

Delegated Report		Analysis sheet		Expiry Date:	13/08/2010
		N/A		Consultation Expiry Date:	30/07/2010
Officer			Application Number		
John Sheehy			2010/3246/P		
Application Address			Drawing Numbers		
Gower Mews London WC1E 6HP			Refer to decision notice		
PO 3/4	Area Team Signature	C&UD	Authorised Officer Signature		
Proposal					
Erection of electronically controlled metal gates at the entrance to the mews.					
Recommendation:		Refuse permission			
Application Type:		Full Planning Permission			

Reasons for Refusal:		Refer to Draft Decision Notice					
Informatives:							
Consultations							
Adjoining Occupiers:		No. notified	45	No. of responses No. electronic	5 3	No. of objections	3
Summary of consultation responses:		<p>Site notice displayed from 9th of July to 30th of July.</p> <p>The occupiers of the following properties objected to the application: 9 Gower Street; 18 Gower Mews Mansions; and “Blackfriars TN27 8EQ”. In summary the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Proposed gates not typical of a mews;Proposal would cut the mews off from the rest of the community in Bloomsbury;Proposal would damage the pleasant mix of residential, commercial and office space;Very little if any crime in the mews to warrant its blocking off;Added security for users is unnecessary and would soon prove inconvenient;Change of paviments would make tyre noise louder and could be slippery when wet;Proposal would not enhance the appearance of the area. <p>The following occupiers wrote in to support the application: 3 and 9 Gower Mews Mansions. In summary the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Proposal would improve the aesthetic character of the mews;Proposal would increase security;Proposal would reduce antisocial activity in the mews lane;Proposal would reduce traffic in the mews; andOver the years the mews has suffered from white vans and minicabs parking with engines running. <p>Metropolitan Police Crime Prevention Design Officer has commented on the proposal and raised no objection.</p>					
CAAC/Local groups comments:		<p>Bloomsbury CAAC, objection: “The Committee questioned the desirability of the proposed introduction of gates and considered that the present arrangement should continue unless there is an overriding justification. This is not Downing Street after all”.</p> <p>Charlotte Street Association, objection: “One of the characteristics of central London is that it retains quiet backwaters and tranquil areas such as Gower Mews and the Mews make a contribution to the Conservation Area. If it is the wish of residents for night protection that gates would provide, approval should be subject to the condition of the gates being kept open during daylight hours. However strong objection is made to the design of the gates; they should take their reference from the gates and railing on the frontage of the Georgian Terrace on Gower Street.”</p>					
Site Description							
<p>The application relates to Gower Mews; a mews situated in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The mews is located to the north of Bedford Square and runs parallel east-west with the Grade I listed terrace of townhouses lining the north side of the square. To the north is Store Street, a mixed use street with education, residential and commercial uses.</p> <p>Gower Mews leads off the west side of Gower Street and is a cul-de-sac, with its only entry point being at the Gower Street end of the mews. There is a row of residential premises on the northern side of the mews known as Gower Mews Mansions comprising two floors of accommodation above ground floor garages. The southern side is flanked by predominantly 2-storey mews buildings with attics which generally serve the Grade I listed terrace on the north side of Bedford Square. There are 2-storey mews buildings with attics terminating the mews at its western end.</p>							

The buildings in Gower Mews, the oldest of which date from the 19th century, mostly retain a mews-style character with garages at ground level, although Gower Mews Mansions has an Art Deco interwar quality of a grander nature. The entrance to the mews is tight in streetscape terms, measuring circa 4.3m W x 18.5m L. It is flanked by two closely spaced terraces of Grade II listed townhouses lining the west side of Gower Street. However, spatially the mews roadway flows with no interruption from the principal highway of Gower Street, as is traditional throughout London.

The mews is an adopted highway under the jurisdiction of the London Borough of Camden and it currently has a standard tarmac finish with no space for pavements, just single yellow lines to control parking.

Relevant History

None

Relevant policies

Camden Replacement Unitary Development Plan 2006

SD1 Quality of life
SD6 Amenity for occupiers and neighbours
B1 General design principles
B3 Alterations and extensions
B6 Listed buildings
B7 Conservation areas
T3 Pedestrians and cycling
T12 Works affecting highways
T13 Adoption of highways and other access routes

Camden Planning Guidance 2006

Bloomsbury Conservation Area Statement

LDF Core Strategy and Development Policies

As the draft LDF Core Strategy and Development Policies documents have now been published, they are material planning considerations. However, as a matter of law, limited weight should be attached to them at this stage.

