

26-27 Bedford Square

WC1B 3HP

Heritage Assessment
to accompany a listed building
application for refurbishment and
minor alterations

Anthony Walker

Dip arch(dist). Grad dip (cons) AA, RIBA, AABC



November 2013

1 Scope

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to accompany an application for planning and listed building consent for refurbishment and minor alterations to 26 and 27 Bedford Square.
- 1.2 It has been prepared by Anthony Walker a conservation architect with a post graduate diploma in building conservation and who is on the Register of Architects Accredited in Building Conservation.

2 Relevant legislation

2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.1.1 There is a presumption in the NPPF in favour of sustainable development. At the same time there is a clear intention to preserve designated heritage assets in accordance with their significance. It is recognised that much of this ground has been covered in previous applications and it is not intended to review past decisions.

126. Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account:

- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*

129. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

2.2 Camden LDF Policies

- 2.2.1 **CS14** Promoting high quality places and preserving our heritage
The Council will ensure that Camden's places and buildings are attractive, safe and easy to use by:
 - a) requiring development of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character;*
 - b) preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens;*
 - c) promoting high quality landscaping and works to streets and public spaces;*
 - d) seeking the highest standards of access in all buildings and places and requiring schemes to be designed to be inclusive and accessible;*
 - e) protecting important views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster from sites inside and outside the borough and protecting important local views.*

DP25 Conserving Camden's heritage

Conservation areas

In order to maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will:

- a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;*

- b) only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;*
- c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- d) not permit development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and*
- e) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage.*

Listed buildings

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- e) prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- f) only grant consent for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building; and*
- g) not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.*

2.3 Bloomsbury Conservation Area

The site lies in Sub Area 5 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Conservation area appraisal emphasises the importance of the terrace frontages and their consistency. Paragraphs 5.62 to 5.64 stress the significance of the complete frontages around Bedford Square. There is no reference to the rear elevations of the properties.

3 The Buildings

3.1 26 and 27 Bedford Square

- 3.1.1** The buildings form part of the terrace along the north side of Bedford Square. They are listed grade I and have group value. The listing description reads: *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. The following have blind boxes: Nos 16-19, No.20 to 1st floor only, Nos 21 and 25. The following have cast-iron balconies to 1st floor windows: Nos 12-15, 18-21, 23-25. No.12 has a good early C19 cast-iron balcony with round-arched trellis and tented canopy. Cornice and parapets, Nos 12 & 27 having balustraded parapets. INTERIORS not inspected but noted to contain original stone stairs with cast and wrought-iron balusters of various scroll designs, decoration and features; special features as mentioned: No.12: 5 window return to Gower Street, some blind, plus single storey extension. The doorway is stucco, not Coade stone. No.13: Leverton's own house, occupied in 1782 but he did not settle here until 1795. Stucco doorway, not Coade stone. Rear elevation with canted bay to lower 3 floors and cast-iron balconies. INTERIOR: stair replaced*

by a timber version late C19. 2 fine plaster ceilings. No.14: rear elevation with full height canted bay. Plasterwork friezes and ceilings. Some curved doors. No.17: plaster ceiling. Nos 18 & 19: rusticated ground floor; 5 Ionic pilasters rise through the 1st and 2nd storeys to support a frieze with roundels above each pilaster, and pediment with delicate swag and roundel enrichment on the tympanum. At 2nd floor level a continuous enriched band running behind the pilasters. INTERIORS with curved staircases; No.18 with original cellar including a storage cupboard. Attached to and facing the rear of No.19, a finely proportioned contemporary 2 storey and basement stuccoed building. 3 windows. Round-arched ground floor openings; windows set in architraved Coade stone surrounds with guilloche impost bands and female head keystones. 1st floor palm leaf string course. A rare survival of this kind of building attached to the rear wall of the coach-houses. No.21: screens and a plaster ceiling. Attached to and facing the rear, a well detailed contemporary 2 storey brick building. 3 windows. Arcaded ground floor with stucco impost bands. Entrance with radial patterned fanlight. Gauged brick flat arches to all sashes. Brick mutule cornice which continues around the pediment containing a blind oeil-de-boeuf. A rare urban survival of an ancillary building of the period. No.23: panelled doors and a plaster ceiling. No.24: rear elevation with canted bay to lower 3 floors. Plaster ceilings and panels. No.25: rear elevation with full height bow and full height half-canted closet. Wood carving and plaster ceilings, one originally with painted panels. No.26: plasterwork and closet room behind the stairs. No.27: original basement door with interesting metalwork. Some houses with original lead rainwater heads and pipes. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings to areas with urn or torch-flambe finials. No.17 with a wrought-iron lamp bracket and snuffer. Most houses with good wrought-iron foot scrapers. 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. Leverton was a country house architect and may have been involved with only the grander houses; he lived at No.13. Palmer was the Bedford Estate surveyor and may be responsible for the vagaries of the square. The majority of the plots leased by the estate were taken by Robert Grews, a carpenter, and William Scott, a brickmaker. No.22 was the residence of Sir J Forbes Robertson, actor (plaque).

