

# **18 Bedford Square WC1B 3HH**

## **Conservation assessment of proposed air-conditioning for The Bedford Estate**

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## **1.0 Scope**

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to consider the conservation significance of the building in relation to the installation of air conditioning with a condenser units situated at basement level and at roof top and with encased units in each room.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Anthony Walker who is on the register of architects Accredited in Building Conservation. It is based on a desk top study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement and Andrew Bryne's architectural study of Bloomsbury Square.

## **2.0 Location**

- 2.1 The site is located on the north side of Bedford Square.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described in the current draft statement as being within Sub-Area 6 Bloomsbury Square, Russell Square and Tavistock Square. Bedford Square is described as:

*6.57 Bedford Square is one of the most significant and complete examples of a Georgian (1775) Square remaining in London. Its national importance is highlighted by the grade I listing of all the properties fronting the square. It is also notable that many original streetscape elements remain (also listed) and that the gardens are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Greater London (Grade II\*).*

*6.58 The square was part of a planned development of the Bedford Estate that included a series of interlinked streets and spaces and is a major landmark both along Gower Street and within the Bloomsbury area. Despite the impact of traffic along Gower Street the Square remains a relatively intimate space with the degree of enclosure enhanced by the large mature trees and landscaping within the oval gardens. This central, private space is defined by iron railings with gates under wrought iron arches. Although initially a residential square it is now entirely occupied by offices.*

*6.59 The terraces are three storeys with a basement and attic level. The front elevations are particularly notable as they were designed as a whole to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony to the square. The elevations are constructed of yellow stock brick with tuck pointing and have a central stucco pedimented element and a rusticated base. The doorways have intermittent voussiors of Coade stone (a type of artificial stone) and faces on the keystones*

## **3.0 Background and description**

- 3.1 Bedford Square was conceived during the building boom which followed the Peace of Paris in 1763. A lull from 1767-1771 was followed by an upturn between 1773 and 1777 which turned into a further down turn in 1778 when France entered into the American War of Independence. However loans to builders from the Bedford Estate allowed the scheme for the Square to be completed by the end of 1783 as part of the spread of development north of New Oxford Street.
- 3.2 The Estate had considerable control over the form of the development and the Square is unique in having four complete sides of 'palace-fronted' terrace houses surrounding a central garden, in this case oval in shape.
- 3.3 The building facades had to keep to a regular format with an emphasis on the central properties of which 18 is one. This uniformity has been broadly maintained although careful inspection reveals a wealth of detailed variations.

- 3.4 The coherence of appearance, combined with some very good interiors, has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade I.
- 3.5 A lease to number 18 was granted for 99 years to Robert Grews in 1782. The plot was 30feet wide by 138 deep and a mirror image of 19 which was leased the same year but to William Scott who was also responsible for development at 20 and 21.
- 3.6 Number 18 is a standard layout on four main floors with a basement below. The main frontage faces the Square and is three bays wide with individual balconies to each window at first floor level along the frontage to the Square.
- 3.7 The main façade is clearly visible from the Square and is an important element in the composition of the terrace on the northern side of the Square.



- 3.8 At the back the building there is a small light well abutting a closet wing at the western end and overlooked by a two storey building behind which is another small courtyard with a further two storey building on the northern side.



Second courtyard

Courtyard behind historic building

#### 4.0 **Significance**

- 4.1 The building in common with all of Bedford Square is listed grade I The listing description states that:  
*CAMDEN TQ2981NE BEDFORD SQUARE 798-1/99/77 (North side) 24/10/51 Nos.12-27 (Consecutive) and attached railings (Formerly Listed as: BEDFORD SQUARE Nos.1-54 (Consecutive)) GV I Symmetrical terrace of 16 houses forming the north side of a square. 1776-1781. Mostly built by W Scott and R Grews; probably designed by either Thomas Leverton or Robert Palmer; for the Bedford Estate. Yellow stock brick with evidence on most of the houses of tuck pointing. Plain stucco band at 1st floor level. The 2 centre houses, Nos 18 & 19, are stuccoed. Slate mansard roofs with dormers and tall slab chimney-stacks. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys, attics and basements. 3 windows each. Recessed round-arched entrances with Coade stone vermiculated intermittent voussoirs and bands; mask keystones. Enriched impost bands and cornice-heads to doors. Side lights to panelled doors, some 2-leaf. Fanlights, mostly radial patterned. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes, most with glazing bars. No.23: panelled doors and a plaster ceiling. HISTORICAL NOTE: the houses in Bedford Square form a most important and complete example of C18 town planning. Built as a speculation, it is not clear who designed all the houses.*  
 The building is clearly of significance as part of the complete range of terraces around Bedford Square and as an example of this type of development.

- 4.2 Internally the layout of the rooms, the main staircase and the decorative items particularly on the ground and first floors are of significance.
- 4.4 For the Conservation Area the significance of the building is as noted in 4.1 in relation to Bedford Square.

#### 5.0 **Proposals**

- 5.1 The proposed works include positioning condenser units within the small area directly behind the main building, these replace existing units in a similar location. Three further units are located at roof level at the eastern end of the valley between the front and back roof ridges. The units in the light well will not be generally visible. Those at roof level

have been carefully positioned to be shielded by the front and back roofs and will be supported on steels spanning between the two party walls thus avoiding any internal intervention in the roof structure.

- 5.2 Internally individual fan units will be installed and at basement, ground and first floors are encased to represent items of free-standing furniture. The service runs to the units are detailed on the application drawings and will be taken under the floor boards.
- 5.3 The vertical risers will be contained within an existing vertical duct which runs up the building beside the lift on each level. Horizontal distribution will generally follow existing runs wherever possible.
- 5.4 The positioning of the fan units and enclosures on the upper floors is generally under the windows but on the first floor, where there are floor to floor windows, they have been sensitively and sympathetically located on the solid masonry piers between the windows, thus reinforcing the significance of the tall windows. These units in principle replace existing modern radiators.

## **6.0 Assessment**

- 6.1 None of the proposals have an adverse effect on the front elevation of the building of the building which, as described above, is of particular significance. They therefore do not adversely affect the significance of the exterior of the listed building, nor the adjoining listed buildings or the Conservation Area.
- 6.2 The roof top units are well hidden behind the pitched roofs in front and behind. They have been kept away from the roof light to the main staircase.
- 6.2 The proposals for internal distribution of services keeps these concealed using existing voids for the purpose and thus they do not adversely affect the significance of the interior features.
- 6.3 The proposals for the fan units do not try to hide them but provide a casing which is sympathetic to the detailing of the building. Their locations respect the relative importance of the different window situations and do not adversely affect the appearance of the interior.
- 6.4 The arrangement of the installation is fully reversible without detriment to the building.
- 6.5 The proposals comply with Camden Local Plan and Conservation area Policies and National Legislation in the form of the NPPF by protecting the designated heritage asset and preserving and enhancing the Conservation Area.

**Anthony Walker**  
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