

21 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 21 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 21 was granted to William Scott for 99 years in 1782. The plot was 28 feet wide by 138 deep.
- 3.6 Number 21 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 The main façade is clearly visible from the Square and is an important element in the composition of the terrace on the northern side of the Square. There is a continuous anthemion balcony dating from the early 19th century across the frontage at first floor.
- 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.
- 3.9 At the back the building there is a small light well with a modern building at basement and ground floor which formed part of the 1988 consent and a further courtyard at the back of which there is a pedimented two storey brick building which is probably contemporary with the house and provided service accommodation. It is three bays wide with flat-headed ground floor windows recessed in semi-circular arches. Internally this building has been modernised and has no features of decorative interest.

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 are set out in the Tuffin Ferraby Taylor LLP Design and Access Statements for the refurbishment and for the Installation of Comfort Cooling.
- 5.2 For the purposes of this Assessment they may be summarised as removing some inappropriate modern partitions, removing existing kitchen fittings, upgrading lavatories, upgrading services, replacing modern ironmongery and general repair and 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 similar to those approved elsewhere. The condenser units will be installed at roof level where they will be shielded from view by being sited in the valley between the front and back pitched roofs.
- 5.4 Externally the only works are those of repair to the roofs, rebuilding one chimney stack to the historic courtyard building as existing, the installation of the condenser units as described above and the installation of a new door entry panel similar to the existing installation.

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. Careful consideration has been given to the accommodation provided in the historic courtyard building to ensure that it does not prejudice the view of the building from the outside.

6.5 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.

Anthony Walker
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