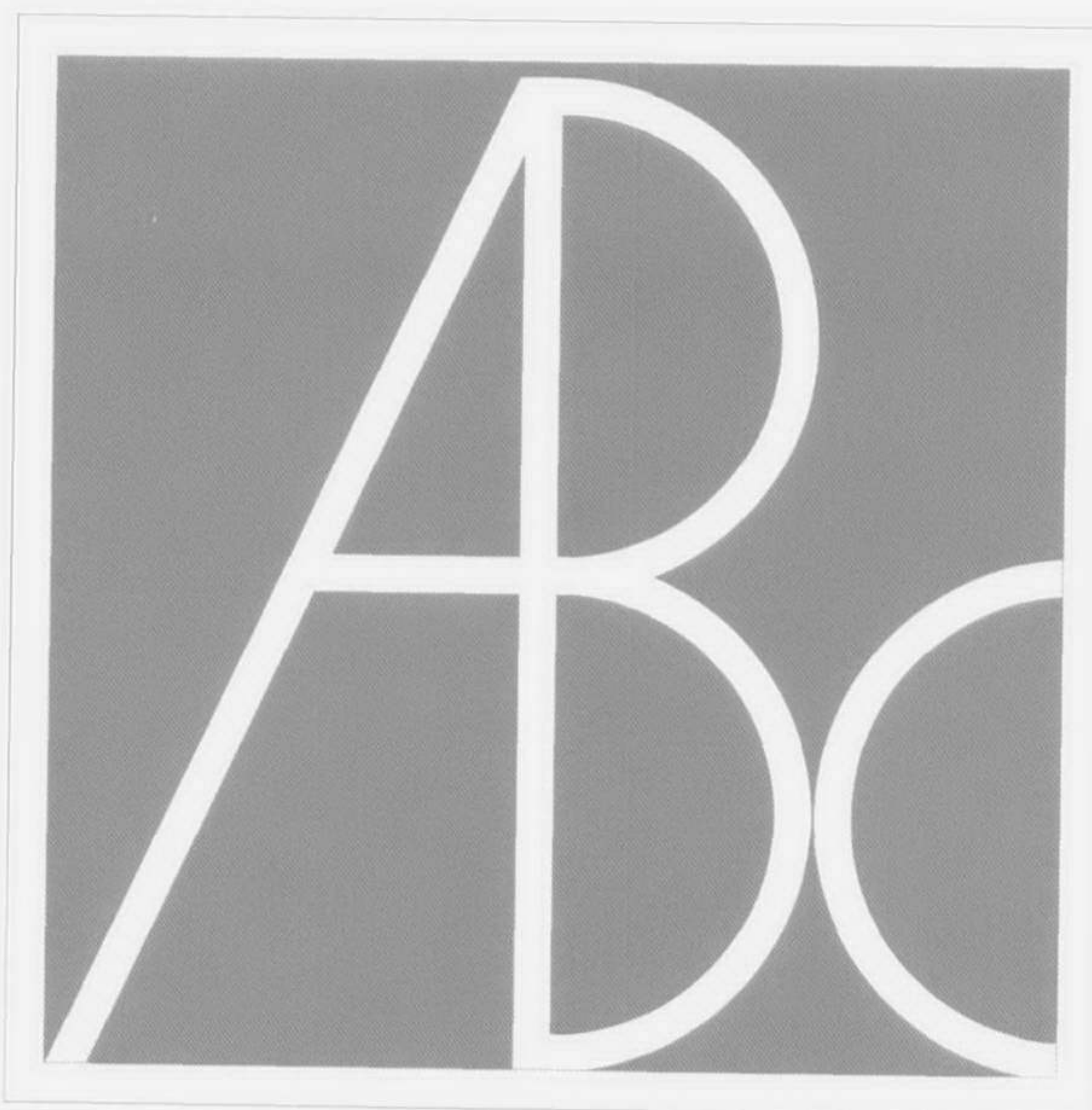


# **125 HIGH HOLBORN**

**A site comprising 121-126 High Holborn, 9-10  
Southampton Place and 1-13 Southampton Row**

## **Supporting Statement by Anthony Blee FRIBA FRSA**

**December 2004**



**ANTHONY BLEE CONSULTANCY**



## 125 HIGH HOLBORN

**A site comprising 121-126 High Holborn, 9-10 Southampton Place and 1-13 Southampton Row**

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### **Development Proposals for Grandsoft Ltd**

#### **1.00 The Application Site, its History and Character**

10 1.01 Plans at the Bedford Estate archive at Woburn Abbey show that the greater part of 121-126 High Holborn, 1-13 Southampton Row (but excluding 9-10 Southampton Place) and 3-9 Southampton Row came to be erected by Herbert Ford of Ford Son and Burrows between 1899 and 1902. 11-13 Southampton Row was finished in 15 1902.

20 1.02 Herbert Ford FRIBA (1832-1903) is identified with these buildings in his obituary notice (**AB2/15**). He had an unexceptional career, designing in bastardised neo-Flemish style as at High Holborn, or in Romanesque or in Gothic according to the stylistically promiscuous inclinations of the era (**AB2/16**). He could not be rated as an important architect in any style or sphere of building activity.

