
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY
The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

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Our ref: 2017/06/009

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Dear Ms Carr

RE: Carlisle House, 8-10 Southampton Row (Grade II, *Bradshaw Gass and Hope*, 1905-6)

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on this application, which was discussed by our Southern Buildings Committee at its most recent meeting. We wish to register our objection to the proposals as they stand.

The Grade II listed Carlisle House was built as a Royal London Friendly Society branch office, incorporating the Tollard Royal Hotel. It forms part of a wider Edwardian streetscape with highly listed neighbouring buildings – both the Central School of Arts and Crafts and Kingsgate House being Grade II*. Indeed, this portion of Southampton Row is really an extension of Kingsway, the prestigious Edwardian redevelopment undertaken by the London County Council to connect Holborn with the Strand. The broad, tree lined avenue was begun in 1898 and was soon lined with grandiose commercial buildings that were built in the following decades.

Bradshaw Gass and Hope designed many nationally important buildings, though given their northern base, buildings in London by the firm are unusual. The monograph *Bradshaw Gass & Hope: The Story of an Architectural Practice* (2007) provides a more in depth understanding of the firm; it also includes a perspective drawing, external elevations and internal elevations of the ground floor that have not been submitted; for ease these are appended at the bottom of this letter. It is probable that there is further material regarding Carlisle House (for example, the other elevations) in the Bradshaw Gass & Hope Archive and the applicant should be required to submit this as part of the application. Considering the impact of the proposed interventions, it is unjustifiable for the scheme not be informed by this accessible material and the cost of this research must also be inconsequential in the context of the overall budget.

Whilst the scale of the proposed rear extension is considered to be broadly acceptable in principle, it is severely let down by the way in which it is connected to the listed building and the palette of materials chosen, which do the former no favours. Firstly, it should not be assumed that the rear elevation is only of limited significance. It is possible that the present unusual steeply pitched roof matches the form of the original roof. The 1905 drainage plans are the only information that we have at present, and

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they are not easy to read, but they do show that the roof originally began at fourth floor level as it does today, and from this point appears to be set back further as the building rises, indicating a steep pitch. This roof type is not without precedent – two Edwardian examples in Manchester offer useful comparisons. The infamous and now demolished York House by H.S Fairhurst and Sons, 1911, is one; the other is the recently listed 58 Richmond Street Manchester (Grade II) and one of the stated reasons for the latter's designation is *"the raked and glazed rear elevation that maximises light without affecting adjacent properties"*. Rights to light also explains the reason for the arrangement at the rear of Carlisle House: behind the offices and hotel was a school building (as seen in the perspective drawing below) until destroyed by a bomb. The school building originally fronted onto Southampton Row, until the road was realigned to line up with the new Kingsway, freeing up the plot that Carlisle House is built on. The school's west facing elevation was therefore its principal façade and we can see that it had numerous tall windows. The curiously steep rake of the rear roof slope would have allowed the most amount of light into the hotel and the school.

We are therefore sceptical about the following statements in the applicants Heritage Statement –

'In addition, the non-original roof scape to the rear, which is not of special interest will be improved' – we contend the roof form is of special interest, unless further research proves otherwise.

'As demonstrated only a small portion of the rear elevation of the listed building is in its near original form and as such this elevation, in relative terms, is much less sensitive to change than the other elevations' – it seems likely that it is in its near original form. The rear elevation of the hotel would also have always been very visible from Fisher Street, Catton Street (then Eagle Street) and the school and is likely to have been given a dignified treatment.

'Restoration and reconfiguration of rear roof form with traditional materials' – there is no restoration in this location.

'The roof form at these two levels [6th and 7th floors] will be greatly enhanced by the introduction of a slate roof with a mansard style configuration to match the mansard with dormers to the rear' – a mansard never existed here (the side elevational drawing shows this).

Link

Notwithstanding these concerns, the size of the link block needs to be minimized in any case – that it is glazed is not mitigation for its bulk; it would still be prominently visible. It should be reduced by two storeys so that there is at least a perceived gap between the two elements, rather than it appearing to crash into the listed building. If this meant that the uppermost floors are not able to be used as hotel accommodation, we would not be persuaded that the harm caused to the listed building would be outweighed by the public benefits of bringing this very small amount of space back into use. The link block would also greatly benefit from a reduction in width; the lifts should be located in the main body of the extension. With the vast majority of the original rear elevation concealed by the extension, it almost appears as though the listed building is subject to a façade retention scheme. The effect is to compromise its integrity and in order to limit the harm, it must be possible for the external envelope of the listed building to be read for what it is. Additionally, the corner turrets at the rear, which are a prominent feature of the original design, have always stood proud of the building line and it is therefore an uncomfortable arrangement for there to be a new structure in such close proximity, as this diminishes their primacy.

Materials

It is not understood why the top floors of the extension are to be clad in such a vibrant brass colour, when it is this part of the building that should be the quietest. It is crucial that the extension does not detract from the listed building, given that it is the latter

that is recognized as nationally important for its special architectural interest. The extension should really seek to be background noise in comparison, to avoid causing harm to the listed building's setting, by competing visually with it.

It would make better sense for precedents to be sought from large rear projections to other Edwardian buildings, study of which is likely to suggest brick as a suitable primary material. For example, the nearby Kodak House (Grade II, *Burnet & Tait*, 1911) at 65 Kingsway is a contemporary Edwardian commercial building that occupies a very similar plot. It is also flanked by two side streets with visible elevations owing to a bend in the road. Here the masonry clad, prestige office building transitions into a subservient (but not without interest) brick rear projection. Paragraph K25 of the Kingsway Conservation Area Statement, which includes the application site, states that '*rear extensions should be as unobtrusive as possible and should not adversely affect the character of the building or the Conservation Area*'. We strongly suggest that looking at precedents found closer to home will produce a much more unobtrusive and successful piece of new architecture that will be better integrated with the host building.

The site demands a nuanced response and this has not been presented. The current design is not well informed and is consequently harmful to the listed building; we recommend that this application is refused or withdrawn for significant amendments. I would be grateful if you could inform me of your decision in due course; we would also welcome the opportunity to comment on any amendments.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Bowring
Conservation Adviser



