

Design, Access and Heritage Impact Statement

Birkbeck College, Malet Street, Bloomsbury WC1E 7HX

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Installation of a platform lift and canopy on the terrace on the 5th floor



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Applicant: **Birkbeck College, University of London**

Agent: **Spheron Architects**

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1.0 Introduction

This Design, Access and Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared by Spheron Architects to accompany an application for the proposed installation of a canopy and enclosed platform lift to the 5th floor roof terrace at Birkbeck University, Malet Street.

2.0 Site Appraisal

The building, known as Birkbeck Extension Building, is located between Torrington Square and Malet Street and it connects the Main Birkbeck Building on the south east side of the site to the University of London's Student Union Building on the north-west side. It lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation area, known for its Georgian terraces, garden squares, as well as its many cultural, educational and healthcare institutions.

It was built in 1960s and it's composed by three blocks: a 6 stories high rear block which hosts a refectory on the fifth floor, a 5 stories high perpendicular central block which hosts a terrace connected to the refectory on the fifth floor and a 4 stories high front block facing Torrington Square. The terrace on the fifth floor of the perpendicular central block is connected to the refectory through a short stair case and a swing door, and it provides external seating to the refectory.

3.0 Planning Policy

The following provides a review of the statutory, national, regional and local policy relevant to 26 Russell Square as a designated heritage asset.

Relevant Legislation:

The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act

1990: provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest over and above the protection provided through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Under Section 16(2) of the Act, in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving any features of special architectural or historic interest which the building possess.

Under Section 72 of the Act, the local planning authority also has a duty to pay special attention to the 'desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance' of conservation areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): published on 27 March 2012 cancelling earlier national policy, such as PPS5. Chapter 12 of the NPPF sets out national policy in relation to conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

The NPPF still retains a general presumption against development that would harm the significance of a heritage asset; and the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for any loss.

However, paragraph 14 of the NPPF sets out that at its heart there 'is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.' The onus is on decision makers to support sustainable development wherever possible and without delay.

PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (March 2010): whilst PPS5 has been revoked, it is a useful tool to aid analysis and as such is a material consideration.

Both the NPPF and PPS5 recognise the value of a heritage asset because of its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interests. In paragraphs 55-57 the Practice Guide notes that it is important to understand:

1. The nature of the significance;
2. The extent of the fabric that holds that interest;
3. The level of importance of that interest.

British Standards Institution, BS 7913: Guide to the conservation of historic buildings, 2nd ed, 2013:

The BS 7913 codifies standards for historic building conservation, on the other hand, identifies four different groups: cultural, social, economic and environmental, as well as a 'non-exhaustive' list of 25 alternative individual heritage values.

Nevertheless, there are no hard and fast rules as to how the significance of a historic building should be assessed and presented, but the assessment should be handled on a case by case basis, in the spirit of Semple Kerr's philosophy.

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The London Plan (2011): sets of the strategic planning policy for London. This proposal does not give rise to issues of a strategic nature and so the detailed policies of the plan are of limited weight in determining this application.

Camden Core Strategy (2010): sets out the vision for the borough and includes Policy CS14: Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage.

Camden Development Policies (2010): provide detailed planning criteria used in the determination of planning applications. Policy DP25 notes that the Council will 'only grant consent for... alterations...to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building.'

4.0 Analysis of Significance

Architectural and Historic Interest

The primary interest is in relation to the front street elevation, which will remain unaltered.

Artistic Interest

There is no artistic significance associated with Birkbeck's Extension Building or the buildings in the immediate vicinity over and above their shared architectural style. Although the overall architectural features on the front facade have some minor artistic value in their own right, they are common features on a building of this age and style and will not be affected by the proposed development.

Archaeological Interest

Birkbeck's Extension Building appears to be located very close to the London Suburbs Archaeological priority area, nonetheless the proposed interventions are minor, therefore will have no effects on any assets of archaeological significance.

