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To: Planning
Cc: Diver, John; BCAAC@hughcullum.com; Bloomsbury Association
Subject: APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION 2015/6593/P

12 GOWER MEWS, LONDON WC1E 6HP

CONVERSION OF GROUND FLOOR GARAGE INTO HABITABLE ROOM & ASSOCIATED ALTERATIONS TO FRONT ELEVATION. INTERNAL ALTERATIONS.

Application for planning permission: 2015/6593/P

The Bloomsbury Association objects to this application.

Ordinarily we would support applications for change of use from commercial to residential use in this location, providing the proposal resulted in a real addition to housing stock and not a short-term holiday rental. However we are mindful that Bedford Square is unique. It is acknowledged as one of the best preserved set pieces of Georgian architecture in London and in 2000, with substantial funding from Bedford Estate, English Heritage and the London Borough of Camden, its public realm underwent careful refurbishment to reflect the asset value of its heritage. Its buildings are Grade I listed and English Heritage defines Grade I buildings as being 'of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be internationally important'.

Gower Mews is part of the grade I listed buildings and is also unique in that it is the sole surviving mews to Bedford Square. The mews on the other three sides of the Square have all been lost through subsequent redevelopment. When I worked in these buildings they were all in either garage or storage use at mews level and most were in quasi residential use on the upper floors, which is the traditional arrangement. They all still retain their original doors, which again in Bloomsbury, if not London, is unique.

The broad principles established in national policy and guidance on the historic environment are reflected in the London Plan. Policy 4B.12 seeks to ensure that the protection and enhancement of historic assets in London is based on an understanding of their special character, and form part of the wider design and urban improvement agenda. This recognises that asset value is more than the fabric of the Square's buildings but in the spatial quality of the space that they define and the approaches to and from it. The proposed ground floor doors and windows will appear incongruous on entering the mews from Gower Street and will detract from the group setting. These are not characteristics that are compatible with a policy that seeks to protect these values, nor are they consistent with the design principles for Bedford Square contained in the Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia Area Action Plan.

Policy DP25 states that the Council will "only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area" and will "not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building". This proposal fails to satisfy on both counts.

We might be more supportive of a comprehensive approach to the use of all the Estates' garages on Gower Mews but not a one off proposal such as this. We encourage continued residential use of the upper floors.

Stephen Heath
Bloomsbury Association