

Selkirk House

Design & Access Statement

Selkirk House Relocation
of NCP Staircase



Design & Access Statement

2

Introduction

This is a limited Design and Access Statement for the removal of an existing fire escape stair to free up the site at 15 West Central Street for future development opportunities. A future proposal is presently under consideration for the site and will be subject to a further detailed planning application that will be submitted later this year. This initial application will only entail the enabling works to open up the site with works consisting of the demolition of an existing stairway, erection of a new alternative means of escape stair as well as limited alterations to the outward appearance of the existing car park structure.

Urban Context

The site is located off Museum Street at the corner of West Central Street as it turns north toward New Oxford Street. This road is a quiet crescent, remote from the hustle and bustle of the surrounding roads. The site is only minutes away from the British Museum and the commercial heart of Covent Garden. The closest tube is Tottenham Court Road is a short 5 minute walk from the site to the west.

The surrounding buildings are a mixture of residential, retail, pubs, hotels, and offices. These include a variety of historical with the oldest buildings being the stucco face mid-19th century Victorian period properties along New Oxford St, West Central St and Museum St; Edwardian terracotta and brick mansion blocks to the rear on Grape Street and Shaftesbury Avenue; and to the south is the modern concrete tower block currently occupied by the Travelodge Hotel and the NCP multi-storey car park and ramp. Immediately adjacent to the site at 14 West Central St is a four storey yellow brick Victorian building originally built as a fire station but now used as an office with residential flats above.

Property Description

The property at 15 West Central Street consists of a vacant site to the north west of the existing NCP car park. We understood this site was once occupied as a single building until it was demolished to allow the erection of major office development in the sixties that now forms the Travelodge and car park. The site's principle use is an access route to and from the private car parking levels that lie below the NCP car park. The access ramp is located at the rear boundary of the Grape Street blocks with the street entrance off West Central Street besides the old fire station building. The remaining part of the site faces directly onto West Central Street and is surrounded by a high painted rail security fence. Within the fenced off compound is a concrete stairway with bridge links back to the car park to all levels. Below the escape stairway is an extension stair linking the lower car park levels plus a ventilation mechanical plant room serving the lower levels

of the car park. In terms of scale and architectural impact, the present stairway can be viewed down West Central Street from both New Oxford Street and Museum Street. The oblique view of the stair from Museum Street is particularly pronounced. Whilst the height of the stairway is lower than the surrounding buildings, the somewhat brutal style of the architecture is out of character with the historic context.

Site Considerations

The site is only used for pedestrian and vehicle access to and from the lower car park levels. The fenced in compound may previously been used as part of the hotel functions, however it currently unused and remains vacant and subject to littering. In recent years, the hotel has sublet the parking areas to third parties on temporary leases who no longer require constant usage of the ramp for access. The property has only had minimum maintenance undertaken over the years as witnessed by the unpainted render party wall along the ramp.

As a consequence the site leaves an impression of urban abandonment despite it being a short walk to the very active and vibrant areas of the west end. Visually the existing staircase serving the car park contributes little to the streetscape and may be considered an eyesore by most people walking past the site.

Historical records also reveal that there are underground tunnels beneath the site that once served the neighbouring post office. These tunnels may no longer be used, however their presence has led to design solution involving a light weight structure built over a raft foundation.

Scheme Design

The proposal will involve the demolition of the three storey concrete open staircase abutting the NCP car to the south. This will be replaced with a new metal stair clad in a bronze effect metal mesh at the base of the vehicle ramp on the west side of the site. Further work to the existing car park walls will be include infilling existing door openings facing West Central Street in a matching material and extending the solid panels to the rear face of the car to ensure the new stair conforms to building regulations for fire protection.