DP17 Walking, Cycling and Public Transport
DP21 Development Connecting to the Highway Network
DP24 Securing High Quality Design
DP26 Managing the impact of development on occupiers and neighbours
DP29 Improving access

Assessment

Proposal: erection of electronically controlled metal gates at the entrance to the mews.

Assessment

The principal material planning considerations are as follows:

- Design, Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Impact
- Transport;
- Crime; and
- Sustainable Communities.

Design, Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Impact

Background

In assessing this proposal, regard has primarily been had to UDP policies B1 'General Design Principles', B6 'Listed Buildings' and B7 'Conservation Areas'.

Policy B1 states that the Council will grant permission for development that is designed to a high standard. With particular reference to this proposal, the following points contained within this policy are relevant:

- that development should respect its site and setting;
- development should improve the spaces around and between buildings, particularly open spaces;
- development should improve the attractiveness of an area and not harm its amenity or appearance;
- the Council will consider the existing pattern of routes and spaces.

Policy B6 'Listed Buildings' states that the Council will not grant planning permission for development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.

Policy B7 'Conservation Areas' states that within Conservation Areas, the Council will only grant permission for development that preserves or enhances the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The formal historic layout of streets, squares and mews in Bloomsbury Conservation Area, in which Gower Mews is centrally located, has a high degree of permeability: there are almost no historic examples of gates or barriers to mews, streets or squares either in the immediate context of the site or in the wider Conservation Area.

The proposal:

The proposed new gates would span the full width of the roadway as it passes through the gap between the two listed terraces facing Gower Street, at a position abutting the two flank walls of each terrace close to the rear elevation of the properties.

The gates would be 3.5m in height and would be in 2 parts, a smaller section which would allow pedestrian access and a larger section which would swing open to allow vehicular access. The applicant has stated that the pedestrian section would be operated by a wall-mounted button which would allow free movement in and out of the mews lane during the day. At night-time the pedestrian gate would be operated by video-phone with access controlled by occupants within the mews.

It is unclear from the information submitted as to whether the gateposts would be freestanding or whether they would be attached to the two adjacent listed buildings, which potentially would harm their historic brickwork.

No details have been provided with regard to the appearance or the method of fixing of either the wall-mounted pedestrian access buttons or the proposed video phone panel which would appear to be attached to a listed building. Neither of these elements is indicated on the applicant's proposed elevation drawings.

Position of gates

The addition of gates in this location is considered to harm the setting of the listed buildings (as outlined in policy B6), which were built in two terraces with a deliberate gap between them in order to accommodate the entrance to Gower Mews. Historically there was never an intention to erect a gate in this location, thereby creating a barrier between the buildings and the spaces associated with them.

It should be noted that the flank walls of both terraces are of special interest in listed building terms since they are punctuated and articulated by a series of blind windows. The erection of gates would detract from this elevational composition. The gates would therefore impact negatively on the setting of the listed buildings.

Detailed design of gates:

The gates would be constructed from metal (it is assumed from steel) to emulate cast-iron and they adhere to an ornate pattern of a heavy appearance for which no historic reference point is given, and which is at odds with the largely unadorned Georgian architecture in the surrounding area. The gates would consist of two portions set in one plane, with an overall design of a tripartite nature with the centrepiece raised: they comprise a wider vehicular gate in the southern and central sections and a pedestrian gate in the northern section. As such, the three sections do not correlate aesthetically with their basic function i.e. they are not honest in their design. Furthermore, they will appear imbalanced when in their open position (as shown in the picture on the cover of the applicant's Design Report dated June 2010). The drawings state that the gate design is indicative only, so in the event of a recommendation for approval this would require a further submission for approval of details.

The heavy detailed design of the gates will create a screen when closed, so preventing visual as well as physical permeability between the main street and the mews. As stated above, this is against the traditional street pattern of Bloomsbury and the wider London context, where primary and secondary streets flow into each other (i.e. grand residential streets and the mews that traditionally served them). The introduction of the gates would therefore cause harm to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (policy B7), which is not characterised by gated developments.

The Council has the ability to attach conditions to any permission to control the way in which a development is operated. The proposal would create an environment with reduced pedestrian, vehicular and cycle access. It is considered that the Council would have serious difficulties in controlling the operation of the gates and preventing the incremental reduction or elimination of free pedestrian access to this part of the Conservation Area. Any condition to prevent incremental reduction/ elimination of free pedestrian access to the mews is considered to be unenforceable in practice.

