

70 Great Russell Street

Staircase Refurbishment

Design & Access and Heritage Statement

April 2025



Executive Summary

The current application seeks listed building consent to refurbish the stairs leading from the ground to the first floor of the Grade II listed property at 70 Great Russell Street. The proposed works are limited to this section of the staircase, and no other parts of the building will be affected.

This statement should be read in conjunction with:

Architectural drawings by Hugh Cullum Architects:

GRS70-E-100 Existing Drawings

GRS70-P-100 Proposed Drawings

Structural drawings and documents by Structural Assembly Ltd:

0031-SK21 Part Plan

0031-SK22 Repair Detail Sheet 01

0031-SK23 Repair Detail Sheet 02

0031-SK24 Repair Detail Sheet 03

No. 67 to 70 Great Russell St – Stair Report_P2

250214 – No. 70 GRS Investigation Results

HUGH CULLUM ARCHITECTS – April 2025

Site and Heritage Significance

The site is 70 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3BN.

The site is part of a Grade II listed terrace of six houses, dating from 1777-78 and lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (Sub Area 7 – Museum Street/Great Russell Street).

The Historic England list entry description:

Grade: II

Date first listed: 30-Jun-1969

TQ3081NW GREAT RUSSELL STREET 798-1/100/687 (South side) 30/06/69 Nos.66-71 (Consecutive) and attached railings

GV II

Terrace of 6 houses. 1777-8. By John Nash. Stuccoed brick, roof not seen. Four storeys and cellars. 3 windows each. No.66 with 5-window return (some blind) to Bury Place. Plain band at 1st floor level and 1st floor sill band. Recessed sash windows. 4th storeys as attic with cornices cut back. No.66: C20 reproduction of C19 shopfront. No.67: wooden doorcase with Ionic pilasters carrying entablature with cornice. Nos 68 & 69: architraved doorcases with half Ionic pilasters carrying entablature with cornice. No.70: wooden doorcase with Ionic pilasters carrying entablature with cornice. No.71: round-headed ground floor openings, one forming blocked extra entrance. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with urn or pineapple finials, No.71 foliated, to areas. HISTORICAL NOTE: John Nash's first work, and one of the earliest developments of stuccoed houses.

Significance of no.70 Great Russell Street

The significance of no.70 Great Russell Street is derived from its special architectural and historic interest. Its significance is not derived from any artistic or archaeological interest.

Historic interest:

The historic interest of 70 Great Russell Street is both illustrative and associative. The property, together with the wider terrace and the urban form of the vicinity, represent a period of growth and development of Bloomsbury as a new fashionable suburb from around 1670 until the mid to late Georgian era. As pointed out in the listing description, it is also noteworthy that the terrace comprising nos. 66-71 is John Nash's first work, and an early example of fully rendered front facades.

Whereas the footprint and exterior appearance of terraced townhouses have survived, the building and its immediate neighbours have undergone substantial internal changes, with a dental practice occupying the ground floor and basement of no.70, and the upper floors subdivided into flats (with similar layouts for nos. 67-70).

Architectural interest:

The architectural interest of no.70 Great Russell Street is evident from its coherent and repetitive design as part of a listed terrace. The terrace of six houses and its urban form have survived well, contributing to the distinct and pleasing character and appearance of the street. No.70 and the adjoining buildings are good surviving examples of a mid-18th century London terrace.

The setting of the site is also significant, in the wider context of the early to mid-Georgian development of the southern part of Bloomsbury in general, and especially because of its immediate proximity to the Grade I listed British Museum on the opposite site of Great Russell Street.

No.70, like the five other buildings of the terrace, comprises four storeys plus basement, is three bays wide and has a fully stucco rendered façade. It has got a plain parapet, with a hidden roof behind it, and cast-iron railings around the front area.

The relevant passage in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (p. 52, para 5.107) states:

'The south side of Great Russell Street is largely four storey terraces stepping up to a group of five storey mansion blocks between Bury Place and Museum Street. The height and bulk of these buildings create a sympathetic transition between the smaller scale of the built form to the south and the British Museum to the north. To the east of Bury Place, Nos. 66-71 (consec) is a grade II listed, four-storey stucco-faced terrace built in 1777 to the designs of John Nash. These townhouses have basements with front boundary railings and simply decorated facades, including at Nos 67-70 (consec) a plain band at first-floor sill level, a projecting cornice below the upper-floor windows and Ionic pilasters on the door surrounds.'

The staircase, which is proposed to be repaired, is of the original timber construction, but has had numerous repairs and alterations in the past, including the insertion of non-original furring pieces over the existing treads to level parts that lean towards the inside edge of the stair, and the insertion of a non-original cut timber stringer to the inside of the original outer stringer between the first floor landing and the wreathing piece.