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1.03 The site of the infill building at 3-9 Southampton Row was apparently never part of the Ford Son and Burrows scheme as designed. Early C19 buildings there (**AB2/13/4**) were replaced by the present building in



1936-37, which was designed by the architects' department of J Lyons & Co (**AB2/14/4**). It gives the impression of a post-war utility office building. 9-10 Southampton Place looks as if it might have been built as a tenement building in the 1890s (**AB2/14/18-20**). It is an undistinguished red brick and stucco block with a semi-basement and four storeys above, plus an additional attic storey over the northern half. It relates neither to the Georgian terrace (**AB2/14/17**) nor to the High Holborn buildings.

1.04 Overall, the site is at a particularly important and prominent interface between two distinct major development campaigns, Georgian Bloomsbury (see **Appendix A**) and Edwardian Kingsway (**AB2/8&10**) and three distinct architectural periods, Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian.

1.05 It falls on the historic margins of the Duke of Bedford's original London estate development. The character of that Georgian era still survives locally, notably in Southampton Place itself (**AB2/19**). Here one sees the calm composure of Georgian uniformity leading southward on the axis of Bloomsbury Square.

1.06 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Statement (February 1998 **AB2/7**) naturally tends to concentrate on the essential Georgian framework of Bloomsbury. Only brief mention is made (in paragraph 3.2) of the fact that "with



*the growing appreciation of buildings of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, these areas were included in later extensions to the conservation areas where this development was considered to have high group value”.*

5 The Statement suggests that separate Conservation Areas may be designated in situations where the character or appearance differs significantly from Bloomsbury (paragraph 6.3), but as yet that has not happened. Consequently, the Statement tends to focus  
10 on Georgian Bloomsbury with no mention of specific Victorian elements such as this present application site.

1.07 Such disciplined regimentation, as seen in Georgian Bloomsbury, was to be disrupted by the Victorians, who  
15 seemed to be deliberately disrespectful of their Georgian inheritance. For the Victorians, what they perceived to be Georgian monotony had become tedious, even offensive. Sir George Gilbert Scott, for example, found the Georgian terraces *“utterly intolerable”*. The Victorian  
20 desire for diversity and ornate decoration reached its apogee towards the end of the C19. The Bedford Estate employed Charles Fitzroy Doll (1851-1929), an ebullient architect, to create confections such as the Russell Hotel, and to reface Waterstone’s (formerly Dillons) and  
25 the south side of Russell Square, both being examples of a kind of façadism. Robert Worley (1850-1930) was commissioned to design Sicilian Avenue in the same spirit **(AB2/20)**. Nothing could have been more at odds with the Georgian work in the midst of which these



buildings came to be erected. A different aesthetic prevailed, with buildings of greater stature, having a more vibrant palette and more restless massing with a riotous silhouette. It was all tending to become as exhibitionist as it could be.

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1.08 The Victorian buildings on the application site were actually built before Sicilian Avenue **(AB2/20)** was developed. They are somewhat lifeless concoctions by comparison **(AB2/14/1,2,3,7)**. They were built at the end of the C19, when the Holborn-Strand Kingsway improvements were already being conceived **(AB2/8-10)**, but the Bedford Estate seems to have taken little note of such architectural progress.

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1.09 The Kingsway slum clearance and improvement campaign heralded a protracted building programme in the district **(AB2/13/5)**. The developments at the north end of Kingsway and on into Southampton Row, close by the application site, were established at an early stage, that is between 1900 and 1905. This range of buildings, in which the use of stone was a stated requirement, and where the influence of the Beaux Arts, enriched by the Art Worker's Guild was evident, illustrated the desire to play what Lutyens had frivolously called *'the façade game'* in which *"it was a point of honour that no street façade should show a repeat vertically of the same window type"*.

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1.10 In this context, it is clear that the buildings on the present application site do not manifest any particularly significant relationship with the best of any of the three diverse architectural strands that set the scene in this district. This group of buildings, when observed in Southampton Place, are as alien to their dark grey brickwork Georgian neighbours, the Flitcroft designed terraces **(AB2/14/17)**, as they are to the stone-faced Edwardian pile by Adams & Holden on the opposite corner **(AB2/14/5)** and the Kingsway developments.

1.10 The buildings fronting Holborn and Southampton Row appear to me to be distinctly uninspired and outclassed by the assured composition of Worley's Sicilian Avenue **(AB2/20)** on the one hand, while appearing lack-lustre by comparison with the classically inspired, and Arts and Crafts influenced, works for the Methodists by Keen, or by the LCC Architects' Department for the Central School of Arts and Crafts directly opposite in Southampton Row. It is difficult to identify any *special* interest or real virtue that these buildings manifest in relation to the identified character and appearance of either the Bloomsbury or the Kingsway Conservation Areas, other than a certain visual interest arising from the complexity of the roofline profile noted in page 34 of the appraisal made by Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners Ltd (Lichfield's), (see 1.17 below). Lichfield's believe that is sufficient to justify their inclusion in the list of buildings which make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area (page 43). I have



come to accept that they do make a contribution, of sorts, although the assessment by Lichfield's was not based on a qualitative architectural appraisal.

5 1.12 As long ago as 1970, Hammersons, who at that time owned not only this site but also numerous surrounding properties, asked me to undertake a study of the redevelopment potential of this their '*DoB Estate*'. Since then, properties that I considered to be worthy of  
10 preservation, such as Sicilian Avenue, have indeed been listed. I did not, and do not even today, consider the application site properties to be of a calibre that really deserves preservation. Nevertheless, I have carefully reappraised them for this application, having regard to  
15 the fact that appreciation of the qualities of Victorian architecture has matured over the past 30 years. Now, the intention is to retain the Ford façades anyway.