Transport

Development and alterations to buildings should be designed to improve access and use for all (Policy SD1, T3 and T13). The Council will also resist 'gated communities' to ensure that access routes are available to the public as rights of way. Access to areas, use of the footway and the attractiveness of travelling by walking and cycling are also taken into consideration in the assessment of planning applications. The proposal to gate off Gower Mews is not consistent with the above objectives, as it would segregate Gower Mews from the highway, restrict public access, and provide an unattractive walking and cycling environment in and around the mews due to the lack of natural surveillance which the mews currently provides.

The Council seeks to protect the safety and operation of the highway network (Policy T12). The proposed installation of gates at the entrance to Gower Mews is considered to have significant highway safety implications. Gower Mews is accessed via a single vehicle width section of road directly off Gower Street, a Classified Road with heavy vehicular, cycle and pedestrian traffic. If a gate were to be acceptable, it should be located 15m back from the carriageway at Gower Street to allow any vehicle to clear Gower Street before stopping to open the gates (as proposed the set-back would be 13.5m from the pavement edge). Having vehicles stop on or protrude into Gower Street would cause a significant delay to traffic on Gower Street and could potentially cause collisions due to pedestrians walking in the road to get around a vehicle stopped waiting to get into Gower Mews.

A more significant safety issue is vehicles not gaining access to Gower Mews and having to reverse out into Gower Street. The view of Gower Street from vehicles reversing out of Gower Mews is blocked by the sides of 7 and 9 Gower Street, and this makes visibility of both pedestrians and vehicles poor particularly for delivery trucks which are the vehicles which are most likely to be refused access. A Stage 1 Safety Audit needs to be provided to justify the safety of locating gates here. This was not provided with the application.

Crime

It is noted that the Metropolitan Police have commented on the proposal and raised no objection.

Notwithstanding this the following concerns are raised.

Reference is made in the planning and design statements to 'problems experienced at night' and 'nefarious activities' but no evidence or explanation is offered as to what these are or to the frequency of events as required by Chapter 16 'Designing Safer Environments' of Camden Planning Guidance (CPG). Information from the Safer Neighbourhoods Team, public realm officers, Street Safe, the Safer Streets team and the Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) teams indicate that there have been no reports of crime or ASB from Gower Mews.

The design statement refers to 'any possible ASB such as homeless person misuse or drug misuse in and around the Mews' – CPG states that evidence must be provided of ASB and crime - possible future misuse is not sufficient cause to gate a mews given the detrimental impact it will have on community cohesion (please see below for further comments on community cohesion). It also states that 'the gates help to create a clear sightline along the street which increases the possible surveillance in the area.' It is difficult to see how this will be the case given that there are currently very clear sightlines into and from the Mews and gates would interfere with these.

The planning statement (para 9.11) states that 'the introduction and installation of a set of gates at the entrance to the mews would improve its visual and security aspects helping to promote community safety and provide a safe and secure environment in accord with policy SD1 of the UDP.' Officers are of the view that the gates are unlikely to improve community safety outside the Mews and the recess created by their installation may lead to the fear of crime. Officers are of the view that the proposed gates would also have a negative impact of the perception of community safety in the vicinity of the Mews suggesting an embattled place where gating is required to protect residents and properties: this may also lead to the fear of crime.

Sustainable Communities

As noted above, the Council will seek to ensure that development fosters sustainable communities which meet the needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users; contribute to a high quality of life; and provide opportunity and choice. To achieve this, development should, among other things, enhance the environment and promote social cohesion. It is considered that the gating of the mews as proposed would result in an inward-looking enclave and would separate the residents of the mews from the surrounding community of which it currently form part. The proposal would fail both to enhance the environment and to promote social cohesion.

Other issues

Resurfacing of the highway

The resurfacing of the highway does not require planning permission. However, improvements to the existing highway would be welcomed in conservation and urban design terms, as the tarmac finish is not traditional to the mews. Traditional stone pavements, granite setts and granite kerbs are to be welcomed provided that the detailed design is in keeping with the historic character of the mews. It should be noted that the plan drawings show discrepancies: the gate layout drawing shows road markings on the roadway in the location of the new surfacing, whereas the surfacing materials drawing fails to indicate this.

Recommendation: Refusal.

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