5.0 Design Considerations

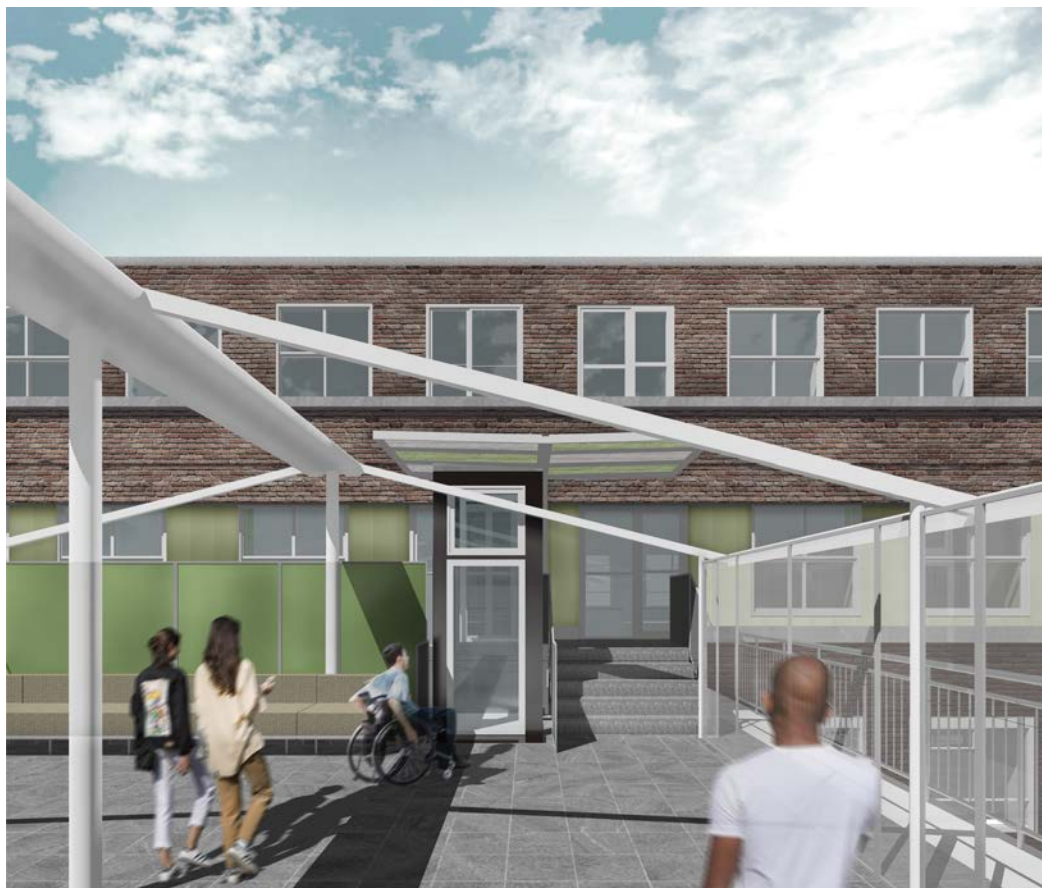
Objectives, opportunities and constraints:

In considering the objectives for the development of this property, it has been necessary to identify and assess the site, its opportunities and constraints.

These include, the actual size and shape of the site, its physical and geographical features, its contextual relationship with adjoining developments, the character of the area, the need to provide a high quality living environment, as well as to ensure that due attention is paid to the planning requirements set out in the development plan and the relevant SPG's produced by London Borough of Camden.

Proposal:

The proposal is to install an enclosed platform lift to allow access to the terrace from the refectory to disabled users, as well as a canopy above the stair and the platform lift to provide a degree of weather protection. Moreover, the proposal includes replacing the current swing door leading to the existing platform with a bi-folding automatic door.



6.0 Access

No change is proposed to the main access to the property

7.0 Assessment

This section of the Statement provides an assessment of the proposed development in the context of the key planning, design and heritage issues arising from the policy framework, as well as other guidance. It also considers the impact of the proposals, on the architectural and historic significance of Birkbeck's Extension Building as an individual building, on the character and appearance of Bloomsbury Conservation Area and in relation to other relevant heritage assets.

Effect on the Architectural Interest

The submitted proposal involves only the installation of a platform lift and a canopy. As such, there is no harmful effect on the architectural appearance or interest associated with the property. Moreover, neither the canopy or the platform lift can be seen from the streets and public spaces that the building faces, which are Torrington Square and Malet Street.

Effect on the Bloomsbury Conservation Area

The proposed works are minor and so do not have an impact on the Conservation Area, there is no harm to the surrounding area resulting from the proposed alterations. The appearance of the existing building will be preserved and its integrity retained in relation to the Conservation Area.

Effect of the Proposals on Amenity

The proposed alterations do not give rise to any unacceptable amenity effects in terms of nearby properties.

8.0 Conclusion

The significance of Birkbeck's Extension Building relates to the front facade and the building's relationship to the street.

The proposed work does not harm this significance nor it gives rise to any harmful effects since all the proposed works are minor. On this basis, we consider that the proposed work preserves the integrity of the host building, is appropriate to its setting, and the significance of that setting, and has no discernible effect on the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The proposal is therefore compliant with national and local policies and we request that planning permission be granted.