

**Land bounded by High Holborn, Hand
Court, Bedford Row and Brownlow
Street**
Conservation Area Consent Application
Statement

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February 2009

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Extent of demolition plan

Appendix 2

Bloomsbury CA boundary

Appendix 3

Elevations showing buildings to be demolished

1. Application Context

Development Proposal and Applications

- 1.1. This application for demolition consent for buildings on a site partly within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area relates to a concurrent application for planning permission to redevelop, refurbish, and convert, the site to provide:

“Mixed use redevelopment of the site involving the demolition of Caroline House, 18-22 Hand Court and parts of High Holborn House, retention and refurbishment of High Holborn House including the facades to provide new B1 (office) space. Retention and refurbishment of the facades of 23 Hand Court, 49-51 Bedford Row, Brownlow House and 45-48 Bedford Row. Provision of A1/A2/A3/A4 floorspace at Ground floor level together with new B1 (office) space. Conversion of 46-48 Bedford Row to create 3 single family dwellings, provision of 15 residential units within 24-25 Hand Court, 45 Bedford Row and 49-51 Bedford Row, conversion of Brownlow House to provide 10 residential units (total of 22 additional residential units – 6 existing on site). Redevelopment of 23 Hand Court to provide 22 student units, new servicing access from Brownlow Street, and various public realm works to Brownlow Street, Bedford Row and Hand Court. (Revised Application).”

- 1.2. The buildings to be demolished are identified on the plans in **Appendix 1**. The terrace of three listed buildings on the north part of the site (46-48 Bedford Row) are to be retained and restored to allow their conversion back to their original single family residential use.
- 1.3. Prior to this submission there has been two previous schemes on this site for mixed use development, of a similar size and configuration to what is now proposed. Both these schemes, known respectively as Scheme A and Scheme B, comprised of planning, listed building and conservation area applications, were refused and subsequently appealed.
- 1.4. The key difference between this application and the previous two applications for conservation area consent is the extent of demolition proposed in relation to High Holborn House. This difference reflects the fact that the Inspector in his appeal decision concluded that there was a need to retain more than just the façade of High Holborn House to High Holborn and that a substantial part of the pantile roof should also be conserved.
- 1.5. Aside from conserving more of High Holborn House the Inspector was satisfied that the level of demolition proposed in both Schemes A and B was acceptable. This application therefore reflects this appeal decision and retains the front element of High Holborn House together with its roof.

2. Relevant Planning Policies

National Planning Policy and Guidance

- 2.1. PPG15 sets out national planning policy on protection of the historic environment. Although this was published in 1994 it remains relevant. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires LPAs when considering planning applications to take into account whether a proposal would preserve or enhance Conservation Areas. Advice on conservation areas and their assessment is provided through non-statutory documents including English Heritage Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2006). The site and the existing buildings have been considered in the light of this guidance.
- 2.2. The key principle of PPG15 is that, where a building makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area, the general presumption should be that it will be retained (para 4.17). Where it is proposed to demolish such buildings PPG15 requires an assessment to be made of that building as if it were a listed building so that the criteria for considering demolition set out in para 3.17 apply in determining the acceptability of the proposed demolition. Of the buildings proposed for demolition in this application those that are considered to make a positive contribution to the BCA are either retained or their façade is retained to ensure their positive contribution is maintained.

Development Plan Policy

- 2.3. The London Plan (2004) contains overarching policies relating to the design of development and particularly the need to ensure that any proposals for redevelopment protect or enhance the historic context in which they are set. In relation to conservation areas this includes consideration of the wider urban environment and the need to make effective use of the historic assets to contribute to the economic regeneration and the enhancement of the character of these special areas.
- 2.4. Camden UDP Policy B7 sets out local development plan policy on conservation areas. In Part A (Character and appearance) the policy restates PPG15 guidance that the general presumption is in favour of retaining buildings that make a positive contribution to the conservation area. It goes on to note that planning permission will not be granted for development outside a conservation area where the Council considers it would cause harm to the conservation area's character, appearance or setting.
- 2.5. Part B of the policy (Demolition of unlisted buildings) again reflects the principles of PPG15 that where any unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the conservation area is proposed for demolition (total or substantial) permission will only be forthcoming where exceptional circumstances that outweigh the case for retention can be demonstrated.
- 2.6. The explanatory section of the policy (para 3.70) confirms that where an unlisted building is considered to make little or no contribution to the conservation area the Council will consider the contribution that the replacement building will make in determining any proposal for demolition.

