

Portico Heritage

Bracknell Gate, Frognal Lane

London, NW3



Replacement of existing rear metal balconies:

Heritage Impact Assessment

June 2017

Introduction

The report has been prepared to support the planning application to replace the existing rear balconies and redundant coal lifts at Bracknell Gate, Frognal Lane, London, NW3.

The report provides detail of the background and significance of the existing buildings as well as relevant policy relating to heritage and considers the proposals in light of this policy.

The author of the report is Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC. Nick has over twenty years experience in the property sector, including most recently as a Director of the Conservation Team at integrated design consultants, Alan Baxter & Associates. Nick spent eight years at Historic England as Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas where he led a specialist team of historic building inspectors, architects and archaeologists on a wide range of heritage projects in East & South London. Previously Conservation Officer at the London Borough of Bromley, Nick began his career at international real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle as a Chartered Surveyor.

Background

Bracknell Gate was built in the 1920s/30s as purpose built mansion flats. Built as three blocks their main elevations display classic details from that period, including art deco stucco detailing around the entrance and bay windows, crittal steel windows and a pantiled mansard roof. Each block has two deep returns and between these, to the rear, are balconies at each floor.

These balconies are utilitarian in design and form, and contain a redundant lift that was originally designed to deliver coal to each floor. These lifts are no longer operational or necessary. After nearly 90 years the balconies are now in a poor state of repair and in need of replacement.

Bracknell Gate lies within the Redington/Froggnal Conservation Area, and more specifically within Sub Area 7.

The Conservation Area Appraisal describes Froggnal Lane of having a generally uniform and consistent character on its southern side, but that the northern side has a wide mix of quality and styles of architecture. It describes: *'Nos. 1 & 3 Froggnal Lane and Bracknell Gate are well set back from the road and their main contribution to the character and appearance of the street is the original boundary wall which is partly constructed from 'lava' bricks – misfired bricks from the local brickfields. Bracknell Lodge at the junction to Bracknell Gardens has been radically altered over the years and its corner entrance feature has been diminished as a result'*.

Significance

In terms of significance, Bracknell Gate therefore is not regarded as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. At best, as polite neighbours in a mixed-style part of the conservation area, the development could be regarded as making a neutral contribution.

It is also clear that the main architectural detailing of the blocks was focussed on the elevations facing the streets. The rear elevation, where recessed between the building returns, is functional in detailing and contains the service pipes, service access etc. The balconies are similarly functional and 'industrial' in their form and construction. Unseen from the road the rear elevations make no contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

In terms of the assessment of proposals for the replacement of the balconies, the Froggnal/Redington Conservation Area is a 'designated heritage asset' as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF).

Buildings and structures that make a positive contribution to the conservation area – such as unlisted buildings of merit – would be considered as 'non-designated heritage assets'. In this case, the Conservation Area Appraisal shows that this is not the case for Bracknell Gate.

Policy

The following is a summary of some of the key national policies found in the NPPF:

Paragraph 129 says that 'local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset conservation and any aspect of the proposal'.

Paragraph 134 says that 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

Paragraph 135 requires that local planning authorities take into account the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset when determining the application. It says that 'In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'.

Camden's Local Plan deals with heritage in Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy, which requires (amongst other measures) that 'development is of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character'. Camden Development Policy DP25 provides more detailed policy regarding Conservation Areas. It states (amongst other measures) that the Council will 'a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas; b) only permit development...that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the conservation area'.

Proposal

The proposals are for the replacement of the existing balconies and the redundant coal lifts. This is due primarily to the state, and cost of repair, of the existing structures. The new metal balconies will be elegant replacements but will not include the existing coal lifts. This is for both practicality and cost. The lifts no longer operate and are no longer needed. They are in a poor state of repair and the cost of their refurbishment (even remaining in-operable) would be a considerable, and unreasonable, burden on occupiers for no return benefit. The new balconies are also an opportunity to provide a slightly larger amenity space for the upper-floor flats.

It is proposed that the coal lifts can be photographed and this record deposited with the local studies library for posterity and as a record of the building's evolution.

Compliance with policy

In terms of policy, the Conservation Area Appraisal provides a comprehensive review of the significance of the area, including its broad character and appearance and also those buildings regarded as making a positive contribution as required by paragraph 129 of the NPPF and relevant to Camden Policy DP25.

Any potential 'harm' caused by the removal of the coal lifts, according to paragraph 134 of the NPPF, needs to be caused to a 'designated heritage asset' – in this case the Frognal/Redington Conservation Area. It is clear that the proposals will have no impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and therefore *preserves* the character and appearance of the area and cannot be regarded as causing any harm (DP25).

The Conservation Area Appraisal also makes clear that the buildings are not regarded as making a positive contribution to the conservation area in their own right and cannot therefore be considered 'non-designated heritage assets'.

Even if they were, the coal lifts form a very small element of the overall development – which is best appreciated through the art deco detailing to the front elevations – and it would seem entirely unreasonable to expect occupiers to retain and pay considerable cost for the retention of a redundant and un-working feature.

The proposed new balconies will be elegant replacements that have the potential to enhance the existing building. The photographic recording of the coal lifts will mitigate their loss and should be sufficient to ensure this change to the buildings is appropriately documented and retained for posterity.