

25 Bedford Square WC1B 3HH

Heritage Assessment of proposed alterations

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1.0 Scope

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to accompany a listed building application for 25 Bedford Square to include restoration works, modifications and the installation of new services including cooling and heating.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Anthony Walker who is on the register of Architects Accredited in Building Conservation. It is based on a desk- top study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement and Andrew Bryne's architectural study of Bloomsbury Square.

2.0 Location

- 2.1 The site is located on the north side of Bedford Square.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described as being within Sub-Area 5. Bedford Square/Gower Street is described as follows:

5.62 Dating from 1775, Bedford Square is one of the most significant and complete examples of a Georgian square in London. Its national importance is acknowledged by the grade I listed status of all the townhouses fronting the square. Furthermore, a sizeable number of original streetscape elements remain (many of which are grade II listed) The private gardens in the centre of the square are included in the English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Greater London* at grade II*.

5.63 The square is the centre piece of the Bedford Estate's planned development which includes a series of interlinked streets and spaces and is a major focal point both along Gower Street and within the wider Bloomsbury area. Despite the impact of traffic along Gower Street the square remains a relatively intimate and secluded space. The landscaped oval gardens at its heart green the space, and the iron boundary railings and group of mature trees heighten the sense of enclosure. The gardens are entered through gates under ornate wrought iron arches. Originally of a purely residential nature, the square now contains several office and institutional uses. However, a small number of properties are now being returned to single family dwellings.

5.64 The terraces comprise three principal storeys with a basement and attic level. The frontages are of particular note because they were designed as a whole in a neoclassical style to give a sense of architectural unity and harmony to the square. The four The front facades are constructed from yellow stock brick with tuck pointing. Each of terraces has a central, stuccoed pediment as a centrepiece, with rusticated bases. The doorways have distinctive intermittent voussiors of Coade stone (a type of artificial stone) and each key stones is decorated with a human face. It should be noted that five townhouses in Bayley Street extend the northern side of the square to the west, all of which are listed grade II.

3.0 Background and description

- 3.1 Bedford Square was conceived during the building boom which followed the Peace of Paris in 1763. A lull from 1767-1771 was followed by an upturn between 1773 and 1777 which led to a

further down turn in 1778 when France entered into the American War of Independence. Loans to builders from the Bedford Estate however allowed the scheme for the Square to be completed by the end of 1783 as part of the spread of development north of New Oxford Street.

- 3.2 The Estate had considerable control over the form of the development and the Square is unique in having four complete sides of 'palace-fronted' terrace houses surrounding a central garden which is oval in shape.
- 3.3 The building facades had to keep to a regular format with an emphasis on the central properties. This uniformity has been broadly maintained although careful inspection reveals a wealth of detailed variations.
- 3.4 The coherent appearance, combined with some very good interiors, has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade I.
- 3.5 A lease to number 25 was granted to Robert Grews for 99 years in 1777. The plot was 28 feet wide by 71 feet deep.
- 3.6 Number 25 is of a standard layout on four main floors with a basement below. The main frontage faces the Square and is three bays wide.
- 3.7 It is the western most house of the Palace front forming the northern range of buildings. For this reason it has a balustrade parapet and is stepped forward of its neighbours to the west. The first floor windows have individual cast iron anthemion nineteenth century balconies.
- 3.8 Planning consent was granted in 1988 for a combined application for numbers 21/25 Bedford Square. This included the demolition of the existing closet wings at the back of numbers 21, 22, 24 and 25 which were then rebuilt. In the case of 25 this provided for a lift with lavatory as a back closet wing and at the base a small leanto structure which accommodated the lift motor room.
- 3.9 The interior of 25 is considered by Andrew Byrne to be one of the best in Bedford Square and like 14, which has a similar plan, was probably by Thomas Leverton. The ceilings and some of the joinery on the ground and first floors are of particular note.

