

Heritage Surveys Limited

Conservation Plan & Statement of Heritage Significance Report

Relating to:

Proposed Security Gate & Railings
136-137 Levita House
Ossulston Estate
Chalton Street
London
NW1 1HR

Ref: SEB/379

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Table of contents

1	Introduction	3
	1.1 Introduction	3
	1.2 The Buildings	3
	1.3 Listing Status	4
	1.4 Conservation Area	5
	1.5 Setting	5
	1.6 Construction	6
	1.7 Background to the Proposals.	6
2	Proposals	7
	2.1 Generally	7
3	Impact Assessment	8
	3.1 Assessment of impact of proposals on the Historic Asset	8
4	Summary and Conclusions	9
	4.1 Summary	9

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This statement forms part of the listed building consent application in relation to the provision of a security gate and railings serving 136 & 137 Levita House, located in block 136 – 180 Levita House.

The purpose of this statement is to provide a brief overview of the setting and the building's history before explaining the background to the proposals being put forward for consideration.

Finally, this statement describe the proposals in detail and will assess their impact on the building and its surroundings.

1.2 The Buildings

The proposed security gate and railings will serve two ground floor flats within Levita House.

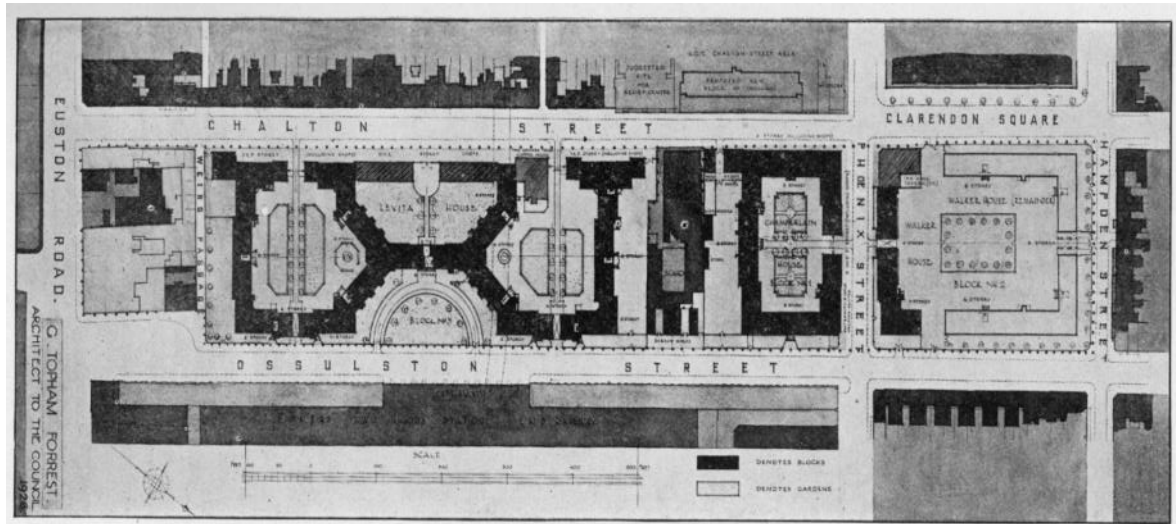
Levita House is a part of the Ossulston Estate, Somers Town, which also includes Chamberlain House and Walker House.

It is believed to have been designed by the LCC Architects Department, under Architect George Topham Forrest. Construction of the Ossulston Estate began in 1927 and was completed in 1931.

The Ossulston Estate represents an important inter-war development providing, at the time, new designs for inner city housing accommodation, apparently influenced by Modernist Viennese workers' housing models in terms of layouts and elevations. The high-density Ossulston estate blocks of flats are grouped around courtyards and greens accessed through archways.

In 2004–07, Levita House was extensively refurbished by Sprunt Architects, which included creating larger flats, external refurbishment of the fabric and transformation of the courtyard areas

The subject block has frontages on Ossulston Street and Chalton Street.



