

Design, Access and Heritage Impact Statement

26 Russell Square, Bloomsbury, London WC1B 5DQ

our ref: F466-A-DnA001 Revision A 15.06.2017

Description : Proposed alteration to the kitchenette



Applicant: **Birkbeck College, University of London**
Agent: **Spheron Architects**

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1.0 Introduction

This Design, Access and Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared by Spheron Architects to accompany an application for listed building consent for alterations to the kitchenette on ground floor at 26 Russell Square.

2.0 Site Appraisal

The site lies within Bloomsbury Conservation area known for its Georgian terraces. Russell Square itself is largely made up of 3 and 4-storey late 18th or 19th century terraces, it is also the largest of Bloomsbury's squares. It was laid out by an early 19th century landscape architect Humphrey Repton, and extensively replanted in 1959. Property developer James Burton (1761-1837) built the original, surviving terraces in early 19th century which are of 4 storeys with basements and attics. These terraces are built in yellow stock brick with a rusticated stucco base and 26 Russell Square with the original front is one of them.

25-29 Russell Square including the railings and lamp holder as a group was first listed on 28 March 1969 (list entry no: 1246377). They were built in circa 1814 with round-arched doorways. Noticeable features for no.26 include pilaster jambs, fanlights and double panelled doors, gauged brick flat arches to recessed sash windows, continuous cast-iron balconies to 1F windows, stucco cornice at 3F sill level as well as parapets above attic storey.

Description of the room concerned:

The interior of the building has been altered on a number of occasions and there appears to be no record of when these changes took place. At the time of listing in 1969 the interior of the building was not inspected.

A visual inspection was carried out on 5 May 2017 in the absence of any original drawings. The room has two recessed bays, each contains a large sash window with panelled surrounds including non-operable shutters on both sides and one below the window sill. The room is accessible via two doors, both have seemingly the original architraves albeit one is a 4-panel door while the other is a plain door appears to be installed at a much later date. Other noticeable period features are the cornices and a band of decorative mouldings directly beneath them, these features are interrupted by a beam supported on four cast iron columns, all appear to be later additions. It suggests that the cornice running

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along one side of the beam might not be original. Furthermore, the original fireplace had been removed and the room had undergone phases of modernisation with modern lighting and electric fittings as well as an in-built kitchenette.



Top: The two sash windows facing the rear and the cast iron columns to the left.

Bottom left: The beam and the cast iron columns within the room appear to be later additions, suggesting that the cornice along the beam might not be original.

Bottom right: The 4-panel door to be retained.

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Top: Inside of the room, note the solid door to the right which is not original.

Bottom: the band of decorative mouldings beneath the cornice, running along all four walls but intercepted by the beam supported on cast iron columns.

3.0 Planning Policy

The following provides a review of the statutory, national, regional and local policy relevant to 26 Russell Square as a designated heritage asset.

Relevant Legislation:

The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest over and above the protection provided through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Under Section 16(2) of the Act in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving any features of special architectural or historic interest which the building possess.

Under Section 72 of the Act the local planning authority also has a duty to pay special attention to the 'desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance' of conservation areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): published on 27 March 2012 cancelling earlier national policy, such as PPS5. Chapter 12 of the NPPF sets out national policy in relation to conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

The NPPF still retains a general presumption against development that would harm the significance of a heritage asset; and the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for any loss.

However, paragraph 14 of the NPPF sets out that at its heart there 'is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.' The onus is on decision makers to support sustainable development wherever possible and without delay.

PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (March 2010): whilst PPS5 has been revoked, it is a useful tool to aid analysis and as such is a material consideration.

Both the NPPF and PPS5 recognise the value of a heritage asset because of its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interests. In paragraphs 55-57 the Practice Guide notes that it is important to understand:

1. The nature of the significance;

2. The extent of the fabric that holds that interest;
3. The level of importance of that interest.

British Standards Institution, BS 7913: Guide to the conservation of historic buildings, 2nd ed, 2013:

The BS 7913 codifies standards for historic building conservation, on the other hand, identifies four different groups: cultural, social, economic and environmental, as well as a 'non-exhaustive' list of 25 alternative individual heritage values.

Nevertheless, there are no hard and fast rules as to how the significance of a historic building should be assessed and presented, but the assessment should be handled on a case by case basis, in the spirit of Semple Kerr's philosophy.

The London Plan (2011): sets of the strategic planning policy for London. This proposal does not give rise to issues of a strategic nature and so the detailed policies of the plan are of limited weight in determining this application.

Camden Core Strategy (2010): sets out the vision for the borough and includes Policy CS14: Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage.

Camden Development Policies (2010): provide detailed planning criteria used in the determination of planning applications. Policy DP25 notes that the Council will 'only grant consent for... alterations...to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building.'

