

Heritage Statement

Vernon House,
St. Mark's Square,
London NW1 7TN

August 2019 | Project Ref 3970A



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1.0

1. 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-20th 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-19th 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.

- 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 has been prepared to accompany retrospective Listed Building Consent (LBC) for installation of additional mezzanines at the ground and first floor levels. In addition, this application includes other minor internal alterations that do not require Listed Building Consent. These minor internal alterations have been included in the application for completeness and on without prejudice basis. This report seeks to address the alterations and confirm that they would not make any impact on the special interest of the building. It accompanies a listed building consent application, detailed plans and Schedule of Alterations.
- 1.6** This heritage assessment describes the significance of the heritage assets and assesses the potential impact of change on their significance.
- 1.7** Numerous site visits have been undertaken by the author of this report throughout 2018 and 2019, the most recent on 17 July 2019. Heritage Collective have completed a number of other supporting documents for both internal and external changes to Vernon House, and as such have a robust familiarity with the site.



2.0

2. Relevant Heritage Policy and Guidance

- 2.1** The decision maker is required by section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possess. There is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm 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** Harm is defined by Historic England as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.¹
- 2.3** The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (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. Setting is defined in the NPPF as follows:
- "The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."*
- 2.4** 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 193 to 196 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.

¹ Paragraph 84 of *Conservation Principles* 2008.

2.5 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.

2.6 In the Camden Local Plan the policy relating to the alteration of listed buildings is summarised below:

Policy D2(j) states the Council will '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'.



3.0

3. The 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 whether the mansard roof accommodation is original or a later addition. The dormer window frames at fourth floor date to the mid-20th 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

probable 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 7 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. The building is visually distinctive as a large, complete terrace running between Princess Road and the Grand Union Canal. The decorative detail on the exterior adds interest, however it is not so unique as to possess more than a moderate amount of aesthetic interest.

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. This illustrates the changing perspectives on density in the 19th century 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 not directly associated with any artist or artistic movement of note, and therefore possesses no intrinsic 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

4. Potential Impacts on Significance

Introduction

4.1 This chapter of the assessment describes the installation of additional mezzanines on the ground and first floors of the building, along with other minor internal alterations. The design approach as well as the renovation works throughout the various phases have been informed by specialist heritage guidance by Heritage Collective, and have given careful consideration to the preservation and enhancement of the heritage asset.

4.2 This report should be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement and the Schedule of Alterations.

Alterations requiring retrospective listed building consent

4.3 The works identified as requiring Listed Building Consent are limited to the additional mezzanines. Other works not requiring LBC have been included for completeness and on without prejudice basis, and are summarised as follows:

- Installation of removable slatted ceiling panels
- Installation of key entry pads
- Other minor amendments

4.4 A summary of relevant recent planning history and previous applications for the site is included in chapter 2 of the Design and Access Statement.

4.5 **Mezzanines:** A number of rooms feature existing as well as previously approved (LPA ref: 2018/1692/L) new build sleeping platforms that provide additional space to an otherwise relatively limited floor area. Following this principle a number of additional mezzanines have been installed in rooms that were identified to have a small floor area but sufficient ceiling height, which are in the ground and first floors. As per the existing mezzanines, the additional sleeping platforms have been

constructed away from the windows, allowing continued appreciation of the windows and shutters and the original full height of the rooms.

The new mezzanines are of two types:

Type A: Build in mezzanine - It has been built over the en suite to match the refurbishment of the existing mezzanines. Refer to drawing PL1-240. (Figure 2)

Type B: Joinery mezzanines - These mezzanines are designed as a stand-alone joinery. They are pre-assembled raised bed frames/mezzanines made from white faced ply and supported on timber posts or secured to the walls where necessary. These are to be found in the rooms along the rear and to the side of the main building. The design and construction of the joinery allows easy dismantlement. Refer to drawing PL1-241. (Figure 3).

4.6 Removable slatted ceiling panels: these have been installed in sections along all communal corridors from lower ground floor up to the third floor level. These panels are formed of prime quality maple slats perpendicular to the length of the corridors, mounted on black softwood fixing rails. (Figure 1). LED strip lighting has been installed in the recess to each fixing rail. The removable slatted ceiling panel conceals the services installed along the corridors at high level, while allowing easy access for maintenance. The polystyrene ceiling tiles that have been replaced by the maple slats were of a low quality, and detracted from the overall aesthetic of the property. The remaining sections and the communal corridor in the fourth floor have plasterboard suspended ceiling. This change has not affected the special interest of the building, and as such does not require LBC.