1.13 Taking as a guide the '*Conservation Area Practice*'  
20 (CAP) pamphlet published by English Heritage in October 1995, and making an up-to-date overall assessment in 2004, one can readily identify the historic topographical framework, the diversity of styles and quality of the various components, and the three  
25 coherent strands of architectural character, as described above.

1.14 The ten tests in CAP may be answered as follows:



(Note: numbers have been added to these bullet points, for ease of identification)

- 5 (1) is the building the work of a particular architect of regional or local note?

*Answer: No. Herbert Ford's career was without any distinction (see 1.02 above).*

- 10 (2) has it qualities of age, style, materials or any other characteristics which reflect those of at least a substantial number of the buildings in the conservation area?

15 *Answer: No. There are but few buildings of this age in this Conservation Area. The boundary of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area was extended to include this site in 1981, when the GLC noted that these buildings were considered "to have some claim to consideration for listing".*

- 20 (3) does it relate by age, materials or in any other historically significant way to adjacent listed buildings, and contribute positively to their setting?

25 *Answer: It can be said that there is some relationship with Sicilian Avenue, which was listed in 1974 (AB2/20).*

- (4) does it, individually or as part of a group, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in which it stands, or of an earlier phase of growth?

30 *Answer: That cannot be denied, but I have always considered this to be a question to which the answer is invariably bound to be in the affirmative.*

- 35 (5) does it have a significant historic association with established features such as the road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?

40 *Answer: No.*

- (6) does the building have landmark quality, or contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces, including exteriors or open spaces within a complex of public buildings?

45 *Answer: No.*

- (7) does it reflect the traditional functional character of, or former uses within, the area?

50 *Answer: No.*



- (8) has it significant historic associations with local people or past events?

Answer: No.

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- (9) does it contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area?

Answer: *Inevitably, that must be so, especially due to the extent and prominence of the development.*

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- (10) if a structure associated with a designed landscape within the conservation area, such as walls, terracing or a minor garden buildings, is it of identifiable importance to the historic design?

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Answer: No.

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In English Heritage's view, any one of these characteristics could provide the basis for considering that a building makes a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area, provided that its historic form and qualities have not been seriously eroded by unsympathetic alteration.

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1.15 Within a context such as this, one is drawn to the clear-cut conclusion that the application site group does not exhibit any particular *special* interest in itself, while it barely qualifies significantly to relate to its neighbours, many of them Listed Buildings of very apparent and special interest. Its townscape quality, such as it is, arises from the repetition of a relatively uninspired formula of fenestration and from its complicated skyline **(AB2/14/7-12)**, all derived from Flemish origins with which it does not bear detailed comparison. Conformity with prevalent building materials is also absent. The lack of any subtle or sensitive contextual relationships, such as would be advocated today, is evident especially in Southampton Place. Consequently, one can readily identify significant *harmful* effects on the settings of the

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better Georgian and Victorian neighbours - the antithesis of conformity with normal Conservation Area precepts. Nor do these buildings even fulfil a particularly respectful, or passively deferential role of a kind that might serve to show off to advantage those neighbouring works which are of recognised special interest.

1.16 The building at 121-126 High Holborn, with 1 Southampton Row, presents a complete urban block frontage (**AB2/14/5&12**), highly exposed at the street corners. Paradoxically, those turreted corners are noticeably weaker than the gabled treatment of 11-13 Southampton Row (in **AB2/14** compare photo 6 with photo 1). At 11-13 Southampton Row the principal cornice is at the same level as at 121-126 High Holborn, that is above the four storeys comprising ground (retail) plus three (offices originally called '*chambers*'). In the present context at the primary junction of Kingsway/Southampton Row with High Holborn, the corner turret feature at 121-126 High Holborn is considered to be inadequate in fulfilling such a prominent urban design role. This is because stronger statements arise at the other corners and because the corner itself is relatively feeble. A comparable corner at Whitehall Court (1894) (listed Grade II\*) on the Victoria Embankment has far greater distinction.

1.17 Now, having made a rigorous re-evaluation in the light of the current guidance, I find that the buildings are still of



very limited interest, and certainly nothing that could be described as 'special'.

5 1.18 The 1998 Camden Council Conservation Area Statement  
for Bloomsbury, which was approved by the DC Sub-  
Committee in February 1998 (**AB2/7**), gave no proper  
analysis of the section with which this application is  
concerned. Previously, yet quite without any justification,  
a Report to the Planning and Communications  
10 Committee in 1981 proposed that the Ford buildings  
might be listable for Group Value (**AB2/7**). That proposal  
must have been ignored or rejected.

15 1.19 The inclusion of the site within the Conservation Area  
must be seen primarily as justified only by proper  
concerns for group value and the desire to control the  
form and nature of any redevelopment in such close  
proximity to highly valued Listed Buildings.

20



## 2.00 The Negative Elements

### 2.01 3-9 Southampton Row (AB2/14/4)

It is known that this property was redeveloped by J Lyons & Co in the 1930s. It is built in a drab brick with vaguely art-deco stone details around the entrance and at the bases of the pilasters. The cornice line is set slightly higher than the principal cornices of the adjacent buildings. There are four retail units. The attic storey rises to an intermediate point between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors of 11-13 and there is a plain, brick-enclosed plant room above that (AB2/14/7).

