

**WREN HOUSE
43 HATTON GARDEN
LONDON EC1N 8EL**

CHANGE OF USE OF THIRD AND FOURTH FLOORS OF EXISTING BUILDING FROM USE CLASS B1(a), OFFICES TO USE CLASS C3, RESIDENTIAL, INTERNAL ALTERATIONS

**FOR
RIVERCREST INVESTMENTS LIMITED**

**DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
HERITAGE ASSESMENT**

RECEIVED
22 SEP 2011

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The subject building is a four storey plus basement structure, located on the south east corner of the junction between Hatton Garden and St Cross Street. It is a grade II listed building, initially built as a church in the 17th Century by Lord Hatton, reputedly to a design by Sir Christopher Wren, but later converted to a school, known as St Andrews Parochial Church School. It was severely damaged by incendiary bombs in the Second World War and was later reconstructed to provide offices behind the original public facades. Originally a two storey building, internal works have created a third floor and an additional storey has been added to the roof. A copy of the list description is attached at **Appendix WH1**.
- 1.2 The permitted use of the entire building is for office purposes. It was acquired by the applicants in 2000 and significant works were undertaken to create a modern office environment. To reflect the changes to the Use Classes Order, the lawful use of the building would fall within class B1a.

- 1.3 This application is for planning permission and listed building consent. It relates to the third and fourth floors of the building only and the proposal includes internal alterations and the conversion of the vacant office space to two dwellings, falling within use class C3. The application, therefore, comprises the completed application form, site location and site layout plans, floor plans of the existing building in its entirety and floor plans of the third and fourth floor, as proposed and an analysis of the marketing of the building dated 2nd September 2011.

2 USE

- 2.1 Since the acquisition of the building in 2000, and its subsequent refurbishment, the building has been in sporadic use as offices. Reference to the marketing analysis and appendices that accompany the submission shows that in early 2003 the basement, ground and first floors were let and occupied and later that year, tenants moved in to the third and fourth floors. The second floor remained empty until, in July 2004, following a surrender of the lease by the initial occupier, a new tenant was found for the basement, ground, first and second floors. That tenant remains in occupation, to date.
- 2.2 The original tenants vacated the third and fourth floors of the building at the end of 2008. Since that date the floorspace has been marketed with a view to securing new, long term tenants. Three agents have been instructed on behalf of the applicants. Following the refurbishment of the space, the first agent sought offers over a period of more than nine months, during which 27 viewings took place but no offers were received. A new agent was instructed in September 2009. New particulars were prepared and the rent was reduced. In the ten months to June 2010, 22 viewings took place but no offers were received. In September 2010, another new agent was instructed, the rent was further reduced, new particulars were prepared, a video campaign was initiated and internal space planning advice offered. To date, 30 viewings have been arranged and four proposals have been

made. Two offers were withdrawn and two were deemed unsatisfactory by the mortgagers, as set out in the analysis.

2.3 After a period of almost 3 years, it must be reasonable that alternative options are considered for the use of the upper floors of the building. The application building occupies its entire site. It can only be serviced from the public roads of Hatton Garden and St Cross Street, along which there are parking restrictions and bollards to prevent pavement parking or loading/unloading. There is no parking on site, although there is a dedicated motorcycle bay on the public highway, close to the intersection. Whilst the building has a basement, this is only accessible from within and is used as offices and for plant. The available space is on the third and fourth floors of the building. Whilst there is a lift, this is for passengers, rather than goods and it is shared with the lower floors that remain in office use. A reasonable working environment must also be retained for the existing tenants and floor loadings may be an issue. The structural columns that are found throughout the development significantly impact upon the potential use of the available space. It must be concluded that, due to the restrictions in terms of loading and unloading, the structure of the building, the lift arrangements and the potential conflict with the existing office tenants on the lower floors, other commercial uses such as storage, industrial or workshops would be impractical.

2.4 The guidance of Central Government, as set out in para 27 to PPS1, is that LPA's should seek, actively, to bring vacant and underused, previously developed land and buildings back into beneficial use. It must be concluded from the marketing information submitted that there is no reasonable prospect of finding a tenant or tenants who would wish to occupy the space for its lawful use. LDF core policy DP13 seeks to protect existing business premises for business use, with a particular emphasis on industry and storage/distribution. However, primarily due to access, loading/unloading and the impact on existing users, the third and fourth floors of the subject building are not considered suitable for such alternative business uses. This conclusion appears to be supported by the recent Business Premises Study which found that businesses would not compromise on access when considering

the suitability of sites. In such cases, where a site is not suitable for continuation of any business other than B1(a) offices, policy DP13 accepts that a change of use to permanent residential may be allowed.

