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## No.1 Birkenhead Street WC1H 8BA London Borough of Camden



*A Heritage Appraisal of the Building's Significance and a  
Commentary and the Proposed Works*

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# 1 PURPOSE OF THE APPRAISAL

1.01 This report seeks to describe the heritage significance of No. 1 Birkenhead Street by an investigation and description of the building fabric, architecture and history. The building will also be viewed in the context of the surrounding historic environment of which it forms a part.

1.02 The proposed alterations to the building will be discussed in the context of both local and national policies for managing change in the historic environment.

# 2 DESIGNATIONS

2.01 No.1 Birkenhead Street was listed Grade II in 1974 as being of special architectural or historic interest. The listing description reads:

*Nos. 1-7 (Consecutive) and attached railings*

*GV (Group Value) II*

*Terrace of 7 houses. c1827-32. Built by W.Forrester Bray, altered. Yellow stock brick, No. 1 with stucco ground floor. No.6 painted with rusticated stucco ground floor. Plain stucco 1<sup>st</sup> floor sill bands.*

*3 storeys and basements; Nos. 1, 5 & 6 with attic dormers. Nos. 1 & 7, 3 windows each; Nos. 2-6, 2 windows each. Round-arched ground floor openings. Doorways of Nos. 1, 2 & 4 with fanlights and panelled doors; doorway of No. 3 converted for use as a window. Doorways of Nos.5 & 6 with fluted quarter Doric columns carrying cornice- heads; fanlights (No.6 patterned) and panelled doors. Doorway of No. 7 with stucco surround and pilaster-jambs carrying cornice-head and fanlight. No.1 with mews entrance. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes; 1st floor in shallow arched recesses (No. 1 linked by impost bands).*

*Nos. 5 & 7 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows with cast iron balconies. No.5 with wrought-iron sign bracket. Parapets.*

*INTERIORS: not inspected*

*SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with mostly bud finials.*

2.02 No. 1 Birkenhead Street is situated within the designated Kings Cross Conservation Area (Sub Area 3: Euston Road)

### 3 HISTORY OF THE SITE

3.01 Before the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area that now contains Birkenhead Street was part of an open common, the waste of the Manor of Cantlowes. Such open agricultural land within easy reach of central London was used for market gardening and grazing for the insatiable demands of the capital city.

3.02 The demand for development grew to be irresistible by the 1820s. Just before 1823, the estate owner William Brock sold his 15 acre estate south of the New (Euston) Road to Thomas Dunston of Old Street, William Robinson of Charterhouse Square and William Flanders of Colebrooke Row, Islington.

3.03 These men were urban developers uninterested in grazing and market gardening. They obtained an Act of Parliament for development in 1824. The streets to be created for new housing were Argyle street, Manchester Street (now part of Argyle Street), Belgrove Street, Chesterfield Street (now Crestfield Street), Liverpool Street (now Birkenhead Street) and Derby Street (now St Chad's Street).

3.04 Liverpool Street (now Birkenhead Street) was begun in 1825 when the first two houses were complete. It was common in the speculative world of London development for developers to offer building mortgages to smaller developers to spread the financial risk. This was the case here, with W. Forrester Bray,

who built at least some of the Birkenhead Street Houses as well as much of Crestfield, Belgrove and Argyle Streets.

3.05 To modern eyes these diminutive Regency terrace houses have a distinct charm and character. But they never became a respectable neighbourhood, possibly due to their restricted sizes and ultimately the effects of the coming of no less than three busy railway termini just north of the Euston Road (Euston 1837, Kings Cross 1852 and St Pancras 1869).

3.06 Charles Booth's maps of London Poverty (1889) show Liverpool Street (Birkenhead Street) as having inhabitants who were "Fairly comfortable - Good ordinary earnings". But earlier, in 1848, Mr Sinclair from the Deacons Court of the Regent Square Church, reporting on destitution in this area, talked of a population of no less than 7000 people, sometimes as many as five families in a house, the occupants being labourers, beggars and street traders. Drunkenness and squalor were prevalent.

## 4 THE BUILDING

4.01 No. 1 Birkenhead Street is an end of terrace house situated at the northern end of the eastern side of the street. It is three storeys high, plus a basement and a slated roof storey behind a parapet. The front elevation is three windows wide and the first and second floor is faced in London stock brick. The flat gauged brick arches over the windows are now painted white.

4.02 The ground floor is faced in modern stucco with a deep sill band at first floor level. There is a semi-circular window to the right, now with modern window joinery. The front entrance door is also a modern glazed replacement. To the left there are original double gates giving access to the rear mews. The basement area has cast iron railings.

4.03 The mews arch, which occupies one third of the building's width, means that there is little room for a private rear yard or garden as the space is occupied by a carriageway to the rear.

4.04 The front first and second floor sash windows are modern replacements having “12 over 12” panes on the first floor and “8 over 8” on the second floor. The appropriate original pattern should be “6 over 6” on both floors. The first floor windows and their flat gauged brick arches are set within semi-circular relieving arches springing from imposts on shallow plain brick pilasters.

