

Listed Building Consent Application for the White House Hotel

January 2018

Minor amendments to previous Listed Building Application 2017/2840/L approved on 29th June 2017.

Melia White House Hotel Historic Building Report

To be read in connection and as amendment to the previous Historic Building Report issued for the LBC 2017/2840/L

Commentary on the Proposals and description of the amendments.

The amendments to the proposals involve the internal refurbishment of the ground floor of the Melia White House Hotel, focusing on the two northern wings.

One new restaurant would be located in the north-east wing, replacing an existing restaurant, conference room and kitchen. This would result in the removal of the main corridor and several modern partition walls to create one large open-plan area, in addition to a small office and distribution hall along the south wall.

The original plan form of this wing has largely been lost, apart from the retention of the corridor. The corridor has, however, been altered. It no longer spans the full width of the wing and its original door openings, which originally served individual flats, have been infilled. It is unclear if sections of the corridor walls date from 1935 or were rebuilt later in the century.

Nevertheless, this fabric is of limited interest. The loss of the corridor would therefore have a very limited impact on the significance of the listed building, which primarily lies in its overall star-shaped plan and external façades. An echo of the original form of the corridor would however be preserved with the retention of the flanking risers and columns, as well as the insertion of a strip of suspended ceiling following the line of the original corridor.

The modern conference rooms along the east side of the north-west wing would be replaced by an open area with tables and chairs, forming an extension to the restaurant area, with a new reception area to the south. The modern partition walls in the business centre on the west side of this wing would also be removed to create a larger room. These alterations would have negligible impact on the significance of the building as the plan form of this wing has been substantially altered and the works mostly involve the removal of modern moveable partition walls.

The modern reception area in the north apex would also be removed. To the north an open area adjacent to the Longford Street entrance would serve the new restaurant (north-east wing) and new reception area (north-west wing). This would have no impact on the significance of the listed building.

The low-quality traditional-style interior decorative scheme would largely be replaced and updated with a more streamlined interior design ethic that would be more in keeping with the original appearance and 1930s date of the building. Although most of the suspended ceilings will be retained due to the works would include the replacement of the suspended ceilings and cornices in some areas.

The modern floors would be replaced by a combination of marble, and timber flooring, depending on the location.

New doors would either be timber or glass, depending on their location. The existing wall panelling would be retained and painted white wash to improve its appearance, while the walls and columns of the restaurant area would be faced in marble, with tiling to its back wall. Where new walls are proposed white washed timber panelling and light lacquered skirting would be installed to match the existing.

Overall these works would improve the internal appearance of the building, thus enhancing its significance.

Justification of the Proposals

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the legislative basis for decision making on applications that relate to the historic environment. Section 66 of the Act imposes a statutory duty upon local planning authorities to consider the impact of proposals upon listed buildings and their setting, and also to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the special architectural or historic interest of listed buildings.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012) has, however, crystallised previous policy approaches to the historic environment. At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and it emphasises the need to take account of the pros and cons of any proposal to alter and adapt buildings of 'special' architectural and historical interest. Following on from this, the NPPF states that any 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of a heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing the optimum viable use of a designated heritage asset (NPPF para 134 – see appendix).

The removal of the corridor in the north-east wing could, at worst, be said to cause very much 'less than substantial' harm to the significance of the building due to the loss of an element of the original plan form. However, as outlined above, this wing has been substantially altered and the corridor only represents a fragment of the original plan form.

The NPPF places a particular emphasis on having a balanced judgement as to the scale of harm or loss verses the significance of the heritage asset. On balance, any perceived harm would be out-weighed by the public benefits of the proposals.

The proposals would offer the following heritage benefits:

- the introduction of a more appropriately designed entrance door to the north-east wing;
- the general upgrade and refurbishment of the dated interior.

Conclusion

In accordance with the statutory duties outlined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building would be preserved by the proposed works. In terms of the National Planning Policy Framework, it is considered that these works would enhance the significance of the listed building. The proposals are, therefore, considered to be acceptable in heritage terms.