2.02 It is a simple, somewhat sombre building. Whereas during the inter-war period, to quote H S Goodhart-Rendel, the *“new starkness made a nice change from our too prettily upholstered past”*, he was probably thinking in terms of some of his own excellent work, rather than tedious, unimaginative buildings such as this one.

2.03 3-9 Southampton Row does not exhibit any valuable qualities, so in terms of the English Heritage Conservation Area checklist of discernable characteristics that might be valuable, this building must be judged to *detract* from the special character of the area. The most recent assessment produced for the Council in October 2001 (AB2/7) reveals that Lichfield’s simply considers this to be *“a plainer, slightly later building but of consistent scale and materials”*, which is



not to say that it makes a positive contribution. Perhaps that observation should be interpreted as a 'neutral contribution', that is neither enhancing nor detracting. It is certainly not a building to be treasured, nor do I find that its scale is consistent with its listed neighbours. I consider this to be an 'opportunity site'.

#### 2.04 9-10 Southampton Place

It appears that this has existed as a single unit for a great many years whereas the adjacent terrace is composed on narrow domestic plots. An early Horwood map, however, shows it as two properties even at that time, rather larger than the other Flitcroft houses in the street. The present building (**AB2/14/18-20**) has the aspect of a tenement block, but there seem to be no Bedford Estate records available to confirm that supposition. It was probably built as chambers. This late Victorian building may be described as very ordinary and far less distinguished than some contemporary Peabody buildings, for example. It could not even be categorised as 'neutral', and in fact it surely fails to make any contextual design responses or manifest any design attributes. It must be said to harm the setting of the fine Georgian terrace by reason of its thick-fingered detailing and graceless proportions. The Appraisal by Lichfield's for the Council in 2001 completely ignored this building. This, therefore, is to be classified as an 'opportunity site', with the added incentive of needing to formulate a



sensitive, contextual interface between the Georgian terrace and the Victorian corner building.



### 3.00 A Conservation Assessment

3.01 In 1970, I was drawn to the conclusion that this group of buildings certainly did not enhance, but tended to detract from the particular and special qualities of the neighbourhood due to its mediocre attributes. The mood might have changed, with the passing of time, but only to a certain degree. The very fact that the buildings by Henry Ford have survived and could be said to relate in a rather passive way in terms of date and character to the more positively exuberant aspects of Sicilian Avenue, suggests that one should err on the side of conservation and explore retention, at least of the façades. That is what Sheppard Robson have concluded and are proposing. Façade-only retention is the chosen option, because the interiors are of absolutely no special interest and are chronically badly planned.

3.02 The words of the guidance provide a clear indication in PPG15, paragraph 4.27 by noting that, *"In less clear-cut cases - for instance where a building makes little or no contribution ... the decision maker is entitled to consider the merits of any proposed development"*. This is not a clear-cut case, in my submission, but Sheppard Robson have proceeded on a cautious basis and have prepared an essentially conservation-orientated set of proposals.

3.03 Viewed generally, there are no significant beneficial relationships between the buildings on the application site and the Conservation Area of which they form a part.



It should, in my view, be categorised overall as an “*opportunity site*”, where an exercise in conservation can be explored with a degree of licence, taking the opportunities that arise to improve the accommodation, and in the process to effect improved connections between the stylistically diverse components of this urban scene.

3.04 In recent years there has been a well-orchestrated attempt to denigrate façade-only retention of buildings, called by the pejorative term *façadism*. The expression presumes a purist approach to architecture such as is predicated by a rigorous modernist philosophy of architectural integrity and expression. The Council’s Bloomsbury Conservation Area Statement is rather more realistic on this subject (page 23).

3.05 The integrity of a building as structure, and the three-dimensional contribution that it makes, lies at the heart of our present-day method of architectural analysis. We tend to believe that the proper expression of a particular building type derives from a three dimensional integrity. It is widely held that façade-only retention, with the retained main frontage of an historic building reduced to what is perceived to be two-dimensional theatrical street scenery, must produce a fundamentally less-than-genuine result due to the loss of integrity and the sacrifice of the true building-in-the-round (see:



'*Conservation Area Practice*', English Heritage, October 1995, paragraph 5.4: *Façadism* and PPG15, 3.15).

3.06 Undoubtedly, many of the greatest works of architecture  
 5 ring true because they are composed in their totality: the  
 external expression reflecting the internal spatial  
 organisation, the two being indivisible and inter-  
 dependent. It follows that when dealing with such  
 10 buildings, to respect and preserve only the façade must  
 be an inadequate or incomplete act, a mere gesture.  
 The purist is likely to proceed to condemn the practice of  
*façadism* out of hand as a matter of principle, perhaps  
 without close enough scrutiny and without discernment,  
 whatever the particular circumstances. But such a  
 15 doctrinaire attitude tends to be exposed as superficial in  
 itself when a specific case such as this one is examined  
 more closely on its merits, as it should be. Then one  
 may discover that some façades already display precious  
 little regard for the inner spaces they protect and more  
 20 often than not vice versa. In many cases an  
 indiscriminate relationship, or at any rate an  
 inconsequential relationship, already exists.