4.05 The rear elevation of the building has windows with segmental brick arches. There is a mixture of original sash windows and some modern replacements. The roof storey has been raised to a sheer elevation incorporating a series of modern casement windows.

4.06 The interior of the building broadly retains its original plan form, but altered by the insertion of bathrooms to serve the existing hotel use. The ground floor has the original entrance hall with a modern pair of doors to the front room. The hall and front room are of a restricted size due to the space taken by the mews archway. The rear room has a modern lobby and entrance into the front room. To the left is the original timber dog leg staircase which serves every floor in the house. This is the best quality original feature surviving in the house.

4.07 The first, second and third floors retain their original plan form, but this has been interrupted by the creation of hotel bathrooms in many of the original rooms.

## 5 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

5.01 No. 1 Birkenhead Street has important heritage significance as a component part of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century terrace of houses situated within the Kings Cross Conservation Area. The house and its terrace form part of the initial development of the area. Intrinsically, it retains most of its original internal plan form. The most complete and notable feature is the simple neo-classical staircase which survives throughout the house.

5.02 The buildings use as a hotel has, however, led to a serious of alterations including intrusive bathrooms which have, to some extent, obscured the original plan form of the house. The front elevational windows and front door have been unsuitably replaced, as have some of the rear elevation windows.

## 6 THE PROPOSALS

6.01 The applicant has furnished information on the non-viability of the current hotel use. It is proposed to convert the building to office use. The principal of this change of use has been positively received by the local planning authority during pre-application consultation.

6.02 The proposals involve removing the en-suite hotel bathrooms and modern partitions to return the house more closely to the original plan form.

**BASEMENT-** The existing plan form would be retained for office use.

**GROUND FLOOR -** The rear room plan form would be reinstated with a new partition and panelled sliding door. A servery and W.C. would be installed in the rear of the room.

**FIRST FLOOR -** The front room appears likely to have always been a single space and this would be retained. The smaller rear room would be separated from the front room by a glass screen in the position of the now-lost original partition. This rear room would have a kitchen, W.C. and copier space. The larger left hand rear room would have a partition reinstated in the original position separating it from the main front room, incorporating a panelled sliding door.

**SECOND & THIRD FLOORS -** Similar proposals are indicated for the top two floors, with kitchens and W.Cs within the smaller right hand room and a restored partition reinstating the division between the rear and front rooms. Nib walls would be built in

the front rooms to indicate the likely original plan form on these upper floors.

GENERAL - The existing staircase would be retained and repaired. Throughout the house, appropriate painted timber panelled doors would be installed as required.

EXTERIOR - The existing elevations will be restored and repaired. The inappropriate modern windows and entrance door will be replaced by painted timber single glazed sash windows and a panelled entrance door to match the original design of the 1820s period.

## 7 POLICY CONTEXT

7.01 The policy guidance from the Government is provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In Section 12 “Conserving and enhancing the historic environment”, it states in paragraph 126 that local authorities should take account of:

- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- *the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation can bring;*
- *the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
- *opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of place.*

7.02 Historic England provides design and conservation advice in its publication “London Terrace Houses 1660 - 1860:

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*...The domestic plan form of London terrace houses is an important part of their character and special interest. As a general rule the character, proportion and integrity of the principal rooms at ground and first floor levels, together with the primary and secondary staircase compartments should be preserved. Normally such areas should not be subdivided. Elsewhere a greater degree of flexibility may be possible, although the original plan form and features should remain clearly discernible. Any alterations should be reversible.*

7.03 The Mayor of London's London Plan Policies (FALP) 2015 generally mirror the aspirations of national and local policies; heritage assets should be appropriately valued, protected and incorporated into new proposals.

7.04 The London Borough of Camden has policies within the LDF that seek to preserve heritage assets;

*DP24 - Securing a high quality of design.*

*DP25 - Conserving Camden's heritage.*

## 8 COMMENTARY ON THE PROPOSALS

8.01 The current proposals seek to remove partitions and bathrooms that have altered the listed building due to its use as a hotel. The proposed office use will allow a "looser fit" scheme to be implemented that allows the original plan form and cellular structure of the building to be restored and appreciated.

8.02 The scheme would also include the significant restoration of original features. Panelled doors would be restored throughout the building and the provision of kitchens and W.C. facilities would be restricted to the lesser of the two rear rooms. Most importantly, the external facades of the building would be repaired and renovated and the original pattern of sash windows and entrance



door would be restored. The major historic feature of the full height staircase would be retained and restored.

## 9 CONCLUSION

9.01 This proposal will introduce a more sympathetic and “light handed” office use into the listed building. The new use would replace the hotel use which, as well as being non-viable economically, has introduced harmful and intrusive alterations to the building interior.

9.02 The welcome restoration of historic features and the provision of an economic future will both enhance the building and ensure a sustainable future both as a listed building and as a component part of the Kings Cross Conservation Area.