4.0 Analysis of Significance

Architectural Interest

The following assessment identifies those elements of 26 Russell Square that contribute or detract from its architectural interest:

1. The exterior of the building is of architectural interest given its early 19th century town house appearance.
2. It is one of a few groups of buildings built by Burton in the area

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3. Its key elements include the round-arched doorways, pilaster jambs, fanlights and double panelled doors, gauged brick flat arches to recessed sash windows, continuous cast-iron balconies to 1F windows, stucco cornice at 3F sill level as well as parapets above attic storey.

4. Alterations have taken place internally, but overall the interventions have been sympathetic to the original features, and many of them survive the alterations over the years.

Historic Interest

The historic interest associated with 26 Russell Square and the wider group of buildings within this part of Bloomsbury Conservation Area is primarily associated with the external appearance of the properties as a planned and coherent example of housing development in the early 19th century. Such buildings are not uncommon and a number of them have been listed including 26 Russell Square. The primary interest is in relation to the front street elevation, which will remain unaltered.

Artistic Interest

There is no artistic significance associated with 26 Russell Square or the buildings in the immediate vicinity over and above their shared architectural style. Although the overall architectural features on the front facade have some minor artistic value in their own right, they are common features on a building of this age and style and will not be affected by the proposed development.

Archaeological Interest

26 Russell Square appears to be located very close to the London Suburbs Archaeological priority area, nonetheless the proposed interventions are internal and minor, therefore will have no effects on any assets of archaeological significance.

5.0 Design Considerations

Objectives:

In considering the objectives for the development of this property, it has been necessary to identify and assess the site, its opportunities and constraints.

Opportunities and constraints:

These include, the actual size and shape of the site, its physical and geographical features, its contextual relationship with adjoining developments, the character of the area, the need to provide a high quality living environment, as well as to ensure that due attention is paid to the planning requirements set out in the development plan and the relevant SPG's produced by London Borough of Camden.

Proposals:

The traces of historic elements present in the existing interior define a small media base of quality materials.

The applicant proposes to construct a dividing partition to create a meeting space to include the refurbishment of the interior space and associated works. (see architectural drawings enclosed for materials and details)

The traces of period features within the room concerned have been painted over many times, they are of limited merits but on the whole they are of less significance compared with say, the external facade, or even the original staircases within the premises.

Nevertheless, design measures have been taken to minimise impacts on these features, for instance, new bulkheads and skirting boxings will be installed to protect the existing mouldings. The four-panel door will be retained, albeit it will swing inward to the new meeting room while the door in the entrance corridor, which is of no architectural nor historic significance, will be replaced by a new self-closing Fire-door with intumescent seals. (see architectural drawings for details)

Other interventions include lighting and electrical alterations, additions of smoke and heat detectors. These interventions are all necessary to bring the new rooms in full compliance with latest Building Regulations Requirements.

6.0 Access

No change is proposed to the main access in to the property

7.0 Assessment

This section of the Statement provides an assessment of the proposed development in the context of the key planning, design and heritage issues arising from the policy framework, as well as other guidance. It also considers the impact of the proposals, on the architectural and historic significance of 26 Russell as an individual building, on the character and appearance of Bloomsbury Conservation Area and in relation to other relevant heritage assets.

Effect on the Architectural Interest

The listing of 26 Russell Square as part of the group built by Burton is based on certain key elements intrinsic to the late Georgian/Regency townhouse architecture deemed contemporary of that era. These key elements include features on the front facade like the sash windows, cast-iron railings, flat-arches, parapets etc. The submitted proposals are wholly for works to the internal, therefore hidden from street level. As such, there is no harmful effect to the architectural appearance or interest associated with the property.

Effect on the Historic Interest

The primary historic interest of 26 Russell Square lies in its exterior appearance and in particular the front facade, while at the time of listing the interior was not inspected. The proposed refurbishment makes use of a combination of traditional and contemporary materials, and there is no unacceptable material impact on the historic interest of the premises.

Effect on the Bloomsbury Conservation Area

The proposed works are all internal and so do not have an impact on the Conservation Area, there is no harm to the surrounding area resulting from the proposed alterations to the extant permission. The appearance of the existing building will be preserved and its integrity retained in relation to the Conservation Area.

Effect of the Proposals on Amenity

The proposed alterations will improve and enhance the amenity of the room and do not give rise to any unacceptable amenity effects in terms of nearby properties.

8.0 Conclusion

The significance of 26 Russell Square is as a listed building in proximity to similar buildings designed in the around and about the same period within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The principal significance relates to the front facade and the building's relationship to the street.

The proposed work does not harm this significance nor it gives rise to any harmful effects since all the proposed works are internal and not visible from the public realm.

Furthermore, the proposed modern interventions are necessary in order to bring the space in line with modern working standards expected of a reputable High Education institution, as well as to make it become building control compliant. The proposed refurbishment whilst preserving the special character of the existing listed building will also enhance the quality of life for its current and future occupants. On this basis, we consider that the proposed work preserves the integrity of the host building, is appropriate to its setting, and the significance of that setting, and has no discernible effect on the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The proposal is therefore compliant with national and local policies and we request that planning permission be granted.