



Ashton Court, Camden Road, NW1

HERITAGE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

June 2014

for Archadia Architects

Prepared by: **Geoffrey Huntingford** BSc(Hons) MA MRTPI IHBC

Checked by **Stephen Simkins** RIBA

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 West Waddy ADP have been commissioned by Archadia Chartered Architects to prepare a heritage assessment of their scheme for Ashton Court, Camden on behalf of Origin Housing. The proposals involve the remodelling of the accommodation in the tall main block on Camden Road and the replacement of a link block behind, fronting onto Camden Park Road. Properties fronting onto Camden Mews are to be replaced with market housing to help fund the works. The site is in Camden Square Conservation Area. The proposals have been the subject of several pre-application discussions with LB Camden as local planning authority. The original 'pre-app' response (October 2013) confirmed that there were no heritage issues with the remodelling of the main block as the works are mainly internal with minimal external alterations but that concerns were raised about the design of the new link block and of the replacements fronting onto the Mews such that the officers were not able to support the application.
- 1.2 The Conservation Area is a 'heritage asset' under the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF', March 2012). The site itself has been highlighted in one of the 'pre-app' responses as an 'non-designated heritage asset' under the NPPF and as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 1.3 The site was viewed for the purposes of this report on 10 June in fair weather.

2 NATIONAL POLICY: NPPF 'CONSERVING AND ENHANCING THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT'

- 2.1 Government guidance published in Chapter 12 of the NPPF has superseded but largely endorsed the new procedures first introduced by PPS5 (March 2010) for proposals affecting the historic environment. It requires decisions affecting 'heritage assets' to be based on an understanding both of the significance of the asset and the potential effect of development proposals on that significance. Applicants for development are expected to describe:

'the significance of any heritage assets affected, the level of detail being proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact on their significance'. (paragraph 128)

- 2.2 The NPPF retains two concepts: ‘heritage asset’ and ‘significance’, introduced by PPS5 (March 2010). Heritage assets are defined in the NPPF as:

“a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)”. (Annex 2)

- 2.3 Significance for heritage policy purposes is defined as:

□ *“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting. (Annex 2)*

- 2.4 Regarding non–designated heritage assets, the NPPF states that:

‘The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’ (paragraph 135)

- 2.5 Refusal of the application under the terms of the NPPF is only mandated for applications that:

‘will lead to substantial harm or to total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset unless it is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits’ or all of a series of specified conditions apply’ (Paragraph 133) These circumstances should be exceptional (paragraph 132)

- 2.6 In the exercise of their planning powers, local authorities should avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal by taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise (paragraph 129).

3 THE ISSUES

- 3.1 The issues for this heritage assessment are:

- Whether there is substantial harm or total loss of significance to the only designated heritage asset involved (the Conservation Area)
- The balance to be taken on the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the non-designated heritage asset (Ashton Court)

4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASHTON COURT AS A HERITAGE ASSET

- 4.1 The buildings are of a single fairly reticent design, all in yellow brick with square bay windows with slight projection. The link block is single storey under a spreading roof. The Mews properties are treated as shorter versions of the main building with identical detailing.
- 4.2 Map 3 'Townscape' of the Council's excellent and detailed Camden Square Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy ('Camden [2011]') identifies which buildings or structures are listed, which are positive, neutral or negative when set against the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Section 5.9 of the Appraisal provides more information. The main building on the site is identified as a positive building but the existing link and the mews buildings are without any notation. At its face, Camden [2011] does not identify the rear elements as positive in the context of the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Camden Mews

- 4.3 As set out in Camden [2011] the whole area was developed by the Camden Estate between the 1840's and around 1880 as part of the general expansion of London during this period. (Camden Town did exist as a separate location until 1791: Richardson [2000]) The original plan for a high class residential enclave was compromised by smoke and vibration from the Midland Railway taken under part of the site and the railway line and marshalling yard from Kings Cross and probably also by the proximity of the huge Metropolitan Cattle Market established just to the east in 1855. The mews that were intended for carriages and stabling to serve the large houses in the main residential roads were not built up and have since provided locations for infill development of modest properties.
- 4.4 Camden Mews has the typical intimate and informal mews character which provides such an attractive foil to the grander main streets of Victorian housing developments in the metropolis but with much greater variety in built form than is normal for the mews which were built to plan in inner London.

The Ashton Court properties fronting the Mews

- 4.5 These are the buildings proposed to be replaced by market housing to fund the intended improvements. In my view their design and appearance is less than desirable in their context. The northern half of their ground floor elevation towards the Mews (closest to the corner with Camden Park Road) is set behind a boundary wall of alternating brick walling and plain railings. These boundary walls are unwelcome in a Mews which is functionally devoted to access traffic and movement.

