

**81 GOWER STREET  
LONDON  
WC1B**

**Heritage Assessment of proposed alterations**



August 2017

## **1.0 Scope**

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to accompany a listed building application for 81 Gower Street to include restoration works, modifications and the installation of new services including cooling and heating.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Sean Emmett who is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. It is based on a desk- top study of the building, the listing description, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement.

## **2.0 Location**

- 2.1 The site is located on the west side of Gower Street, near the junction of Torrington Place.
- 2.2 It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is described as being within Sub-Area 5. Bedford Square/Gower Street is described as follows:

The west side of the street is characterised by the repeated yellow stock brick fronts with tuck pointing, fenestration pattern, window detailing, the frontage railings, stucco banding and parapets, chimney stacks and pots, and the shared height of the threestorey blocks with mansard roofs (with the exceptions of Nos 25, 39, 91 and 103 which are of four stories). The most notable variation is the treatment of doorways.

5.68 Whereas the street was originally entirely residential, its uses now consist of a combination of university halls of residence, other educational uses, hotels and offices (many of the university buildings are situated on the east side of the street, which falls in Sub Area 3). There are also a few townhouses which have been converted to flats, and an increasing but small number returning to single family dwellings.

## **3.0 Background and description**

- 3.1 81 Gower Street is a mid terraced property having been constructed between 1780 and 1820. It is understood that all of the buildings within the terrace are Grade II listed, being an excellent example of planned systematic development. The developers were under strict contractual controls over issues such as dimensions, materials and surfacing imposed by the Bedford Estates. Internally the properties in the terrace are configured differently, partly as a result of the initial layout being set by the first leaseholder and partly as a result of subsequent alterations.
- 3.2 The building facades had to keep to a regular format with an emphasis on uniformity although there are some minor differences.
- 3.3 The coherent appearance has justified the listing of all the buildings as Grade II.
- 3.4 The property is currently leased to two separate occupiers, which expires at the end of 2017. The longest of these two leases was for a period of 10 years having commenced in November 2017.
- 3.5 81 Gower Street is of a standard layout on four main floors with a basement below. The main frontage faces Gower Street, whereas the rear faces Ridgemount Gardens and a private strip of recreational

space.

- 3.6 There are various historic planning application although none of them have resulted in significant alterations to the property. This includes three applications for change of use, plus the introduction of secondary glazing.

#### **4.0 Significance**

- 4.1 The building in common with all of the properties on the street is listed grade II The listing description states that:

Terrace of 18 houses. Nos 51-59 built 1786; Nos 61-85, 1787. Darkened yellow stock brick. Stucco band at ground floor level and to 1st floor sills. Slated mansard roofs with dormers. 3 storeys, attics and basements. Nos 65, 67 & 73, 4 storeys. 3 windows each. Entrances with stucco surrounds with pilasters and dentil cornices; alternating round and segmental-arched doorways with fanlights and panelled doors. Gauged brick flat arches to recessed sash windows, most with original glazing bars. Ground and 1st floor windows with bracketed sills and cast-iron window guards. Nos 65 & 67 ground floor windows in segmental-arched recesses with stucco archivolt, impost and keys. Stone dentil cornices; Nos 65, 67 & 73 cornices at 3rd floor level. Parapets. INTERIORS: not inspected. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings, mostly with urn finials, to areas.

- 4.2 Internally the joinery items, such as the doors, architraves, skirting boards and windows & associated shutters are of significance. The decorative items, such as the cornices are decorative and of importance although the detail has been lost either by way of historic damage or excessive paint build up.
- 4.3 For the Conservation Area the significance of the building is, as noted in 4.1, its relationship to Bedford Square.

#### **5.0 Proposals**

- 5.1 The proposals for refurbishment and for the inclusion of comfort cooling are set out in the Design and Access Statements for both aspects appended to this application.
- 5.2 For the purposes of this Heritage Assessment they can be summarised as follows. Removal of existing kitchen fittings, upgrading of lavatories previously modernised, upgrading of services as necessary, removal of basement partition and construction of demountable partitions to accommodate shower facilities, the renewal of ironmongery and redecoration. It also includes the provision of a service riser.
- 5.3 For the comfort cooling the work entails the removal of redundant boilers, radiators and redundant pipework combined with the installation of new units internally in purpose made joinery units. The condenser units will be installed within the rear light well and as confirmed in the Design and Access Statement will not be visible from street level or from the back garden of the adjoining properties.
- 5.4 Externally the only changes will be a new entry phone plate by the front door and the provision of the condenser units set out above.

5.5 Thus the proposals do not affect the external appearance of the building as seen from both Bayley Street and the wider Square.

## **6.0 Assessment**

6.1 None of the proposals has an adverse effect on the front elevation of the building which, as described above, is of particular significance: therefore they do not adversely affect the significance of the exterior of the listed building, nor the adjoining listed buildings, nor the Conservation Area.

6.2 The minor demolition work will result in minimal loss of historic fabric and is not considered to be significant. The location of the new service riser has been carefully chosen to reduce the impact. By setting it back from the front face the delineation of the chimney is still maintain and replicating the cornice will ensure it is not visually intrusive.

6.3 The installation of cooling units is beneficial in meeting modern comfort standards with the least intervention in the building and in a way which is fully reversible. This complies with the objectives of the NPPF in achieving a sustainable building which despite large south facing windows can maintain reasonable environmental standards while at the same time conserving the heritage asset.

6.4 Upgrading the lavatory accommodation only affects modern additions / fittings, having been installed during the 1990s, and will bring these up to the required modern standard.

6.5 In summary it is considered that the proposals comply with both national and local guidance on the protection of designated heritage assets and the conservation area while ensuring that the building provides a sustainable asset.

**Sean Emmett**  
**August 2017**