

No. 27 John's Mews, London, WC1N 2NS

## Heritage Appraisal



The Heritage Practice

August 2016

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The following Heritage Appraisal has been prepared to support an application for planning permission in respect of a proposed scheme at no. 27 John's Mews, London, WC1N 2NS (LB Camden). This report should be read in conjunction with the drawings and Design and Access Statement prepared by Scenario Architecture and the Planning Statement prepared by Savills.

## Research and report structure

- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to set out the history and significance of no. 27 John's Mews. No. 27 forms part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is considered by LB Camden to make a positive contribution to its character and appearance. Within the building's closer and wider context, there are a number of listed buildings that include no. 13 Northington Street/25 John's Mews and the terraced Georgian properties to the east along John Street. This report considers the acceptability of the proposed redevelopment of the building and its consequent replacement against the significance of the site and its context and relevant historic environment policy considerations.
- 1.3 It should be noted that in common with many historic buildings, sites and places, it is not possible to provide a truly comprehensive analysis of the site's historic development. The research and analysis set out in this report is as thorough as possible given the type and number of archival resources available. Research has been undertaken at the London Metropolitan Archives and the London Borough of Camden's Local Studies and Archive Centre. A number of online sources have also been used including British History Online, and the London Borough of Camden's historic planning records.
- 1.4 This desk-based and archival research has been combined with a visual assessment and appraisal of the existing building and its context. Further sources and evidence that add to our knowledge and understanding of the site and its history may become available at a future date.
- 1.5 The report is divided into three main sections. The first (section 2) describes the site and its context and at section 3 sets out the historic development and significance of the building and its setting. This is followed by a brief description of the proposals and an assessment of the proposals against the building's significance and relevant historic environment policy.

## Author

- 1.6 This appraisal has been prepared by Kate Graham MA (Hons) MA PG Dip Cons AA of The Heritage Practice. Kate Graham is a skilled and knowledgeable historic environment professional with extensive employment experience in the sector and a strong academic background in history and building conservation. Kate was most recently the Design and Conservation Team Leader at the London Borough of

Islington and prior to that was a Senior Historic Buildings and Areas Advisor for Historic England's London Region. In both cases, Kate has dealt with a variety of schemes and proposals for a broad range of listed buildings and conservation areas. Kate has also worked for the Architectural Heritage Fund and in the policy team at English Heritage. Kate has an extensive background in research, listed building assessment and analysis and understanding policy and its application. She is also experienced in dealing with new design and build in and around historic buildings and areas both in London and across the UK. Kate is a member of the Islington Design Panel.

#### Designations

- 1.7 No. 27 John's Mews forms part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area which was first designated in 1968. The conservation area covers an area of approximately 160 hectares extending from Euston Road in the north to High Holborn and Lincoln's Inn Fields in the south and from Tottenham Court Road in the west to King's Cross Road in the east.
- 1.8 As noted above, no. 27 John's Mews is considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The building is not statutorily listed. The following section provides more detail of the site and its context.

## 2 Site and context

- 2.1 The following section considers the principal characteristics of no. 27 John's Mews and its context. This takes into account the character and appearance of John's Mews and building's that form part of the setting of the existing building.
- 2.2 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area is of such a size that it is sub-divided into a number of smaller character areas. John's Mews is included within Sub Area 10: Great James Street/Bedford Row. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (adopted in 2011) notes that 'The Great James Street and Bedford Row sub area was developed during the Georgian and Regency periods under various ownerships, although part of the street pattern was laid out earlier by Nicholas Barbon. The area has a clear street hierarchy structured on a grid layout. Bedford Row, Doughty Street and John Street are wide thoroughfares characterised by larger properties. There is a progression in scale (and grandeur) from Millman Street, through Great James Street to Bedford Row.' A plan of Sub Area 10 is provided at appendix A.
- 2.3 The appraisal goes on to note that 'The historic built form comprises townhouses built in long terraces with rear mews. This fine grain remains an important characteristic and the continuous building frontage created by the terraces creates a strong sense of enclosure.' John's Mews is one example of a mews development, situated to the west of John Street and the east of Cockpit Yard.
- 2.4 The mews typology is described at paragraph 5.189 of the appraisal setting out that the mews were developed as service streets to the larger houses in nearby principal streets. The appraisal notes that the distinctive general Mews character is derived from 'the smaller scale of the street, the footprint and scale of the mews buildings (mostly of two storeys), their elevational treatment reflecting their original use with large ground-floor openings and small openings on the upper floors, and building lines immediately behind the street edge.'
- 2.5 The appraisal notes that pressure for change has led to mews buildings being replaced. John's Mews and Cockpit Yard are noted as having a greater number of interventions than better preserved mews such as Doughty Mews or the northern end of Brownlow Mews. The appraisal states that the fundamental character of John's Mews has been retained despite a fair amount of alteration and change within the Mews and beyond.

### John's Mews Character and Appearance

- 2.6 John's Mews has changed considerably since it was first constructed. At its southern end, the large post-war library dominates views, as does the development at nos. 29-31 John's Mews which was constructed in the 1950s (along with the reconstruction of nos. 31 and 32 John Street to the east). The stepped back flank walls of nos. 29-31 are very dominant in the streetscene. The Assembly Hall, a former Council Depot and now forming part of the Cockpit Arts site, was constructed

in the 1930s and involved the demolition of a number of mews properties on the western side of the southern arm of John's Mews. The northern end of John's Mews has also been altered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century with pre-war development at its northern end (which includes the grade II listed no. 21 John Street, the Duke of York Public House and Mytre Court). The west side of the northern arm of the street (formerly consisting of properties around Kirk Street) has been cleared and redeveloped with the St George the Martyr Church of England Primary School.

