

# **11 Gower Street London WC1**

**Conservation Assessment  
for the  
Bedford Estate**

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1.0 **Scope of this appraisal**

1.1 The site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area sub area 5. The building is listed grade II as part of a group of buildings numbers 1-15 Gower Street.

1.2 This report has been commissioned to accompany an application for installation of a new heating and cooling system.

2.0 **Site – historical context**

2.1 *Origins*

2.1.1 The area was developed as part of the expansion of the major estates to the north of Oxford Street during the second half of the eighteenth century. Rocque's map of 1746 shows it to still be an area of largely rural nature with development close to the major roads such as Tottenham Court Road. By the time of Horwood's map of 1799 the area had been substantially developed.

2.1.2 This was part of a systematic development of the area starting with Bedford Square and was intended to be a grand primarily residential district. The uniformity of the elevations in Gower Street reflected increased contractual controls by the Bedford Estate over matters such as dimensions and materials. The form of narrow fronted terraces in the area reflected the desire to maximise the number of dwellings within a given frontage.

2.1.3 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Statement describes the area as follows:

**Sub Area 5: Bedford Square/Gower Street**

5.60 This sub area is a virtually intact and exemplary piece of late 18th century town planning, consisting of terraced housing built speculatively by a number of different builders to a plan produced by the Bedford Estate. Also in the area are smaller-scale mews to the rear of the square which serviced the townhouses, and an early 20th century terrace on the south side of Store Street which is of a similar scale and grain.

5.61 The terrace frontages have a strong uniformity since they are of similar scale and proportion and share neo-classical architectural elements. They are of three or four storeys with mansard attic storeys, raised on basements, with iron railings around basement areas. The blocks maintain a continuous parapet line at roof level and banding at first-floor level, coinciding with decorative iron balconies to first-floor windows of the *piano nobile*. There is a strong urban grain: townhouses within terraces have consistent widths, containing three windows of vertical proportions. Window openings mostly have rubbed brick heads, and window frames are recessed, sliding sashes, subdivided into small panes by slender glazing bars. Doorways mostly have semi-circular arches containing fanlights with decorative radiating glazing bars. The terraces in Bedford Square are the most ornate, whilst those in Gower Street tend to be plainer in architectural detail.

*Gower Street (including Bloomsbury Street)*

5.65 Although the eastern side of Gower Street has been largely replaced by institutional buildings associated with the expansion of the university (in Sub Area 3), there is a strong interrelationship between both sides of this long north-south street contributing to a strong linear character.

5.66 Along the west side of Gower Street is a significant stretch of grade II listed terraced houses, between Bedford Square and UCL Medical School. Development progressed northwards from 1780 to 1820.

5.67 The west side of the street is characterised by the repeated yellow stock brick fronts with tuck pointing, fenestration pattern, window detailing, the frontage railings, stucco banding and parapets, chimney stacks and pots, and the shared height of the three storey blocks with mansard roofs (with the exceptions of Nos 25, 39, 91 and 103 which are of four stories).

- 2.1.4` Notwithstanding the listing of the buildings and the Conservation Area Appraisal Pevsner says that Ruskin considered Gower Street as 'the nec plus ultra of ugliness in street architecture' and records that the Bedford Estate made concessions to 19<sup>th</sup> century taste by adding some stuccoed entrances further to the north along the street.

### 3.0 **Appraisal of the buildings today**

- 3.1 9 Gower Street was listed grade II in 1974 and the listing was amended in 1999

- 3.2 CAMDEN TQ2981NE GOWER STREET 798-1/99/603 (West side) 14/05/74 Nos.1-15 (Odd) and attached railings (Formerly Listed as: GOWER STREET Nos.1-15 (odd) and Nos.2-20 (even)) GV II Terrace of 8 houses. c1780. Darkened multi-coloured stock brick; all are, or show evidence of having been, tuck pointed. Nos 1-7 with rusticated stucco ground floors. 1st floor stucco sill bands. Slate mansard roofs with dormers. 3 storeys, attics and basements. 3 windows each. Nos 7 & 9 with return of 3 blind windows to Gower Mews and No.15 with 3-window return, mostly blind, to Store Street. Round-arched, recessed entrances with rusticated surrounds, impost bands and cornice-heads beneath fanlights and mostly panelled doors. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed 2-pane sash windows, most at 1st floor level with cast-iron window guards. Cornice and parapet. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with acorn finials to areas.

- 3.3 The building has generally retained its original plan form and the lower floors have some decorative detailing including panelling in the entrance hall and a good simple staircase.

- 3.4 There is a small lightwell at basement level at the back of the building which is well concealed.

- 3.5 The building is heated by radiators generally located under windows and of no heritage significance

### 4.0 **The proposals**

- 4.1 It is proposed to install a new heating and cooling system as set out in the TPS report. In principle the existing radiators will be replaced by heating and cooling units in joinery enclosures. Apart from where there are full height windows on the first floor where these are positioned on the masonry pillars between windows the units are located below existing windows.
- 4.2 The enclosures are as used in at 12 Bedford Square and other buildings in the area and are fully reversible.
- 4.3 The heat exchanger is located in the small lightwell at the back where it is well concealed from adjoining properties. It is set to one side so that while visible it is not intrusive from inside the building.

- 4.4 The pipe work is concealed within the floor void and in an existing riser on the staircase and has no impact on the appearance of the building. Generic details have been provided for notching joists where necessary in order to minimise any intervention.
- 4.5 From a conservation point of view there are no alterations to the exterior of the building other than the provision of the heat exchanger in the back light well.
- 5.0 **Conclusions**
- 5.1 Impact on the designated heritage asset. The provision of chillers in joinery enclosures for the office areas the proposals will improve the appearance of these spaces.
- 5.2 Impact on the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The chiller is well concealed and the changes will not be visible they will have no adverse impact on the conservation area. They preserve and enhance the aspects of the conservation area noted in the Conservation Area Statement.
- 5.3 Impact on the setting of nearby designated heritage assets. The proposals have no impact on the exterior of the building and thus have no adverse impact on other designated heritage assets.
- 5.4 The proposals therefore preserve and enhance the designated heritage asset and the Conservation Area and comply with CPG1 Design and DP25 of the LDF.

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