

History

Derby Lodge comprises two blocks: Flats 1-36 Derby Lodge, originally Derby Buildings, are located in Britannia Street in the London Borough of Camden. They were listed Grade II on 11 March 1994; the list entry no. is 1272350 and the National Grid Reference is TQ 30680 82911.

The adjacent block comprising Flats 37-102 Derby Lodge, is located on Wicklow Street and was also listed Grade II on 11 March 1994; the list entry no. is 1379194 and the National Grid Reference is TQ 30700 82884.

Derby Lodge was built in 1865 and is among the earliest surviving examples of the work of the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, one of the many philanthropic providers of housing for the poor in this period. The Company had been founded two years earlier by the Victorian philanthropist, and later Lord Mayor, Sir Sydney Waterlow, with a capital of £50,000, and grew into one of the largest and most successful of the model dwellings companies, housing around 30,000 at its height. The builder, as for most of the IIDC's dwellings was Matthew Allen; Waterlow preferred to work directly with him rather than use an architect. The principle behind the various Model Dwelling initiatives was typically Victorian: the unhealthy living conditions in which so many lived would be addressed by provision of well-built accommodation for those who could afford a modest rent, whilst providing a reasonable return to investors, and indeed similar enterprises like the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Co made this explicit in their title. The IIDC aimed to produce a 5% dividend and by 1871, when over 1,000 dwellings were occupied, was exceeding this return. The schemes were directed at the working classes: there was a strict selection and discipline regime amongst its tenants to try to protect returns on investment, although these often proved less than anticipated. The very poor were unable to afford such accommodation.

Like many philanthropic dwellings the accommodation in Derby Buildings was designed as purpose-built flats, itself a novelty. Flats were provided with balcony access, which allowed ventilation for the stairs and at the same time exempted the blocks from house duty, but they differed from those of other companies by being entirely self-contained, having their own lavatories and sculleries behind the living-rooms no matter how small the flat. Floors were commonly of concrete, as Allen was an early exponent of concrete construction for cheapness. Without a regular architect, the IIDC normally relied for its designs upon a modification of their original plan, worked out between a consulting surveyor and their secretary, who for many years was the industrious James Moore. 'We have what we call standard plans', said Waterlow in 1884, 'and if plan No. 1 does not fit, plan No. 2 or No. 3 or No. 4 probably fits the peculiar ground we have to deal with'.

The IIDC had already built very similar blocks. Cromwell Buildings in Southwark, a single block, and Tower Buildings in Wapping, two blocks, were opened in 1864. Stanley Buildings, originally five blocks east of St Pancras station, of which only the two fronting Stanley Passage and Clarence Passage remain, and they are truncated, was completed in 1864-5.

It is interesting to note the design development over just a few years: Leopold Buildings in Columbia Road, Hackney, was completed in 1872 but by this date the design has become more ornate, with decorative quoins and projecting bay windows to each floor.

Derby Lodge comprises six blocks which form a group, with two on Britannia Street [1-18 and 19-36 Derby Lodge] and four on Wicklow Street [37-53, 54-68, 69-84, and 85-102 Derby Lodge]. Only blocks 69-84 and 85-102 form part of this application, the other two being in separate ownership. Cobden Buildings, a single block on the East side of King's Cross Road, was built by the IIDC at the same time and is of very similar appearance and detailing. Clarendon Buildings in Balderton Street, Mayfair, followed in 1871 and has an extended open frontage arrangement, clearly a development from Derby Lodge.

Description

The blocks are of six stories, the front elevations built of recently cleaned yellow/buff bricks with cream-painted sharply incised rusticated stucco at ground floor level. They are planned around very compact recessed open stairwells with balcony access, with winders turning around either a semicircle or two quarter-circles; the balcony areas have decorative stucco work with Tuscan 'pilastrades'. The full-height balcony recess is divided into two broad bays by a brick pier with a stylised capital from which spring decorative filigree lintols. Ornate cast iron lattice-pattern balcony railings give the frontage depth and interest, enhanced by stucco work around the windows and decorative iron ventilation grilles between windows at each floor.

Investigative work shows that access balconies are of clinker concrete with a high percentage of aggregate and little binding matrix. Lintols over opening to the rear wall appear to be made of similar concrete. The front edges of the balconies were originally supported solely by the decorative curved iron beams which span between a central brick pier with decorative padstones and the brickwork of the main elevation to flats. These beams are supplemented by steel channels tucked immediately behind them, which appears to be a twentieth-century remedial structural measure.

Above the balcony recess at roof level there are metal railings

The blocks have undergone internal reworking: drawings exist showing works proposed by LB Camden in 1976-7 which are believed to have been executed.