- 2.7 Within this context, there are a number of mews buildings of varying character and appearance. Nos. 35-37 John's Mews retain something of their original character and with a common eaves height and deep window reveals, there is a suggestion of consistency despite some alteration in the street elevations. No. 39 John's Mews has been reconstructed in the post-war period.
- 2.8 Nos. 11-23 John's Mews are eclectic in character while sharing some consistencies such as a common parapet height. All of the buildings have undergone alteration and all have roof level extensions. Nos. 21 and 19 appear to have been substantially rebuilt. There is variation in fenestration pattern and materials (for example, some have exposed brick facades and others are rendered and there is considerable variety in window position, materials, size and detail).
- 2.9 No. 27 John's Mews relates to the traditional or original character established by nos. 35-37 and no. 23 John's Mews. It appears to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of an original mews property and is detailed accordingly. It is greater in height than the pair at nos. 35-37, has arched red brick window heads and red brick banding. Blue engineering brick has been used around the entrance doors and window and this reads as a later alteration.
- 2.10 John's Mews is not therefore an example of a typical, well preserved mews that Doughty Mews is considered to be. There is a considerable amount of 20<sup>th</sup> century development that has changed the character of the mews to a degree. The southern end of John's Mews does retain a sense of enclosure – where buildings continue to be positioned directly on the pavement edge even where they are not original to the streetscene or are otherwise contrary to a mews typology.
- 2.11 No. 27 John's Mews is identified within the schedule on page 143 of the appraisal as a building that makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is not identified as making such a contribution on the accompanying map to the Sub Area (appendix A).
- 2.12 Nos. 11, 13-15, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 27-39 John's Mews and the rear of the Assembly Hall in Cockpit yard (which forms the western side of the southern arm of John's Mews) are also considered to make a positive contribution in the schedule on page 143 of the appraisal. None of these buildings are highlighted on the accompanying adopted map of the Sub Area which was published in 2010, a year before the adoption of the appraisal. Images of John Mews are included in the photographic schedule at appendix B.

- 2.13 That all of the buildings of the southern arm are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area is an interesting assertion. Nos. 29-31, which is a post-war development of considerable scale (albeit with a three storey façade to the street – there are a number of higher floors set back from the road) does retain a sense of mews detailing with large garage doors for example but the building as a whole is very different to a traditional mews building. The Assembly Room, which is of three storeys high but runs almost the full length of the eastern side of the street, again is atypical in terms of a mews development.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing the site (highlighted blue) and nearby listed buildings (red).

- 2.14 There are a number of grade II and grade II\* listed buildings within the wider setting of no. 27 John's Mews (as indicated on figure 1). The terraced Georgian properties of Great James Street are grade II\* listed. Those closest to the proposed site include the early 20<sup>th</sup> century grade II listed no. 13 Northington Street and the grade II listed mid-18<sup>th</sup> century terraces of John Street (figure 1).
- 2.15 No. 13 Northington Street is immediately adjacent to no. 27 John's Mews and the listed terrace at nos. 29-36 John Street is situated to the east. No. 27 John's Mews shares a property boundary with no. 30 John Street.
- 2.16 The significance and historic development of these heritage assets is considered in the following section alongside that of no. 27 John's Mews.

### 3 Historic development and significance

- 3.1 The following paragraphs provide an overview of the historic development and significance of no. 27 John's Mews and that of its most closely associated listed buildings at no. 13 Northington Street and no. 30 John Street (along with neighbouring properties in the relevant designated terrace).
- 3.2 John's Mews was built as part of the development of the area to the north of Gray's Inn that gathered pace in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. An extract from Rocque's map of London in 1746 (figure 2) highlights that development was beginning to encroach upon the market gardens north of The King's Way (Theobald's Road). Great James Street had been laid out with Cockpit yard and Cockpit Court to the east. John Street and the east side of John's Mews had not yet been laid out.

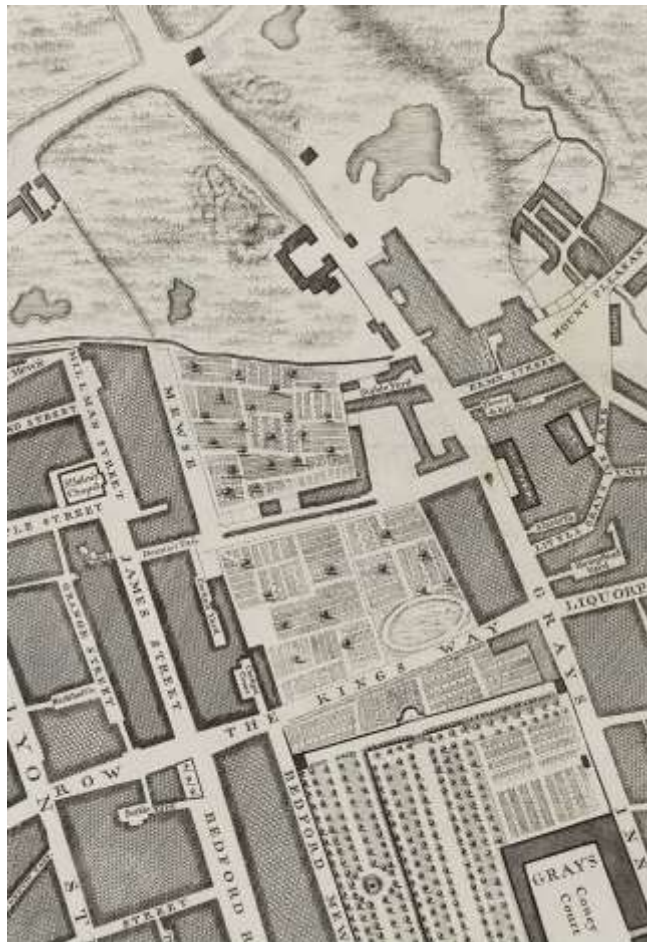


Figure 2: Extract from Rocque's map of London (1746).