The soffit of the stair has still got the original lath and lime plaster finish, whereas the soffit of the first-floor landing as well as the curved wall under the stair are later plasterboard replacements.

Impact assessment

This application proposes refurbishment works to the stairs leading from the ground to first floor only. As the structural report shows, the stairs are failing and in urgent need of repair, as they are currently proving to be a hazard to the health and safety of the occupants of no.70.

The proposed interventions have been limited to the absolute minimum, and include the localised insertion of steel angle brackets, woodscrews and hardwood wedges to stabilise tread, riser and stringer joints, as well as the connection between the stair and the timber studwork.

A sizeable crack in the wreathing piece will be repaired by the application of three layers of thin plywood sheathing to the inner face, glued together and secured in place by 5 nos. bolts with traditional square coach heads – these coach heads will be the only visible signs of the structural interventions. Alternative, non-visible solutions like back fixings with threaded sockets or added timber struts have been discussed with the structural engineer, but neither solution would be feasible due to the thinness of the existing wreathing piece and the geometry of the winders.

The visible coach heads will be of minimal size (about 25mm x 25mm) and of a traditional appearance, and therefore appropriate for the period and size of the original stairs.

To get access to the structural parts of the stairs, the original lath and lime plaster stair soffit will have to be carefully dismantled, and – once the repair works have been carried out – re-instated with matching laths, lime plaster and reinforcement, which is most likely to be formed of horsehair (to be confirmed by analysis of the dismantled soffit - care will be taken to ensure no pollutants are unduly released in the appraisal and repair of the original fabric and if any contaminants are suspected the contractor will undertake the appropriate isolation and treatment).

The historic form and structure of the original timber stairs will be retained, and therefore the only aspect of this proposal with any potential for adverse impacts is the removal of the original lath and plaster stair soffit, which is necessary in order to get access for the crucial structural repairs.

Apart from the small 5 nos. bolt heads, no changes will be discernible, and as such, adverse impacts will be confined to the loss of a small section of historic fabric, which will be re-instated like for like, and this adverse impact can be considered very minor in nature. With an adverse impact at the very lowest level of less-than-substantial, this proposal will not distract from the building's overall special interest.

