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69 GOWER STREET, LONDON: RESPONSE TO BLOOMSBURY CAAC OBJECTION – APPLICATION REFERENCE 2024/3914/P AND 2024/3983/L

Savills Heritage and Townscape have been instructed by the applicant to advise with regard to heritage matters for refurbishment works to the Grade II listed No. 69 Gower Street, London. This has included the provision of a Heritage Statement in support of the recent LBC application for MEP upgrades to the listed building (ref: 2024/3983/L and 2024/3914/P).

The proposals for this application comprise the sensitive upgrade of the hotel's MEP systems in order to replace defunct kit, improve energy efficiency and provide effective heating and cooling to the refurbished hotel rooms as part of the wider upgrade works recently consented (ref: 2024/1614/L and 2024/1264/P and 2024/3964/L and 2024/3915/P). Savills Heritage and Townscape have advised on the proposals for the listed building throughout the design process, with the core aim of the project being to provide the listed building with a much-needed refurbishment, in order to secure its long term viable use as a hotel whilst sensitively retaining and restoring surviving historic features.

Iterative consultation was undertaken with the MEP consultants for the scheme as part of the design development, in order to ensure that the proposed MEP upgrades could be achieved in a manner sensitive to the significance of the listed building. As can be seen in the site photographs below, the condition of the existing plant detracts from the significance of the listed building due to numerous piecemeal interventions undertaken over time, including intrusive boxing in of soil pipes and service runs across ceilings. Externally this is also apparent in the unsympathetic vents installed within historic windows, numerous externally-routed soil pipes and plastic downpipes.



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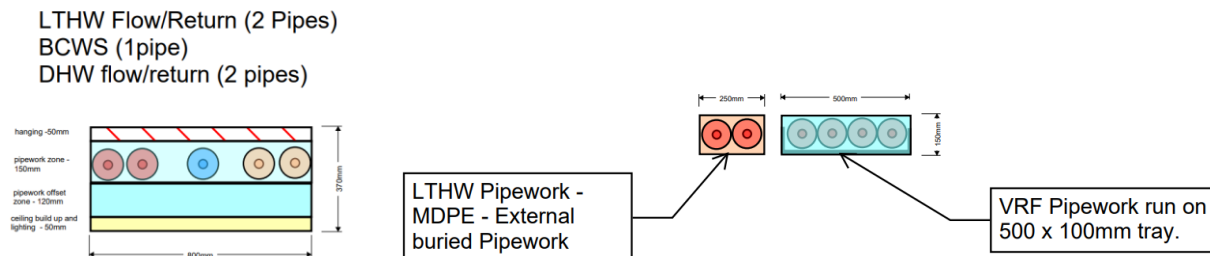
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The MEP proposals seek to rationalise and vastly improve this existing condition, by concealing most service runs within vertical service risers as included in previously consented layout changes. The proposed service runs have been carefully considered in order to minimise visual and fabric impact to the listed building, with service runs discretely located and using existing service routes as much as possible. The key objective of this approach is to better reveal the historic form and character of the listed building.

The objection received from the Bloomsbury CAAC states that: *'...we are strongly opposed to the addition of Air Conditioning, not least because it will require so much ducting.'* This is considered to represent a misunderstanding of the proposed interventions, and it is noted that the objection also states the proposed internal plans have not been consulted (available online under application reference 2024/3914/P), which would suggest that the objector has not been able to fully review the proposed scheme and required interventions. It should be noted that the heat pump system proposed does not operate using air-handling ductwork, but instead uses small diameter pipes which allow the flow of heated (or cooled) fluid to the head units. The only air-handling ductwork is for the bathroom mechanical extract fans, which will be located exclusively in the service risers.

Where new openings are required, these pipes will result in minimal fabric impact and are a maximum of 20mm in diameter. High performance insulation will be used to minimise the size of new openings where possible. The only area in which boxing has been required to achieve a workable system layout is on the lower ground floor, and most of this will be replacing existing boxing, or located within the service corridor adjacent to Room 2. Extracts of drawing numbers 10499-IRB-XX-LG-S-Z-5001 and 10499-IRB-XX-GF-S-Z-5001 are provided below to show the dimensions of this ductwork. The lower ground floor has good ceiling heights and no historically interesting plasterwork, and as such is a better location for boxing than anywhere else in the building.



Such a system has been consciously selected by the design team and applicant in order to ensure that the proposed MEP upgrades are as sympathetic as possible to the listed building.

It is noted (and welcomed) that the Bloomsbury CAAC are *'...not opposed to the refurbishment work itself, which seems to be carefully planned.'* The proposed MEP upgrades are a key element of this wider refurbishment for the listed building's long term viable use as described above. The proposed internal plans are attached to this response for ease of reference, which are considered a robust response to Bloomsbury CAAC's concerns alongside this further justification of the proposals.

Prepared by:



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