- 3.3 By the time of the publication of Horwood's map of London (1792-9), John's Mews is shown to the west of John Street (figure 3) with houses fronting onto Theobalds Road. Only the southern part of John Street has been constructed by this time. The list description for nos. 29-36 John Street note that their date of construction was c. 1754-59 and it can therefore be assumed that the site of no. 27 John's Mews was



developed with a mews house at a comparable date. The building now on the site does not appear as mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in character.

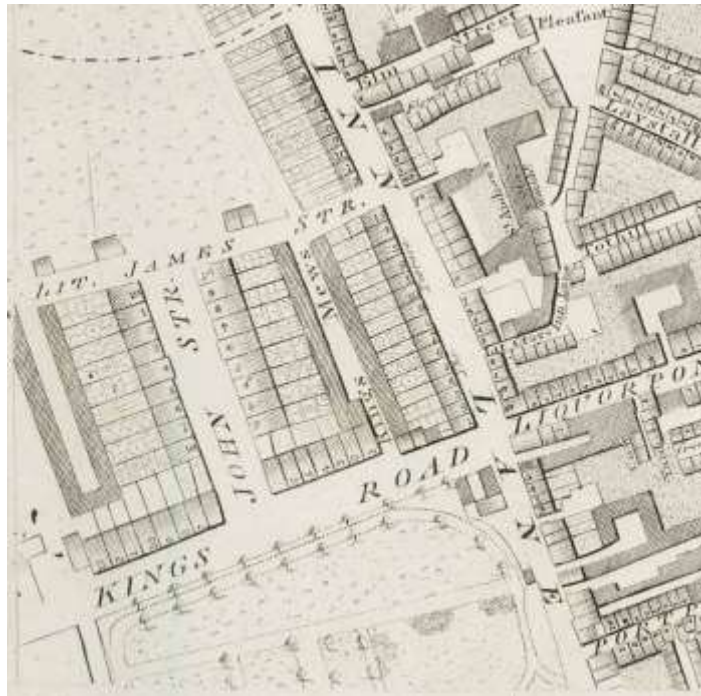


Figure 3: Extract from Horwood's map of London showing no. John's Mews at the left hand side of the image. Little James Street was the former name for Northington Street.

- 3.4 By 1830, and as shown in Greenwood's map of London, John's Mews (north and south), Northington Street and John Street had been fully laid out and their periphery had become densely developed (figure 4).
- 3.5 During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the residential properties of John Street and surrounding streets became increasingly used as offices, in common with many areas on the fringes of the city. Many of the houses in John Street and around fell into use as offices – law firms being one of the main occupiers given the proximity to Gray's Inn and Lincoln's Inn.
- 3.6 An extract from the 1877-8 OS map extract does not provide sufficient detail to adequately highlight this phenomenon but it does show the layout of the streets and building form at this time. John's Mews at this time was much more uniform in character with small regularly sized mews buildings along the east and west sides of its southern arm. On the corner of John's Mews and Northington Street there is building shown with a greater footprint. This is the predecessor to the existing building at no. 13 Northington Street.
- 3.7 Goad Insurance Plans do provide much greater detail on the prevailing historic land uses during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1901 plan (figure 5) shows some of the changes that had been made to the area during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and gives some detail on the nature of the buildings in John's Mews. On the east and west sides of the street there are a series of two-storey stables with domestic accommodation over. At the centre of the east side of the street no. 33 John's Mews has been most likely



redeveloped as a clothing factory. A photograph of 1959 of John's Mews shows two mews buildings which reflect the original character of the street (figure 6).



Figure 3: Extract from Greenwood's map of 1830.



Figure 4: OS map extract of 1877-8.

- 3.8 The John Street terraces are shown as being principally in office use. At the corner of Northington Street and John's Mews is a small two-storey mews type building with a similar ground floor stable with a small flat at first floor. Next to that is a single storey structure identified as being occupied by a Coach Builder. This building was subsequently demolished ahead of the construction of the existing 1903 structure.



Figure 5: Goad Plan extract showing the layout of the mews in 1901. Most of the John Street terraces (at least on the western side) were in use as offices by this time with stabling and domestic use to the mews buildings.

