

## Heritage Assessment



## Vernon House, St. Mark's Square, London

On behalf of SAV Group

May 2018

Project Ref: 3970

Project Number:	3970
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Date:	May 2018
Document version	M:\HC\Projects\Projects 3501-4000\3901 - 4000\3970 - Vernon House, Regent's Park Road\Reports\2018 05 17 Vernon House Communal Garden Room Heritage Assessment AMENDED.docx

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This heritage assessment has been written and prepared by Heritage Collective on behalf of SAV Group. It relates to a grade II listed building known as Vernon House, built circa 1860. Vernon House was listed grade II on 14 May 1974. The site in question comprises numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the terrace on St. Mark's Square, and it should be noted that numbers 9, 10 and 11 St. Mark's Square were also part of Vernon House until 1996 at which point they were returned to use as single dwellings. The listed building is officially described as follows (the listing description has not been updated since 9, 10, 11 St. Mark's Square were returned to use as single dwellings):

*"Terrace, formerly of 8 houses, now converted to one building. c1860, altered. Stucco with rusticated ground floor and quoins. 4 storeys and basements; projecting end bays, left hand with extra attic storey. Symmetrical facade of 13 windows and 3-window left hand return. Prostyle Doric porticoes with dentil entablatures continuing across and around the buildings; doorways of former Nos 5 (on left return), 6 and 10 with pilaster-jambs carrying cornice heads, sidelights, fanlights and half glazed doors. Other doorways converted to windows. Tripartite ground floor sashes, most with cast-iron window guards; projecting left hand bay with canted bay window and cast-iron window guard. 2nd floor sashes architraved with console bracketed segmental pediments and continuous cast-iron balconies; projecting left hand bay with canted bay window and balcony. 2nd floor, architraved sashes with console bracketed cornices; 3rd floor, architraved sashes with keystones. Projecting left hand bay with tripartite sashes to 3rd, 4th and attic storeys; 2nd floor with console bracketed cornice. Simplified dentil entablature with console bracketed cornice and blocking course. INTERIOR: not inspected."*

- 1.2 The terrace stands opposite St. Mark's Church, a grade II listed church built 1851-2, with mid-20<sup>th</sup> century interiors. There are a number of listed buildings in the vicinity of 5-8 St. Mark's Square. These comprise (all grade II): 16 Prince Albert Road, 17-22 Prince Albert Road, 1 St. Mark's Square, 2 and 3 St. Mark's Square, and 36 Regents Park Road – all of which are stucco fronted mid-19<sup>th</sup> century semi-detached villas. Number 10 Regents Park Road was designed by Erno Goldfinger, and constructed in 1954-56 on a mid-terrace bomb damage site. The Grafton Bridge over the Grand Union Canal is another grade II listed asset in the vicinity of the site in question.

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- 1.3 The site in question is predominantly surrounded by other housing of a similar age and style. To the south of the site is St. Marks Church, and to the east (next to number 11 St. Mark's Square) is the Grand Union Canal.
- 1.4 The site is within the Primrose Hill Conservation Area.
- 1.5 This report accompanies planning application for a proposed communal garden room at the rear of the site.
- 1.6 This heritage assessment describes the significance of the heritage assets and assesses the potential impact of change on their significance.
- 1.7 Site visits were undertaken on 5 January and 17 April 2018.

## **2.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE**

- 2.1 The decision maker is required by sections 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building and its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. There is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm the special interest of the listed building, though the presumption will plainly be lessened if the harm is less than substantial within the meaning in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as is explained further below.
- 2.2 There is a broadly similar duty on respect of the preservation of the character and appearance of a conservation area in section 72(1) of the Act.
- 2.3 Harm is defined by Historic England as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.4 The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF as being made up of four main constituents - architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. The setting of the heritage asset can also contribute to its significance.
- 2.5 The assessment of significance (and the assessment of impact) must be made with primary reference to the four main elements of special significance identified in the NPPF.
- 2.6 The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of the heritage asset to be considered in terms of either “substantial harm” or “less than substantial harm” as described within paragraphs 132 to 134 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and recent case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly English Heritage. The relevant guidance is in paragraph 84 of Conservation Principles 2008.

- 2.7 Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset when considering applications that affect its significance.
- 2.8 This assessment is confined to the significance of the heritage assets and the impact of change on that significance. It does not address the planning balance in which public benefit is weighed against the degree of harm, if any.

