



# ENGLISH HERITAGE

LONDON OFFICE

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Our ref: L00434783

6 October 2014

Dear Mr Baxter

## **CHAMBERS 1 GRAY'S INN SQUARE LONDON WC1R 5AA**

Thank you for consulting us on the above application (your ref: 2014/5717/L).

1 Gray's Inn Square is a Grade II\* listed building, within a Grade II\* registered park & garden, itself within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Though the foundation of the Inn is ancient, and the reconstruction of Gray's Inn Square dates to the 1670s, the survival of historic fabric on this site is patchy. Damage caused by bombing in the Second World War was of a devastating scale and much was lost at that time. Consequently, those individual buildings selected for their historic significance warrant special care.

The National Planning Policy Framework requires consideration of the following points of relevance to this application:

- *Local planning authorities should take into account the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation (126)*
- *In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected... The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance... (128)*
- *Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset... As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification (132)*
- *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (134)*

An adequate assessment of the significance of the existing panelling and the interior to which it relates has not been provided. As such it is not possible to fully assess the impact of this application.



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A principal room on the ground floor of a high status building such as 1 Gray's Inn Square would invariably have been panelled on all four walls; the completeness of this aesthetic quality is key to retaining the significance of the building internally. Given the desirability of retaining as complete a representation of the historic interiors of this building as possible, it is unlikely that we will be able to support this application should the proposal be further developed.

Should the applicant wish to progress this proposal further, we would need to see a detailed heritage assessment (please see our publication *Conservation Principles: Policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment*) and an options appraisal that explored any alternative means of reducing noise disturbance. These might include changing the pattern of use / usage of rooms so that noisy rooms are not adjacent, or modifying the existing panelling (depending on its significance) in order to retain the same aesthetic significance whilst improving acoustic performance.

Unless the application can demonstrate the unavoidable necessity of works to conceal the existing panelling, we can only conclude that the proposal will cause unjustified harm to the significance of this Grade II\* listed building.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further as the implications of this application are significant and we are unable to direct as to the granting of listed building consent at this stage. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted.

Yours sincerely

**Matthew Cooper**

Assistant Inspector of Historic Buildings

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