

The
Heritage
Practice

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Design and Heritage Statement
Drinking Fountain, Princes Circus, Shaftesbury
Avenue, London Borough of Camden
November 2019





1 Introduction

1.1 The following Design and Heritage Statement has been prepared by The Heritage Practice in support of proposals to relocate a grade II listed drinking fountain from its current position at the centre of Prince's Circus to a new area of public realm between Shaftesbury Avenue and the Shaftesbury Theatre as part of the London Borough of Camden's West End Project (WEP). The WEP will deliver a traffic and public realm improvement scheme in the area of Princes Circus close to the Shaftesbury Theatre. An illustrative plan of the proposals is provided as part of the application and background illustrative material is provided at Appendix A.

1.2 The list description for the drinking fountain reads as follows:

Drinking fountain. 1897. Presented by the St Giles Board of Works through the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain & Cattle Trough Association to mark Queen Victoria's two Jubilees. Polished red granite. Romanesque style. Rectangular stepped base with block steps to canopy with attached columns at angles supporting an entablature, the cornice of which rises to form segmental pediments to each face; surmounted by a gadrooned dome. Beneath the canopy each face with a shallow round-arched niche with incised decoration, water spout and projecting semicircular basin.

1.3 The proposals to relocate the fountain, which has already been moved from its original location as part of public realm works in the early 2000s (LSX0205228), involve the careful dismantling of the fountain, its storage and then its re-erection on a site closer to the Shaftesbury Theatre within a new area of public open space.

1.4 The drinking fountain is currently located within an isolated area surrounded by modern railings which until recently were permanently locked to deter anti-social behaviour (figure 1). As noted above, and as set

out in the following section, this is not the original location of the fountain – it was moved to its current site in 2003/4 where dismantling and reconstruction were also required and subsequently approved and completed.

1.5 The proposals to relocate the fountain will once again see it as very much part of the local public realm as it once was. The fountain was originally located at the corner of New Oxford Street and Shaftesbury Avenue (as noted in the list description for the fountain which was written in 1998, prior to the fountain's relocation). In its original location the fountain had a much more immediate relationship with the street on an active corner as shown in the cover image. Its current location divorces the fountain from the public realm and leaves it somewhat stranded within a busy traffic system.



Figure 1: The fountain within the railed enclosure on the Princes Circus traffic island.

1.6 This appraisal considers the acceptability of the proposals, given the fountain's history and the benefits of the scheme now proposed. It takes into account



the significance of the drinking fountain against the relevant historic environment policy context.

1.7 It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying documentation and drawings providing information on the scope and intention of the proposed scheme. The purpose of this appraisal is to establish the acceptability of the principle of relocation (subject to a method statement setting out an appropriate method for dismantling, storage and re-erection).

Author

1.8 This appraisal has been prepared by Kate Graham MA (Hons) MA PG Dip Cons AA of The Heritage Practice. The Heritage Practice was established in 2011 as a consultancy providing advice on all aspects of the historic built environment. Prior to establishing The Heritage Practice Kate was the Design and Conservation Team Leader at the London Borough of Islington and before that was a Senior Historic Buildings and Areas Advisor for Historic England's London Region. The Heritage Practice has previously been appointed by LB Camden to oversee applications for the relocation of statutory and street furniture to facilitate the delivery of the West End Project.

1.9 Historical research for this report was undertaken by Dr Ann Robey FSA, a conservation and heritage professional with over twenty years experience. She has worked for leading national bodies as well as smaller local organizations and charities. She is a researcher and writer specialising in architectural, social and economic history, with a publication record that includes books, articles, exhibitions and collaborative research.

2 Historic Development

2.1 The following section sets out the background to the erection of the drinking fountain at the end of the 19th century and the story behind its provision, its original location and its current position at Princes Circus.

Background

2.2 Water supply in Victorian London was chaotic and insanitary. The cholera epidemic of 1848-9, which killed thousands of London's inhabitants, was largely responsible for the growth in the movement to supply free fresh drinking water for the poor of London. In this regard, the most important philanthropic institution to provide clean water for public use was The Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association (originally known as The Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association) which was established by Samuel Gurney, MP, in 1859.

