

**DESIGN/ ACCESS/ HERITAGE  
ASSESSMENT**

**21-25 Mecklenburgh Square,  
London**

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**ON BEHALF OF  
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## **1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF STUDY**

1.1 This heritage assessment of 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square, London has been researched and prepared by Ramona Usher BA, MSc, PgDip, PhD (Dr Ramona Usher Conservation) on behalf of CBP Architects.

1.2 The assessment examines the following proposed internal works:

- Removal and replacement of upper staircase – 24 Mecklenburgh Square
- Installation of feature perimeter handrail and removal of perimeter dado rail – 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square

1.3 Information regarding Listed Buildings was obtained from Historic England's *National Heritage List for England*.

1.4 This study has been prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and provides an assessment of the significance of heritage asset on the site and its vicinity. As a result, the assessment enables relevant parties to identify and assess the impact of the proposed internal works.

## **2. PLANNING BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN FRAMEWORK**

2.1 In considering any application for Listed Building Consent, the local planning authority will be guided by current legislation, the policy framework set by government planning policy, by current Local Plan policy and by other material considerations.

### **2.2 Current Legislation**

2.2.1 The applicable legislative framework is summarised as follows:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (P(LBCA)) Act 1990

2.2.2 The P(LBCA) Act provides for the protection of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, and is largely expressed in the planning process through policies in regional and local planning guidance.

2.2.3 The P(LBCA) Act is the primary legislative instrument addressing the treatment of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas through the planning process.

2.2.4 Section 66 of the 1990 Act states that *'...in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'*.

### 2.3 National Planning Policy Framework

2.3.1 In March 2012, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2.3.2 Section 12 of the NPPF, entitled Conserving and enhancing the historic environment provides guidance for planning authorities, property owners, developers and others on the conservation and investigation of heritage assets. Overall, the objectives of Section 12 of the NPPF can be summarised as seeking the:

- Delivery of sustainable development
- Understanding the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits brought by the conservation of the historic environment, and
- Conservation of England's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

2.3.3 Section 12 of the NPPF recognises that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term. Paragraph 128 states that planning decisions should be based on the significance of the heritage asset, and that the level of detail supplied by an applicant should be proportionate to the importance of the asset and should be no more than sufficient to review the potential impact of the proposal upon the significance of that asset.

2.3.4 Heritage Assets are defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as: a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. They include designated heritage assets (as defined in the NPPF) and assets identified by the local planning authority during the process of decision-making or through the plan-making process.

2.3.5 A Designated Heritage Asset comprises a World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area.

2.3.6 Significance is defined as: The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. This interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

2.3.7 In short, government policy provides a framework which:

- Protects nationally important designated Heritage Assets (which include World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Protected Wreck Sites, Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields or Conservation Areas)
- Protects the settings of such designations

## 2.4 Planning Practice Guide

2.4.1 The NPPG is a web-based resource which is to be used in conjunction with the NPPF. It is aimed at planning professionals and prescribes best practice within the planning sector. The relevant section is entitled *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*. The guidance given in this section is effectively a condensed version of the PPS5 Practice Guide and sets out the best practice to applying government policy in the NPPF.

## 2.5 Local Planning Policy

*The Core Strategy 2010 - 2025*

2.5.1 The following Core Strategy policy is considered relevant to these proposals:

CS14 Promoting high quality change and conserving our heritage

*The Council will ensure that Camden's places and buildings are attractive, safe and easy to use by:*

- a) requiring development of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character;*
- b) preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens;*
- c) promoting high quality landscaping and works to streets and public spaces;*
- d) seeking the highest standards of access in all buildings and places and requiring schemes to be designed to be inclusive and accessible;*
- e) protecting important views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster from sites inside and outside the borough and protecting important local views.*

- 2.5.2 The 'Listed Buildings' section of Policy DP25 in Camden Development Policies 2010-2025 is as follows:

Listed buildings

*To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:*

- e) prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;*
- f) only grant consent for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building; and*
- g) not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.*