- 3.2 The two buildings formed part of a group occupied by The National Council of Social Services in the second half of the last century including numbers 26/27 and numbers 6-10 Bayley Street which provides a continuation of the terrace to the west. The buildings, according to means of escape drawings in 1979, were used for a number of purposes including office and residential accommodation. They were all linked laterally at most levels.
- 3.3 In 1992 listed building and planning consent was obtained for substantial alterations to 26 and 27 as a combined unit. This consent retained the main room layout and in general the alterations which already existed but included substantial alterations at the back of both buildings including a new lift tower at the back of 27 and reorganisation of the lightwell. Windows were replaced and new doorways created to link rooms. The principle decorative plaster work in number 26 was retained although new tiling was installed in the ground floor WC. It appears that some new mouldings were introduced at higher levels in the building.
- 3.4 Andrew Bryne in *Bedford Square* groups 26,27,37,38 and 39 together on the basis that they are outside the 'palace fronted north and west sides and because of their inferiority in all respects with the other houses in the Square.' That said he notes that 26 is the most interesting on account of the exuberant plaster-

work. According to Bryne the only item of interest in 27 is the basement door to the area.

4 The Proposal

- 4.1 It is understood that the use of the property will revert to B1 once the Pregnancy Advisory Service vacates the building in the spring of 2014 and the current mixed use which is personal to the Service ceases.
- 4.2 The proposals are intended to facilitate that change in circumstances. These are set out in more detail in the applicants Design and Access Statement however for the purpose of this assessment they can be summarised as retaining the principle layout of the existing building, removing some later subdivisions and renewal of facilities including kitchens and lavatories as well as testing and renewing electrical services including lighting.
- 4.3 Basement kitchen. The kitchen is to be retained in the same location which is an appropriate use for rooms which would always have been part of the service area of the building. Kitchen units are to be replaced. This room is of no special significance and the changes will have no adverse effect on the architectural or historic interest of the designated asset.
- 4.4 Lavatories and shower room. The lavatories are retained in the existing locations which are in the basement of 26 and the upper floors of 27 all of which were part of the 1990's refurbishment and extensions. The refurbishment of these rooms does not have any adverse effect on the architectural or historic interest of the designated heritage asset. The original lavatory at ground floor level is retained. The latter has significant decorative plaster work above dado level but the tiling and flooring are not original and are assumed to be from the 1990's. The retention of all the historic fabric is of importance but the replacement of the later finishes does not have any adverse effect on the architectural or historic interest of the asset.
- 4.5 The renewal of services is part of maintaining a sustainable property in working condition. The proposal to retain chandelier fittings for the lighting in the principle rooms is consistent with their significance.
- 4.6 Some later subdivisions are shown to be removed in the basement and ground floor. These are not original partitions and their removal will not have an adverse effect on the architectural or historic interest of the asset.

5 Heritage Assessment

- 5.1 The buildings have been in joint use over many years. While the principle room layouts have been retained there have been a number of interventions and in particular in the 1990's substantial alterations to the backs of the buildings including the introduction of a new lift shaft behind 27 and extensions behind the staircase to 26.
- 5.2 The applicant has been aware of the significance of the building and in particular the need to preserve the decorative plaster work and original joinery and has respected that in the proposals.
- 5.3 The removal of some partitions in the basement and ground floor will not have an adverse effect on the asset and in general will reinstate earlier layouts.
- 5.4 The renewal of services is part of maintaining a building in active use and has been carefully considered to minimise any disruption of historic fabric.

- 5.6 Lavatories and kitchen accommodation are retained in the existing positions established by the 1990's works. The renewal of the finishes is to a high standard consistent with the status of the historic building and there is no loss of historic or architectural interest. The only area affected which is of significance is the lavatory at ground level in number 26 and in that location the existing historic finishes will be retained and only the late 20th century wall finishes below dado rail and on the floor are to be changed. It is considered that all this is not only appropriate but will actively compliment the historic building.
- 5.7 The rebuilding of the chimney while not needing consent as it is a like for like repair is of benefit by ensuring the retention of this significant part of the skyline.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposals are in accordance with the objectives of the NPPF to provide sustainable development which takes account of the significance of the building. In this case the significance lies in the role of the building as part of the terraces of buildings surrounding Bedford Square including their general room layout and where appropriate the decorative plaster work and joinery particularly in number 26. None of these will be affected by the proposals.
- 6.2 The proposals do not change the appearance or character of the front of the building facing Bedford Square and thus preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and do not affect the setting of the adjoining designated heritage assets.
- 6.3 The internal alterations are to an appropriate high standard of design and detail and as such compliment the importance of the designated heritage asset. The renewal of services is a necessary means of keeping the building in active use and the proposals take full account of the need to retain historic fabric.
- 6.4 It is therefore concluded that the proposals comply with the objectives of the Camden Core Policy CS14 and Policy CD25 to conserve Camden's heritage while ensuring a sustainable use for the future of the buildings.

Anthony Walker
November 2013