

**Retail Units 01 and 02, Centre Point Link, 101-103 New Oxford Street, London,  
WC1 1DD:  
Heritage Statement – September 2018**

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## Introduction

- 1 This report has been prepared to support an application for proposed fit out works to Units R01 and R02 which forms part of the lower basement, basement, ground floor and mezzanine of the Centre Point Link building situated on New Oxford Street and Earnshaw Street W1.
- 2 The report has been prepared by Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC of KMHeritage. Nick has twenty years experience in the property sector, including most recently as a Director of the Conservation Team at integrated design consultants, Alan Baxter & Associates. Nick spent eight years at Historic England as Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas where he led a specialist team of historic building inspectors, architects, and archaeologists on a wide range of heritage projects in East & South London. Previously Conservation Officer at the London Borough of Bromley, Nick began his career at international real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle as a Chartered Surveyor.

## History

### Development of the area

- 3 St Giles's Circus, one of London's most congested intersections by the 1950s, was earmarked for redevelopment by the London County Council (LCC) for the creation of a gyratory system. In March 1957, Hubert Bennett, the new LCC Chief Architect, produced a design for an 18-storey building, with nine and eleven-storey blocks to the east to rehouse the people living on the site. Legal disputes between the LCC and landowners over compensation were circumvented by Harry Hyams' Oldham Estates Co, which purchased the land as a speculative undertaking whereby the LCC would receive the land required for road widening in exchange for a higher development than would normally be allowed under the LCC's 'plot ratio' regulations.
- 4 Hyams engaged Richard Seifert and Partners as his architects. Seifert's leading design partner was George Marsh. Marsh had previously worked with an 8-storey block of shops and flats, lined by a bridge over a gyratory, received outline planning permission from Camden Council, and designs for a 31-storey curtain-wall tower with a lozenge-shaped plan, closely resembling the Pirelli Tower, Milan (1955-60) were drawn up.
- 5 Further modifications were required due to the LCC's demand for wider roads, and Seifert negotiated a reduction in the tower's footprint in return for two more storeys, plus an extra storey on the link; the lower block was subsequently widened. Work began on the lower block in 1961. A revised application for the tower received planning permission in January 1962, and the scheme was completed in 1966. The

pond and fountains in the open area to the front of the tower, designed by Jupp Dernback-Mayen were removed in 2009 as part of the Crossrail development.

- 6 Centre Point received limited by mainly enthusiastic reception. The design of the tower, which shows a deliberate move from the smooth regularity of International Modernism towards a more inventive, sculptural approach with strong contrasts between light and shade, was admired at the time and since for its confidence and originality. It rapidly became a symbol of the sixties: Erno Goldfinger dubbed it 'London's first pop art skyscraper, whilst Building (may 1968) enthused that 'like the Beatles and Mary Quant, this building expresses the supreme confidence of sheer professionalism...more than any other building Centre Point made London swing, it backed Britain, a product of real team work which must figure as an invisible export'.
- 7 By 1966 however the market was saturated with new offices and Hyams, who had assigned the freehold to the LCC in return for a 150 year lease at low rent, chose to hold on to his portfolio until he could get a better price. Centre Point, including all the flats, gained notoriety for standing empty for many years at a time of housing shortage. It was not unique in this respect, but it was the most prominent empty high-rise and came to symbolise 1960s speculative greed. It has been more fully occupied since 1987 when it was sold and refurbished. Since then, the area surrounding the tower has been transformed for the arrival of Crossrail and the tower has been further refurbished and altered. This application forms part of the fit out relating to this final evolution – the infill of the space under the link building, that was formerly St Giles High Street which was approved under planning permission ref: 2015/50621/P and Listed Building Consent ref: 2015/50691/L.

### **The heritage context**

- 8 Centre Point lies within the Denmark Street Conservation Area, which was first designated in 1991. The building was listed Grade II in November 1995. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area lies immediately adjacent to the site to the north of New Oxford Street.

### **Heritage significance**

- 9 Denmark Street Conservation Area and the Grade II listed Centre Point are 'designated heritage assets', as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (NPPF).
- 10 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic'. The Historic England 'Planning for

the Historic Environment Practice Guide’ puts it slightly differently – as ‘the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest’.