George Topham Forrest Site plan

1.3 Listing Status

List Entry Number: 1113232

Grade: II

The listed description reads as follows:

Date first listed: 13-Dec-1996

Includes: Nos.16A-76A Levita House, attached shops, screen & Somers Town Coffee House CHALTON STREET. Blocks of council flats and attached shops and coffee house/tavern forming part of the Ossulston Estate; frontages to Ossulston Street, Chalton Street and Weir's Passage.

1930-1.3/4house/tavern forming part of the Ossulston Estate; frontages to Ossulston Street, Chalton Street and Weir's Passage.

1930-1. To the designs of the LCC Architect's Department under G Topham Forrest. Flats and shops: load-bearing brickwork rendered with coloured roughcast, channelled to ground floor to appear as stone; reinforced concrete balconies. Hipped pantiled roofs with dormers and tall chimney-stacks.

PLAN: central spine on north-south axis with 4 diagonal spines from angles joined to north and south blocks to form enclosed courtyards; enclosed courtyard to west, open to east.

EXTERIOR: 5 and 4 storeys plus attics. Windows mostly flush framed sashes with exposed boxing. Balconies designed to make the voids above them read as holes punched in the building.

Eastern range has central courtyard block of ground floor portico with outer bays of projecting balconies and inner bays of flush rectangular balconies grouped 2:3:2 to 3 upper floors; top floor has round-arched voids. Diagonal flanking wings have alternating canted bays. North and

south-eastern facing blocks with central round-arched vehicle entrances above which long rectangular voids with bowed fronts; top floor of 3 round-arched voids and central projecting semi-circular balcony, all with cast-iron balustrade. Flanking bays of long rectangular voids with 3 vertical slits beneath each. Outer bays of paired sashes in shallow full height recesses.

Other facades are variations to this style using voids, axes and massing to effect; southern facade has Lombardic frieze to parapet. Western courtyard is enclosed by a range of single storey shops with central fluted Doric screen flanked by pillars having fielded finials to angles.

Coffee house/tavern: the Somers Town Coffee House on Chalton Street forms the southern part of the entrance to the northern courtyard. 1927-8, believed to be by Halsey Ricardo. Rendered and painted brickwork. Pantiled hipped roof with tall chimney-stacks, dormers and covered cornice to projecting eaves. 2 storeys, attic and cellars. 5 windows and 4 window left hand return. Public house frontage of central transom and mullion window with small panes flanked by similar windows with central part-glazed doors. 1st floor slightly recessed sashes with exposed boxing.

INTERIOR: not inspected.

1.4 Conservation Area

The property is not located in a Conservation Area.

1.5 Setting

The setting of Levita House is very diverse, with a wide mix of building styles and uses. Chalton Street to the west is a combination of retail and residential units, leisure (e.g. The Rocket public house) and further along is the Somers Town Medical Centre. The New Horizon Youth Centre forms part of block 204 – 238 Levita House.

The Ossulston Estate extends northwards to include Walker House, comprising similar residential blocks, although interrupted by a modern low rise housing block, Hadstock House. The Ossulston Estate blocks incorporate some retail and commercial units at ground storey level.

To the South of the estate is Weirs Passage and the large Pullman hotel building with a modern clad facade and windows. This incorporates the Shaw Theatre.

To the east there are two significant buildings- the British Library and the recently completed Francis Crick Institute. Further to the east is the Kings Cross regeneration area which creates a mix of commercial and residential uses and new public space. These developments are changing the nature of the area, however high crime levels persist. New developments in the area appear to have moved anti-social behaviour to more vulnerable areas where it was not originally designed out. This application therefore seeks to implement measures which will help tackle some of these problems by improving the safety of part of Levita House.

1.6 Construction

In order that the proposed gate and railings harmonise with the setting, the existing construction has been considered in detail.