- 3.9 Around this time, a drainage plan application was submitted for new drainage to no. 26 John's Mews. While this obviously doesn't directly relate to the existing building, it can perhaps give an indication of how no. 27 was originally configured at ground floor level (figure 7). The layout appears to show three stalls for horses with associated storage spaces.
- 3.10 In 1903, the existing building at no. 13 Northington Street was constructed for Henry Finch as a brewery stables. It is constructed in a red brick with stone quoins and dressings over two-storeys. Henry Finch was a prominent brewer and pub owner in London during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 1950s, no. 27 John's Mews is now in use as a garage (figure 8) with domestic use above. No. 13 Northington Street was converted to a safehouse with domestic use above. In 1960, an application was made to demolish no. 27 John's Mews and consequently widen the site at nos. 31-33 John's Mews which was being constructed at that time. The application was refused on the basis that the development would exceed the council's plot ratio.
- 3.11 The redevelopment of nos. 31-32 John Street and nos. 31 John's Mews was permitted in 1959, eight years after the John Street buildings were listed. This scheme involved the full redevelopment of the buildings in question with a new façade to match the existing and the reuse of various features within the new building (such as a particular ceiling for example). In 2011, an application for the change of use of the building from commercial to residential was approved. This also involved the demolition of the existing rear façade for a new rear façade (figure 9) which was considered to integrate better with the surrounding context.

- 3.12 By the 1970s, no. 13 had been converted to garage use (figure 10). It was during this decade that an application was submitted to demolish no. 13 Northington Street and no. 27 John's Mews for their redevelopment with a four storey office building (figure 11). The application was approved in 1977.



Figure 6: John's Mews, 1959 – a depiction of the original character and appearance of the street and its buildings.

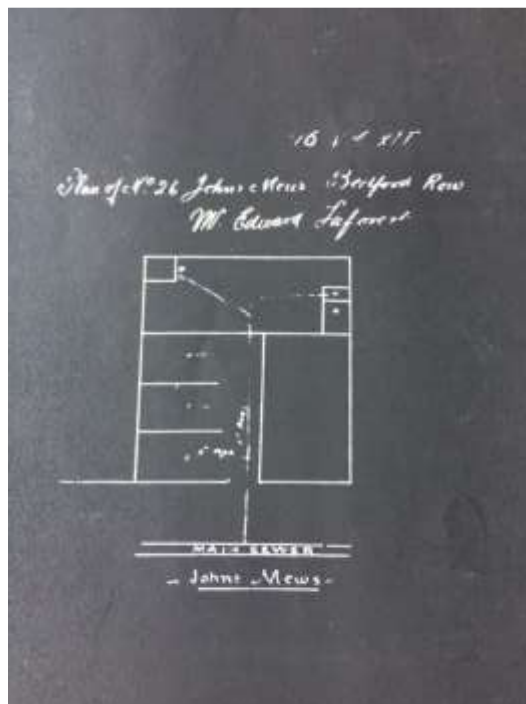


Figure 7: Drawing to drainage application c. 1901 showing no. 26 John's Mews.





Figure 8: 1950s Goad Plan extract.

- 3.13 That an application for both properties was made indicates that both no. 13 and no. 27 John's Mews were in single ownership at this point and may have been for some time. While it is assumed that there was originally a relationship between no. 27 John's Mews and most likely no. 30 John Street, this relationship has been severed for some time.
- 3.14 In 1971, an application for the demolition of existing ground floor structures and a new rear ground floor extension was approved at no. 30 John Street. This application saw the complete infilling of the rear yard to no. 30 up to the property boundary with no. 27 John's Mews. The existing full length ground floor extension now masks the rear elevation of no. 27 John's Mews at ground floor level. Only the first floor and modern roof extension to no. 27 are visible from no. 30 John Street. There are no windows or doors to the rear of no. 27 at ground floor level (and no trace of these internally).
- 3.15 It is possible that in the post-war period, and certainly by the 1970s, no. 27 John's Mews was owned by the garage at no. 13 Northington Street and used as part of the garage facility. By the 1990s it was in residential use according to a planning application submitted in 1995 for the reconfiguration of the building and the provision of a mansard roof. An application for the residential conversion of no. 13 Northington Street was also made in 1995. At the time, the two buildings were in different ownership. No. 13 was listed in 1999.
- 3.16 Existing drawings submitted as part of the application provide some detail on the character and appearance of no. 27 John's Mews at this time (figures 12 and 13). The building was used for garaging at ground floor with a small dog leg stair in its south-western corner leading to first floor where there was a simple arrangement of four rooms.



Figure 9: The rear elevation of John Kirk House from the rear of no. 27 John's Mews.



Figure 10: No. 13 Northington Street in the 1970s with no. 27 John's Mews just seen to the right.

- 3.17 The 1990s existing roof structure is shown as a pitched roof over the front part of the building with a flat roof to the rear. This may indicate that the rear part of the building had been altered or extended at some point – certainly a comparison of the rear building line on the Goad plan extracts provided above suggests that the rear

part of the building was extended or altered at some point (prior to the 1950s when skylights were certainly introduced).