2.3 As a charity it aimed to provide the poor living in London with a clean, fresh water supply by erecting fountains 'yielding pure cold water'.¹ The charity's first drinking fountain was erected in 1859 against the wall of St Sepulchre's Church, Snow Hill. The Society was also concerned with the welfare and water provision for horses, dogs and animals such as cattle being walked to market. By 1865 the majority of drinking fountains also had troughs for dogs attached to them.

2.4 In 1879, Charles Dickens Jnr's *Dictionary of London* stated that the organisation 'has erected and is now maintaining nearly 800 fountains and troughs, at which an enormous quantity of water is consumed daily. It is estimated that 300,000 people take advantage of the fountains on a summer's day, and a single trough has supplied the wants of 1,800 horses in one period of 24

¹ David A Hayes, 'Drinking Fountains and horse troughs of Hampstead and St Pancras', *Camden History Review* 27 (2003)



hours'.² Local district boards and vestries also worked with the Society to add to the number of water fountains in London.³ The St Giles District Board instigated the erection of a fountain in 1887.



Figure 2: The grade II listed drinking fountain.

The Drinking Fountain

2.5 At the centre of Princes Circus, at the intersection of High Holborn and Shaftesbury Avenue, stands the disused but still impressive red granite drinking fountain dating from the end of the 19th century (figure 2). It was listed at Grade II in 1998.⁴ It was moved about 200 yards to its current position from the junction of Shaftesbury Avenue and New Oxford Street in 2003 as part of a Camden street works enhancement scheme in conjunction with the Home Office called Project Lilac that had

started c.2001.⁵ The removal and re-erection of the drinking fountain was overseen by Watkins:Dally, chartered landscape architects.

2.6 The inscription on the fountain reads: 'Erected by the Board of Works for the St Giles district to commemorate the sixtieth year of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria 1897'. In May, 1897 the Board of Works decided that they wanted to commemorate this record anniversary and that a drinking fountain was a suitable memorial. It was to cost no more than £250 and was to be located at the 'entrance of Shaftesbury Avenue from New Oxford Street'.⁶ An OS map of 1916 shows the fountain in its original position (figure 2).

2.7 By June 1897 it was reported that various 'designs for the drinking fountain' had been presented to the Committee and in consultation with the Commissioners of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues it was recommended that the fountain should be 'erected on the footway at the junction of New Oxford Street and Shaftesbury Avenue'.⁷

2.8 They had selected a design 'for a fountain of polished and fine axed red and grey Aberdeen granite set on two raised standings measuring 8ft 6ins square at the ground line and 4ft 6ins square at the base of the fountain with polished columns at angles, the total height of the foundation above the ground line to be 14ft 6ins, and dog troughs to be provided at each of the four sides'.⁸ The total cost including fixing, was to be £250.⁹

² <http://www.victorianlondon.org/dickens/dickens-d.htm>

³ Philip Davies, *Troughs & Drinking Fountains*, (1989)

⁴ See Introduction for the list description.

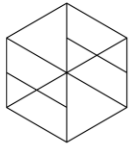
⁵ LB Camden LB LSX0205228 (31 March 2003) The scheme aimed to reduce drug dealing, drug using and rough sleeping.

⁶ LB Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre Board of Works for St Giles District Minute Book B/8B6, p.429 (11 May 1897).

⁷ LB Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre Board of Works for St Giles District Minute Book B/8B6, p.487 (15 June 1897)

⁸ LB Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre Board of Works for St Giles District Minute Book B/8B6, p.488 (15 June 1897)

⁹ *ibid*



2.9 It appears that the fountain was to be made 'in-house' by workmen in St Giles, as it was stated that the design and a rough sketch on an enlarged scale had been made in the stone yard. The work was to be carried out under the superintendence of the Engineer to the Board.¹⁰



Figure 3: The fountain at the corner of New Oxford Street and Shaftesbury Avenue. The building remains but the telephone boxes are no longer in situ.

