

Conservation Area Application Report
52/53 Russell Square, London WC1

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Design Statement – Prepared by dMFK

Introduction

The building comprises a Grade II listed double fronted office building facing Russell Square arranged over 5 & 6 stories with a further rear building, accessed from Bedford Place, which is 2 & 3 storey, built during the 1960's Both buildings were substantially refurbished in the 1980's with no.52 completely internally re-structured.

At present the building has a number of tenants. Bedford Estates intend to refurbish the interior of the building, replacing all services to bring the standard of accommodation up to the standard expected by modern building users and make the building suitable for a single tenant user to use the building for their headquarters. Proposals seek to retain all period features & treat the building with sensitivity & care. At present the building suffers from several problems which make the property difficult to let in its current condition. We intend to address these issues in a sensitive manner with the refurbishment works as follow:

DDA – Refer also to Access Statement

At present only the ground floor of the rear building is accessible to wheelchair users. Access to all other parts of the building requires assistance as the existing lift, located in the front building, is separated from the rear building by a stair. A single stair serves all floors of the front building with a further spiral stair located in the rear building which serves rear 2 & 3 storey accommodation.

The existing single sided lift car is to be replaced with a double sided car. WC accommodation is to be removed at ground & ground/1st floor landing levels to provide wheelchair access to all principal floor levels via the new double sided car.

In order to provide wheelchair access to the existing rear building 1st floor level, it is necessary to extend the existing link building by 1 storey. Impact of alteration to the 19thC front building has been minimized by dropping the cill of the existing window to the landing to make the required level access from the lift.

Circulation within the main stair of the building is constricted at present. Existing doors separating the lift lobby & stairwell are not required for fire compartmentation and make access very awkward for wheelchair users being less than 900mm clear opening. It is therefore intended to remove all such doors to ground & upper floors of the front building.

At present there is no DDA compliant WC for wheelchair users at ground floor level. By extending the link building at ground & 1st floor levels it is proposed to provide a fully DDA compliant WC at ground level and provide additional WC accommodation to replace the WC's displaced to create the new lift lobbies at ground & 1st floor levels.

Approach & access

When the front building was refurbished in the 1980's the stair to no.52 was removed to accommodate the new lift. As such access to all upper floors of no.52 is via the stairwell of no.53. This left the main entrance to no.52 of limited use as it provided access only to ground floor accommodation. In terms of priority, the entrance to no.52 is of greater significance than the entrance to no.53 and was provided with more elaborate detailing accordingly. The fact that this door is not the main entrance to the building at present makes approach & access to the building confused.

It is proposed that the no.52 entrance be brought back in to use and both entrances united. This is achieved by creating a reception area which links both entrances. The non-original entrance lobby to no.52 is to be removed and new openings are proposed to the party wall between 52/53 at ground level. The openings are detailed to match existing doorways with architraves & mouldings all to match existing joinery and be held back flush within bespoke joinery units on

magnetic hold open devices. The existing lobby door screen is to be retained and re-positioned to align with the spine wall separating front & rear rooms in the front building.

Reception

It is proposed to increase the size of the existing door opening in no.52 between the reception area and lift lobby to improve circulation. New doors will be detailed to match existing and be held back flush within bespoke joinery units on magnetic hold open devices. This will improve circulation for all building users including wheelchair users.

The new reception will be provided with a high quality stone floor finish.

Lighting – fully recessed low voltage downlights set within existing non-original drylined ceiling.

Link building

Form of the link building extensions are to match existing with all materials, details & window openings to match existing courtyard elevations. All window frames are to be in painted timber sliding sashes, brickwork in stocks to match existing. Roof in metal to match existing.

Offices

Existing office accommodation refurbished to provide contiguous space with new openings provided within existing non-original drylined non-structural partitions to 1st, 2nd & 3rd floor levels. All existing cornice lines maintained, openings are not full height.

Lighting – All surface mounted light fittings replaced with fully recessed fittings set with existing non-original drylined ceilings.

All switch plates to be flush.

Secondary glazing

Existing timber secondary glazing to Russell Square internal elevation does not align with existing windows & is to be replaced with timber framed glazing panels aligned with existing mullions/transoms.

WC's

Fixtures & finishes to be replaced to existing WC's with high quality materials.