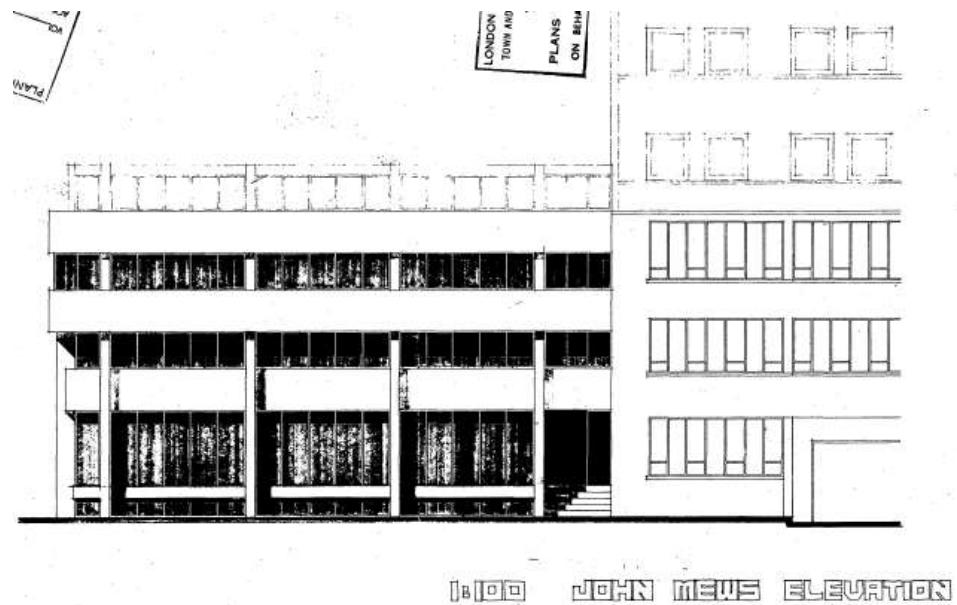


Figure 11: The 1977 permitted scheme for John's Mews.

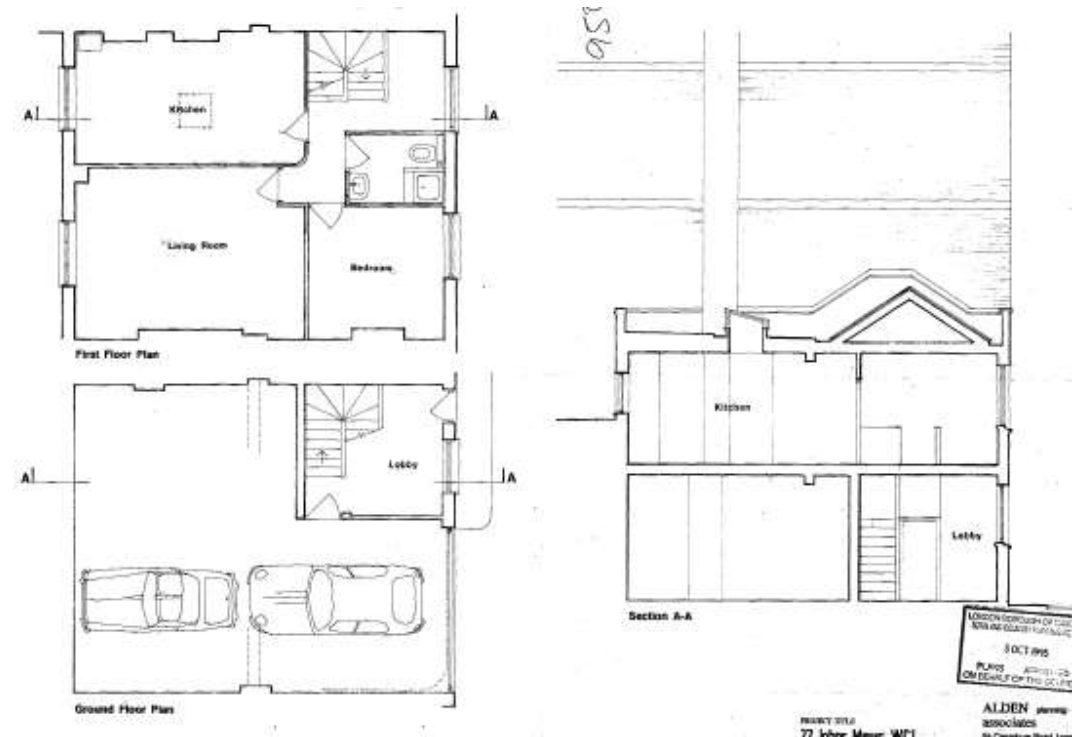


Figure 12: Existing plans and sections of no. 27 John's Mews (1995)



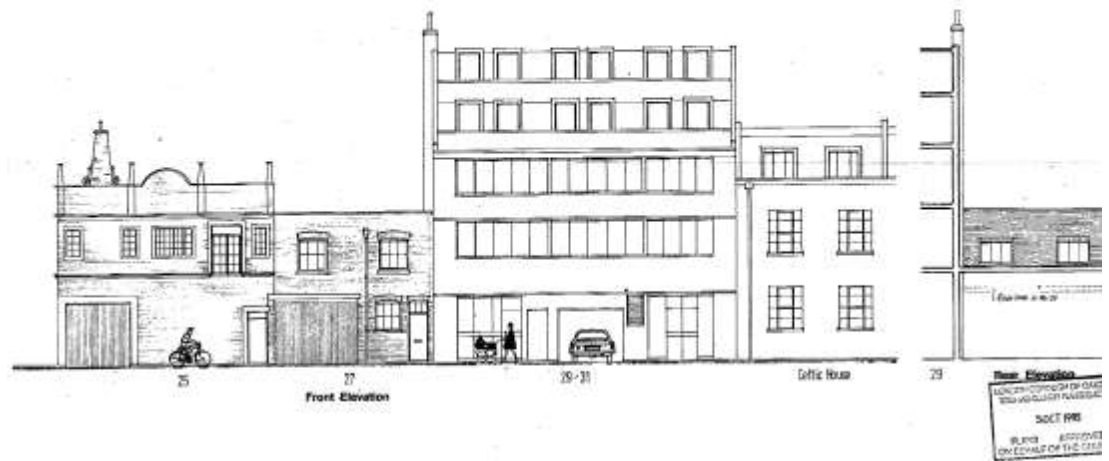


Figure 13: Drawing from 1995 showing the then existing streetscene (including no. 27 John's Mews and neighbours).

