**Comments from Bloomsbury CAAC on the application for 42-43 Russell Square 2018/3851/P**

We apologise for the delayed submission of these comments.

**This is a very worrying application to which we strongly object**.

Apparently made at the same time, and by the same architects, as the application for 41 Russell Square (2018.3864.P), we could have hoped to have found some respect for these two old houses, like that that is apparent in the application for 41 Russell Squre. 42 Russell Square has evidently been fundamentally altered, probably around 1900, when a new staircase was built, not in the original position. But the fact that 42 is currently linked to 43 at 1st and 3rd floor level appears to been taken as an excuse to pretty well gut both buildings, to add new links on ground and 2nd floors, and to treat 43 as if too had been badly altered.

Like the application for 41 Russell Square, we have found this second application difficult to process, principally because the individual drawings are not labelled; we may have missed important changes. It is particularly worrying that we have not been able to find a drawing of the front railings, when these are an essential part of the street view and, in the case of 42 and 43 Russell Square, badly in need of restoration.

As pointed out by us in relation 41 Russell Square, the British Museum’s new building on Montague Place was justified in planning terms on the basis that the Georgian buildings on the east and west side of the main building, acquired by the Museum in the early 20th century, were unsuitable for modern behind-the-scenes museum use because of their listed status. Since this is the case, the Museum cannot resort to special pleading in applying to turn 42and 43 Russell Square into open plan laterally converted office space.

The ill treatment envisaged for these two old houses (described at one point simply as ‘nineteenth century terraced houses’ – their actual date is 1800-1803 and rather than being simple terrace houses they frame the most important square in Bloomsbury) is particularly apparent in the proposals for the upper stories: here it is proposed d to remove all partition walls with the exception of those near the staircases, retained no doubt because of fire regulations. In the Design and Access Statement it is written that the intention is ‘to remove existing modern partitions’. This is seriously dishonest: the proposal is to remove modern partitions *and* the original partitions that defined the Georgian bedrooms.

We also have major reservations about the proposal to *increase* the opening between these two houses. In fact we have come to the conclusion that the two houses need to be treated in fundamentally different ways. If the British Museum wants to maximise office space, it could be allowed to do so within reason in relation to 42, the house which has been altered.

But no.43, apart from the doorways through to 42, seems as well preserved as no.41 and should be treated with similarly respect. .

The railings at the front of both houses can be seen in photos to have been sunk half way up their height in brickwork or concrete (apparently to impede views into the basement). A minimum requirement of any consent should be to remove this masonry, a terrible eyesore, and to restore the railings here, as in the balconies above, to their original condition.

Another minimum requirement should be to recreate a lightwell between the original curved rear wall of the kitchen of no.42 and the basement extension which covers half the garden.

As at no. 41, there is also an urgent environmental need to re-establish real gardens at the rear of nos.42 and 43. .

In the bird’s-eye photo at the beginning of the Design and Access Statement, a flourishing large green tree can be seen at the back of these two house. Further into the document an ordinary photo records on p.43 a pathetic stump, all that apparently remains of this fine tree. There is no application to fell the tree (a horse chestnut?) in Camden’s list of applications for this address a(no.42) nd the indications are that the tree was cut down without consent.

As with the application for no.41, we are glad that the services will be renewed and hidden as far as possible.

Hero Granger-Taylor, committee member, Bloomsbury CAAC, [bcaac@hughcullum.com](mailto:bcaac@hughcullum.com), 13th November 2018.