Basement courtyard

Existing WC accommodation to be removed from courtyard to the rear of no.52 to improve the visual amenity from surrounding office accommodation.

Building exterior

Window frames to be re-decorated to match existing.

Materials & detailing

High quality materials and details proposed for all refurbishment works. All existing detailing including cornicing, skirtings, architraves to be retained and matched where required to be made good.

Services – See also M&E method statements

Existing wet heating system is to be removed and replaced with discrete comfort cooling. Visual appearance of all rooms will be substantially improved by removal of existing unsightly bulky radiators, replaced with slim fan coil units in a combination of bespoke joinery & factory casings. The new heating/cooling system will be much more energy efficient than the existing installation. The existing electrical supplies will therefore not require increasing in size.

A new plant room is located within the roof void to 3rd floor of no.53. The existing roof form will completely conceal plant equipment. It is proposed to provide an additional upstand to the rear section of roof in order to create a continuous roofline to match neighbouring property no.54.

Service riser doors – Existing riser doors, located on the face of the faux chimney breast (lift shaft), are unsightly. It is proposed to infill existing openings & provide access to the retained riser via riser return walls.

Conservation Assessment – Prepared by Anthony Walker, DLG Architects

- 1.0 The buildings date from 1802 and there are good records of alterations to number 52 but rather less for 53. Alterations were undertaken in 1898 according to the listing which introduced a terracotta cornice and frieze supposedly due to the Russell Hotel which inspired the then Duke of Bedford to add a terracotta feature to the terrace 52-60. These appear to have included extensive internal changes as well.
- 2.0 At the beginning of the 20th Century there are lease plans showing layouts which are clearly not original and which had been further changed at the time of the survey for the extension and alteration of the buildings in 1986.
- 3.0 The 1986 proposals by Shenston and Partners show further alterations which it is assumed obtained listed building and planning consent. Externally the main change was an extension to the back of the buildings. Internally there were radical alterations including the removal of the staircase in 52, the necessary lining of both buildings at all levels together with the introduction of a common lift to serve both properties. Associated with these works were extensive alterations and removal of partitions many of which were not original combined with the formation of new dummy features.
- 4.0 **Upper floors**
From inspection on site and examination of the drawings little, if any, of the original fabric survives other than the external walls and possibly parts of the floor construction. Partitions and cornices are recorded as having been replaced and by inference so have skirtings and ceilings through out. The main windows which are probably from the 1898 alterations have been extensively repaired and the inner secondary glazing is probably later still. Fireplaces are noted as having been moved or being new fireplaces introduced into the building.
- 5.0 **Ground floor**
The ground floor rooms of both buildings have been altered although those of 52 have been the most radically changed. Some alterations such as a new door from the hall to the front main room appear to have been granted consent but not implemented although other alterations were carried out. The subdivision of the back room in 53 has an uncomfortable relationship with the chimney breast although the record of alterations in 52 indicated a similar change having been made possibly to accommodate two bachelors living in the property at the time. There is a good staircase in 53 which has been extended at the upper floors in new matching construction. The cornices appear to be replacements although they may have been copies of ones found on site.
- 6.0 **Basement**
Only limited inspection which suggests together with the drawings that little of value has survived.
- 7.0 **Proposals.**
 - 7.1 The proposals have been reviewed and it is considered that they are sympathetic to a building which has already been substantially altered.
 - 7.2 There are opportunities to redress some of the work from the 1980's including removal of intrusive duct access doors, the new service riser will be provided with discrete doors to return faces on all floors.
 - 7.3 Replacement of secondary glazing to Russell Square elevation which does not align with existing external windows. New secondary glazing will align with existing.
 - 7.4 New fire panels to be discretely located.

- 7.5 Existing non-compliant electrical distribution boards to be replaced with more discrete units.
 - 7.6 Existing surface mounted light fittings to be replaced with recessed fittings to improve the look of spaces.
 - 7.7 Existing assorted radiators to be replaced with new slim line fan coil units concealed within a combination of bespoke joinery and factory casings.
 - 7.8 Non-original casings to windows to Russell Sq internal elevation to be removed and architraves to run to floor level.
- 8.0 A continuing detailed assessment is in hand and will be provided with illustrative material.