- 3.18 The 1995 scheme, which involved the full reconfiguration of the interior of the building and the provision of a mansard roof, was permitted in October 1995. The street elevation of the building has new timber doors and windows and to the rear, there are uPVC windows with concrete lintels. The rear elevation of the building has obviously changed considerably as has its roof (which has been completely replaced). The first floor level windows look out over the bulky skylights of no. 30 John Street's ground floor extension which abuts no. 27's rear wall. The brickwork of the front elevation of the building appears to have been aggressively cleaned and pointed with a hard cementitious mortar.
- 3.19 As described above, and in section 2 of this report, John's Mews has changed considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This level of change applies to no. 27 itself which has been altered and extended and the original modest mews character of the building has been removed to a degree. The following paragraphs consider its level of significance and the contribution that the building makes to the setting of nearby listed buildings and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

#### Significance

- 3.20 Sub Area 10 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area clearly has a strong character which is derived from the interrelationship of the network of streets and the variation in built character between the principal streets, secondary streets and mews and service areas. John's Mews does contribute to this character to a degree although it is not the best preserved example of a historic mews development having been substantially altered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- 3.21 The buildings on the southern arm of John's Mews are more varied in character than at the northern end with the more traditional mews buildings having been largely redeveloped during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The replacement buildings do retain a sense of the original enclosure to the mews but the pattern of small scale, two-storey mews buildings has obviously been changed.
- 3.22 No.27 John's Mews has been identified as making a positive contribution to the conservation area. Certainly in the form, appearance and detailing of its street elevation the building is redolent of the former character of the mews. Beyond the façade, the whole building has been altered with a new stair, windows, floor layout and roof structure. To all intents and purposes there is a modern family house behind the street façade that is of a greater scale and footprint than the more traditional mews dwellings.
- 3.23 The façade of no. 27 John's Mews has more in common with the mews buildings to the north along the northern arm of John Street (nos. 11-23) in terms of materiality and proportion. The mews buildings at nos. 35 and 37 are more representative perhaps of the original mews buildings of the street. While there are some shared characteristics between no. 27 and the buildings at nos. 11-23, there remains distinct variety of door and window openings and materials. One of the key shared characteristics is a similar parapet height that helps to define a common height to the buildings and provide the correct scale and sense of enclosure to the street.
- 3.24 It is considered that the building's contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area is positive but the level of contribution is limited. The assertion that all the buildings along the southern arm of John's Mews make a positive contribution is confusing as clearly there is considerable variation in building typology, quality and age. While none of the buildings detract particularly from the street – with the exception of no. 31 perhaps (which is of a noticeably greater scale than its neighbours even with its setbacks) and the Assembly Hall which has a far greater plot width than would be expected in the mews – it is considered that there is a scale in terms of the level of contribution those buildings make.
- 3.25 In comparison to the mews buildings at nos. 35 and 37, the façade at no. 27 is removed from that character which is more reflective of the traditional appearance of the street. Much of the historic building at no. 27 has been altered, reconfigured or extended and the building no longer is of a mews quality or character behind the façade. As an independent building, it has lost much of its original integrity and authenticity and therefore its contribution can only be limited.
- 3.26 The historic built environment around no. 27 is of a high quality but there is substantial variation and signs of change all around the building. The underlying historic network of streets and the buildings of the principal streets are legible but there is evidence of change within the built environment. As described in section above, much of John's Mews has been altered as have nearby historic and listed buildings.

- 3.27 Clearly the building in its current form relates to nearby historic buildings – it does form part of a mews and in the scale and detailing of its brick street elevation to parapet level it does convey the impression of a supporting mews building. Its scale, materials and parapet height are in a way its defining characteristics. Its historic development relates to that of other buildings locally including perhaps no. 13 Northington Street and the John Street terraces. In common with those buildings it has undergone change and alteration and is no longer in its original or related historic use, form, layout and scale.

## 4 Assessment of the proposals

- 4.1 The following section provides a consideration of the proposed scheme against the significance of the existing building at no. 27 John's Mews and its contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It also takes into account relevant historic environment policy considerations.

### Outline of the proposed scheme

- 4.2 The proposals are set out more fully in the accompanying drawings and Design and Access Statement submitted by Scenario Architecture. The proposals involve the redevelopment of the existing building behind the existing façade which is retained as part of the proposals.
- 4.3 As set out in the Design and Access Statement the proposal therefore involves:
- Retention and protection of the building's existing façade (considered to be the focus of its significance and contribution to the conservation area given the degree of alteration to its structure and fabric)
  - Demolition of the existing building behind the principal façade (which has been heavily altered and compromised by development on the site and on adjoining land) to create a dwelling for a family of five;
  - Rearrangement and reconstruction of the interior and rear façade with a new roof structure;
  - This new roof volume allows for much needed additional floorspace and manages the change in height between no. 13 Northington Street and no. 29-31 John's Mews. The new roof volume has been detailed in such a way so as to have a minimal impact in views thereby retaining the impression of scale given by the existing building from Northington Street and John's Mews.
- 4.4 The proposed new roof volume would be raised by 1.7m at the side of no. 29 John's Mews but would be shaped in such a way as to significantly reduce any perception of bulk from the street while cleverly providing additional floor space. The existing front façade would be retained – the design of the new roof structure has been designed so as to relate harmoniously to this retained element of the building. It would be metal clad so as to relate to the surrounding built environment and would wrap over the building to be used on the rear elevation. The design allows for a winter garden to the rear of the building which is much needed on a site where there is no outdoor private space (with the exception of an existing small balcony at second floor level).
- 4.5 From the front, the building would read very much as it does now in terms of its overall character and appearance. An increase in height would be perceptible to the rear of the building; essentially an increase of a single storey. The rather poor quality rear elevation would however be replaced with one of high quality with appropriate materials and detailing (figures 14 and 15).