3.07 It is evident from historic precedent that the architectural  
 25 philosophy which demands three dimensional integrity  
 has not always been accepted as the only appropriate  
 way of addressing architecture. I have in mind a  
 significant range of historic buildings where development  
 has taken place with the primary intention of achieving a



superficial effect, that is as an urban design exercise to create a particular effect on the street frontage. The Place Vendôme in Paris and Lewes Crescent in Brighton may be cited as original examples of *façadism*, where quite deliberately the façades were constructed first for the sake of a contrived but consistent street scene and subsequently a variety of buildings was constructed behind that architectural scenery.

10 3.08 Victorian architects, and perhaps more frequently their Edwardian successors, were prone to tolerate inconsequential relationships in so far as interior spatial accord with exterior elevational display was concerned.

15 3.09 Thus a puritanical approach to the whole of such a building may be inappropriate, for it assumes that a building valued for its street identity must be a thoroughbred and satisfactory conception through and through, although it is often not so. The Secretary of State has on occasion realised the reality of this by permitting façade-only retention when it secures a new lease of life for a worthwhile façade and when there is nothing of special interest inside (e.g.: Carlton House, 11 Regent Street, 1 May 1990 decision, paragraph 10). Of course, one must deplore the bad examples of *façadism* where thoughtless designers perpetrate the incompatible and make nonsense of the architecture.



3.10 It is disingenuous to suggest that all façade retention work is going to result in insensitive, jarring and indiscriminate conflicts, just as it is to presume that all listed façades are related to valuable and well-integrated interiors. That too is where the habit of condemning the preservation of a façade of some interest on its own, just because there is nothing of value behind it, can be contrary to the most fundamental principles of good architectural conservation.

3.11 Furthermore, it can be argued that *façadism* should not be derided when it is remembered that previous generations have sought to achieve an exterior architectural conformity overlying an interior diversity, for the sake of effect.



## 4.00 The Application Proposals

4.01 The current redrafted design by Sheppard Robson would make a very definite statement of the new identity of the site by means of the patently modern insertions proposed at 3–9 Southampton Row and 9-10 Southampton Place, while maintaining Ford's façades unaltered.

4.02 The design of the new-build elements is described in detail by Sheppard Robson. It is a well-proportioned, minimalist modern structural expression, carefully related in stature and scale to its historic neighbours. This is the right approach, as indicated in the EH/CABE publication *Building in Context* (2001).

4.03 Perhaps the most challenging exercise for the architects has arisen in Southampton Place. Here the Georgian terrace on the east side (Nos. 1 to 8) is to be extended by three units in brickwork on three storeys plus an attic, modern in design but harmonious in its expression of implied plot widths and in its proportions (drawing 2047-20-260A). Well set back from the main front, the building would rise unobtrusively by a further two storeys (drawing 2047-20-250B) to relate to the ridge line of Ford's building (Nos. 121 to 126 High Holborn). Presented in this way, the two progressively recessed uppermost floors would not impinge on the continuity of the Southampton Place street wall.



4.04 The comparable design exercise on the Southampton Row elevation adopts similar disciplines. The street elevation of the proposed new building at 3–9 Southampton Row presents an interesting elemental study in proportion and rhythm, well related vertically to the adjacent Victorian buildings (drawing 2047-20-261B and 410). This is intended to bridge the gap between No. 1 Southampton Row and Nos. 11-13 with a fenestrated framework which maintains, in an harmonious way, the vertical emphasis inherent in the neighbouring buildings. It also generates a contemporary identity for the new development which would work well with the organisation of the new office plan (drawing 2047-20-241A).

4.05 Undoubtedly, the scheme would capture certain essential scale and grain relationships properly, and enhance the neighbourhood by providing finely tailored new elements that would reflect the spirit of the age in which we live and, at the same time, complement the diversity that characterises this zone of Bloomsbury. I consider this to be faithful to the design and conservation thinking of our era, which is to seek to *“add inspirationally to the built fabric we have inherited, ... an intelligent and imaginative approach that can enrich historic environments”*<sup>(1)</sup>.

4.06 A recent example of extensive façade-only retention that has been implemented is on the corner of Old Broad

<sup>(1)</sup> Foreword to 'Building in Context', English Heritage/CABE 2001



Street and Threadneedle Street in the City of London. This includes the Grade II\* element at 51-53 Threadneedle Street by Mewes and Davis, which in 1930 was awarded a London Street Architecture Medal (an award which by its very title reflects a façade approach to architecture). There, only the good main banking hall has been retained behind the fine Roman palazzo-inspired façade.

10 4.07 The proposed modern insertions would be significantly more harmonious and contextually responsive than the buildings that they would replace, thereby justifying the submission that Conservation Area enhancement would be achieved. In particular, the setting of the range of  
15 Flitcroft's listed Georgian terrace in Southampton Place would be considerably enhanced by this scheme. It would echo, in an abstract way, the solid to void relationships and rhythms of the adjacent Listed Buildings and it would relate much more satisfactorily in  
20 stature, being conceived as a well-integrated component of the street wall.

4.08 The integration of the floor levels with the retained  
façades has been carefully studied. This is an issue  
25 upon which the City of Westminster had produced valuable supplementary guidance to which I believe it to be useful to refer in this case (DES 7.4 (**Appendix B**)).



