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Flats 2, 20 Prince Albert Road NW1 7ST

PROPOSALS IMPACT ASSESSMENT / HERITAGE STATEMENT

CONTENTS

Part I: Report

- Context
- Existing situation and Planning history – the Group
- Ground Floor – original plan form (reception rooms and ‘service annex’ to front)
- Existing situation and Planning history – No. 20 ground floor flat
- Principles of Conversion
- Assessment and Recommendations

Photo documentation

Images 1-3

Part II: Appendices

Appendix 1: Statutory List Entry

Appendix 2: No. 20 existing ground floor plan, elevations and proposed plan

Appendix 3: No. 18 conversion of lg and g flats into single flat (Camden archives)

Appendix 4: No. 18 conversion into single dwelling house /plans (Camden archives)

Appendix 5: No. 18 conversion into single dwelling house /photos (Camden archives)

Appendix 6: No. 18 alteration at lg level /plans (Camden archives)

Appendix 7: No. 19 conversion into 4 flats (Camden archives)

Appendix 8: No. 20 alteration of the ground floor flat / photos (Photos)

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Context

No. 20 Prince Albert Road forms part of a group of 3 linked, semi-detached pairs. The group, nos. 17-22 Prince Albert Road, was listed grade II in 1974 and according to the Statutory List Entry dates in the mid-19th century. It is situated in the Primrose Hill Conservation Area of the London Borough of Camden. The statutory list description is in Appendix 1.

The purpose of this document is to assist the submission of the application for planning permission and listed building consent to allow for internal alteration to the ground floor flat. The author has gathered all information from a chartered and registered architect and a qualified and accredited conservation architect which is fully qualified to provide such advice in the context of the relevant NPPF requirement for Heritage Statements.

Existing situation and Planning history – the Group

Each building in the group consists of lower ground floor, upper ground floor, 1st and 2nd floors and attic. The links are to the lower and upper ground floors only. The group was originally constructed as single dwelling houses. Its planning history as recorded in the Camden Planning web archives suggests relevant past and current uses of the individual buildings being as follows:

No. 17: (possibly) single dwelling house;

No. 18: conversion into 4 flats (1985); conversion of l/g and u/g flats into 1 flat (2004/drawings date) conversion into single dwelling house (2005/drawings date) / all post -1974 listing

No. 19: conversion into 4 flats (1985); conversion into 5 flats (appeal -1990) / post – 1974 listing

No. 20: conversion into 4 flats (1957) / pre-1974 listing

No. 21: single dwelling house

No. 22: hotel

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No 18

Drawings dated 2004 of an approved conversion of an existing lower ground floor and an existing upper floor flat into a single flat, which are in Appendix 4.

This scheme, however, was not implemented. Instead, as archival material shows, the applicants were able to purchase the remaining of the building which they followed up with an application with drawings dated 2005 to convert the building from 4 flats back to single dwelling house use. The 2005 drawings show an existing at the time subdivision into 4 flats as follows: l/g flat; u/g flat; 1st floor flat; 2nd and 3rd floor flat. This subdivision dated in 1985 and extracts from the planning file, of the existing and proposed are in Appendix 6 and photographs from the same file in Appendix 7.

Further alterations at lower ground floor level to create an open plan kitchen and dining area were approved in 2013; extracts from the local planning authority records are in Appendix 8.

No 19

Drawings dated 1985 showing the conversion of the listed building into 4 flats are in Appendix 9.

Ground Floor – original plan form (reception rooms and ‘service annex’ to front)

Expected typology, in situ evidence, and evidence from the Council’s planning records on the individual buildings within the group suggest an original ground floor plan (for no. 20 and the rest of the buildings in the group) consisting of:

Entrance porch and hallway (in link) leading to:

Hallway with Stairs to lower ground floor only (in link) with hallway leading to:

Hallway and Stairs to all floors;

Ancillary room over stairs to lower ground floor (link);

Two principal reception rooms one to the front and one to the rear.

Importantly, the two principal rooms appear to be interconnecting while each having its own separate access from the hallway with the main stairs. Interestingly, the room to the front has two windows, a bay window and a single window, while the room to the rear only has one large tripartite sash window. The two windows in the front room and surviving original ceiling compartmentation at no. 20 and elsewhere in the group appear to suggest the existence of a

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‘service annex’ to the front room, associated with the single window: it could well have been the original intention to enter the reception rooms through the room to the rear and service them through the access to the front room opposite the main stairs by means of a well defined but not necessarily partitioned off ‘service annex’ area. The existing plan form and surviving ceilings (Appendices 2 and 10) confirm this. At no. 20, the former ‘service annex’ is currently occupied by the kitchen and dining area.