Figures 14 and 15: The proposed scheme (front and rear elevation).

#### Pre-application advice – July 2016

- 4.6 Following a request for pre-application advice, the provision of a detailed pre-application submission and a meeting on site with LB Camden Officers, written advice was received from the Council in July 2016.
- 4.7 The pre-application scheme that was originally considered by LB Camden involved the demolition of the building in its entirety and the subsequent reconstruction of its main façade. The proposals had been very much designed to respect the original mews building type while being aware of the historic value of the building's setting.

The essential difference between that pre-application scheme and the scheme now proposed is the retention of the existing main façade and its various features, characteristic and fabric.

- 4.8 The pre-application advice received from the Council made a number of points. It was acknowledged that the site ‘comprises a 19<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of an original mews property that has been heavily altered. The most significant alteration is the provision of an additional floor which is clearly visible in street views of the property.’
- 4.9 The advice also noted that the building is a positive contributor to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and that the proposal would result in its total loss as a non-designated heritage asset. The quality and interest of the proposed design was noted and the advice set out that it ‘could be an enhancement upon the quality of accommodation provided by the existing, much compromised mews house.’ While the proposed design was therefore received relatively positively, the main issue raised was the loss of a façade that contributed to the character and appearance of the conservation area. LB Camden wrote that ‘The design needs to give more consideration of how the proposal [can] conserve as much of the historic material character of the surviving fragments of the building as they can, to sustain their positive contribution to the conservation area.’
- 4.10 The same advice letter noted that ‘Other aspects of the design are positive. The innovative roof form will be scarcely visible from surrounding streets, conserving the character and appearance of the conservation area, and concealing the additional internal space effectively. The same can be said for the glazed section to the rear of the house: the existing mews, as views from the rears of John Street houses, appears as an characterful modern building, while the proposed would add some architectural interest while still reading as a surviving mews-scale building.’
- 4.11 The pre-application advice went on to conclude, in terms of Heritage and Design that, ‘Design revisions could mitigate the harm by ensuring the retention of as much of the building’s positive contribution. It is agreed that loss of the existing building would cause only less than substantial harm to the conservation area as a whole.’
- 4.12 In response to the comments raised in the pre-application response in terms of heritage and design, the scheme has been amended. As noted above, the main difference is the retention of the existing principal façade with some repair/refurbishment as necessary. A new dwelling is still proposed behind this retained elevation which will be of the highest architectural quality as envisaged at pre-application stage.
- 4.13 As noted above in this document and in the pre-application response received from LB Camden, the significance of this much altered and compromised building is focussed principally in its main elevation and it is this, together with its established scale as perceptible from public viewpoints, that combine to make a positive



contribution to the surrounding conservation area. The merits of this approach are discussed in more detail below but it is reasonable to say that in amending the scheme in this way, the proposals address concerns raised by LB Camden by retaining the better elements of the building that currently relate positively to its historic surroundings.

#### Relevant policy context

- 4.14 The following paragraphs briefly set out the range of national and local historic environment policy and guidance. The relevant statutory provision for the historic environment is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 4.15 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets out the government's approach to the historic built environment. Section 12 of the NPPF deals specifically with this area of policy. Policies relevant in this particular case are as follows.
- 4.16 Paragraph 128 states that applicants should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. 'The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.' A history of the site and a statement of significance are presented at section 3 of this report.
- 4.17 Paragraph 132 states that 'when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be.
- 4.18 Paragraph 134 deals with cases where a proposal causes less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset such as a listed building or conservation area. It states that any such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals. It follows that if harm is not caused then proposals will be acceptable.
- 4.19 A number of policies within the London Borough of Camden's Core Strategy and Development Policies seek to preserve and enhance the borough's historic environment, and protect elements and features of special interest. The relevant policy from the Core Strategy in relation to the historic environment (CS14) sets out Camden's overarching strategy and focuses on the need to preserve or enhance heritage assets and their setting and the requirement for new development to be of the highest quality and to respect local context and character.
- 4.20 Policy DP25 of Camden's *Development Policies Document* provides further guidance on the council's approach to the historic environment. In terms of conservation areas, the Council will only permit development within conservation areas that preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Further it will 'prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where

this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention.’