## 5.00 London Borough of Camden UDP

5.01 I refer to the relevant policies in the current Unitary Development Plan for Camden (adopted March 2000).

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### 5.02 EN31 Character and Appearance of Conservation Areas

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The proposal would both preserve and enhance the character and appearance of this sector of the Conservation Area. The local character derives from its architectural variety and mixed uses. The prevalent historic uses of the existing buildings on the site have never been residential. They have been retail and office use. The policy explanation recognises (paragraph 4.75) the fact that established uses contribute to the character and should not be displaced.

### 5.03 EN32 Demolition of Unlisted Buildings in Conservation Areas

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The façade-only retention proposed here will probably be said by some to breach this policy by apparently failing adequately to safeguard the integrity of the existing buildings, but the explanation (paragraph 4.76) makes it plain that if the case can be made, as it certainly can be here, that the parts lost by demolition are not essential to the contribution the building makes to the Conservation Area, and provided that the elements to be retained are not put at risk, then the proposal conforms with policy.



#### 5.04 **EN33 & EN34 Restoration and Shopfronts**

These policies recognise the damage that can be inflicted by unsympathetic alteration. The current retail demand is for larger units than those originally built  
 5 **(AB2/13)**, many of which original details **(AB2/15,5,6,7)** have long since been lost. The proposal is for a polite, plain and unadorned (drawings 2047/20/261B & 261A) while retaining and restoring such original detailing as has survived, such as at the former bank (No. 126 High  
 10 Holborn) **(AB2/14/12,13,15,16,17)** and at the elaborate entrances on Southampton Row (No. 1 and No. 13) **(AB2/14/1&3)**.

#### 5.05 **EN38 Preservation of Listed Buildings**

15 There are no Listed Buildings within the application site, but the policy is also concerned with the setting of such buildings in close proximity, as is the case here. Therefore these proposals, being designed to establish more harmonious scale and rhythmic relationships, in  
 20 particular in Southampton Place, will be readily appreciated as benefiting, rather than diminishing, the quality of the setting of those buildings.



## 6.00 Conclusions

6.01 Heedful, in particular, of the English Heritage advice on *façadism* at 5.4 of 'Conservation Area Practice', I conclude that this scheme would not diminish the special interest of the Conservation Area. On the contrary, the whole proposal to replace the poor buildings with attractive and effectively planned modern ones while retaining the better façades would be distinctly beneficial and lead to general enhancement. The scheme entailing façade-only retention of the Ford designed buildings is justified by the relative lack of special interest of the buildings to be demolished and the absence of interior features of any special quality or interest behind those retained façades. The environmental bonus would be the restoration of the entire range of retained façades and the formation of high-quality, modern insertions to achieve better junctions, thereby creating an improved urban environment.

6.02 I conclude that these proposals respect and adhere to the relevant UDP policies (March 2000), Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings Policies and properly heed and conform to Planning Policy Guidance PPG15.

**ANTHONY BLEE**

**December 2004**



## APPENDIX A

### A 1.00 General Background History of the Bloomsbury Area

A1.01 The Messuage of 'Blumesburye' belonged to Thomas Wriothesly, the Lord Chancellor, who became Earl of Southampton in 1547.

10 A1.02 This property, having been confiscated in 1601, was later restored to the Earl by James I, but it was not until 1638 that the Fourth Earl thought to move to Bloomsbury, having applied to demolish his home opposite Grays Inn and to erect tenements there instead.

15 A1.03 Southampton House on the north side of Bloomsbury Square is known to have been designed in 1660 and was under construction in 1664, with the terraces of fine houses to the east and west of the square (AB2/11).

20 A1.04 On a 1720 print one can see the big house with the Square flanked on each side by Allington Row to the west and Seymour Row to the east. Further to the west there was Montague House which came to be turned into a museum in 1759. Behind and beyond these great houses, the fields stretched away to Hampstead and Highgate and secured the 'good air' which the diarist Evelyn noted, while the local scene was developing with the Square and Southampton Row to the east maintaining that 'rus-in-urbe-ish' character that was originally observed and enjoyed by the poet Gray in 1759 and is still valued in Bloomsbury even today (AB2/1).

35 A1.05 From these early days it is reputed to have been a favourite residential location. The residents of the houses surrounding Southampton House seem to have been prepared to pay exactly double the rating value compared to those living nearby in Queen Square, because of their noble neighbours, good wells and the especially healthy local climate. Development around London at that time was difficult, because the Building Licences that had to be obtained were hard to come by and the standard of building was rigorously scrutinised. So there was a rarity value as well.

