

**55 GOWER STREET
LONDON
WC1E 6HQ**

Heritage Assessment of proposed alterations



August 2017

1.0 Scope

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to accompany a listed building application for 55 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 Chenies Street.
- 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 three-story 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 55 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 be kept 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 Ronaldsons Solicitors LLP and it is understood that they have been in occupation since the 1970s. The tenant has chosen to terminate their lease, returning the property to the Bedford Estates.
- 3.5 55 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 is a single planning application on Camden's records dated 22 December 1977. The existing plans are available which shows the internal configuration at this date. There are no proposed plans available on Camden's planning register, however The Estate hold drawing dating back from this period, which shows various internal changes.

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 Most of the internal joinery items have been historically lost. The majority of the original panel doors have been replaced with modern flush fire doors. The cornices have also been replaced in a non-original profile. The original double hung sash windows remain, however the internal shutters have been lost.
- 4.3 The internal layout has changed somewhat from the original configuration. The plans held by Camden Council show the original configuration in the 1970s, which shows the ground floor primary spine partition not being present and the separating wall being aligned with the chimney breast. The wall has been reinstated into its original position; however this is now a modern plasterboard stud partition. Demountable partitions have also been introduced throughout, providing small office spaces.
- 4.4 For the Conservation Area the significance of the building is, as noted in 4.1, its relationship to the terrace of properties.

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. Upgrading of lavatories and kitchen facilities previously modernised, upgrading of services as necessary, removal of stud partitions reinstating to a more typical layout, formation of traditional door opening between the front principle rooms and the adjoining rear room, 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 Gower Street or the wider area.

6.0 Assessment

- 6.1 None of the proposals have 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 majority of the internal demolition work relates to non-original demountable partitions and generally speaking the layout will be reverted to its original form, improving the historic value.
- 6.3 The introduction of openings between the front principle rooms and the rear rooms on the ground and 3 upper floors is a common introduction and will not materially affect the form. The openings will include the introduction of non standard height paneled doors of traditional design, as per the drawings contained within the application. The openings will be set down from the ceiling and the original architrave will not be disturbed. Architraves will be installed of a profile to match the original. The plans held by The Estate show that most of these spine walls have either been replaced in modern construction, or historic openings have been infilled.
- 6.4 Increasing the opening between the hallway and the front principle room is not a traditional alteration, however given that the opening already exist the widening of it does not have a significant impact. The opening will be set down from the original ceiling and therefore easily identified. This could also be reinstated at a later date if required.
- 6.5 The enlargement of the existing service riser to accommodate the new services will result in a section of cornice being removed, however the cornice does not appear to be original. New mouldings will be taken and new sections of cornice will be fabricated to match both the profile and the material.
- 6.6 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 being located on a busy highway, can maintain reasonable environmental standards while at the same time conserving the heritage asset.
- 6.7 Upgrading the lavatory and kitchen facilities only affects modern additions / fittings, having been installed during earlier alterations, and will bring these

up to the required modern standard.

- 6.8 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
September 2017