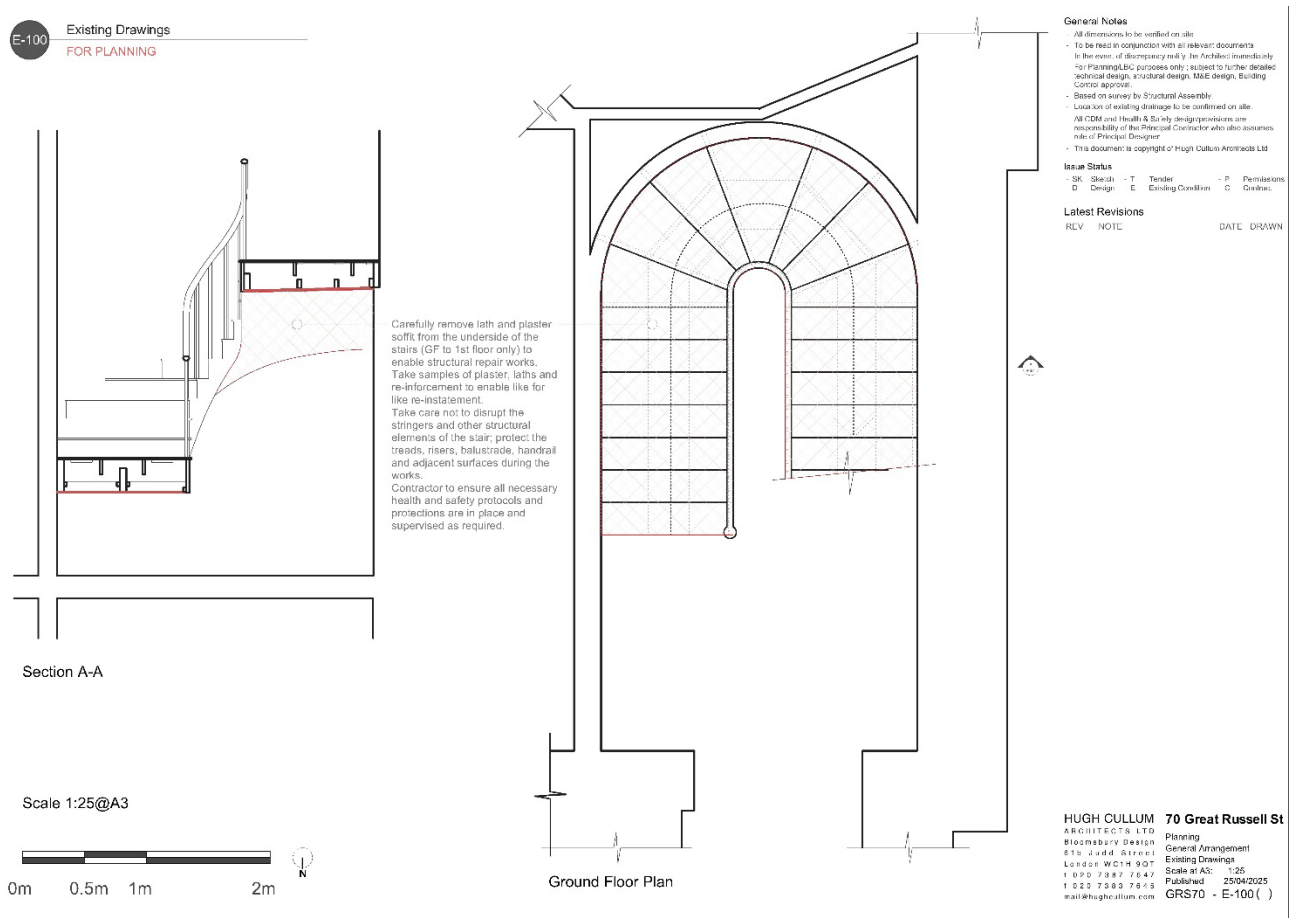
Proposed Refurbishment

The lowest flight of the stairs is failing and needs urgent structural repairs to function as the only access for the upper floors of this building with several flats.

As described in the Site and Heritage Significance section above, the proposed works are limited to the refurbishment and structural strengthening of the original timber stairs section from ground to first floor level. Because of the heritage significance of the building, it has been decided to keep the interventions to a minimum and retain as much of the historic fabric as feasible and re-instate any fabric that has to be lost during the works like for like.

For details of the proposed works, please refer to the structural and architectural drawings which form part of this listed building consent application.

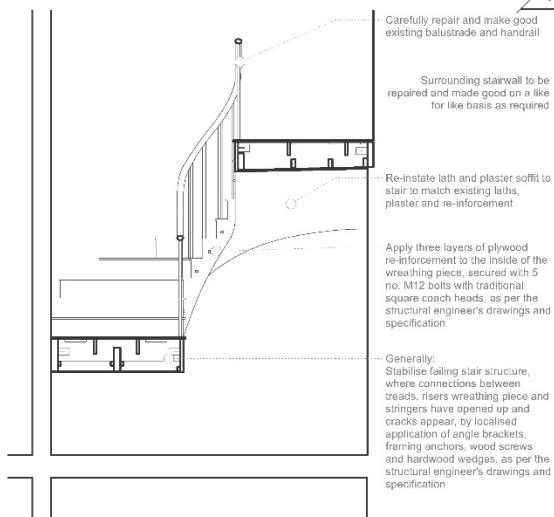
Existing Drawings



Proposed Drawings

P-100

Proposed Drawings
FOR PLANNING



Section A-A

Scale 1:25@A3



Ground Floor Plan

General Notes

- All dimensions to be verified on site.
- To be read in conjunction with all relevant documents.
- In the event of discrepancy refer to the Architect's drawings.
- For Planning purposes only: subject to further detailed technical design, structural design, M&E design, Building Control approval.
- Based on survey by Structural Assembly.
- Location of existing drainage to be confirmed on site.
- All CDM and Health & Safety design provisions are responsibility of the Principal Contractor who also assumes role of Principal Designer.
- This document is copyright of Hugh Cullum Architects Ltd.

Issue Status

SK: Sketch - T: Tender - P: Permissions
D: Design - E: Existing Condition - C: Circular

Latest Revisions

REV: NOTE DATE DRAWN

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70 Great Russell St
Planning
General Arrangement
Proposed Drawings
Scale as A3: 1:25
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GRS70 - P-100 ()

Conclusion

The front elevation of no.70 and its architectural form has survived well, and the proposed scheme does not seek to change this.

The proposed repairs to the stairs will not change the existing plan form and will ensure continued safe and secure use by all occupants of the building.

It has been assessed within this design, access and heritage statement that the proposed works would preserve both the architectural and historic interests of the grade II listed terrace and the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

The effects of the proposed works offer a sympathetic and informed solution to a serious structural problem with a negligible impact on heritage significance.

HUGH CULLUM ARCHITECTS.