



12A GOWER MEWS
LONDON WC1E 6HP

INTERNAL ALTERATIONS TO FACILITATE CONVERSION OF EXISTING DWELLING (C3) INTO 2x SELF-CONTAINED DWELLINGS (1x 1-BED, 2-PERSON AND 1 x 2-BED, 4-PERSON); INSTALLATION OF ROOF LIGHT AND ALTERATION OF FRONT GARAGE DOORS

Application for planning permission: 2016/3765/P

Application for listed building consent: 2016/4101/L

5 August 2016

The Bloomsbury Association objects to this application and wishes to make the following comments.

- 1 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 not believed to be part of the grade I listed buildings (so why is there a parallel application for listed building consent?) but it is unique in being it 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, when open, 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.

- 2 We do not accept the waste management principle indicated in the Design & Access Statement that "bags will be left on the street after 9pm, for collection the next day." This is ill considered. It negates the objectives of requiring waste storage within the premises, as required by LDF Policy DP26. It is also dangerous, encourages street dwellers, junkies and vermin to shred bags apart

during the night and is damaging to the character of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Sadly, through lack of effective enforcement, it is common but it is not something the Council should be encouraging. Indeed, we suggest that should the Council at some time be minded to approve the application, there should be a condition requiring bags to only be put out for collection half an hour before morning collection.

- 3 We note that no existing and proposed elevations accompany the applications and no details are provided of the proposed roof light. The application should not be determined without them.
- 4 Our views remains the same as given on the similar application for the adjoining building (2015/6593/P). We could be supportive of a comprehensive approach to the adaption of all the Estates' garages on Gower Mews but not ad hoc proposals such as this. We encourage continued residential use of the upper floors.

For these reasons we urge the Council not approve the application in its present form. We would be grateful if you would let us know of any further modification to the application; the decision, if it is to be decided under delegated powers, or the meeting date if it is to be decided by Committee. We would also be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this communication.

Stephen Heath
On behalf of the Bloomsbury Association

Copies to:

Catherine Bond, Conservation and Historic Buildings Advisor, London Borough of Camden
John Diver, London Borough of Camden
Hugh Cullum, Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Chair, Bloomsbury Association