- 4.6 The southern half of the ground floor elevation is taken up a single wide opening providing car parking. This is closer to the Mews spirit but the width of the single opening is excessively crude and does not generate the greater vertical emphasis that attention to the traditional plot widths of the Mews might have provided.
- 4.7 At first floor level, the mews façade as a single comprehensive design again fails to respect the traditional plot widths in the Mews. The slight projections of the bay windows are insufficient to counter the strong horizontal emphasis of the elevation.
- 4.8 For these reasons I must disagree with the Council in its assessment of the mews properties as positive in respect of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. While the patchy development history of Camden Mews has produced an unusually wide variety of buildings, the current Mews frontage of the site in question seems to run counter to the essence of a Mews. Bearing in mind the general reticent appearance of the Mews frontage and its construction in yellow stock brick, I believe that the mews buildings on the site can be regarded fairly as 'neutral' in the Conservation Area.
- 4.9 For this reason, on the second issue outlined above, the scale of any harm or loss is not sufficiently great to justify the retention of the Mews properties.
- 4.10 Flowing from this, regarding the first issue above, there is no substantial harm or total loss of significance to the only designated heritage asset involved (the Conservation Area).
- 4.11 Given the analysis above, the greater vertical emphasis of the proposed replacements and the provision of individual ground floor entrances off the Mews are to be welcomed.

The link building

- 4.12 This is a simple building functioning in design terms as providing enclosure for the open space to the west and in articulating the comprehensive design on the site between the main block on Camden Road and the Building on Camden Mews. Its appearance towards the public realm is dominated by its roof. It has no notable features towards Camden Park Road and is totally subservient in design terms.
- 4.13 The demolition of this plain building is not annotated in townscape terms in Camden [2011]. Again, the scale of any harm or loss is not sufficiently great to justify the retention of the link building.
- 4.14 Once again, and flowing from this, regarding the first issue above, there is no substantial harm or total loss of significance to the only designated heritage asset involved (the Conservation Area).

5 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

5.1 Using the categories set out in Historic England [2008] the significance of the various assets relevant to this study can be set out as follows:

	Evidential Potential to yield primary evidence	Historical Means of connecting with the past	Aesthetic Sensory and intellectual stimulation	Communal Meaning for collective experience and memory	Overall
Camden Square Conservation Area	Attractive planned residential suburb important as part of London's expansion in early C19	Variety of styles indicates sequence of development. Losses show passage of time	Character of main streets with Gardens and Mews as an essential foil.	Provides attractive housing close to services and central London, in area with strong local association	High
Camden Mews	Integral part of planned development with unusual history	Shows different styles of buildings to rest of the Area with interesting modern designs	Intimate quality and variety of streetscape underlined by survival of setts as road surface.	Has provided valuable location for modest housing with interesting modern architectural infill.	High
Ashton Court	Unified architectural design: articulated plan steps down from main road to Mews	No significant historic interest	Link block and Mews are reticent but Mews façade fails to evoke traditional Mews design	Has provided useful accommodation but is need of modernisation	Low

Asset	Significance	Impact of proposal on significance
Camden Square Conservation Area	High – important component of historic development of Camden Town with fine architecture	No impact – scheme will involve the replacement of parts of Ashton Court that do not make a significant contribution to its character of appearance
Ashton Court elements to be replaced	Low – Reticent and well-mannered development let down by boundary wall and large single opening in Mews façade and blandness of first floor elevation	Balance – significance is not sufficiently strong to prevent replacement. LPA has control over replacement design.

5.2

6 SOURCES CONSULTED

Camden [2011] 'Camden Square Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy' LB Camden (March 2011)

Historic England [2008] 'Conservation Principles, policies and guidance' English Heritage, April 2008

Richardson J [2000] 'The Annals of London' London, Cassell and Co.

Whitfield P [2006] 'London: A Life in Maps' London, the British Library

in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (Camden [2011])



- 1 *9 Camden Mews. This is an original mews property surviving and demonstrating the typical immediate and easy access arrangements of a traditional mews not shared by half of the current mews façade of the Ashton Court development*



- 2 *31, 31a and 33 Camden Mews. The strong modelling of the façades relates to the traditional plot widths of the Mews.*



- 3 *41 Camden Mews with its prominent third floor and distinctive façade treatment.*



- 4 *The property on the corner of Camden Mews and Murray Street. The largely glazed elevations introduce another style to the Mews. No 62 (Edward Cullinan's house for himself – the only listed residential property in the Conservation Area) shares the timber frame and glazed elevation but over a masonry base.*

COMPANY AND PERSONNEL PROFILE

West Waddy ADP is an established architecture, town planning and development consultancy which deals with all types of planning and development proposals with a clientele ranging from private individuals and interest groups through to local authorities, institutions, house builders and major companies. It has a particular track record in the conversion of rural properties of architectural or historic interest.

This report has been researched and written by Geoffrey Huntingford BSc MA MRTPI IHBC.

Qualifications	BSc(Hons) Town and Country Planning Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh 1976 MA in Architectural Conservation De Montfort University, Leicester 1999 Member Royal Town Planning Institute 1978 Member Institute of Historic Building Conservation 1998
Current Employment	Conservation Planner, West Waddy ADP 2002
Employment history	Senior Planner, Smith Stuart Reynolds 2000-2 Senior Planner, McCoy Associates 1985-2000 Senior Conservation Officer, Sheffield City Council 1981-5 Design and Conservation Officer, South Staffordshire DC 1978-81 Local Plans Assistant, Bridgenorth DC 1976-8 Planning Assistant, Banff and Buchan DC 1975
Experience	Considerable local authority experience in respect of listed building and conservation area work, including grants, design guidance, character appraisals and enhancements. Civic Trust Commendation 1985 for street furniture restoration programme in Sheffield. Private sector experience includes preparation of evidence and appearance at s78 appeals and hearings; feasibility studies and appraisals; applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consents including preparation of drawings; historic research and recording of buildings; environmental improvements and conservation area appraisals and proposals; contract administration of restoration of railings in London squares.