## **Local Policy and Guidance**

- 2.9 In the Camden Local Plan the policy relating to heritage assets is contained in paragraphs D2 a–k. These policy items coordinate with the relevant items contained in the NPPF and the Act, as described above.

## 3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HERITAGE ASSETS

### Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter of the assessment identifies the significance of the designated heritage assets according to the guidelines in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

### Vernon House, 5-8 St. Mark's Square, London.

- 3.2 Vernon House (5-11 St. Mark's Square) was listed grade II on 14 May 1974. The list description has not been updated to reflect the subdivision and conversion of numbers 9-11 as single dwellings.
- 3.3 In 1840 the Southampton Estate was sold in freehold parcels for development. The sale map shows the expectation for a grand estate populated by detached and semi-detached villas in generous gardens. This layout is largely reflected in the street pattern of the area at present, though with a greater range of accommodation types than first drafted on the sale map.
- 3.4 Detached and semi-detached villas were the most common building types of the late 1840s, but the 'grand terrace compositions' (such as 5-11 St. Mark's Square) incorporated a density that had not originally been envisaged for the area. By 1870 the estate was almost completely developed.
- 3.5 When it was first built the terrace would have consisted of basement level plus four floors. It is not clear when the mansard roof accommodation was added, but is thought to be mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 3.6 Until the electrification of the nearby railway line in the 1970s, the area had a poor environmental quality, and demand for grand residences was not as high as it had been. Accordingly, many large single dwellings were converted into multiple residences. The record of conversion for Vernon House has not been located, but it is possible that at the time of these works, the mansard roof extension was also added.
- 3.7 Architectural interest: Vernon House was built circa 1860, at a period of rapid development in the area. Originally built as a terrace of 8 houses, following the



prevailing local use of stucco, with rusticated ground floor and quoins. The building is 5 storeys high (one of which is in the mansard roof) and basements; the projecting western end bay has an extra attic storey. The façade is symmetrical with 13 windows and a 3-window left hand return. The entries are emphasised with Prostyle Doric porticoes with dentil entablatures which continue across and around the buildings. The doorways of number 5 (on left return), 6 and 10 have the best surviving examples of pilaster-jambs carrying cornice heads, sidelights, fanlights and half glazed doors among the terrace. The ground floor windows are tripartite sashes, most with original cast-iron window guards. The projecting left hand bay has a canted bay window and cast-iron window guard. The second floor sash windows are architraved with console bracketed segmental pediments and continuous cast-iron balconies; with the projecting left hand bay with canted bay window and balcony. The third floor windows are, architraved sashes with keystones. The projecting left hand bay features tripartite sashes to third, fourth and attic storeys; while the second floor has a console bracketed cornice. The interiors have been substantially altered in the process of reconfiguration, with the original floor plan largely illegible through many modern partitions dividing the original room volumes, and suspended ceilings featuring prominently throughout the building.

- 3.8 Historic interest: Vernon House has not been attributed to a particular architect. There is an illustrative link to the morphology of the area, as the 'grand terrace' model is a clear departure from the previously popular detached and semi-detached villas of the area in the 1840s-1850s, showing the changing perspectives on density and also how the area has developed over time. The history of conversion and re-conversion of the building shows how the site has changed over time, and how attitudes to the area have also changed.
- 3.9 Artistic interest: The building is visually distinctive as a large, complete terrace running between Princess Road and the Grand Union Canal. The decorative detail adds interest, however it is not so unique as to possess more than a moderate amount of artistic interest.
- 3.10 Archaeological interest: Vernon House is not of intrinsic archaeological interest.
- 3.11 Initial assessment of significance: Vernon House is of special architectural and historic interest. Its significance is largely derived from its principal front elevation and contribution to the local street-scene. Internally, there is little

remaining original detail, and even the plan form has been consistently obscured throughout. It retains its historical value and is of medium significance.