2.5 The site is located in an area of mixed character in terms of use. Along Hatton Garden, there is a commercial feel with a number of retail premises at ground floor with some commercial uses above. The St Cross frontage has a more mixed character with a predominance of offices at street level with some residential units in the form of flats, apartments and maisonettes over, in amongst business uses. Attached to the statement at **Appendix WH2** is an aerial view of the area where the uses of some adjoining buildings are noted, following a short, walk round survey. It is concluded that the introduction of further residential development on the upper floors of the building could not be considered out of character with, or harmful to, the surrounding area.

2.6 Core Policy CS6 acknowledges that the provision of additional housing is a land use priority and Development Policy DP2 seeks to maximise the supply of additional homes in the Borough. The development proposed would, of course, satisfy both policies. The gross external area of the building to which the application applies amounts to some 765 sq m. For reasons which will be explained below, the proposal is to form two dwellings. Development Policy DP3 requires that developments that result in an additional 1,000 sq m of floor area, or more, will be required to provide affordable housing. The floor area here is well beneath that threshold.

3 LAYOUT AND SCALE

3.1 The application building covers the entire site. No parking is available or to be provided. However, the site is highly accessible in terms of its location and in an area where the policies of the LPA would discourage car use.

- 3.2 The submitted plans show that it is proposed to subdivide the third and fourth floors vertically to form two dwellings. The lift and central staircase from the lower floors are shown to be retained. The external stair from the fourth floor terrace down to the third floor will be removed and two new internal stairs will be installed. At the lower level, third floor, internal walls would be erected to divide the space into entrance halls, bedrooms and bathrooms. At fourth floor, walls will simply be erected between the units and to provide entrance lobbies for each unit. The open plan space would be for living/dining and food preparation. Access, via glazed screens, is available from the each of the living areas onto the independent amenity terraces for each unit.
- 3.3 Of course, in considering the suitability of the conversion of any space into residential use, it is important to ensure that the dwellings that will be created will have a reasonable living environment. The area is in a busy part of the city, containing business, service and residential uses. The roads and pavements surrounding the building are well used, but the accommodation to be created will be above street level and well insulated from any noise from the public areas below. Similarly, the amenity areas for the dwellings are at fourth floor level, reasonably private and above the activity at street level. In terms of daylight and sunlight, the areas are already well lit from the windows on the St Cross Street frontage, the glazed screens to the same frontage and facing east onto the terraces, and, at fourth floor, from the large glazing sections of the existing roof and the lightwells down to the third floor windows. By arranging the accommodation with the bedrooms on the lower level, the development seeks to maximise daylight and sunlight to the principal living areas. Within this city centre context, good levels of daylight, sunlight, privacy and outlook are achieved.
- 3.4 Access to the building is available from Hatton Garden, through the original main entrance to Wren House. In St Cross Street, an additional stair, for escape purposes, is available in the modern, glass fronted, infill section, constructed when the building was converted to office use. This stair will remain up to second floor level to continue to serve the office use on the lower floors. The two dwellings will

be accessed, exclusively, from the original, main entrance. The spacious lobby, with ramped, disabled access, leads onto the passenger lift shaft, with the low rise stairs. Access to the ground floor offices remains available through doors on either side of the stair. At ground floor, the existing office courtyard will be retained and the wc and staff areas remain unaffected. The communal entrance arrangements will cause no operational problems and, in fact, the residential and office uses will dovetail well in terms of the patterns of use.

4 EXTERNAL APPEARANCE AND DESIGN

- 4.1 The proposed development involves a change of use and, predominantly, internal alterations. Only two minor alterations to the design or external appearance of the building are proposed. First, the external stair from the terrace down to the third floor will be removed and the area floored over to match. Second, the existing glazed screen at fourth floor level onto the terrace will be replaced or altered to ensure that each dwelling has an independent access. These alterations are, indeed, minor and affect only the private elevations of the building at high level.

5 ACCESS

- 5.1 The application site is in a highly accessible location, where occupiers of the dwellings would not be reliant at all on the use of a private car. Wren House is close to two tube stations, Chancery Lane and Faringdon, the latter also giving access to mainline services. Bus stops are within 100 m of the site and shops and services, as well as employment opportunities are within easy walking distance. Secure cycle parking could be made available in the communal lobby at fourth floor level. There is no external access to the basement. Due to the restrictions of the site, where no external space is available outside the site which is accessible, refuse collections are arranged on a daily basis to serve the existing use. It is envisaged

that this service will be expanded to deal with domestic waste and recycling on the same basis.

