four storeys with basements set back from the pavement edge behind lightwells with railings to the frontage. They have vertically proportioned windows with the tallest at first-floor level emphasising the piano nobile (or principal floor) and diminishing in size on successive upper floors. Window openings are characterised by box sashes subdivided into small panes by slender glazing bars. The architectural hierarchy and articulation of facades is characterised by uniformity and repetition. The properties at 49-51 Gordon Square are representative of the character of Bloomsbury Conservation Area and are identified as making a positive contribution.

The Proposals and their Impact on Significance

17. The proposals seek to provide a safe environment for UCL staff and students of 49-51 Gordon Square through the replacement and upgrade of the fire alarm systems within the buildings. The works are necessary as the current systems are not fit for purpose and are not functioning efficiently to meet modern standards.
18. The works proposed are predominantly internal, with minor external works, and full details can be found in the supporting drawings and schedule of works document, prepared by Fowler Martin.
19. As previously noted, the majority of the rooms within the buildings have been subject to modern alterations or do not retain any features of significance and are therefore considered to be of low

significance. The rooms which do retain features of significance, in the form of ceiling mouldings, are largely sited to the front of the buildings, or form circulation spaces and are therefore considered to be of medium significance.

20. In order to minimise the impact of the new fire alarm systems on the listed buildings, the new devices will utilise existing device locations wherever possible. Furthermore, the upgraded system will allow for the rationalisation of fixtures throughout the buildings.
21. As a smoke detector is required in all rooms, and in order to ensure the maximum effectiveness of the new system, these are required to be located centrally within the rooms. Therefore, where these are to be installed in rooms which do retain features of significance, in the form of moulded ceilings, the fixtures will be sited as sensitively as possible to minimise harm. Within these rooms/areas the location of the smoke detectors has been guided by the position of existing ceiling mounted fixtures, for example, track lighting and wi-fi points, with the aim to consolidate these. This approach has been taken to limit their visual impact and avoid further disrupting and cluttering the decorative ceilings with modern fixtures. It is highlighted that there will be no fixing to mouldings.
22. The systems are required to be supported by cabling which is proposed to be installed within suspended ceilings or clipped to floor joists. Where visible, the cabling is proposed to be surface mounted in mini trunking and clipped to walls and ceilings. This would require minimal intervention to the listed fabric and the cabling will be sensitively routed.
23. Minor external works are proposed to support the new systems, and these will not impact upon the special architectural and historic significance of the listed buildings, or the character and appearance of the conservation areas.
24. Whilst works are proposed in areas of significance, the devices have been sensitively sited to minimise their impact and not detract from the decorative mouldings.

Conclusion

25. Overall, the proposals would cause no harm to the significance of the building and would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed buildings. The proposal seeks to improve the safety of the buildings through the provision of upgraded fire alarm systems, which would allow the overall number of fixtures to be rationalised. Whilst smoke detectors are located within areas of significance, this is unavoidable, and every effort has been made to sensitively locate modern fixtures to ensure any impact on the listed buildings is minimised.
26. The proposed works would therefore preserve the significance of the listed building and the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. They are considered to be in accordance with the Local Plan Policies D1 and D2, as well as relevant national policy relating to the historic environment. Furthermore, the applications would satisfy the statutory provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.