## **Primrose Hill Conservation Area**

- 3.12 5-8 St. Mark's Square falls within the boundary of the Primrose Hill Conservation Area. The conservation area was designated in October 1971, and extended in June 1985. The conservation area statement was adopted in December 2000. The conservation area is divided into four sub-areas, of which the site in question is in sub-area 1: *Regent's Park Road South*.
- 3.13 The conservation area is generally residential in character, comprising a series of well laid out Victorian terraces. It is punctuated with local industries, shops and pubs.
- 3.14 Sub-area 1 of the conservation area is largely flat, with a small incline from south-east to north-west. It is neighboured to the west by Primrose Hill, and bounded on the south by Regents Park and London Zoo, Regent's Canal to the north-west and the railway line to the north. The sub-area is characterised by Italianate Villas lining principal streets, with generous set-backs and mature street trees giving the area a leafy character. Three to four storey Italianate villas are the primary typology in the area, with raised ground floors and numerous decorative features. The villas are generally semi-detached or in terraces, and most commonly have stucco fronts, rusticated on lower floors.
- 3.15 St. Mark's Square is referred to in the conservation area statement as one of two 'grand terraces' in the area, and makes a positive contribution to both the immediate street-scene and wider conservation area.

## 4.0 POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON SIGNIFICANCE

### The application proposal.

- 4.1 Vernon House will remain in residential use.
- 4.2 The proposed scheme is for a single storey communal garden room to the rear of the site.
- 4.3 As detailed on drawings 17023\_PL3\_101 (site plan), 17023\_PL3\_105 (garden plan), 17023\_PL3\_140 and 17023\_PL3\_141 (sections) the proposed communal garden room makes an unobtrusive addition to the garden space, and the use of a green roof and additional screening helps the communal garden room further recede into its garden setting. The retention of trees along the western perimeter, and trellis with climbing plants also helps screen the garden and garden room from properties in the immediate vicinity.

### Effects on the listed building

- 4.4 Impact on Architectural interest: The architectural interest of the building is best understood through the front façade of the terrace. The proposal for a subservient communal garden room with no loss of original fabric, will therefore have a negligible effect on the architectural significance of the building.
- 4.5 Impact on Historic interest: The proposed changes will not affect the historic interest of the building. The continued residential use will retain the historic connection with the original domestic function of the building.
- 4.6 Impact on Artistic interest: There will be no impact on the artistic interest of the building. The external elevations will remain unchanged.
- 4.7 Impact on Archaeological interest: There will be no effect on the building's archaeological interest.

## Effects on Primrose Hill Conservation Area

- 4.8 The proposed scheme for the communal garden room has been designed with sensitive regard for the special interest of the host building, and will be a subservient addition to the site. The character and appearance of the conservation area will be preserved for the purposes of the decision maker's duty under section 72(1) of the Act.

## Summary of impacts

- 4.9 Consideration of change and harm: The addition of a communal garden room to the rear of the site will have a negligible impact on the significance of the building. The proposed communal garden room has been designed sensitively to respond to the context of the garden, the listed host building and the conservation area.
- 4.10 Proportionality and professional judgment: The application of a proportional approach and the use of professional judgement confirm that the application of the methodology is consistent with the overall assessment of the effects, which are neutral and will not cause harm.
- 4.11 Overall conclusion: Vernon House is a designated heritage asset of **medium significance** which will be the subject of **negligible** change resulting in a **neutral** impact. The listed building and conservation area will be preserved for the purposes of the decision maker's duty under sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Act.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Built circa 1860, the listed terrace was part of the rapid development of Primrose Hill at the time, brought on in part by the presence of the railway terminating at Euston and by the sale of land from the Southampton Estate. The building used the popular stucco finish of the area, but was one of the 'grand terraces' which diverged from the more popular detached and semi-detached typology which initially characterised the area.
- 5.2 The building is typical of many in the area which came to the point where it could not sustain use as a single family dwelling, and it was therefore divided into multiple accommodation. The fact that three of the eight buildings in the terrace were returned to single family dwellings in 1996 shows the changing fortunes of the area over time. Its changes of use have resulted in significant alterations and the loss of interior details and legibility of original plan form. It makes a positive contribution to the street scene and the conservation area.
- 5.3 The effect of the proposed addition of a single storey communal garden room to the site is **not harmful** for the purposes of policy D2 of the Camden Local Plan.
- 5.4 The character and appearance of Primrose Hill Conservation Area will be **preserved**, for the purposes of the duty in section 72(1) of the Act.
- 5.5 There will be no impact to the fabric of the listed building, and negligible change to the setting of the building, resulting in **no harm** for the purposes of the duty in sections 66(1) of the Act. Paragraphs 133 and 134 of the NPPF are therefore not engaged.