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- 5 A1.06 The Bloomsbury Market, which was sited opposite St George's Church and linked with what is now Barter Street, was established in 1662 to service the new Estate (**AB2/1**). It was originally called Southampton Market and dealt in 'fish and fleshe'. It was cleared away in 1847.
- 10 A1.07 When the next Earl died in 1667 without a son, the property passed to his eldest daughter who married the Fourth Earl of Bedford's eldest son. Thus the two families merged, although the house was not called Bedford House until 1740. The Fourth Earl of Bedford, Francis Russell, had already given London the first of its great squares - the Covent Garden Piazza designed by Inigo Jones.
- 15 A1.08 The gardens of Bedford House were developed with groves of limes and acacias. Rocque's Survey of 1746 (**AB2/1**) shows the layout of the place at a time when a re-building programme was under way under the direction of the architect Henry Flitcroft who had succeeded William Kent as Master Mason and Deputy Surveyor in the Office of Works and who eventually became Comptroller. He continued with the building of Southampton Place (then Southampton Street) between 1758 and 1763.
- 20
- 25 A1.09 There were wild disturbances in 1765 when the Riot Act was read in Bloomsbury Square and the ensuing Gordon Riots caused great concern among local residents in 1780.
- 30 A1.10 The Fourth Duke of Bedford died in 1771 to be succeeded by his five year old grandson. For the time being, his widow the Dowager Duchess, a formidable woman by the maiden name of Gertrude Gower, acted as Trustee and, with her agent, she pressed on with developing the plans for extending the Estate that had first been mooted in 1766. So, by the time the Fifth Duke came of age in 1786, Bedford Square was complete and much else besides as may be seen on Horwood's Plan (1799) (**AB2/2**).
- 35
- 40 A1.11 Now James Burton - who had been developing the neighbouring Foundling (Coram) Estate to the east - started work on the Bedford Estate. He was one of London's most important speculative builders. By 1802 when the Fifth Duke died, Burton had put up 336 houses on the basis of a careful plan of *'improvements on the Estate of His Grace the Duke of Bedford'* which involved the demolition of the Duke's house to make way for Bedford Place and which established the area on a layout which has largely survived
- 45



- 5 to the present day. The main axis developing from Southampton Place, through Bloomsbury Square and on beyond to Russell Square has always been considered to be one of the most significant and innovative developments in the history of town planning.
- 10 A1.12 On the other hand, it seems scandalous that such a fine house should have been demolished to make way for what was really a down-to-earth repetitive street of houses. But it must have seemed good business sense and besides, the land at the back had become less private with the traffic on the New Road from Paddington to Islington, so it was time to move out to his estate in the country. Sir John Summerson has said that: *"... it is, after all, business - good sound business - combined, perhaps, with a little snobbery and a bare minimum of artistic feeling, which has provided us with the squares and streets on which, we lavish so many nostalgic regrets"*.
- 15
- 20 A1.13 All this was done at a particularly precarious time and must have been an enormous gamble. With the Napoleonic Wars at full tilt, Burton *"... took advantage of the national difficulties to employ so many hands which would have otherwise been idle both because of the war which had generally put a check on the enterprising spirit of builders and because of the excessive price of every article necessity ..."*
- 25
- 30 A1.14 Burton even formed a corps of his workmen in case Napoleon should invade, calling them the *'Loyal British Artificers'* and exercising them under his direction (as Colonel Burton) in what is now Russell Square. It is interesting to note that the architect Decimus Burton was James Burton's famous tenth son.
- 35
- 40 A1.15 The main parts of the Estate being practically complete and the Fifth Duke having died, Burton moved elsewhere and although the main bones of the district seem to have changed very little for the next twenty-five years, Burton's successor Thomas Cubitt carried on extending the plan into Tavistock Square and Woburn Place. Cubitt was also rebuilding within the area, being responsible for Bloomsbury Way. Many of those houses were bombed in the 1940 air raids and very little has survived.
- 45
- A1.16 The 1840 plan for New Oxford Street affected the site boundaries and involved the demolition of 130-135 High



Holborn including the King's Arms public house (Monarch Yard was called King's Arms Yard at that time). Eventually the whole of the High Holborn frontage was rebuilt **(AB2/2)**.

- 5    A1.17    In the late 19-century, part of the south side of Bloomsbury Square was demolished to make way for the College of Preceptors and the buildings adjacent to it.
- 10    A1.18    The 1894 map **(AB2/3)** shows the layout of the area immediately prior to the redevelopment of the application site when there was a large post office there.
- 15    A1.19    Then came the Kingsway improvements so that the local scene was extensively transformed **(AB2/4)** by road widening, new construction and the advent of the tube. The range of occupancy and uses on the redeveloped application site is shown in the 1904 Post Office Directory **(AB2/12)**.
- 20    A1.20    In 1924-25 the original houses on the east side of the square were demolished and that whole area was redeveloped with Victoria House designed by Charles Long and built between 1925 and 1930.



**G.5** The architectural relationship between the interior and exterior of buildings in conservation areas is also important. This is often particularly significant in the case of cellular buildings where the design of the facades reflects the internal arrangement of rooms and circulation spaces. For example, the large windows of the piano nobile (first floor) of Georgian town houses reflects the size and importance of the rooms behind. The attic rooms, which are normally much smaller and plainer, are lit by much smaller windows.

**G.6** The City Council has published guidance on structural alterations to historic buildings:

*The Protection of Historic Buildings in Westminster – A guide to structural alterations for owners, architects and developers.*

### **DES 7 H** **Redevelopment behind retained facades**

Where complete demolition behind the facade is allowed, it may be necessary to maintain the scale of the original rooms behind the principal facades where it will affect the character or appearance of the conservation area.

**H.1** The City Council seeks to avoid the 'stage set' effect, which results from insensitive redevelopment behind retained, historic facades. In such cases it is clear from the street that the new building and the old facade have little architectural relationship. Such developments can have a seriously adverse impact on the conservation area.

