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AUTHOR: Charlotte Evans BA (Hons) MSt (Cantab)

17 John Street, Bloomsbury, London – heritage statement addressing variations to planning and LBC applications 2017/2552/P and 2017/3179/L (granted on 24/08/17)

17 John Street is a Grade II listed building and lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (designated in 1968), Sub Area 10 'Great James Street/Bedford Row'. It is listed as part of a group of buildings forming this stretch of terrace (nos. 10 – 20 consecutive) with attached railings. John Street is in the south-east of Bloomsbury, running north from Theobald's Road to Guilford Street. Building in this area started in 1754 and the upper west side of John Street had been developed by 1760 (nos. 34–36 survive from this earliest development); the remainder was slowly completed by around 1800. The street was named after John Blagrove (carpenter) who was employed by Henry Doughty, a speculative developer of the Doughty Estate.

The Great James Street and Bedford Row sub area was developed during the Georgian and Regency periods under various ownerships, although part of the street pattern was laid out earlier by Nicholas Barbon. The area has a clear street hierarchy structured on a grid layout. Bedford Row, Doughty Street and John Street are wide thoroughfares characterised by larger properties. There is a progression in scale (and grandeur) from Millman Street, through Great James Street to Bedford Row. There is no planned open space in the sub area, although the more formal streets are characterised by regularly spaced street trees, planted at regular intervals in the pavement. The historic built form comprises townhouses built in long terraces with rear mews. This fine grain remains an important characteristic and the continuous building frontage created by the terraces creates a strong sense of enclosure.¹



(L-R) View looking north east towards no. 17 John Street and the listed terrace buildings along this section; view looking north along John Street, with no. 17 visible at the right.

John Street is a wide and grand thoroughfare, comprising mainly three and four storey Georgian terraced houses, many of which are listed and reflect the high quality of the built environment in this area. In the 19th century, many of the buildings were converted into office use for trade associations and charities and corner plots were refaced. 17 John Street is a fine example of a 'first rate' house, built for affluent Georgian families with many still remaining in the street today. Its principal elevation

¹ Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal

on John Street remains largely intact, although the building has undergone various internal alterations which include fixtures and fittings for contemporary living. Much of the original plan form remains but in many areas, internal appearance has been compromised by unsympathetic, later additions, including modern kitchens and bathrooms, and built-in storage.

17 John Street, including this section of listed terrace buildings, have high historical and architectural values for what they tell us about the development of this area of Bloomsbury in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and with striking, formal elevations along the principal thoroughfare of John Street. No. 17 retains well executed details of the period, including elaborate decorative cornices, original staircase and some chimney pieces. The contribution of the setting to the significance of the listed building is also important, and despite having evolved considerably over the centuries, the area remains its distinct urban character of broad streets interspersed by formal squares.

The proposals which are the subject of this planning variation are for the creation of a single storey, L-shaped extension to the rear of the building. The extension will provide much needed recreational space for the family in an area which is currently underutilised. The L-shaped extension will follow the same principles as that for which planning has already been granted and will be a light touch, minimalist design which can be reversible and will not impact the fabric of the listed building. The proposals also include the infill of an existing window at first floor level, in the rear closet wing. Visual inspection and opening up has confirmed that this window has been cut into the existing, historic panelling, and is therefore considered to be a later addition.

Historic England's guide 'London terrace houses 1660-1860' acknowledges the value of the terrace house in the context of London's historical development, and suggests that these buildings can be highly adaptable, if this adaptation is approached sensitively: "The aim should be to minimise the impact on the building while helping the owner to adapt the property to suit reasonable needs". Regarding the addition of rear extensions, it says: "With skill, sensitivity and expertise, rear extensions can often be acceptable, providing they are well related to the original building and are in scale with the building and the space around it... Where a distinct rhythm of rear extensions exists, any new proposals should follow the existing scale and character."



Image extracted from Google maps (for information only) showing the infill extensions to the rear of buildings along this section of John Street.

The extensions to the terrace houses along this stretch of John Street predominantly consist of single storey, full width extensions. The adjacent extensions at Nos. 16 and 18 John Street have roof terraces which occupy the entire floorplate of the extension. The presence of extensive modern development at the rear of the property and with full width extensions and solid boundary treatments at either side of the building, the existing outdoor space feels boxed in and slightly oppressive – which creates an unwelcoming and unused space which would benefit from enhancement and to bring it back into the envelope of the existing living space. The principle of extending grand terrace houses is not new, since they have been forced to adapt to meet their owners needs for centuries and they can reflect the cumulative changes of different ownership and uses which in themselves can add to the special interest of a listed building, reflecting social and individual values and needs.

