

LABS VICTORIA HOUSE

VICTORIA HOUSE Mechanical and Electrical Upgrade HERITAGE STATEMENT



INTRODUCTION

Victoria House is listed Grade II and lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Listed building consent is sought for the refurbishment of the MEP services from the 1st to 3rd floors and 6th to 9th floors of their property. The proposals will allow the occupation of Victoria House for co-working office floors by bringing up the building to the required standards for ventilation.

Previous applications for the office layouts (2019/4278/L and 2019/6203/L) and MEP for the 4th and 5th floors (2020/0771/P) have been submitted between August 2019 and January 2020.

THE BUILDING

- Victoria House was built in 1926-32 as the headquarters for The Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company
- The building is arranged over 13 stories comprising 2 basement levels, ground and upper ground, plus floor levels 1-9. Retail units are located on the east side of the building at street level, facing Southampton Row
- The building occupies a rectangular area between Bloomsbury Square and Southampton Row in London WC1 with facades to Bloomsbury Square, Bloomsbury Place, Vernon Place and Southampton Row.
- The building was listed in 1990 and the current listing refers to Victoria House and current railings, No.37-67 Southampton Row.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Victoria House was commissioned as the headquarters of the Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company and built between 1926 and 1932. The architect was Charles William Long.

The building is steel framed and clad in Portland stone. It features sculptures by Herbert William Palliser and ornamental brass work by the Bromsgrove Guild. At ground floor level are a series of impressive lobby spaces, faced in marble and with decorative brass work and a coffered ceiling to the central space. At basement level is the original ballroom and associated circulation spaces, with coloured glass light fittings and original door surrounds and furniture in stainless steel.

Victoria House was comprehensively refurbished in 2003 to create modern office accommodation to a Category A standard arranged around two central enclosed atriums created from previous central courtyards within the building. This refurbishment retained the original facades and much of the original structure with additional strengthening works carried out. Following the refurbishment, the individual tenants within the building have undertaken fitting out works beyond the landlord's Category A finish. Some of these alteration works are very bespoke reflecting the specific requirements of each tenant.

Externally the building is largely in its original form but for the ground floor retail units on Southampton Row, which have been altered with new glazed shopfronts.

SPECIAL INTEREST

EXTERNAL ELEVATIONS

The building has grand frontages to the Southampton Row (east) and Bloomsbury Square (West) elevations with lesser ones to the North and South. The building is a very large Neoclassical composition. These elevations are made up with 15 window bays each. The west elevation has a central ionic portico from the 1st to 3rd floor levels with columns and paired pilasters.

The windows are metal with small panes and are set in bays with bronze infill panels and copper life glazing surrounds from the ground to the third floors. Windows to the fourth and fifth floors are metal with small panes set in plain rectangular recesses corresponding in their positions with the lower bays. Windows to the two top storeys are set in plain rectangular recesses corresponding to their positions in the lower bays.

The east facade is similar to the west facade but has shops at ground floor (street) level.

INTERNALLY

There are four entrance lobbies which are faced in marble with classical decoration. Handrails and balustrades are in decorative brass work and located throughout the staircase and landing areas.

The central reception area has a coffered suspended ceiling.

A meeting/dance hall is located in the basement. Coloured glass light fittings and door furniture and surrounds in polished steel with radiator grilles embossed with a 'VH' monogram.

On the 3rd and 4th floors, Bloomsbury Square side, offices are panelled in mahogany with contrasting doors and linings. Also located in these rooms are marble surround fireplaces.

The original marble reception desk for the building was removed and stored during the refurbishment works.

Some original signage for the building has been retained and re-incorporated into the refurbishment works.

CONSENTED WORKS BY LSX0004958

Details of the listed building consent granted in 2001 in respect of specified works for the alteration and extension of the listed building have informed the conditions and level of intervention recommended for the new proposals.

Summary of Internal Works consented by LSX0004958

The refurbishment works internally were very extensive within the office accommodation areas and included major alterations that created new space arrangements. These areas have been retrofitted with:

Raised access floors

Suspended ceilings

Lighting

New power distribution

New fire alarm installation

Air conditioning and heating from new fan coil units

Refurbishment of existing windows

The office accommodation located on the Bloomsbury Square side of the building on the third and fourth floor levels have remained unaltered in their arrangement and appearance. These are known as the 'Heritage Rooms'. All fixtures including the light fittings, the finished joinery including such items as the timber polished panelling, door sets and doors, the marble skirting and mouldings have been retained.

