

**BEDFORD SQUARE GARDENS  
LONDON  
WC1B 3HH**

**Heritage Assessment of Proposed Works**



April 2018

## **1.0 Scope**

- 1.1 This assessment has been prepared to accompany a listed building application for Bedford Square Gardens, which extends to the excavation and installation of a fully submerged water tank and pressurisation unit to serve the existing ring main of water services along with the associated power to the pressurisation unit, including all necessary services. Installation of a cloud based fob access control system to the gates and new lighting.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared by Matt Nixon, a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and based on a desk-top study of the garden, the listing description and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area draft statement.

## **2.0 Location**

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

Bedford Square is the finest surviving Georgian square in London, laid out between 1775 and 1780 as a show-piece for the next phase of the Bedford Estate. Despite the success of Bloomsbury Square, the Earls of Bedford had been slow to continue developing. The fourth duke eventually drew up the plans for Bedford Square, and after his death, his widow forged ahead with the building.

The square's architect, Thomas Leverton (1743-1824), lived at No. 13 from 1795 until his death. His design was notable for the 'palace front', used on each side to make the terraced houses look like a single country mansion, and was much copied.

## **3.0 Background and description**

- 3.1 Late C18 private square, forming part of the Bedford Estate, re-landscaped in the 1870s. By the end of the C17 the Russell family owned extensive estates in London, including that of Bloomsbury, a large area now bounded by Tottenham Court Road to the west, New Oxford Street to the south, Euston Road to the north, and Woburn Place and Southampton Row to the east.
- 3.2 The Bloomsbury Estate was developed from 1660s to the 1850s. In the first phase Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street were laid out. In 1723 the Bloomsbury Estate became part of the Bedford Estate. By Rocque's survey of 1762 the 'New Road' (Euston Road) had been laid out, enclosing the Estate to the north, but the land to the south remained largely undeveloped as Lamb's Conduit Fields. In 1776 building agreements were granted for Bedford Square and a second phase of the Bloomsbury Estate development started, transforming the pasture fields into a planned estate. The Square became the focal point of a new grid of streets to the west, north and south and although

this was to take eighty years to complete, the design was harmonious and ensured the unity of the whole. The overall plan of the Estate was based on the existing pattern of closes and field boundaries, hence the variations in the size and shapes of the squares.

- 3.3 Bedford Square was built between 1775 and 1780 and was probably the work of Thomas Leverton, as well as the builder/contractors William Scott and Robert Grews. Each side of the Square was treated as a single unit. The houses were plain brick with wrought-iron balconies to the first-floor windows and the doors were decorated with Coade stone. The central house on each side was stuccoed, pedimented and had a pilastered five-bay centre. The Square was the first garden square with an imposed architectural uniformity and it set the style for garden squares in London through the late C18 and early C19.
- 3.4 The Duke of Bedford's Trustees undertook to make the garden and lay out the surrounding roadway but the work was carried out by Scott and Grews, under the direction of Robert Palmer, the chief agent of the fourth Duke. The layout in the C19 (as seen in Hewitt's Plan of the Bloomsbury Estate, c 1820s and the 1st edition OS map of 1870) consisted of a perimeter shrubbery and path, with serpentine paths leading from the west, north, east and south to a central feature (planting in the early C19 and a hexagonal pavilion by 1870). In the late C19 the design was changed to the present one, which involved moving the pavilion to the west of the garden and removing the paths that crossed the centre. These changes required little alteration to the planting.
- 3.5 The Bloomsbury Estate was enclosed with a system of gates, which were erected in the early to mid C19 to guarantee the residents protection and privacy.

The gates and lodges were removed between 1891 and 1893; those protecting Bedford Square in 1893. Bedford Square residents have included: Lord Eldon, the Lord Chancellor (whose daughter eloped with G S Repton, son of Humphry Repton who designed the neighbouring Bloomsbury and Russell Squares); Thomas Leverton, the architect of the square; the second Duke of Devonshire; William Butterfield, architect; and H H Asquith, Prime Minister. Most of the houses in the Square are now offices. The houses in the Square (Nos.1-54) are all intact and listed grade I.

#### **4.0 Significance**

- 4.1 The listing description states that:
- 4.2 LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Bedford Square, 1ha, is located to the east of Tottenham Court Road and west of the British Museum, in Bloomsbury. The garden, which is on level ground, is enclosed by late C18 cast-iron railings with spearhead finials (listed grade II with the gates). The gardens and railings, both in an oval shape, are surrounded by the buildings of the Square, which are on a rectangular plan. Gower Street and Bloomsbury Street run down the east side of the Square. Bayley Street runs east/west from the

north-west corner of the Square, connecting it to Tottenham Court Road.