NPPF (para 60) states that planning decisions should not 'stifle innovation, originality or initiative'. Some will present the opportunity to promote a design intervention that would not have been possible without the listed building to inspire it. Such high-quality work can delight and add to the historic building's interest.

In general, the design and construction of the extension should:

- show an understanding of the heritage significance of the listed building and its setting;
- seek to minimise any harm to the listed building's heritage value or special interest;
- normally play a subordinate role and not dominate the listed building as a result of its scale, mass, form, siting or materials;
- fulfil a function that is in the listed building's long-term interest;
- sustain and add value to the listed building's significance by being of high quality design, craftsmanship and materials.

It is considered that the addition of an L-shaped extension at 17 John Street fulfils a function in the long term interest of the listed building, will not dominate or harm the values of the listed building and will be of high quality design and craftsmanship.



Photograph taken in July 2017 showing the existing space at the rear of no. 17 John Street which is deteriorated and unused by the occupants.



(L-R) Photograph taken in July 2017 showing adjacent rear infill and surrounding modern development; photograph taken in July 2017 showing the boundary treatment between no. 17 John Street and the neighbouring property to the north. A sequence of adjacent rear extensions with roof terraces leave the outdoor space at 17 John Street feeling overlooked, cramped and unwelcoming.

The Camden design guidelines, which are included in the current Local Plan, state that high quality new development that is appropriate for its context can preserve or enhance the Conservation Area. Alterations and extensions can have a detrimental impact either cumulatively or individually on

the character and appearance of the area. Examples within the area include:

- Inappropriate external painting, cleaning and pointing of brickwork.
- Inappropriate design of extensions including the size and proportions of openings.
- The use of inappropriate materials/ inappropriately detailed doors and windows.
- Extensions of excessive scale, massing or height.

It is considered that the addition of an L-shaped extension would have a moderate impact on the listed building as the addition would be readily noticeable and alter the appearance of the existing outside space. The extension has been designed so that the existing rear elevation remains legible, there is minimal impact on the existing historic fabric, and it is a clearly discernible and contemporary addition. It does not dominate the parent building in bulk, scale, materials or design and is intended as a 'light touch', with the potential of being reversible, without damaging the fabric or appearance of the listed building, in the future. The L shaped extension will offer some outside space, with the lightwell being retained and the provision of a roof terrace on part of the proposed extension roof. Boundary treatments have been designed as softly as possible, so that there is a natural, visual transience between the listed building and the surroundings. The proposed external works (for which planning approval has been granted) will also improve the existing rear elevation of the property, which is currently made unattractive by the numerous uPVC soil pipes and low-quality, timber clad extension. Structural alterations required as part of the proposed scheme have been minimised, with very few amendments made to the existing built fabric. The support for the proposed extension has been designed to mitigate any impact on the historic vaults at the rear LGF level, and instead the extension is supported in the location of recent structural alterations. On balance, the proposal seeks to utilise as much of the outside space as possible which is currently unused by the occupants, with an unwelcoming and hedged-in feeling, due to the extent of surrounding massing from modern development and adjacent extensions. Sensitive re-design of this space with a modern, light touch extension that fully utilises this area and provides pleasant living space for the occupants would be a beneficial change, and therefore on balance, with the positive changes that the whole scheme offers, the residual effect is considered to be moderate beneficial. (Applications 2017/2552/P and 2017/3179/L (granted 24/08/17) offer numerous positive benefits which will improve and enhance the listed building.)

The L-shaped extension will have a negligible impact on setting, views and the conservation area as a whole. It will be contained within the existing exterior footprint and will be single storey. This addition will not impact key designated views within the conservation area or metropolitan views. This listed terrace of buildings along John Street currently comprises as series of full width rear extensions, adjacent to modern development directly to the east. The addition of a L-shaped extension at 17 John Street will not compromise or seek to devalue the surrounding listed buildings, their settings or the conservation area. On balance, the effect is considered to be nil.

A primary consideration in the long-term conservation of historic buildings is that they should, where practical, remain in active use, and that in most cases, the most appropriate use is that for which the building was originally designed. 17 John Street was designed and built as a grand terrace house for residential use. Inevitably, the building has been forced to adapt over the centuries to suit its occupants and whilst there is some legibility to the historic layout and features of interest, some of these changes have been less sympathetic to the listed building.

Overall, the proposals seek to establish a better architectural cohesion to the house, which will adapt existing unused space and create a well-considered distinction between historic fabric and modern additions and adaptations. Redundant spaces which detract from the appearance of the listed building should be improved - in this instance, the addition of an L-shaped extension at the rear of 17 John Street will seek to transform the house into a practical and enjoyable family home for the occupiers and for future generations.