2.10 In December 1879 the Engineer reported that that the drinking fountain to commemorate Queen Victoria's 60th year on the throne was virtually completed.¹¹ The Chairman and Clerk of the Board, the Engineer and the Medical Officer of Health and other Board members went to the junction of the Shaftesbury Avenue and New Oxford Street and 'dedicated to public use the drinking fountain'.¹²

¹⁰ LB Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre Board of Works for St Giles District Minute Book B/8B6, p.488 (15 June 1897)

¹¹ LB Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre Board of Works for St Giles District Minute Book B/8B6, p.622 (14 Dec 1897)

¹² *ibid*

2.11 It remained there until c.2003.¹³ An undated photograph (but taken before 1960), shows the drinking fountain apparently still functioning (with taps and cups attached) when it stood adjacent to two K2 telephone kiosks (figure 3). It is unknown when the four dog troughs shown in the image were filled in/removed.

2.12 A later image taken in 1977 (see cover image), that survives in the London Metropolitan Archives, shows that by that time the top part of the fountain was missing. It was reattached before the fountain was moved c. 2003.¹⁴

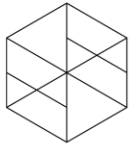
2.13 In 1989, architectural historian Philip Davis described the fountain as 'a rather ponderous pile of polished granite'.¹⁵ However, an appreciation of the survival of such fountains led to it being listed by English Heritage in 1998. It remains an attractive feature, although today it seems somewhat marooned on a busy traffic island. The railings that now surround the drinking fountain, with a permanently locked gate, were added post the 2003 relocation and were intended to prohibit anti-social behaviour focussed around the drinking fountain and the traffic island.

2.14 The drinking fountain was obviously originally intended to be located on a prominent and accessible site so that users could take the water that it provided. The fountain was disused when it was located in 2003/4 and therefore it no longer fully served its original purpose. However, prior to its relocation it did at least act as an accessible and prominent feature of public art or statuary that contributed positively to the local townscape.

¹³ In 2002 English Heritage suggested that the fountain was not in its original site before it was moved to Prince's Circus, but this seems unlikely given evidence from OS Maps.

¹⁴ Camden Planning online. In the papers associated with the relocation of the drinking fountain in 2002, an accompanying photo shows the finial *in situ*.

¹⁵ Philip Davies, *Troughs & Drinking Fountains*, (1989), p.102



2.15 It was also a fully visible illustration of the role of the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain & Cattle Trough Association and the St Giles Board of Works. In its current location it still does perform this role to a degree but its separation from the public realm does diminish its significance and its ability to contribute to the local area as originally intended. This is a monument designed for public interaction but in its current location this is no longer possible.

2.16 The following section considers the proposed scheme and how it would once again better reconnect the drinking fountain with the public realm and a more appropriate setting. It considers the proposals against relevant historic environment policy.

3 Assessment

3.1 The following section provides an overview of the proposals and describes their effect on the significance of the grade II listed drinking fountain. This section considers the proposals against the relevant statutory and policy provisions as set out at Appendix A.

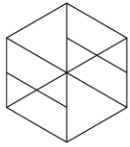
The West End Project

3.2 The West End Project is LB Camden's biggest ever scheme to deliver improvements to the borough's West End. Part of the project includes the delivery of new and regenerated public and green spaces. Work is currently underway to transform areas around Tottenham Court Road, Gower Street, Bloomsbury Street, Princes Circus and St Giles.

3.3 At Princes Circus, the reconfiguration of Shaftesbury Avenue and removal of traffic from part of Bloomsbury Street allows for the creation of a larger public space to be transformed with new planting and seating. Currently the space is heavily trafficked with narrow pavements, cluttered with street furniture and difficult to negotiate for pedestrians.