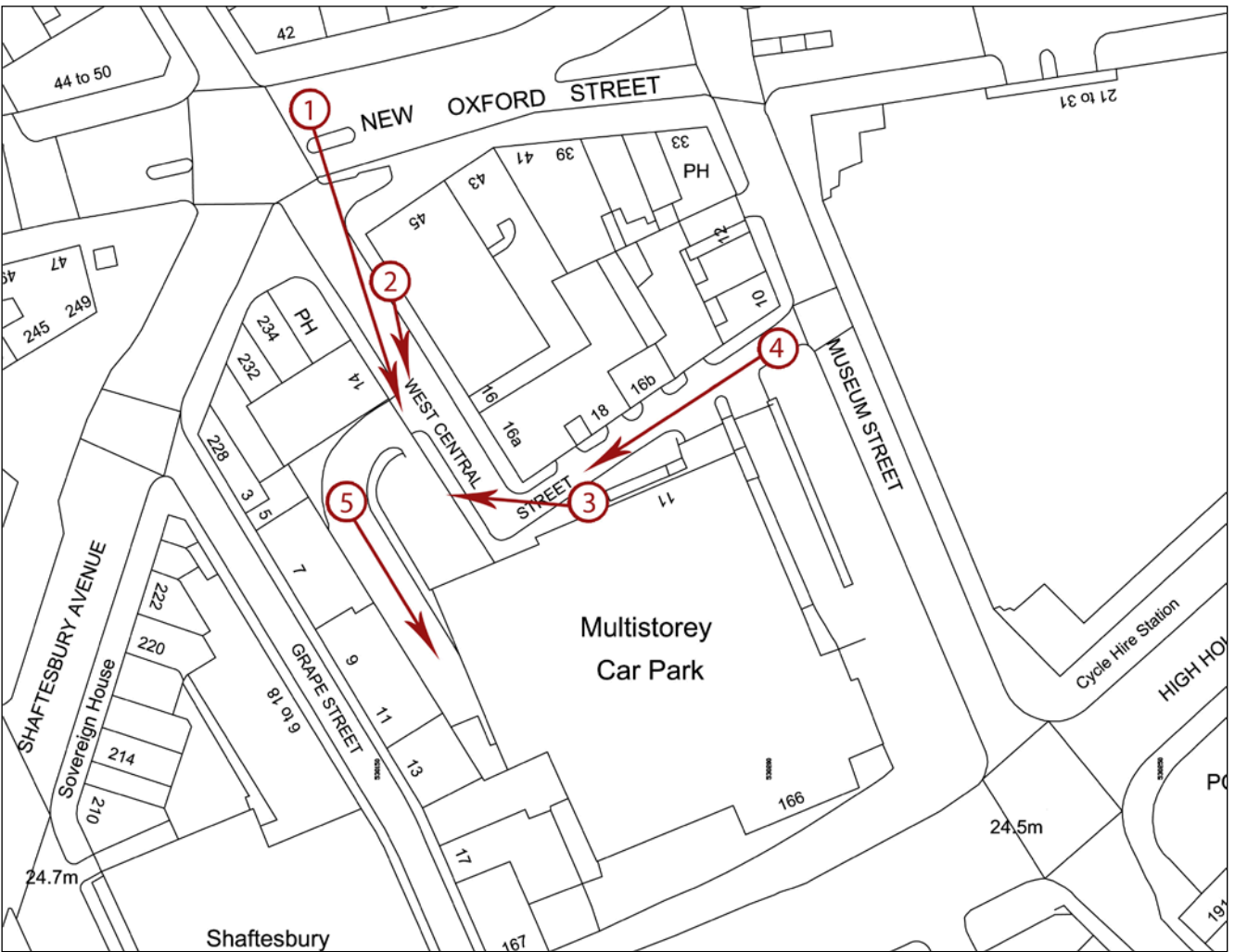
The evacuation from new staircase will be via the base of the ramp that is aligned at the second basement level. This lower level is outside the Environment Agency flood risk plan for the River Thames and has been reviewed with the building control officer who has accepted the alternative exit strategy from the car park.

The proposed staircase will not exceed the height of the existing parapet of the existing car park. As it will be in a new position beyond the view of the general public and therefore will not have any visual impact on the views from West Central Street nor will it be overlooked from the Grape Street properties to the west.

Summary

This proposal for the demolition of the car park stair will provide a positive contribution to the existing street albeit as a temporary measure prior to the redevelopment of the remaining part of the site. When seen in context to the future design opportunities to the site, the removal of the dated and unsightly staircase must be considered an improvement to a site that lies within a historically and culturally important part of London.

tp bennett
February 2015



Photograph Key



1 View looking south from New Oxford St



2 View looking south on West Central St



3 View looking West on West Central St



4 View looking West From Museum St



5 View Looking Down Access Ramp

tp bennett

architecture
interiors
planning

One America Street
London SE1 0NE UK
+44 (0) 20 7208 2000

www.tpbennett.com

R:\Active Projects\Architects\A10882 Selkirk House\Graphics\150220 A4L D&A\ 150220 A10882 A4L D&A.indd