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PROJECT: Proposed Disabled Lift Access
Site Address:Mary Ward House 5-7 Tavistock Place London WC1

Heritage Statement

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Historical Background

Mary Ward House is a unique building type with no present day equivalent in the way it expresses the relationship between the classes in society.

It was opened in 1898,a 'Settlement' generated by the philanthropic impulse of Mary Ward,John Passmore-Edwards and others for the improvement of the working classes in late Victorian London by including the active participation of the educated middle classes to engage with the working men for their improvement and cultural enhancement.

Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel is a forerunner to this opening in 1884.By 1914 there were twenty seven settlements in London.

In 1920 The building became a Women's Settlement for a time.

In 1961 the residential use gave way to the occupation of the building by the National Institute for Social Work with mixed use as offices,conference centre,dance and meditation classes.

The current private owner has used the building as a conference and educational centre since 1998 reintroducing the residential component not for student accommodation.

1.2 Character and Architectural Interest

The aim of the Settlement was of social rebirth and social cohesion so this building is trying to present a new idea in its interior layout,uses and atmosphere.

The residential rooms and public spaces are practically separated but overlap in the Dining,Reading and Billiard rooms.

There is an intention of humility in the detailing and treatment of the spaces- the main entrance from Tavistock Place, once through the monumental stone/rough cottage front door, is a plain space intended to create a modest interior where the middle class visitors would find door head heights set to lower than normal so requiring those with hats to lower their heads.

The residential entrance octagonal lobby (from the west facing elevation) is detailed with mouldings and vaulted ceilings, albeit in an economical and restrained manner. Moving between the main spaces the perception is of a non-hierarchical series of spaces. The residential spaces were designed so that no two bedrooms were the same.

1.3 Need for and Justification of the proposed lift.

The proposal is for a three level lift shaft sited on the north side of the lightwell serving basement, ground and first floors with glazed covered walkway at first floor level linking the lift to the main hall.

The current use has been established for the last fifteen years with a busy conference centre used by a large variety of organisations. Close to the many colleges of the University of London the spaces are used by them for lectures and examinations. The large hall continues to be used for dance, drama and similar classes throughout the week.

Many of the corporate organisations who have used the building have an ethical obligation to ensure that venues they use are accessible. The current degree of accessibility is limited as described in the Design and Access Statement. There is clearly a need for a more comprehensive method of vertical access for less able users of the building.

The consideration of siting the proposed three level lift shaft and its impact on the fabric of the building have been outlined in the Design and Access Statement.

The central courtyard where the lift shaft is to be sited was not meant to be perceived from the external views of the building and internally it is only viewed directly from the residential rooms. It is faced in stock brickwork. Conceptually this central space is a large lightwell housing the staircase projections on the north elevation and all the cast iron pipes which would have compromised the internal plan.

By siting the lift tower in the recess space to the right of the staircase projection it is intended to lessen the impact of this addition.

Alternative positions were considered and these are indicated on plans and commentary in the Design and Access statement.

The aim was to choose a technically simple lift with no lift pit at the base of motor room at the top of the shaft so that the tower could be as minimal in extent as possible. The glazed wall enclosure to the lift shaft will help to contrast with the surrounding facing brick .

Reference has been made to article in Architect's Journal 2/8/1989 by Adrian Forty in the Master Building Series in compiling this statement.

P. Keetley