3.4 The redesign of this area will dramatically improve the pedestrian route between Covent Garden and the British Museum. New pedestrian crossings will make the area easier and safer to navigate while the new inviting space will provide calming places to stop and rest. Distinctive woodland planting will reinforce the strong green identity created by the existing mature trees. These and other significant changes will create a new public square that celebrates Princes Circus, turning this overlooked traffic heavy corner into a space to be enjoyed and cherished.

3.5 Part of the proposals for the new public space involve the relocation of the grade II listed drinking fountain from its current 'traffic island' location to a more prominent position within the public space to be created outside



the Shaftesbury Theatre. The current setting of the listed fountain is poor and it is somewhat isolated from the public realm and pedestrian experience. The proposals as a whole will also enhance the listed buildings on the east side of Shaftesbury Avenue which include the Shaftesbury Theatre.

3.6 The detailed design for the proposed new site of the fountain is set out on drawing 5622_210. This details the proposal to set the drinking fountain on a granite plinth and will be positioned so as to be centrally and symmetrically located. The granite plinth will allow for seating around the fountain and greater public interaction with the listed structure. The paving around the fountain will be finished with granite setts. Details of this are set out in the accompanying drawings.

Significance

3.7 The grade II listed drinking fountain is clearly of architectural and historic interest. It is significant as a purpose-built fountain for public use that was an important piece of street furniture and to a degree, of public art. The fountain is reflective of philanthropic objectives of the later 19th century and a symbol of a movement that saw the provision of clean water to streets across London.

3.8 Part of its significance ultimately lies in its accessibility and visibility – it was intended to be a visible and usable object on the street. This aspect of its significance is currently obscured as it has become physically detached from its local context. The fountain has also been moved from its original location – public realm works to its former location mean that the fountain cannot return to its original site. The fountain can however be returned to a more prominent and pedestrian focussed environment and once again become an accessible, visible and important piece of street furniture.

Assessment

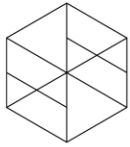
CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE CA – SETTING OF NEARBY LISTED BUILDINGS

3.9 The proposal to relocate the fountain would achieve this objective. The fountain would be appropriately dismantled and stored and then re-erected in a new, prominent and accessible location. A method statement for these works is provided as part of the application submission. It is clear from the fountain's history of relocation that its structure is capable of being dismantled and re-erected. It is understood that minor repairs to the fountain are required and that these will be undertaken as part of the overall works.

3.10 The proposed relocation of the fountain would be new. However, it would remain within the former Parish of St Giles (the fountain was presented by the St Giles Board of Works). It would therefore retain a close and physical association with the locality and the historic interest and value that the location and position of the fountain contribute to its overall significance would be sustained.

3.11 The relocation of the fountain also unlocks the significant and substantial improvements to the road and pedestrian network around Princes Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue as explained in the accompanying documentation. Without the relocation of the fountain, the full delivery of substantial public benefits in the way envisaged would not be possible. The relocation of the fountain is an integral and important part of the proposals. The scheme as a whole intends to enhance the significance of the listed drinking fountain and that of its setting.

3.12 The general thrust of national and local historic environment policy is to protect designated heritage assets (such as listed structures) from harm. Where possible, enhancements to heritage assets should be offered. National and local historic environment policy also sets out that proposals that have a



direct effect on the significance of designated heritage assets should also be fully justified.

3.13 Moving the fountain will allow the delivery of significant public benefits. It is not the case that this scheme seeks the permanent dismantling of the fountain but rather that it seeks to deliver a significant scheme of public realm improvements to which the retention of the drinking fountain is integral. The relocation of the fountain helps to unlock the scheme and will enhance its significance and setting. It is therefore considered that the proposal is justified in respect of the listed drinking fountain.

3.14 The fountain also forms part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (adopted 2011) records the drinking fountain's previous location on New Oxford Street (p. 60, paragraph 5.130). The drinking fountain is located in Sub Area 8 of the conservation area. The map for the Sub Area does not record the fountain's new location at Princes Circus which was relocated prior to the map and appraisal's adoption. The drinking fountain is however described as an element of streetscape interest on page 140 of the appraisal.