- 2.5.3 The Camden Local Plan is proposed for adoption in June 2017. Once adopted it will become part of the statutory development plan for the borough and will supersede Camden's Development Policies. The proposed policy relating to Listed Buildings states:

Policy D2 HeritageListed Buildings

To preserve and enhance the borough's listed buildings, we will:

- f. prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;

- g. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and
- h. resist development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building. We will refuse permission for development which results in substantial harm to, or the loss of, a listed building unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all the following apply:
- i. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- j. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- k. conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- l. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.
- 2.5.4 As with Policy DP25 of the Camden Development Policies, Policy D2 does not allow for any harm to be outweighed by a scheme's public benefits.
- 2.6 Therefore, in considering the heritage implications of any application for listed building consent and planning permission, the local planning authority will be guided by and government policy, guidance and legislation, as outlined above.

### **3. SUMMARY OF HERITAGE ASSETS**

- 3.1 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square is a Grade II\* listed building. The list description is as follows:

*Numbers 11-26 and attached railings, Byron Court (number 26), 11-26, Mecklenburgh Square*

*List entry Number: 1113118*

*Grade: II\**

*Date first listed: 10-Jun-1954*

*Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.*

*UID: 477496*

*List entry Description:*

*TQ3082SE MECKLENBURGH SQUARE 798-1/96/1112 (East side) 10/06/54 Nos.11-26 (Consecutive) and attached railings, Byron Court (No.26)*

*GV II\**

*Terrace of 24 houses forming the east side of Mecklenburgh Square. No.26 incorporates former Nos 27-34. c1810-20. By Joseph Kay. Thomas Penthrin built Nos 11-19 & 30-34; George Payne Nos 20-29. Nos 15 and 27-34 rebuilt in facsimile c1950. Multi-coloured stock brick with stucco ground floors. Centre pavilion (Nos 21-25) and end pavilions (Nos 11-15) and (31-34) in stucco. EXTERIOR: formal composition of 4 storeys, basements and Nos 26-33 with C20 dormers. No.23 with large dormer. Mostly 2 windows each. Centre pavilion: ground floors rusticated stucco with round arched doorways with fluted pilaster-jambs and cornice heads (Greek key pattern), fanlights and panelled doors. Centre 5 bays slightly recessed with 4 Greek Ionic columns rising through 1st and 2nd floors, flanked by 3 bays articulated by 4 pilasters. Enriched entablature with projecting cornice at 3rd floor level. Recessed sash windows; ground floor outer bays segmental headed with small panes to edges, 1st floor centre 6 with pedimented heads, outer bays square-headed in shallow round-arched recesses. All 1st floor with cast-iron balconies. Between 1st and 2nd floor outer bays enriched recessed panels with swags reflecting the round-arched windows in the attic storey. Attic storey with moulded pilasters carrying cornice, the centre pilasters terminating in segmental anthemion stops. Blocking course. Outer pavilions: similar but with only 2 Ionic columns, segmental headed ground floor windows and square-headed 1st floor windows. Nos 16-20 & 26-30: round-arched doorways with fluted pilaster-jambs and cornice-heads (Greek key pattern), fanlights and panelled double doors. Doorways to former Nos 26-34 replaced by windows except former No.29, now main entrance to Byron Court. Segmental headed ground floor windows. Upper floors with gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes; 1st floor with cast-iron balconies. Plain stucco entablature at 3rd floor level. Parapets. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with urn finials to areas; Nos 12, 14, 16 and 19 with wrought-iron lamp brackets. HISTORICAL NOTE: No.21 was the residence of RH Tawney, historian, teacher & political writer (GLC plaque). No.15 and Nos 22-25 (consec) were listed on 14/05/74. (Survey of London: Vol. XXIV, King's Cross Neighbourhood (St Pancras part IV): London: -1952: 47-50).*