- 11 ‘Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment’ (Historic England, April 2008) describes a number of ‘heritage values’ that may be present in a ‘significant place’. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.
- 12 In this case, the heritage significance of the building is clearly identified within the list description and is as follows:
  - Architectural Interest: the slender tower, with its delicately modelled surfaces, carried on the very visible pilotis, is one of the most distinctive high-rise compositions of the 1960s and a major London landmark. Attention is given to detail in the way the brise-soleil expresses the width of the link on the other side. The link provides an elegant transition between the high and low-rise elements, its huge expanse of glazing forming a dramatic contrast with the lively rhythm of the tower elevation. The east block, while of less intrinsic design merit, nonetheless forms a key component of the ensemble and is integral to Centre Point’s planning interest. Its brise-soleil, expressing the office tier, is again a distinctive use of this feature, forming a strong, horizontal continuum with the glazed link.
  - Planning interest: the relationship of tower, link and east block is a notable instance of Le Corbusier-inspired planning in London. The combination of, and contrast between, these elements is thus of note, not just the principal tower.
  - Technological innovation: for the ingenious use of pre-cast panels, which were hung from the frame without the use of scaffolding: the first tall building in London to be constructed this way, and for the link block, a very early use in Britain of armour-plate glazing with metal fixings.
  - Interiors: while the majority of the office, retail and residential interiors lack special interest, the tower, link and east block do each possess specific interiors of note.
  - Historic interest: Centre Point, now seen as a symbol of 1960s ‘swinging London’ is one of the most important speculative developments of its period in Britain, the most notable work of Seifert and Partners, one of the most prolific commercial practices of its day, and an early mixed-used development. The inclusion of shops, and especially housing, was a response to preserving these uses at a time when central London was becoming saturated with new offices.

- 13 As described earlier, the proposals are for Units R01 and R02 of the refurbished building. Unit R01 is an entirely modern infill under the bridge link and is listed by virtue that it is attached to the host building, which is Grade II listed.
- 14 Centre Point falls within Sub-Area 3 of the Denmark Street Conservation Area. The historic buildings on the northern part of Charing Cross Road and St Giles High Street were demolished to make way for the building of Centre Point and the associated major re-routing of traffic.
- 15 Many of the issues identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal of 2010 have been now superseded by the evolution of, particularly the landscaping and traffic solutions subsequent to the Crossrail scheme. The Appraisal does however state that 'development should encourage more people to visit, use and pass through the area, and respect and preserve the differences and varieties of scale, appearance, character and ambience which make up the whole conservation area'.

### **The policy context**

- 16 This section of the report briefly sets out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the historic built environment.
- 17 The legislation governing listed buildings and conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 18 Section 66(1) of the Act requires decision makers to 'have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses' when determining applications which affect a listed building or its setting. Section 72(1) of the Act requires decision makers with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay 'special attention... to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'

### **The National Planning Policy Framework**

- 19 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has recently been revised and was re-issued on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018.
- 20 Section 16 deals with 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. The NPPF says at Paragraph 189 that:

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be

proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

21 A description and analysis of the heritage and townscape significance of the site and its context is provided in this report. With regards to this application, the most significant elements are those which form part of the original building and this includes the piloti, staircases, existing mezzanine and the finishes to these elements.

22 At Paragraph 192, the NPPF says that:

In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

23 Paragraph 193 advises local planning authorities that 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting'.

24 Paragraph 195 says:

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use

- 25 Paragraph 196 says that ‘Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.
- 26 Paragraph 197 goes on to say ‘the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset when determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’.
- 27 Paragraph 200 of the NPPF advises local planning authorities to ‘look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.
- 28 Paragraph 201 says that:

Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 195 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 196, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

#### Local Policy: London Borough of Camden

- 29 Camden adopted its new Local Plan in July 2017. Policies relating to Design and Heritage are found in Policies D1 and D2.
- 30 Policy D1 requires development to respect local context and character and preserve or enhance the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2. Also to comprise details and materials that are of a high quality and complement the local character. The Council will only permit development for artworks, statues or memorials where they protect and enhance the local character and historic environment and contribute to a harmonious and balanced landscape design.
- 31 In terms of Policy D2, the policy requires development to preserve or enhance the borough’s listed buildings and proposals will be resist proposals for a change of use

or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building.