4.7 Key entry pads: The provision of key entry pads to each unit is a minor change to that will not have any effect upon the architectural or historic interest of the property. The position of the pads does not disrupt any sensitive fabric, and is entirely reversible. This is a negligible change which in no way affects the special interest of the listed building, and therefore does not require LBC. The April 2018 Heritage Assessment (in Appendix 2) identified the intent to include entry phones, and that this would not require LBC. The key entry pads are clearly a smaller unit and their introduction likewise does not require LBC.

4.8 Other implemented alterations:

- Changes to the outline of existing walls and services boxings, due to incomplete survey drawings or later discovery of existing services that could not be removed;
- Kitchenettes with swapped sink and hob locations;
- Revised bathroom layouts, dictated mostly by the location of existing pipe work;
- Additional privacy screens to create a sense of distinction between sleeping and living area in larger rooms (Figure 4);
- Provision of additional storage space;
- Low level boxing in existing niches etc. to create shelving/ storage space.

4.9 The above described alterations serve functionality reasons or aim to enhance the interior of the existing building and are consistent with previously consented alterations. They have been carried out following heritage specific guidance, and with careful consideration to avoid alterations to the retained original fabric of the listed building, and do not affect the special interest of the building.

Effects on the core constituents of significance

4.10 Impact on Architectural interest: The additional mezzanine sleeping platforms are in keeping with the existing mezzanines, and their inclusion has been designed to ensure no heritage fabric is impacted. The new suspended ceilings unify the contemporary treatments to the common corridors, and will have a positive effect on the aesthetic of the building through the removal of the previous incongruous suspended ceiling. The swapped sink and hob locations in kitchenettes and revised bathroom layouts are of no consequence to the significance of the building. The other minor amendments (including entry key pads) are easily reversible, and have no impact on the special architectural interest of the property.

4.11 Impact on Historic interest: The proposed changes will not affect the historic interest of the building. The continued use will retain the historic connection with the original domestic function of the building.

4.12 Impact on Artistic interest: Vernon House is not of intrinsic artistic interest, and there will therefore be no effect on archaeological significance.

4.13 Impact on Archaeological interest: Vernon House is not of archaeological interest, and there will therefore be no effect on archaeological significance.



5.0

5. Conclusion

- 5.1** Built circa 1860 the building 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 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 prevalent detached and semi-detached typology which initially characterised the area.
- 5.2** The building is typical of many in the area which could not sustain use as a single family dwelling, and was therefore divided into multiple accommodation. The fact that three of the seven buildings were returned to single family dwellings in 1996 shows the changing favour 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.
- 5.3** The alterations as described in Chapter 4 have brought about a change to the appearance of internal areas of the listed building, but are in line with other proposals for modernisation of the property which were granted consent. There has been no loss of material, and no fabric of historic interest has been affected. The changes have been sympathetic to the building and its significance.
- 5.4** The effect of the alterations to the building are **not harmful** for the purposes of policy D2(j) of the Camden Local Plan.
- 5.5** The report accords with paragraph 189 of the NPPF insofar as it provides a proportionate assessment of the significance of designated heritage assets affected by the changes, and assesses the impact of the changes upon the heritage asset.
- 5.6** Given the negligible impact of change through the introduction of additional mezzanine sleeping platforms, replacement to the corridor suspended ceiling and other minor changes as detailed in chapter 4, it is concluded that the architectural and historical significance of the building is preserved, and there has been **no harm** upon the significance of the listed building overall.

- 5.7** There will be no impact upon the surrounding heritage assets, including the Primrose Hill Conservation Area.
- 5.8** In conclusion, the changes are considered to be informed and appropriate. They have not resulted in any harm within the meaning in paragraphs 193 to 196 of the NPPF, and preservation for the purposes of the duty in section 16(2) of the Act.



Figure 1 – Slatted ceiling to communal corridors.



Figure 2- Mezzanine 'Type A' Built in.



Figure 3 – Mezzanine 'Type B' Joinery



Figure 4 – Slatted privacy screen.