Bloomsbury Conservation Area

- 2.7. The original Bloomsbury Conservation Area (BCA) was designated in 1968 and included only that part of the site that faces north onto Bedford Row. Its designation was then focussed on original planned development that took place in the area principally in the 18th and early 19th centuries but the BCA has been extended a number of times during following decades to include later development, principally Victorian and Edwardian. Most of the site is within an extension confirmed by the Council in 1991.

- 2.8. A BCA Statement was agreed by the Council and published as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in 1998. A map of the Conservation Area boundary and one of the 1991 extension are included at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.9. A Draft Conservation Area Character Appraisal addressing the whole of the designated Bloomsbury Conservation Area was published for consultation with comments to be submitted by 2 June 2008. The applicant responded to the consultation raising concerns at the failure of the assessment to adequately address the site or surrounding area, particularly where it fronts High Holborn, and a lack of proper analysis such as should be included in the document to provide a rational and robust approach to making value judgements about individual buildings. The comments challenge the validity of designating some of the buildings on the site as making a positive contribution to the conservation area. This Draft Conservation Area Statement has yet to be adopted and was not considered to be a material consideration in the recent appeal on this site (November 2008).

3. Buildings in the Conservation Area to be Demolished

3.1. The site contains the following buildings lying within the BCA boundary:

- Brownlow House - 50-51 High Holborn
- High Holborn House - 52-54 High Holborn, 49-51 Bedford Row and the return to Brownlow Street (14-19)
- 19-22 Hand Court
- Montague House - 23 Hand Court
- 24, 25 Hand Court
- 45 Bedford Row
- 46-48 Bedford Row (Grade II listed terrace)

3.2. To inform the pre-application discussions with LB Camden and English Heritage the applicant undertook a detailed assessment of the buildings in the conservation area to consider the contribution of each to its character and appearance. The assessment was undertaken in the light of the relevant policies and other guidance set out in **Appendix 2** of the document published by English Heritage 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006). In addition a Historic Buildings Architect's report compiled by Donald Insall Associates has further informed the proposals and accompanies the applications.

3.3. In relation to the buildings proposed to be demolished the assessment and report consider that:

- 19-22 Hand Court is a two storey with attic terrace of probably mid- 20th century buildings that has been much altered. It is built primarily of gault brick with a slate mansard roof and brick parapet. At ground floor level shopfront entrances are set into the brickwork (brown). The buildings do not reflect any of the qualities of the BCA character, are poorly designed and out of scale with their surroundings reducing the sense of enclosure of the passageway of Hand Court. They form the west boundary of the BCA here with Mid-City Place on the opposite side of Hand Court lying outside the conservation area. They have a neutral/negative impact on the views into Hand Court from Bedford Row, on the BCA and its setting.
- 52-54 High Holborn (High Holborn House) is a very large late 1920/early 30s building stretching back across the site above large basement areas to Bedford Row at the rear and Brownlow Street on the east boundary. It is of steel framed construction, the front elevation on to High Holborn a stone faced neo-classical façade of 6 storeys. Behind the façade the building steps up in height over the steel frame with a tiled double height roof and dormers. A series of lightwells introduce light and ventilation to the centre of the building. Each external elevation has a different architectural treatment. The central section and elevations facing Hand Court are typical late 1920 cheap quality commercial construction with common fletton brickwork and concrete lintels. Facing on to Bedford Row it is 4 storeys high with an additional storey and deep tiled mansard above a heavy cornice that does not relate well to the adjacent listed buildings. This elevation treatment to the building returns to the first part of Brownlow Street and then continues as a long return of 4 storeys with a mansard roof attic storey. Elevations are of brick above a ground floor stone portico and blank glazed infills between columns to Bedford Row and with a further four similar bays on the initial return to Brownlow Street. South of this the

ground level elevation to Brownlow Street comprises large rectangular blank glazed infills and entrance bays divided by brick pilasters extending to the floors above where the elevation has a similar treatment to that facing Bedford Row. The elevation to Brownlow Street in particular is of little design style or quality and detracts from the appearance of the conservation area. From Bedford Row the plant and associated housing on the roof of High Holborn House forms a discordant element in views from the BCA to the south and from Gray's Inn and has an adverse impact on the BCA.