As to how the ‘service annex’ may have been separated or not from the main room to the front, a good indication is provided by images from the local authority archival file in Appendix 7 (photo 4 – surviving original / compare with photo 1 – result of subdivision) showing the open plan /ceiling level compartmentation of the stairs to the lower ground floor and suggesting a similar arrangement between the front reception room and its ‘service annex’. Another possibility could be a detail similar to that surviving in the partition between the two reception rooms (Image 1).

Existing situation and Planning history – No. 20 ground floor flat

The existing ground floor flat compartmentation of no. 20 dates back in the 1950s and precedes the listing of the group in 1974.

It has created a two-bedroom flat with the original front reception room being subdivided into kitchen/dining and reception (with kitchen/dining occupying the ‘service annex’ of the previous section) and the room to the rear into the main entrance hall to the flat, a bathroom, master bedroom and corridor giving access to the bedroom and to the remaining of the rear of the flat. The latter consists of a passage with restricted access (under the main stairs to the floors above) leading to a second bedroom over the stairs to the lower ground floor and to a cloakroom under the stairs and access in the same area to a balcony and external stairs to the garden.

Existing floor plans of the ground floor compartmentation are in Appendix 2. Images of the same are in Appendix 10.

Despite the intense subdivision of the reception room to the rear, all of which is easily reversible, original detail appears to have been largely incorporated throughout. In the front room an original fireplace, the undisturbed ceiling and evidence of the original partition detail with the rear reception room provide a good experience of the original intention (Images 1-3).

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Principles of conversion

‘London Terrace Houses 1660-1860: a guide to alterations and extensions’ English Heritage, Feb 1996, contains relevant advice as follows: ‘The domestic plan form of London terrace houses is an important part of their character and special interest. As a general rule the character, proportion, and integrity of the principal rooms at ground and first floor levels ... should be preserved. Elsewhere a greater degree of flexibility may be possible, although the original plan form and features should remain discernible. Any alterations should be reversible.’

‘The division of a large house into a number of separate units may often be acceptable in principle, but it needs to be planned and carried out with care and sensitivity.’

While the conversions of nos. 18 and 19 into 4 flats each in 1985 predate the publication of the English Heritage guidance above, it is worth remembering that English Heritage (created in 1983 following the GLC demise) had powers of direction on all listed building consent applications in London until 2005 when the determination of applications affecting grade II listed buildings was passed on to Local Planning Authorities. It is therefore important to note that listed building consents for the 1985 conversions would have been agreed by English Heritage.

Looking at the approved / implemented plan forms at ground floor level, in each of these conversions it is noticeable that in both schemes the rear reception room was retained intact, whereas the front reception room was subdivided (in its assumed designed break between reception and ‘service annex’ to it – see in previous) to provide a bedroom, bathroom and access / fire escape for the flat in the case of no. 19 and a bedroom, bathroom and study in the case of no. 18. In both cases, one bedroom flats were created. It is important to note that the annotations to the lobby partitioning within the front reception room suggest that these are not full height and that therefore there is no interference with the shape and ceiling of the historic room.

Regarding the effect of the 1950s conversion of no. 20 into flats, most alterations at ground floor level appear to be easily reversible with the exception of the effects of plumbing pipe-work runs of the flat above which can be seen boxed in at the side of the window to the front and at ceiling level above in the ‘service annex’ of the front reception room (see images in Appendix 10).

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Assessment and Recommendations

The existing subdivision of the ground floor plan of no. 20 provides a 2-bedroom / 1 reception accommodation through the subdivision of the main principal room to the rear into an entrance hall, passage to the rear and bedroom. Such subdivision is contrary to published English Heritage advice and in contrast to subdivision carried out post-listing which has left the same room undivided.

The existing subdivision is also characteristic of the period (1950s / pre-listing) and has introduced complete ceiling cornice treatments to all resulting rooms within the reception to the rear and in the 'service annex' area at the front. It is the only such example within the group.

That the in situ evidence of the original opening between the two reception rooms (Image 1) be used to re-instate the original interconnecting relationship of the two reception rooms – this along with the reinstatement of the 'service annex' as a study will also restore the front room to its original form which would be appropriate and beneficial;

The retained 1950s partition so as to provide a master bedroom to be left as is without additions to further establish its presence and the reinstatement of cornices to be such that the original reception room shape /size is discernible.

There is no doubt that such revisions will improve the appreciation of the listed building ground floor interiors by reinstating the front reception room and its relationship with the rear reception room as original and by freeing the fenestration frame of the reception room to the rear from the obstructing later partitioning and the room itself from the existing bathroom and most of the later subdivision. All this is beneficial to the special interest of the listed building and as such should be welcome.

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Image 01



Image 02

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Image 03

