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Dear Eleanor,

**HOTEL RUSSELL, 1-8 RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON, WC1B 5BE:
APPLICATION FOR HARD REFURBISHMENT OF BEDROOMS, ASSESSMENT
OF IMPACT ON HERITAGE ASSETS**

Further to our earlier discussions, I am writing in relation to the emerging applications relating to the Hotel Russell, 1-8 Russell Square. The Hotel, a Grade II* listed building, will be, as you aware, subject to a number of applications over the coming months, in association with an overall masterplan for its conservation and enhancement, with the overall intention of better revealing its significance, and securing its future as a high-end hotel. The current application follows on from an earlier application that sought the completion of hard strip works for two bedrooms, in order that the final interior design can be agreed.

The current proposals relate to the 'hard refurbishment' of 131 of the 373 existing guestrooms; this will result in the overall number of guestrooms being reduced to 334 with 45 single rooms and 39 suites. The latter, reflecting the historic use of the building, and its own internal hierarchy, will be focused on the principal facades of the building, mainly facing onto Russell Square. As laid out in more detail below, and in the attached information provided by EPR Architects, the proposed works will consist of the removal of existing fixtures, fittings, furniture and decorative details, as well as some minor physical alterations to the building's fabric.

This letter provides an assessment of the impact of the proposed works on the Grade II* Hotel Russell, meeting the requirements of paragraph 128 of the NPPF when read in conjunction with the attached Built Heritage Assessment, and drawings, visualisations and design document provided by EPR Architects.

A full assessment of the history and development of the Hotel Russell is provided within the Built Heritage Assessment submitted herein, but for the purposes of this specific submission, it is important to summarise that the hotel rooms themselves are generally considered, in terms of their plan form and internal decoration, to be of a lower level of significance than the more significant public rooms on the ground floor, and the more decorative circulation spaces on the upper floors. From the hotel's second floor up to the eighth floor, the bedrooms have been systematically altered having been in consistent use since its opening in 1898 and owing to fluctuating styles and nature of their décor from historical periods that have occurred since. Besides the on-going replacement of wall coverings, carpets and furniture, the building has experienced physical alterations to its layout and fabric as a result of changes to the hotel's clientele, and wider social mores and expectations.

It would appear that the hotel was originally designed such that the rooms became cheaper as one travelled further upwards (given that the building was built without lifts), and thus rooms were less lavishly decorated (and often smaller) the further one travelled up through the building. The hotel's rooms were also often originally smaller than those one sees today, and were almost all provided without bathrooms, which were not a standard expectation for hotel guests at the time. It is clear that the vast majority of the rooms would have been built with relatively limited architectural detailing, as a result of the social level to which they were aimed, and it is clear, from an assessment of the hotel as a whole, that little detail remains. In addition, evidence of blocked up doorways, broken coving, and 'goalpost' openings within bedrooms shows that the majority of these spaces consist of an amalgamation of existing rooms, rather than reflecting the original plan form. It is thus considered that the existing hotel rooms, and particularly their decorative finishes, contribute very little to the overall significance of the Hotel Russell.

The proposed works have been developed with this in mind. Focusing, as noted above, on 131 rooms across the second to the eighth floors of the hotel, these works are intended to provide an appropriate upgrade and reconfiguration to these rooms, allowing the hotel to function sustainably as a high end hotel, without impacting upon the significance of the Grade II* listed building. While a full Scope of Works is provided within the associated document produced by EPR Architects (along with a scheme for the interior design of these rooms, produced by Tara Bernerd and Partners), the proposed works will include:

- Demolition of areas of existing walling to create new doorways, and alter arrangement of existing rooms to create new junior suite;
- Removal of existing bedroom furniture, light fixtures and other fittings, and removal and replacement of fixed wardrobes;
- Removal of all existing mouldings, cornices and skirting and replacement with similar;

- Removal and replacement of all existing floor finishes, including acoustic underlay;
- Removal of existing ceiling finishes and replacement with new plasterboard ceilings;
- Introduction of double glazed secondary glazing and window dressing to all external windows and patio doors;
- Strip-out of all existing sanitaryware, brassware and floor and wall finishes within bathrooms. Creation, in new location, of new 'wet room' bathroom, with waterproofing to floors and walls and introduction of underfloor heating;
- Existing guestroom doors and architraves stripped out and reinstated with upgrade to acoustics and ironmongery.

The above works, when seen in the context of the alterations that this part of the Hotel has experienced over time, are considered to represent an appropriate alteration to the building's fabric and internal decoration. Re-using the existing plan form, and seeking to undertake minimal alterations to the actual fabric of the building, it will generate a new type of room within the building that will upgrade the building's offer, in line with a wider programme to return the hotel to its original high status.

Fundamentally, the works will retain the building's existing plan form; the principal physical changes to the structure will allow the creation of new doorways and small openings, and thus alter the manner in which that this plan form is utilised. The principal interventions into the fabric will thus consist of the removal and reconstruction of existing walls, many of them clearly later additions to the building. These minor physical interventions are not considered, in the context of the degraded significance of the upper floors of the Hotel, to result in any harm to the significance of the listed building. Involving the removal of a combination of relatively early and quite recent fabric, they will, in reality, result in the loss of only a very small amount of early or original walling. Consequently, the loss of this historic material will not affect understanding of the Hotel's historical development or its heritage significance, given that it will not fundamentally affect its plan form.

Similarly, as these rooms are located on the building's noisier Russell Square frontage, it is considered that upgrading the existing secondary glazing with equivalents will provide improved environmental and acoustic performance and in fact result in no material or visual harm upon the hotel's elevations, ensuring that its external heritage significance is preserved. These new secondary glazing units will sit within the existing reveals, mirroring existing glazing bars, and will therefore 'disappear' in views towards the hotel. Similarly, from within the rooms, the improved performance of these units will not prevent visitors from appreciating the historic form of the existing windows, the detail of their frames,

or the visual connection that they provide with Russell Square. It is strongly felt that the proposed secondary glazing provide an improved level of performance that is vital to the effective operation of the Junior Suites proposed for this part of the Hotel, whilst avoiding the need to impact upon existing windows, or generate an intrusive visual or physical impact into the building's historic fabric or form.

Finally, it is not considered that the removal of modern fixtures, fittings and other details will result in any harm to the significance of the listed building. This aspect of the works will lead to the removal and upgrade of features which are universally contemporary additions, added as a part of a wider programme of upgrading that one would expect from a hotel that has been in continuous use for nearly 120 years. The new scheme illustrated in full within the attached design document by EPR Architects and designed by Tara Bernerd Associates, will be of the highest quality, and will consist of a contemporary scheme in keeping with the Hotel's overall status and significance.

It is therefore our view that, on the whole, the proposals for the hard refurbishment of 131 of the Hotel's bedrooms will upgrade its existing fabric to a status in keeping with its original operations, and will fundamentally ensure that the its future long-term use is secure. Furthermore, as such works will not materially or visually impact upon the external fabric, the primary heritage significance of the Grade II* listed building will be preserved. As such, we strongly recommend that the LPA grant listed building consent for these minor works.

Yours sincerely,



Laurie Handcock
Associate Director, Historic Buildings

cc.
Tanya Jordan, CgMs
Geoff Hull, EPR Architects