## 4. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

- 4.1 The Great Fire of London (1666) led to the passing of the Building Acts in 1707, 1709 and 1774, with the objective being to limit the spread of fire. These changed the appearance of London's terraces: the 1707 Act eliminated thick timber cornices; the 1709 Act required new development to set back window frames behind the building line; the 1774 Act consolidated various amendments over the century and controlled decoration on facades more rigidly. The 18<sup>th</sup> century also saw the publication of many Palladian pattern books which prompted the spread of ideas.
- 4.2 The London Building Acts were more strictly enforced after 1774. The Palladian principles of proportion which had governed domestic architecture in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century continued to be applied to almost all houses, but the detailing of terraces/rows and villas became more delicate and more uniform. The uniformity recommended in Palladian pattern books for terraces/rows and squares of private houses was rarely achieved in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, owing to the profiteering of developers. However, the 'palace' façade, in which the centre of a terrace/row is marked by pilasters and a pediment, was increasingly preferred after 1760, not only by architects and theorists but all by speculative builders who found that this new magnificence helped to sell property.<sup>1</sup> In the later 18<sup>th</sup> century terraces windows were longer and glazing bars thinner, grey or stock brick superseded red, and finely detailed decorative ironwork emerged, in addition to rusticated ground floors and stucco dressings applied to brickwork.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.3 London's 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century squares occupied much land, but they offered high status residences facing the centrally placed garden. The building frontages were monumentally conceived, enabling grand architectural effects to be achieved. Neoclassical detailing was the most common style, and the use of painted stucco over brick helped to create the impression of antiquity. Plasterwork, joinery, chimneypieces, decorative wall treatments and furnishings all combined to continue the theme within.<sup>3</sup> Different floors performed different functions, creating a distinct hierarchy of spaces, with the basement

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<sup>1</sup> Calloway, S., 2012. *The Elements of Style. An Encyclopedia of Domestic Architectural Style.*

<sup>2</sup> Historic England, 2011. *Listing Selection Guide - Domestic 2: Town Houses.*

<sup>3</sup> Historic England, 2011. *Listing Selection Guide - Domestic 2: Town Houses.*

being functional, providing storage and food preparation, the ground floor or first floor – the piano nobile – containing the principal reception rooms and often the bedrooms, and attic floor acting as the servants' quarters. As such, the reception rooms and principal bedrooms were quite decorative in terms of timber and plaster finishes, whilst the basement and attic storey had much simpler and functional finishes reflecting the social hierarchy.

4.4 Numbers 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square form part of a terrace of 24 houses which form the east side of Mecklenburgh Square. The terrace was built by different building firms to the design of Joseph Kay, with numbers 20-29 being constructed by George Payne circa 1810-20. The terrace is four storeys in height, set over a basement storey.

4.5 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square comprise the centre pavilion, with the frontage finished in stucco, contrasting with the flanking wings which have a ground floor stucco finish with stock brick completing the upper floors. The ground floors are rusticated stucco with round arched doorways with fluted pilasters and cornice heads, fanlights and timber panelled doors. There are five central bays, the first and second floor are slightly recessed, with four ionic columns rising through these floors. These central bays are flanked on either side by three bays divided by pilasters. The third floor is finished an enriched entablature and projecting cornice. Over this is a recessed attic storey. The windows are recessed, timber multi-pane vertical sliding sashes, painted black. The first floor windows have cast iron balconies. The front boundaries are demarcated by cast iron railings, with black and white tiled steps and landings leading to the ground floor entrances.

4.6 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square forms part of a typical late Georgian terrace/square, overlooking a central garden, and exhibiting Palladian principles of design and ornamentation, with these buildings comprising the typical 'palace' façade.

## **5. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT**

5.1 The proposed works include the following alterations, repairs and remedial works in an attempt to make as safe as possible the staircases for the end users of these buildings, working within the confines of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the NPPF and the Conservation Officer's pre-application response and recommendations:

- Removal and replacement of sections of the upper staircase in 24 Mecklenburgh Square (Plate 1) utilising existing elements if possible of the original staircase, e.g. handrail.
  - Various repairs and reinforcement to all staircases;
  - Installation of a perimeter handrail and removal of perimeter dado rail to all staircases in 21 to 25 Mecklenburgh Square.
- 5.2 These works are detailed in the drawings and plans which accompany this application for Listed Buildings Consent. It should be noted that a number of the proposed works detailed in these plans can be treated as like-for-like repairs, not requiring formal consent, but are detailed in order to inform the overall improved circulation strategy for the listed buildings.
- 5.3 The proposed works have been instigated owing to concerns relating to the high usage of these circulation areas and health and safety concerns.
- 5.4 Traditionally, the basement area of such a Georgian terrace was reserved for functional use, such as the storage of coal, cold storage of food and food preparation. The decoration and ornamentation in such rooms was simple, in keeping with their low status. Staircases, doors, architraves and skirtings were simple in form, with no decorative plasterwork. The attic stories were similarly finished: doors, architraves and skirtings were functional, devoid of ornamentation, and any cornices were of a modest profile, in keeping with the low status of the occupiers, the servants.
- 5.5 In contrast, the principal rooms contained more decorative timberwork and plasterwork. The fireplaces were ornate, and the central staircase a focal feature, rising up through the building, exacerbating its height. Therefore, the proposed alterations consist of alterations to less conspicuous, but nevertheless, important areas of these listed buildings.
- 5.6 22 and 23 Mecklenburgh Square's basement staircase serves the current dining area/ancillary spaces and most pertinently the means of escape. These staircases to 22 and 23, Mecklenburgh Square have been omitted from this application, and will be subject to an independent review and separate Listed Building Consent application.

- 5.7 The staircase located between the second and third floor of 24 Mecklenburgh Square is proposed for repair and poses localised structural and egress problems. The proposed remedial works are outlined in the plans which accompany this application.
- 5.8 The proposed structural remedial works to the existing balustrades to the principal staircases in numbers 21 to 25 Mecklenburgh Square will also address localised structural problems and facilitate safe ingress/ egress and overall use. The existing handrails are functional, but given these buildings are over 200 years old, have been subject to prolonged wear and tear. The proposed perimeter handrail on all staircases is intended to ease pressure on the original balustrades. In order to facilitate the installation of this handrail the dado rail will need to be removed. This dado rail appears to be a modern intervention – it does not have a patina of age, signs of 200 years of wear and tear, nor does it exhibit the application of several layers of paint, all of which would otherwise indicate its originality. The areas behind the dado rail will be made good. Therefore, its removal will not result in harm to the significance of the listed buildings.
- 5.9 Whilst there are certain dispensations in the Building Regulations for such existing situations, Goodenough College is keen to ensure the safety of its staff, users and student body. The proposed alterations and repairs have been considered with full regard for the significance of the listed buildings, and the proposed strengthening works have been kept to a minimum. The proposed perimeter handrails will introduce a new element into the buildings, but the proposed handrails have been carefully designed, with consideration for other similar precedents and interventions in similar high-grade listed buildings. The introduction of these perimeter handrails is also reversible – their introduction will be visually subservient in the overall staircase arrangements, and can be removed with negligible harm to the listed buildings. The remaining repairs, as detailed in the plans and drawing which accompany this application can be treated as repairs, not requiring a formal application for Listed Building Consent.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The NPPF states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected. This Heritage Assessment includes a summary of relevant planning policy and guidance at national and local levels. Particular consideration has been paid to the impact of the remedial works proposals on the Grade II\* listed 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square. This Heritage Assessment provides an assessment of the significance of 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square and the potential impact of the proposed development.
- 6.2 It has found that the proposed remedial/ refurbishment works to the stairs serving the third floor of 24 Mecklenburgh Square, plate 1, re-bedding the vertical balusters within the stone treads / timber staircases , introduction of safety film to identified non safety glass windows, reinforcing of the timber staircases, treads, risers, and introduction of perimeter handrails in 21-25 Mecklenburgh Square will fall well below the 'less than substantial' threshold set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF. This very low level of harm will be demonstrably outweighed by the public benefits of the proposals which include securing the optimum viable use of these listed buildings. The key elements of significance of these listed buildings - their early 19<sup>th</sup> century Palladian form, and function as a 'palace' façade - will not be harmed, nor their inherent relationship with their attendant garden in Mecklenburgh Square.

## **PLATES**



**Plate 1: Third floor stairs, 24 Mecklenburgh Square**