

## Design, Access and Heritage Impact Statement

**32 Tavistock Square London WC1H 9EZ**

our ref: F466-A-DnA004 Revision A 15.06.2017

**Description : The creation of an open-plan kitchen at basement level and the alteration of existing storage and toilet facilities at ground floor level.**



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 creating an open-plan kitchen/break-out space at basement and alternating existing storage and toilet facilities at ground floor level at 32 Tavistock Square.

## **2.0 Site Appraisal**

The site lies within Bloomsbury Conservation area known for its Georgian terraces. Tavistock Square as described in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal, is a pleasant public square, and the mature trees along the edge of the space are important elements in the street scene. 32 Tavistock Square is one of the grade II\* listed terrace of seventeen 3-bay wide townhouses on the west side is the only original development in Tavistock Square designed by architect Louis Vulliamy (1791-1871). They were built by G Anstey and JA Frampton, circa 1825-26 and provide an uniform frontage of darkened stock brick and comprise 4-storeys including stucco faced ground floors plus basements and slated mansard roofs. 32 Tavistock Square was first listed on 10 June 1954 (List entry number: 1378967).

### Description of the rooms 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 1954 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. Both room concerned are located at the back of the building and one is directly above the other. The room at ground floor level currently accommodates a storeroom for the photocopier, two W.C. rooms and a small stationary cupboard at the rear. The room at lower ground floor level accommodates two W.C. rooms and a small pantries. (see architectural drawings for the existing layouts) The sash windows in both rooms appear to be original, but internally most of the original features had disappeared over the years. The few seemingly original mouldings or skirting boards found had been painted over or altered many times, and their historic significance had therefore been lost.

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Photos of the rooms at ground floor level.

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**Photos of the rooms at lower ground floor level.**

## 3.0 Planning Policy

The following provides a review of the statutory, national, regional and local policy relevant to 32 Tavistock 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 32 Tavistock 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 the 17 grade II\* 1820s terrace townhouses which are the only original development in Tavistock Square.
3. It was designed by famed architect Louis Vulliamy.
4. Its key elements include the materiality as well as the symmetry of its facade.
5. Alterations have taken place internally, the two back-of-house rooms concerned in this application have no or very limited significance in relation to the building and Tavistock Square.

### Historic Interest

The historic interest associated with 32 Tavistock 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 as group have been listed including 32 Tavistock 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 32 Tavistock 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.



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## Archaeological Interest

32 Tavistock 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 applicant proposes to refurbish and relocate the existing toilet as well as the store and shelving within the room concerned on ground floor. At lower ground floor level, the dividing partitions are proposed to be removed in order to create an open-plan break-out area. (see architectural drawings enclosed for materials and details)

The few traces of period features within the room concerned have been altered or painted over many times, they are of no architectural merits and on the whole they are of much less significance compared with say, the external facade, or even the original staircases within the premises.

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.(see architectural drawings for details)

## **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 32 Tavistock Square 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 32 Tavistock Square as part of the group designed by Louis Vulliamy, 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 interior, 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 32 Tavistock Square lies in its exterior appearance and in particular the front facade, and the fact that it is one of the original developments in this location. Meanwhile, 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 existing building. 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 32 Tavistock 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. The rooms concerned are of no architectural merits with the exception of the windows, which are of limited significance since they are not the fenestrations on the principle facades.

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.