- Montague House, 23 Hand Court was built in the late 19th century and has been considerably altered and extended. It has been used at various times in conjunction with other buildings facing Hand Court as well as No. 48 Bedford Row to which it was once physically linked via rear extensions. It has a heavily decorated terracotta façade to Hand Court with stock brick return adjacent to No.22 with which it is physically linked internally to provide access for its current office use on the lower floors. The roof has been considerably altered and a new mansard added in connection with conversion of the upper floors and rear extension to residential use in 1999. Varying window treatment at ground and upper levels includes new windows that were inserted consequent upon the 1999 planning permission. A 2 storey extension at the rear appears to have been built about the end of 19th century of brick with a flat roof and a double height stone bay window with stained glazing on its north elevation. It has again been altered and a modern lantern light inserted into the flat roof. The front elevation to Hand Court, whilst altered with the insertion of new windows and ground floor entrances, retains a character and architectural quality that contributes positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 3.4. It was agreed by LB Camden and English Heritage that the rear part of High Holborn House behind the High Holborn and Bedford Row frontages and 19-22 Hand Court make no positive contribution to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and could be demolished to allow for an appropriate redevelopment of a mixed use scheme. The redevelopment includes demolition in the conservation area of all 19-22 Hand Court, parts of High Holborn House, and Montague House behind its facade. The rear two bays of Brownlow House facing on to Brownlow Street are also to be demolished but this does not amount to substantial demolition or demolition of a significant part of this building. They are 3 storeys with an attic, built of gault brick with stone dressings and having paired windows with some secondary glazing. They are similar to the immediately preceding bay to the south but do not have the same materials or design quality of the façade to High Holborn or its first bay return to Brownlow Street.
 - 3.5. This revised application shows the retention of the pantile roof form and facade of High Holborn House along with a substantial proportion of the floorplate behind. The revised proposal identifies High Holborn House as a separate office building on six levels over ground floor retail. The proposal reiterates the intention to enhance the quality of this building by introducing a stone return to the party wall with Brownlow House. It also seeks to eliminate the brick stair tower that dominates this backdrop to Brownlow House and continues the pantile roof to this return thereby enhancing the appearance of High Holborn House.
 - 3.6. The front façade of Montague House comprises a 4 storey terracotta elevation to an eclectic design that differs on each floor and displays considerable decorative detail, largely arts and crafts influenced. Much of the fenestration is modern replacement and possibly a somewhat crude imitation of the original detracting from the overall quality of the elevation. An attic floor has added been with the south wall rebuilt to accommodate this. The quality of the building that makes some positive contribution to the conservation area lies in its representation of a historic plot width and the remnant of architectural quality derived from the surviving original 4 storey terracotta elevation.
 - 3.7. The existing loadbearing masonry behind this façade has been considerably altered and extended and the result is a building that has no real coherence in its plan form with access variously obtained at different times from buildings to north and south. The existing layout

and independent access has been much compromised consequently façade retention has been adopted to enable a rational and accessible layout for the proposed residential accommodation. It will also allow the introduction of a new landscaped courtyard at the rear that will provide additional amenity space and open up the rear of the adjacent listed buildings thus improving the amenity for their reuse as residential units and enhancing their setting. The proposed concrete structure will replace the existing masonry structure which has been modified and extended extensively throughout the building's history leaving little of the original building fabric intact other than the front façade. The basement and ground floor will be for retail use, opening up the ground level elevation through its existing openings. An independent access to the residential use at upper levels will utilise existing openings at the north end of the façade. At upper levels the existing window openings will be retained with the floors behind respecting their visual appearance from the street. The proposed new building replacing 19-22 Hand Court will immediately abut Montague House at its south elevation but slightly recessed to allow the latter still to be understood as an independent building facing onto Hand Court hence respecting its historic plot width as well as the degree of architectural interest provided by the front elevation.

4. Effect on the Conservation Area

- 4.1. The extent of demolition is shown on the plan in **Appendix 1**. Elevation drawings in **Appendix 3** indicate the extent of demolition on the street elevations. The demolition proposed, including the rear parts of High Holborn and Montague House, will retain the building elements that are considered to contribute positively to the conservation area. It will also allow the construction of new buildings that provide for much more efficient and sustainable uses appropriate to this important location to a high quality design that respects and responds to the character of each of the different areas that it faces. In addition it provides an opportunity to improve and enhance the character of the conservation area and its streetscape through the introduction of retail and residential uses and activity, encouragement of pedestrian activity, and enhancement of the public realm through introduction of more appropriate hard and soft landscaping both within and around the proposed buildings.
- 4.2. Other unlisted buildings in the conservation area that are being retained and altered, including Brownlow House, are described in the planning application and Planning Design Report. Details of the proposed replacement buildings and the wider proposals that will enhance the conservation area are contained in the concurrent planning application. The revised proposals have been carefully considered to address the appeal decision. It is considered that this application is in line with the recent appeal decision and will both preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.