#### Assessment

- 4.21 The general thrust of national and local historic environment policy seeks to protect the special interest of designated heritage assets such as conservation areas and listed buildings. In this regard such policy, which aligns with the statutory duties set out in the 1990 Act, seeks to protect designated heritage assets and their setting. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 sets out that special regard shall be paid to the preservation of the setting of listed buildings and that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of conservation areas.
- 4.22 Obviously in this case, consideration needs to be given to both factors: the ability of the proposed scheme to preserve the setting of nearby listed buildings and to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out a number of policy considerations that are relevant in this case.
- 4.23 As already noted above, paragraphs 132 and 134 of the NPPF provide details on the concept of harm and how proposals may cause ‘substantial harm’ or ‘less than substantial harm’ to the significance of designated heritage assets. In this case, the designated heritage assets are the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings such as no. 13 Northington Street and the terrace on John Street. Local policy seeks to protect the character and appearance of conservation areas and prevent the demolition of positive contributors.
- 4.24 It has been established above that LB Camden consider the existing building to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area (although this report considers that contribution to be limited). There is therefore an understandable policy presumption against the demolition of the building – the demolition of positive contributors could potentially cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is important to bear in mind the relevant statutory provision which sets out that proposals affecting land in conservation areas should preserve or enhance character and appearance thus allowing for replacement buildings to be designed in such a way so that they preserve the prevailing characteristics of the original building and its contribution to local townscape.
- 4.25 The NPPF explores the concept of ‘harm’ further than local policy. Substantial harm to significance of designated heritage assets should be exceptional or wholly exceptional. Paragraph 133 details the circumstances in which substantial harm can be justified. Paragraph 134 explores ‘less than substantial harm’ and sets out that less than substantial harm can be justified and weighed against public benefits of the proposal. The Council’s pre-application advice noted that the demolition of the

building in its entirety would result in 'less than substantial harm' and that was the conclusion of the applicant's original pre-application report.

- 4.26 While the existing building at no. 27 John's Mews makes a limited positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, this interest is limited to its more distinctive characteristics that relate to a mews typology such as its parapet height, scale, composition and contribution to the street's sense of enclosure - i.e. the building's principal elevation.
- 4.27 The building beyond the façade at no. 27 has been heavily altered and its historic relationship with neighbouring buildings has been diminished either through alteration to its own fabric or of that to the nearby buildings in question (the infilling of the yard at ground floor level behind no. 30 John Street, the redevelopment of John Kirk House on John Street and the redevelopment of buildings along John's Mews).
- 4.28 The proposed scheme now seeks to retain the existing main façade with a new dwelling beyond this elevation. The proposed design would provide a significantly improved building architecturally – the existing interior, roof structure and rear elevation are currently of average to poor quality and contribute very little to the surrounding area. While change is proposed at roof level and beyond the main elevation, from John's Mews and beyond the building would continue to read as a modest mews structure. The proposed additional height would be cleverly concealed within the new roof form so as to not be overly dominant to the proposed building or its neighbours and to significantly reduce its visual impact.
- 4.29 It is considered that the existing building at no. 27 John's Mews makes only a limited positive contribution to the conservation area given the degree of its alteration and extension and its lack of overall integrity and authenticity. The main interest of and contribution made by the building is in its brickwork and openings of the principal elevation to John's Mews that make sense of and relate to the mews typology. The retention of this elevation would help to mitigate the loss of other lower-quality parts of this building and to effectively preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 4.30 The question of harm must also be addressed: it had been agreed at pre-application stage that the demolition of the building as a whole would result in less than substantial harm being caused to the character and appearance of the conservation area, a designated heritage asset. Now that the principal elevation and focus of the building's positive contribution is retained, it is difficult to see where harm is genuinely caused given the existing lack of architectural integrity or historic authenticity beyond the main façade. To all intents and purposes, the existing building is effectively already something of an example of 'façade retention'. The proposals now seek to retain the only part of the building of some architectural or historic interest and this helps to mitigate the loss of other parts of the building while preserving and enhancing the conservation area.

- 4.31 It is therefore considered that in the way proposed, the current scheme would not cause harm to the conservation area but through retention of the main elevation and a high quality and innovative design to the rear would enhance the conservation area and setting of nearby listed buildings.

#### Conclusions

- 4.32 The current proposal offers the provision of a very high quality new home that fits with both the character of John's Mews and the wider context. While there is a presumption against the demolition of positive contributors in local policy, and this proposal does involve some demolition of such a building while retaining the main facade, there are circumstances under which the redevelopment of the building in the way proposed would be possible.
- 4.33 Local policy does allow for the partial demolition of buildings within conservation areas where exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention. In this case, those circumstances are: the retention of the principal elevation, which is the focus of the building's significance and contribution; the fact that there is no real architectural integrity or quality behind the main façade; and, that the proposals would be of the highest architectural quality and interest and would themselves contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is considered that the loss of the rear parts of the building would not cause harm to the designated heritage asset or total loss of significance of a non-designated heritage asset.
- 4.34 For these reasons and for those reasons identified above, it is considered that the proposed scheme would therefore accord with the relevant statutory provision and local and historic environment policy. The evolved design seeks to retain the existing principal façade while developing a high quality building and a positive architectural addition to the conservation area – the outcome of this proposal can only therefore be beneficial.

## Appendix A

### Plan of Sub Area 10 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area





## Bloomsbury CA Sub Area 10 Townscape Appraisal



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Scale 1: Not Usable Scale



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## Appendix B

### Photographic record of nearby mews buildings



Nos. 25-31 John's Mews with no 27 between the listed building at no. 13 Northington Street/25 John's Mews and the taller 1950s building to the south at nos. 29-32 John's Mews (Celtic House).



No. 39 John's Mews (on same side of street as no. 27)



No. 37 John's Mews built to a more typical/original arrangement.



No. 37 John's Mews which is similar in character and appearance to no. 37.



Nos. 29-31 John's Mews



No. 27 John's Mews



No. 25 John's Mews, 13 Northington Street





West side of the southern arm of John's Mews



View south along John's Mews





View back towards no. 27 showing the increase in height along John's Mews



No. 23 John's Mews with new mansard roof.



No. 21 John's Mews



No. 19 John's Mews

The Heritage Practice

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