- 5.2 The existing building is already accessible to the less mobile. Steps are avoided at ground floor level where ramped access is provided to the lift shaft and the office suite beyond the stair. The existing lift gives access to all floors, with the low rise stair as an alternative in the event of breakdowns. The lift access will remain between the third and fourth floors, effectively giving an alternative means by which to travel between the living and sleeping areas of each dwelling.

6 HERITAGE ASSET ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment was published in 2010. It explains that those parts of the historic environment that have significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest are called heritage assets. Some heritage assets possess a level of interest that justifies designation and procedures apply to decisions that involve them. Wren House a Grade II listed building, is such a designated heritage asset. The site is within the Hatton Garden Conservation Area. LPA's, in considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, are advised to take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value it holds for this, and future, generations.
- 6.2 The building at the site was originally built as a church, as a replacement for a former structure destroyed in the Great Fire. It was funded by Lord Hatton and, reputedly, built to a design by Sir Christopher Wren. It was adapted for use as a school at the end of the 17th Century. In the late 19th Century, as Hatton Garden was established as a focus for the jewellery and diamond trade, the use of the building changed and it was occupied by Johnson Matthey Bank, to manage the accounts of the merchants in the area. It was gutted during the Second World War, when the interior was entirely rebuilt behind the retained and restored facade. Late 20th Century works, including the insertion of a third floor and the addition of a

fourth floor, were undertaken to suit its conversion to offices. The building was considered worthy of listing for the architectural and historic significance of its facades, as confirmed by the list description and the fact that its interior was not inspected at the time of listing in 1951.

- 6.3 The works under this current development proposal will involve only the erection of partitions within the open plan space at third and fourth floor levels and changes to the upper terrace. No alterations to the public frontages of the building are proposed or will be required. The sub division of this space will not involve the loss of historic fabric and the work will be undertaken without affect on the existing floors or structural columns. In this respect, the works will be reversible and the walls demountable. In terms of heritage, the existing interior of the building is modern and functional. The works proposed will not affect the significance of the asset.
- 6.4 The building occupies a prominent position in the conservation area, on the south east corner of one of the road junctions of the original Hatton Estate, noted for its intersecting grid pattern layout. The facades to both Hatton Garden and St Cross Street add greatly to the character of the area. However, ever since the 17th Century, the area has seen substantial changes required, either, as a result of disaster, such as The Great Fire and the bombings in World War II, or to reflect changes in the economic situation. The fact, as evidenced by the marketing analysis, is that since 2008, it has not proved possible to let the third and fourth floors at Wren House. The introduction of a residential use on the upper floors of this building will, simply, be another phase in its evolution, accommodating change with no detrimental effect on character. In fact, it is suggested that the change will have a positive effect on the character of the area, reducing the amount of vacant space and assisting in the retention of a vitality and vibrancy that has been an essential component since it became established as a focus for trade in the late 19th Century.

- 6.5 The Government's overarching aim is that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations. To achieve this, the objectives include the need to recognise that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term, and to ensure that, wherever possible, they are put to an appropriate and viable use that is consistent with their conservation (see para 7, PPS5). The proposal here would achieve these objectives.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 It has not proved possible to let the subject floorspace at the application site for its last use, as B1(a), offices over the last three years. The succession of agents acting for the owner have been able to generate only limited interest through advertising, e mail shots, site boards and *you tube*. The consensus is that this situation is unlikely to change bearing in mind the nature and layout of the space and the current economic situation. The proposed development represents the best opportunity to bring this vacant space back into beneficial use at the present time, in accordance with the advice of PPS1.
- 7.2 Locally, it is acknowledged that there is a glut of commercial floorspace at the present time and it is not possible to consider alternative employment uses at the site due to the constraints of the access, loading and unloading arrangements and the layout of the accommodation. In such cases, subject to size and location, permanent residential use is encouraged. Here, the building is an acknowledged heritage asset in a prominent position in the conservation area. Under these circumstances, it is most important to find an appropriate and viable use for the vacant floorspace that is consistent with its conservation.
- 7.3 The alterations to facilitate the change of use are internal only. Primarily, they relate to the erection of partitions, the re arrangement of stairs and the formation of internal lightwells. The works will not result in the loss of any historic fabric and

will have no effect on the appearance of the building, the visual amenities of the area or the amenities of neighbours. The dwellings created will have a reasonable level of amenity in terms of outlook, natural light, amenity and privacy. Space for the storage of cycles would be available and daily refuse collection will be arranged in association with the commercial use of the lower floors. The development amounts to the residential use of the vacant part of an attractive building in a sustainable location and should be encouraged, subject to suitable conditions.

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APPENDIX WH1
Copy list description