- 4.3 ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are entrances to the gardens on the north and south sides through late C18 gates with wrought-iron overthrows (listed grade II with the railings).
- 4.4 GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The centre of the gardens consists of an oval of lawn surrounded by a perimeter path. Between the perimeter path and the railings there are shrubberies, punctuated by small areas of grass, each set with a mature plane tree. Opposite these grassy openings are internal shrub groups on the inner side of the perimeter path. These maintain privacy but because all the shrubbery groups are pierced, views can be glimpsed into and out of the gardens, and from the perimeter path into the centre of the gardens. The shrub groups include laurustinus, holly, laurel, privet and sorbus.
- 4.5 Further mature plane trees are thinly scattered across the lawn and within the shrubberies and beds. A hexagonal pavilion (restored) is placed on the inside of the perimeter path to the west. This is closed on three sides and backed by shrubberies but is open on the three east-facing sides, giving views over the gardens. In the same position on the eastern side there is a compost heap and maintenance area, enclosed by shrubberies. There are two large semicircular beds, containing a mixture of shrubs and herbaceous plants, inset on the north and south sides. Benches are placed around the edge of the lawn.

## **5.0 Proposals**

- 5.1 The proposal is limited to the excavation and installation of a full submerged water tank and pressurisation unit to serve the existing ring main of water services along with the associated power to the pressurisation unit, including all necessary services. We propose to upgrade the existing and dated lighting to be more in keeping with the garden whilst also upgrading the 2no access gates. The gates are currently key operated and the Estates charges tenants a fee for these keys and access.
- 5.2 We propose to upgrade to a cloud-based online fob system. This will allow the Estate to greater monitor who is using and who can access the garden. By undertaking the following works, the garden will be brought up to a modern-day standard and in regard to irrigation allows our in-house gardeners to effectively and efficiently water and maintain the garden space.
- 5.3 The works are fairly limited in nature and for the purposes of this Heritage Assessment the works entail a fully submerged water tank with an above ground pressurisation unit. The pressurisation unit shall be housed in a timber shed structure and obscured from view via planting both within the garden and from outside the garden. We propose to continue the current mien of planting with the following species:
- *Ligustrum vulgare*
  - *Mahonia x media*
  - *Garrya elliptica*

- *Skimmia japonica*
- *Cornus sp.*

We will also incorporate a number of British native species for added aesthetic effect and biodiversity. These would include:

- *Crataegus monogyna* (Hawthorn)
- *Rosa canina* (Dog Rose)
- *Viburnum opulus* (Guelder Rose)
- *Prunus avium* (Wild Cherry)
- *Corylus avellana* (Hazel)

5.4 Externally there will be no change to the appearance of the garden except for the addition of in keeping planting as set out above, new lighting as detailed and new lock mechanisms to work in conjunction with the cloud-based online fob system.

5.5 Thus the proposals do not negatively affect the appearance of the garden as seen from Bedford Square, Gower Street or the wider area.

## **6.0 Assessment**

6.1 The proposal does not have an adverse effect on the garden nor surrounding area which, as described above, is of particular significance: therefore, it does not adversely affect the significance of the adjoining listed buildings, nor the Conservation Area.

6.2 The proposed location for the water tank currently sites a compost mound which shall be cleared in order to facilitate the excavation. As supported by the appended Arboricultural Report some tree loss is required, in order to facilitate the proposed development, these losses have been confined to one low-quality tree on site (T135), while better quality trees have been retained. By seeking arboricultural advice and designing for tree retention, the proposals have provided the best possible chance of successfully retaining better quality trees. A schedule of all proposed tree works with reasons for the works is attached at Appendix B of the Arboricultural Report.

6.3 Built development is proposed within the RPAs of retained trees. In order to avoid unacceptable physiological or structural harm to these trees, special construction methods are proposed that shall minimise the damage to important roots and ensure the protection of the soil environment in which tree roots are growing. Specifically, the perimeter of the pit to be dug for the tank shall be dug manually down to a depth of 1000mm and 500mm across. This shall allow for any tree roots that will be within the footprint to be cut with a clean and sharp blade\*. The remainder of the pit can then be excavated with a 3-tonne mini-digger placed upon suitable ground protection (such as TrakMat Ground Guards) and from existing hard-standing where feasible. Where the pit is to be left open for more than two hours, the sides shall be covered with hessian and kept moist, down to a depth of at least 1000mm, to prevent soil desiccation.

*\*Due to the nature of the pit, which is 7.5m away from the stem of T88, runs radially from T88, and occupies no more than 5% of the total RPA of T88, the*

*total potential root loss is likely to be far less than if the pit ran tangentially, because roots typically radiate out from the base of the tree. Incursions into the RPA of T136 and T145 are very minimal.*

The concrete to be back-filled into the tank pit shall be pumped from offsite in to the pit, which shall be sleeved with an impermeable membrane (high-density polyethylene) to prevent cement leeching. As regards bringing the plastic tank and mini-digger into the site, this shall be achieved via existing vehicular access routes with hardstanding. A trailer shall be used to bring these items on to the site and these items shall be stored outside of RPAs when not in use. The tank shall be lowered in to the pit manually. Pictorial details of the measures proposed are included on the Tree Protection Plan in Appendix A of the Arboricultural Report.

- 6.4 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 garden provides a sustainable asset.

**Matt Nixon**  
**April 2018**