- 32 Development within a conservation area is required to preserve or, where possible, enhance the character and appearance of the area.

### **The proposals and an assessment of their impact on heritage significance**

- 33 The proposals are for the installation of working kitchens, the introduction of associated plant to both cool, heat and extract from the site together with a fit out of finishes to the space. This section should be read in conjunction with the Design & Access Statement which provides detail on the design rationale.
- 34 The proposals have been designed with input from Council Officers to ensure that they are sympathetic to the listed building and include:
- Floor finish in the main restaurant and on the mezzanine to be concrete-polished or raw;
  - Floor finish on the pre-existing mezzanine to be concrete – polished or raw;
  - The underside of the pre-existing mezzanine is to be finished and painted;
  - The visible heritage elements, staircases, balustrades, piloti etc are to be retained and celebrated;
  - There will be minimal fixings to the ground floor concrete ceiling; and
  - Views are to be maintained where possible from New Oxford Street to the newly created piazza
- 35 This attention to detail will ensure that the proposals will not harm the significance of the heritage asset and will also allow for a number of important benefits to be delivered by the scheme. These include: delivering a unique dining destination to Camden, support to local Camden chefs; bringing an unusual new space into public use; and delivering an active frontage to New Oxford Street and the new piazza.
- 36 The active new frontage – both to New Oxford Street and the new piazza – will ensure that the vibrancy of the conservation area is enhanced, and thus its character and appearance.



## Compliance with policy and guidance

- 37 This report has provided a description and analysis of the significance of the site and its heritage context, as required by Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the report also describes that we do not believe the proposals will affect that heritage significance.
- 38 The conclusion of our assessment, contained in previous sections in this report, is that the proposed scheme preserves the character and appearance of the Denmark Street Conservation Area and will allow for continued views through the unit between New Oxford Street and the new piazza. It will also not harm the special architectural or historical interest of the listed building. The proposed development thus complies with S.66(1) and S.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It does not lead to 'substantial' harm or any meaningful level of 'less than substantial' harm to any heritage assets.

## The National Planning Policy Framework

- 39 In respect of Paragraph 192 of the NPPF, the proposals contribute to 'sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation'. It helps to sustain the use of the building and enhances it through the quality of the design and materials. It also provides the vibrancy that is encouraged by the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 40 The proposals comply with Paragraph 193 of the NPPF – the proposals have been developed with a full understanding of the significance of the listed building and the elements of it that are important to conserve. There has also been full regard for the character and appearance of the conservation area newly created.
- 41 Having regard for the discussion earlier in this report, the proposed scheme complies with paragraph 195 of the NPPF – it certainly does not lead to 'substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset'. The proposal very evidently does *not* result in the 'total loss of significance' of the conservation area or the setting of the listed building.
- 42 It also complies with paragraph 196. It does not lead to any meaningful level of 'less than substantial' harm to designated heritage assets.
- 43 The only potential for 'less than substantial' harm would be if the proposed scheme caused the loss of a significant component of the special interest of the listed building of the character of the Conservation Area. The report in previous sections explains why this is not the case – the majority of the works are to take place in the entirely new space created under the link building. Where the proposals will

interact with the historic building - including the piloti, existing staircases and mezzanine – these will be protected and celebrated within the design.

#### Local Policy

- 44 In terms of Camden's local policies, the proposals have had full regard for the special architectural and historical interest of the building and have been prepared with input from the Council's Conservation & Design Officer. The proposals also have full regard for the character and appearance of the conservation area.

#### Conclusion

- 45 The proposed works have been developed with pre-application input from Officers and have been designed to ensure that the significance of the listed building is not harmed and that the newly created space can enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 46 Care has been taken to retain original details and use appropriate materials and finishes to ensure that the listed building is respected whilst providing space that is suitable to provide considerable public benefits to Camden.
- 47 To this end, the proposals comply with national and local policy relating to built heritage.

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