The original construction is of load bearing brickwork, rendered with a coloured rough cast finish with ground floor elevations to appear as stonework. Asphalt covered concrete communal access balconies are provided, most probably of filler joist construction.

The blocks are covered by steep pitched hipped clay double roman tiled roofs with lead or zinc clad dormers and weathering details. Surface water is collected predominantly in parapet gutters on the high-rise sections of the blocks, with a conventional projecting eaves and gutters provided to the low-rise sections. All the blocks include tall, brick built and rendered chimney stacks.

Generally, on the estate gates and railings are black painted steelwork. Many of these may not be contemporary with the original building, however this consistent approach should be continued. Gateways are often identified by a gate post on each side of the gate rising higher than the railings to each side. These posts are formed of four square-section steel rods arranged in a square with welded steel plates. This creates a strong post which retains a delicate appearance. The gates are formed of a frame of rectangular steel sections infilled with thinner square rods often incorporating a diamond motif. Railings tend to be formed of steel horizontal flats and square vertical rods which project above the top rail to prevent climbing.

1.7 Background to the Proposals.

Previous Listed Building Consents have been secured for the ongoing programme of refurbishment to upgrade the external fabric of Levita House including windows, doors, render and roof finishes.

In light of the anti-social behaviour problems discussed earlier, this new application for Listed Building Consent seeks permission to install a new pedestrian security gate and a small run of railings to protect two vulnerable ground floor dwellings, currently accessed from the courtyard. There is limited passive surveillance of the entrance to these dwellings, placing the residents at high risk of crime and antisocial behaviours.

To reduce these risks, it is proposed to create a new security gate and railing forming a defensible line from the front of the refuse store across to the main elevation of the building. The entrance doors to 136 and 137 would then be within a secure, controlled space accessed from a pedestrian gate, in plain sight of the courtyard.

2 Proposals

2.1 Generally

Like the existing gates, the proposed gate is to be formed of a frame of rectangular steel sections infilled with thinner square rods incorporating a diamond motif referred to earlier. The gate sits between two posts formed of four square-section steel rods arranged in a square with welded steel plates. The gate is key operated from the public side with an easy release mechanism, (i.e. thumbturn), on the residents' side for emergency egress. The railings will be designed to prevent tampering with the gate release from the public side. All metalwork will be painted black as elsewhere.

Each flat will have its own call bell, discretely mounted within the vertical sections of the railing. Each resident of which will then operate the gate manually and admit their visitor, closing the gate afterwards. The gate will have a mechanical self-closing mechanism and the lock will automatically lock once the gate returns to the closed position.

Two individual secure letter boxes will also be mounted on the railings with tamper proof flaps accessed from the public side and key operated doors to the boxes on the resident side.

The design of the gate and railings intends to be sympathetic to the existing gates and railings used elsewhere on the estate.



3 Impact Assessment

3.1 Assessment of impact of proposals on the Historic Asset

The proposal intends to improve the security of Levita House and the safety of its residents, particularly those living in Flats 136 and 137 at the base of block 136 - 180.

The railings and gate proposed have been carefully designed to relate to existing metalwork and to be sympathetic to the original design of the listed building. Whilst this new element will be visible, the design is such that it will harmonise with the original design of the building.

It is important that the proposed metalwork is constructed to a very high standard, particularly to ensure ease of operation and low maintenance. The installation on site will endeavour to minimise the impact on the listed fabric. Any fixings will be made carefully such that the gates and railings could be removed in the future without having any irreparable damage to the historic fabric.

4 Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Summary

The proposed gate and railings are a very small intervention in the larger context of Levita House. However, they will have a significant impact on the lives of those living in the two affected dwellings, enabling them safer access to their homes, and mitigating the risk of anti-social behaviour from their doorsteps.

The designs shown on the application drawings have been carefully and sympathetically developed to ensure the new intervention feels like a harmonious part of Levita House which can be fully reversed with no impact on the historic fabric. As such we trust the proposals will be supported, and Listed Building Consent can be granted.