3.15 The appraisal provides a summary of the conservation area's special interest at Section 3. With regard to Landscape and Public Realm, the appraisal notes that 'The notable characteristics of the squares and landscaped spaces are the mature trees within them and the role they play in defining the spaces and street enclosure. Most of the squares are defined by cast iron railings, some with ornate gates. Statues and drinking fountains are often a feature.'

3.16 The existing public realm that surrounds the fountain and indeed, the listed buildings of Shaftesbury Avenue is generally poor and the proposed scheme offers the opportunity to create a new public 'square' and high quality landscaped area that will respond to the traditional character and appearance of the

conservation area. In keeping with the characteristics as described in the appraisal, the new area of public realm will have a drinking fountain as its focus and something of a centrepiece. The proposals relate to a historic, traditional aesthetic and character and are appropriate in the conservation area context. Given the existing context of the drinking fountain, the proposals are considered to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

3.17 The drinking fountain would be relocated closer to the building line and to the listed Shaftesbury Theatre. This position within the streetscene has more in common with its original location on the corner of New Oxford Street in that it formed part of a public area on a street and close to nearby buildings. Its current location is somewhat alien – the fountain has become part of a traffic island of sorts that is divorced from its context by roads and boundary and landscape treatments.

3.18 The proposals as a whole will improve the accessibility and the pedestrian of and visitor experience to the Shaftesbury Theatre. The repositioning of the drinking fountain will return the fountain to a more historical and appropriate context which would not harm the setting of the listed theatre. Instead, the fountain in the proposed position will form part of a scheme overall that dramatically improves the setting of the listed building.

3.19 The proposals would ultimately not cause harm to the special interest of the listed fountain but would enhance it in the medium to longer term. There are public benefits that would flow from its relocation and minor repairs can be undertaken. While technically the fountain would be demolished temporarily in order to allow its relocation, in reality the proposals involve its dismantling for later re-erection. This is not demolition in the truest sense which is rightly resisted by LB Camden in Policy D2 of the local plan. The dismantling of such structures to allow for public realm improvements is not uncommon and has been



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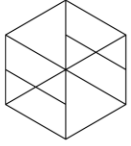
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carried out at least once before to this particularly drinking fountain.

3.20 The public benefits referred to would include significant transportation and environmental improvements to Princes Circus, Shaftesbury Avenue and Bloomsbury Street. This area forms part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and the character and appearance of the latter would clearly also benefit as a result of the proposed works. Pedestrianised areas would be increased and traffic better managed to be less intrusive and dominant within the area. Unnecessary street furniture and clutter will also be removed.

3.21 It is therefore considered that the proposed relocation of the drinking fountain would comply with local and national historic environment policy and would be justified in policy terms. There are genuine benefits that would be associated with the fountain's relocation and these are clearly an important factor in the assessment of the proposals.



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Appendix A

Illustrative background to the WEP: Princes Circus Project



Appendix B

Relevant historic environment policy context

The following paragraphs briefly set out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the historic built environment. The relevant statutory provision for the historic environment is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2018)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets out the government's approach to dealing with the historic environment. Section 12 of the NPPF deals specifically with this area of policy. Policies relevant in this particular case are as follows.

Paragraph 189 states that applicants should 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.' A history of the site and its context and a statement of significance are presented in this report at section 2.

Paragraph 193 sets out 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. 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. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional.'

Paragraph 195 goes on to say substantial harm or total loss of significance may be acceptable in very exceptional circumstances which are set out in the policy.

Paragraph 196 deals with cases where a proposal does cause less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset such as a listed building. Any such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

London Borough of Camden Local Plan

Camden's Local Plan was adopted in June 2017. The most relevant policy in this case is Policy D2: Heritage.

With regard to Conservation Areas, the policy states that the Council will:

- Require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character and appearance of the area.

With regard to Listed Buildings, the policy sets out that the Council will:

- Resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;
- 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;
- Resist development that would cause harm to the significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.