**H.2** If demolition behind retained facades can be justified in conservation area and



**31** 172 Regent Street, W1. The Regent Street facade has been retained whilst the remainder of the site, including the Kingly Street facade, has been rebuilt. (Architects – Chapman Taylor Partners/ Kyle Stewart Design Services).

structural terms, then it will be necessary for attention to be given to the relationship between the new floors and the retained facades e.g. it may be necessary to recreate the relationship between the facade and the internal compartmentation or when the facades of two buildings are retained, it may be

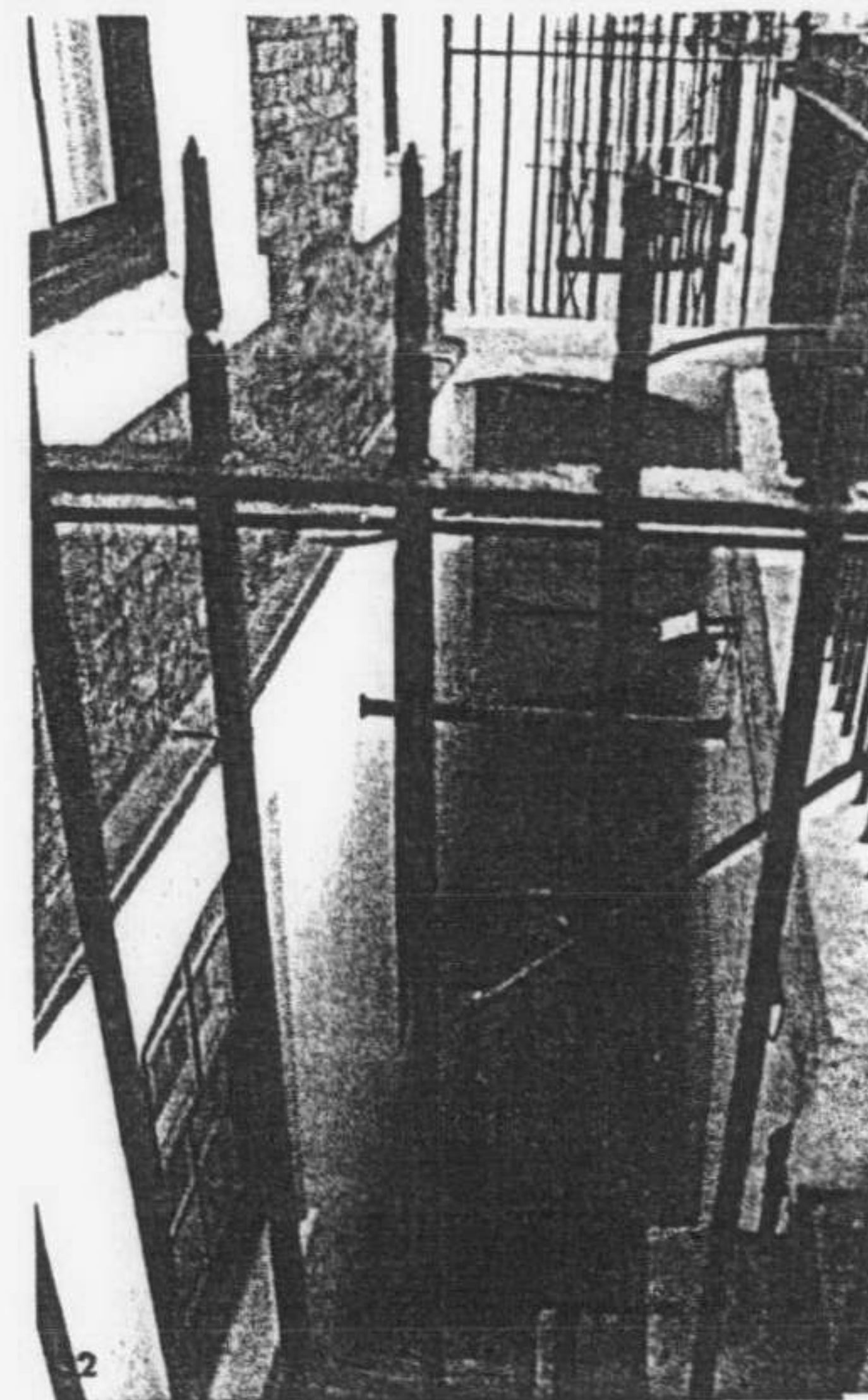
necessary to reinstate the party wall line internally, avoiding large open plan spaces that do not relate to the external appearance of the buildings. Open plan spaces behind the facades of buildings that were originally compartmentalised can have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of a conservation area.

**H.3** New floor levels must be carefully considered so that they are related to the openings in the retained facades. New floor levels which meet the facade below the top (or above the bottom) of existing window openings will not normally be acceptable, as they are likely to have an adverse effect on the external appearance of the building and the architectural integrity of the retained facade. Similarly, suspended ceilings which are below this level are not normally acceptable. This may mean that standard floor-to-floor heights cannot be used and may need to vary.

### **DES 7 I** **Extensions**

Extensions to buildings in conservation areas should preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. They should in general be confined to the rear or least important facades and should not upset the scale or proportions of the building or adversely affect the character, appearance or setting of neighbouring buildings.

**I.1** Extensions to the front or street facades of buildings will normally be unacceptable. This is because it is generally the street facades which make the greatest contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area.



**32** Many 18th and 19th century terraces retain open front areas. These contribute to the character and appearance of many conservation areas and should be retained.

Extensions which involve infilling of light wells at basement level at the front will not normally be acceptable, as these light wells are an important characteristic of many conservation areas, and should be retained.

**I.2** More change is often possible at the rear, or occasionally the side, of buildings, without affecting adversely the character or appearance of conservation areas. At the rear, buildings have often been subject to many alterations over the