



Historic England

LONDON OFFICE

Mr Gideon Whittingham
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall
Argyle Street
London
WC1H 8ND

Direct Dial: 020 7973 3763

Our ref: L00541105

14 February 2016

Dear Mr Whittingham

**Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2015 &
T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
39 GREAT JAMES STREET, LONDON, WC1N 3HB
Application No 2016/6155/L**

Thank you again for consulting Historic England in December last year over proposed alterations to the Grade II* listed 39 Great James Street in Bloomsbury.

Background

In our consultation response of 22 December, we raised some concern over the proposed demolition of the staircase between ground and basement level, the rear extension and the extent of internal alterations which we considered had the potential to cause harm. We therefore advised that a site visit should be undertaken to gain a clearer understanding of the areas subject to change. This visit was undertaken last Tuesday 9 February with the applicant's architect, and your Council's Conservation Officer.

Historic England's Advice

These proposals seek to return the building, which was previously in office use and subsequently squatted, to a single residential dwelling. The plan form, which largely survives on the principal floors, would consequently remain intact without any subdivision to accommodate additional units, and therefore the proposed change of use is welcomed. Moreover, the works (once completed) should facilitate the removal of the building from our Heritage at Risk Register. We are therefore supportive of these proposals in principle.

Regarding our initial concerns about the staircase alterations, it appears from our site inspection that the staircase between ground and basement level is relatively modern. We are therefore broadly content with its proposed demolition on the understanding that the new staircase would be faithful to the original plan form. We would, however, recommend some localised opening-up of the staircase fabric to ensure that no important remnants of the original staircase are concealed within.



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Much of the original 1720s staircase remains from ground floor, although sections have been replaced on the upper levels, and some of the original balusters have been removed. Additionally, the staircase detailing has suffered from years of overpainting. We consider that this application could benefit from the conservation of the staircase by an accredited specialist, as has been undertaken elsewhere along the terrace.

With regards to the proposed rear alterations and extension, we welcome the proposed removal of the various accretions to the rear façade, and rationalising of the servicing. The 19th century sanitation tower makes little contribution to the overall significance of the building in our opinion, and is in extremely poor condition. Its demolition is therefore generally considered to be positive.

The rear garden plots along Great James Street have been altered over time, and their setting has been compromised by the much larger developments along Emerald Street. The principle for a two-storey rear extension is therefore acceptable to us, and there are various precedents along the listed terrace. However, with the exception of a small lightwell, the proposed rear extension would cover most of available garden area up to the raised section at the rear. This would result in the permanent loss of garden space - a key component of the original plot layout.

We would therefore encourage options to be explored to reduce the footprint of the extension to retain some ground-level garden space. Alternatively, we suggest that investigations are carried out into the composition of the raised section of garden to the rear. If it is considered that the section is not of significance, a potential benefit could be to excavate to ground level and reinstate some of the original garden space. Equally, any significant fabric discovered, such as vaulting, could be revealed and offered as a heritage-related public benefit of the scheme in accordance with Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Regarding the other key elements of the scheme, we are content with the proposed third floor subdivision in principle due to the existing partitioning and lack of features of interest. We would welcome the revealing of any historic floorboards as discussed on site. We are also open to the principle of providing a new bathroom on this floor. The installation of a soil pipe within the chimney flue is an unusual element of the scheme; however it potentially offers a discrete solution. It is also understood that the installation would not impact on the workings of any other chimney flue in the building. We are therefore open to the proposal in principle. However, further details will need to be provided, potentially by condition if your Council is minded to approve the scheme.

Finally, we welcome the various proposed areas of enhancement, such as the removal of the modern safety rail behind the parapet and the reopening of the front lightwell vaults. We are particularly encouraged by the intention to remove the cementitious pointing to the main façade and reinstate lime-based tuck pointing.



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Recommendation

Due to the **Heritage at Risk** status of the building, and the intended return to single residential use, Historic England is broadly supportive of this scheme. However, we would urge your Council to address the advice provided and determine the application in accordance with local and national policy and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.

We enclose the draft letter authorising the granting of consent (draft attached) and have referred the case to National Planning Casework Unit. Subject to the Secretary of State not directing reference of the application to him, they will return the letter of direction to you.

If your authority is minded to grant listed building consent, you will then be able to issue a formal decision. Please send us a copy of your Council's decision notice in due course. This response relates to listed building matters only. If there are any archaeological implications to the proposals please contact the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service for further advice (Tel: 020 7973 3712).

Yours sincerely



Alasdair Young

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

E-mail: alasdair.young@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Enc: Draft letter of direction



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