Secure entrance screens and doors have been installed fairly recently, finished in a light grey/green similar to that of the balconies. Front elevation windows to all blocks except 19-36 comprise a pair of tripartite sash windows either side of the entrance with single sash windows to upper floors. 19-36 has single sashes at ground floor level with side-hung casements over fixed lights to upper floors, and the window surrounds retain more elaborate projecting pedimented stucco work than remains at 1-18. Another notable difference is the decorative iron ventilation grilles in the form of small round-arched lancets found between each pair of upper floor windows to 19-36 only. 69-102 retains the stucco arched openings but not the delicate grilles. These two 19-36 and 69-102] are the only blocks with a chamfered plan at the junction of the projecting rear extensions and have differing internal layouts to the other blocks. Presumably the vents were necessary because of the internal plan, which included a dogleg type stair with winders around a semicircular end. The vents are repeated on the rear elevations.

The rear elevations are considerably more utilitarian: built of London stock bricks, with significant patching with non-matching yellow bricks, very obtrusive against the existing which has not been cleaned and is very dark in many areas. Each of the six blocks has a projecting rear bay: this is rectilinear in the four 'standard' blocks, with a pair of windows in its end elevation. These are side-hung casements with timber spandrel panels below, formed in heavy relief. The two 'odd' blocks, as noted above, have a splayed or chamfered plan, and a rather forbidding blank end elevation.

The overall effect of the rear elevations is somewhat oppressive: their form is relieved only by a simple projecting brick cornice. But there are some decorative elements to lighten matters. All windows have painted stone lintols with a simple recessed design; those which have not had their cills raised have painted stone cills. At some point in the second half of the last century, possibly the 1976-7 refurbishment, bathrooms were introduced into all flats and windows to these rooms were replaced with conventional timber stormproof windows generally comprising a sidehung casement below a small ventilating light. The cills were raised and brickwork infilled with the yellow bricks noted above. Occasional windows have been completely infilled.

Apart from these, and the windows to the end elevations of rear extension mentioned above, the windows at 1-36 are generally sidehung casements over fixed lights, some with top-hung ventilators over. A few vertical sliding sashes, again over fixed lights, have been introduced, presumably as available replacements for the non-standard original casements, and the casement types are not consistent in a given location. At ground floor are French windows giving access to the rear area, all part-glazed over a timber panel and with glazed fanlights. Subdivision of the glazed panels varies.

In contrast 69-102 has sliding sashes consistently to all locations except the ends of rear extensions and bathroom windows, both as mentioned above.

All windows were originally single-glazed in painted timber frames. In 2020 Listed Building Consent [2020/5332/L] and planning approval [2020/4317/P] were granted for replacement of all windows and doors to the rear elevations with new double-glazed timber windows to replicate the windows as then existing.

Proposed works

1 Structural issues

The access balconies are of concrete with an integral wearing layer rather than asphalt or other waterproofing finish. Their front edges were originally supported by decorative curved and perforated iron beams spanning between the central brick pier and the brickwork of the main elevation to flats, supported at each end by decorative padstones. These decorative beams are supplemented by steel channels tucked immediately behind them, which appears to be a twentieth-century remedial structural measure.

Significant visible deterioration has been observed in the open balcony areas of all blocks. This includes:-

- cracking and spalling to balcony soffits, generally running back orthogonally from the building face
- cracking to lintols above all opening at the rear of the balconies, ie above front entrance doors, windows, and entrances to staircase
- cracking to central brick piers, combined with significant loss of material to decorative padstones which support the steel channels, in places significantly reducing their structural support
- rusting and corrosion especially at support points to the original decorative curved iron beams
- rusting and corrosion at their support points to the steel channels

2 Structural proposals

The Structural Engineer has prepared scheme drawings which requires careful demolition and rebuilding of the central pier. The existing bricks cannot be reused as their compressive strength is far too low and many are damaged. A new brick with the appropriate structural performance which is a good match in colour and overall appearance has been selected and a sample is available to view.

Padstones will be renewed in concrete, either cast to match the existing profiles or with decorative details made up in proprietary specialist render to exactly match the original in all cases. Similarly, lintols to the inner wall over windows and doors will be replaced in concrete with appropriate reinforcement and cast to match the existing mouldings. Should this be unfeasible they too will be made up to matching profiles in specialist render.

Concrete repairs will be carried out to balcony soffits, and balcony floors overlaid with a waterproof finish coat in order to prevent saturation of the slabs and pier bases.

Decorative iron beams, along with balcony balustrade panels, will be removed, cleaned and repaired by specialists, painted and reinstated. Steel channels will be treated similarly unless their condition dictates replacement.

Rainwater pipes and brackets will be replaced in cast iron, profiles to match the existing.

3 Objectives

The primary aim of the proposed works is to make the blocks structurally safe and prevent further corrosion, movement and loss of material. Besides providing much-needed reassurance for the residents it will allow the obtrusive propping system to be removed.

Waterproofing will prevent reoccurrence of the saturation of vulnerable poor-quality historic reinforced concrete construction.

The proposals will require additional detail as investigation work proceeds, to establish and record the extent of removals and renewals and to accurately record the original detail of items such as the padstones. Further more detailed drawings can be provided as this stage proceeds.

4 Conclusion

In our view the damage to the listed asset is not significant in context. Without the proposed works further deterioration of the already vulnerable historic fabric will occur and unsightly propping will have to remain in situ.