4.0 Significance

- 4.1 The building in common with all of Bedford Square is listed grade I The listing description states that:
CAMDEN TQ2981NE BEDFORD SQUARE 798-1/99/77 (North side) 24/10/51 Nos.12-27 (Consecutive) and attached railings (Formerly Listed as: BEDFORD SQUARE Nos.1-54 (Consecutive)) GV I Symmetrical terrace of 16 houses forming the north side of a square. 1776-1781. Mostly built by W Scott and R Grews; probably designed by either Thomas Leverton or

Robert Palmer; for the Bedford Estate. Yellow stock brick with evidence on most of the houses of tuck pointing. Plain stucco band at 1st floor level. The 2 centre houses, Nos 18 & 19, are stuccoed. Slate mansard roofs with dormers and tall slab chimney-stacks. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys, attics and basements. 3 windows each. Recessed round-arched entrances with Coade stone vermiculated intermittent voussoirs and bands; mask keystones. Enriched impost bands and cornice-heads to doors. Side lights to panelled doors, some 2-leaf. Fanlights, mostly radial patterned. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes, most with glazing bars. No.23: panelled doors and a plaster ceiling. HISTORICAL NOTE: the houses in Bedford Square form a most important and complete example of C18 town planning. Built as a speculation, it is not clear who designed all the houses.

The building is clearly of significance as part of the complete range of terraces round Bedford Square, and as an example of this type of development.

- 4.2 Internally the layout of the rooms, the main staircase and the decorative items, particularly on the ground and first floors, are of significance.

- 4.4 For the Conservation Area the significance of the building is, as noted in 4.1, its relationship to Bedford Square.

5.0 Proposals

- 5.1 The proposals for refurbishment and for comfort cooling are set out in the Design and Access Statements for both aspects prepared by Tuffin, Ferraby Taylor LLP.
- 5.2 For the purposes of this Heritage Assessment they can be summarised as follows. Removal of existing kitchen fittings, upgrading of lavatories previously modernised, upgrading of services as necessary, removal of demountable partitions thereby reinstating original room layouts, renewal of ironmongery, redecoration.
- 5.3 For the comfort cooling there is the removal of redundant boilers, radiators and redundant pipework combined with the installation of new units internally in purpose made joinery units. The condenser units will be installed at roof level and as confirmed in the DAS will not be visible from street level or from the courtyard at the back. As can be seen from the true back elevation a corner of one of the units can be seen and would be visible from high level. There are no nearby properties and so this would only be visible from a considerable distance. It is proposed that the colour of the casing will match that of the slates and it is therefore considered that it will blend in with the roof slopes.
- 5.4 Externally the only changes apart from repairs are at the foot of the lift tower where the existing lean-to lift room, a new entry phone plate by the front door and the provision of the condenser units set out above. It is considered that the revised layout at the

foot of the lift tower provides a more purposeful modelling at this level which is only visible from the courtyard. The condenser units are screened as described above and will be in a colour to blend in with the roof slates

- 5.5 Thus the proposals do not affect the external appearance of the building as seen from the Square.

6.0 Assessment

- 6.1 None of the proposals has an adverse effect on the front elevation of the building which, as described above, is of particular significance: therefore they do not adversely affect the significance of the exterior of the listed building, nor the adjoining listed buildings, nor the Conservation Area.
- 6.2 The removal of modern demountable partitions helps to reinstate the historic layout of the building and thus enhances the architectural and historic interest of the building.
- 6.3 The installation of cooling units is beneficial in meeting modern comfort standards with the least intervention in the building and in a way which is fully reversible. This complies with the objectives of the NPPF in achieving a sustainable building which despite large south facing windows can maintain reasonable environmental standards while at the same time conserving the heritage asset.
- 6.4 Up grading the lavatory accommodation only affects areas already converted under the 1988 consent and brings these up to modern standards. The introduction of two new lavatories meets the needs in areas currently not provided with lavatory accommodation and as such also complies with the objective of providing sustainable accommodation while preserving the heritage asset.
- 6.5 The alterations to the foot of the lift tower are not visible from the surrounding areas and provide a better access to the courtyard at the back. It is considered that they do not harm the appearance of the building nor do they affect the outlook from other buildings.
- 6.6 In summary it is considered that the proposals comply with both national and local guidance on the protection of designated heritage assets and the conservation area while ensuring that the building provides a sustainable asset.

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