The only areas within the 'Heritage Rooms' that appear to have been altered are the lighting units that have been converted to provide emergency lighting, the fire alarm installation and the heating and cooling system that was designed to fit within the constraints of the existing perimeter radiator covers.

Two atriums to the south and north ends of the building have been formed within the existing light wells. These have curved walls of glazing from ground to roof level.

Within the atriums are suspended 'pods' that provide meeting room areas. These are accessed directly from the office accommodation and lift lobby landing areas via glazed lined walkways.

The central reception area has been fitted with a new raised glazed floor which has been fitted over the existing covering and steps.

Four new lift shafts have been constructed to provide access to the newly arranged floor layouts.

AREAS EXCLUDED FROM THE APPLICATION

Precautions shall be taken to secure and protect the interior historical features against accidental loss or damage, or theft during the building works. No such features shall be disturbed or removed temporarily or permanently and are to be fully excluded from this application as follows:

- (a) At street, upper ground and mezzanine level: all internal finishes, fixtures and fittings in the entrance halls, stair halls, lift lobbies and surrounding spaces, and in the entrances and stairs at the northern and southern ends of the building;
- (c) At first to seventh floor levels inclusive: all internal finishes, fixtures and fittings in the entrance halls, stair halls, lift lobbies and surrounding spaces;
- (d) At third and fourth floor levels all internal finishes, fixtures and fittings in the executive office suite and associated halls and toilets in the north western corner of the building (Heritage Rooms).

PROPOSALS

This application seeks approval to upgrade the existing central heating and cooling plant located at basement and roof to serve the office floors through connections to existing services risers. Electrical supplies for lighting and power and IT services will also be derived from existing plant and equipment and will be connected to existing services risers. The existing ventilation systems are unable to provide sufficient air to the accommodate the required occupancy. A combination of new central air handling plant and on-floor air handling plant is to be installed to provide sufficient fresh air for the occupation of the offices.

The existing ventilation louvres within the second-floor elevation will be refurbished and reused to supply fresh air to the lower levels of the building. New and/or enlarged on-floor plant rooms will be

installed to house new air handling equipment. The existing risers will be re-used for main ductwork distribution.

HERITAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Significance Assessment

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines 'Significance' as 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'. 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment', describes instead a range of heritage values, arranged in four groups, which may be attached to places as follows:

- Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.
- Historical value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present – it tends to be illustrative or associative.
- Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.
- Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Victoria House is a substantial building arranged over eight floors, with further accommodation at basement and sub-basement level. Its elevations are an elegant neo-classical composition built of high-quality materials such as Portland Stone and bronze. The building occupies an entire block between Southampton Row and Bloomsbury Square; the architectural motifs and articulation repeats in all four elevations creating a harmonic sense of solid coherence.

The exterior of Victoria House remains largely in its original form, retaining its external finishes and architectural detailing. To Southampton Row the ground floor retail units have been altered, with new glazed shopfronts, however these works do not detract from the overall quality of the facade, blending with the retail and commercial character of Southampton Row.

The building is considered to have high aesthetic and architectural value, not just due to its elegant facades which contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area but because of its grand internal spaces such as the entrance lobbies and basement ballroom.

The building has been a contributor to the evolution of the Bloomsbury area and it has significant townscape value due to its imposing neo-classical facades which are highly visible within the streetscape and its strong relationship with Bloomsbury Square. It is therefore considered that Victoria House has significant historic and aesthetic value as well as lesser degrees of communal and evidential significance.

Proposed works and impact on the significance of Victoria House

The proposals utilise existing plant locations and risers to upgrade the MEP systems.

All original cladding materials and flooring have been removed throughout the office area at the time of the major refurbishment in the early 2000s. The existing raised floor structure and boxing to the external walls will be kept in order to protect what remains of the original substrate.

None of the existing fittings or decorations are of heritage value, therefore the proposed works are considered not to cause any impact on the values and significance of the listed building.

Historic England Conservation Principles accepts that change is part of the life of heritage assets: 'Change in the historic environment is inevitable, caused by natural processes, the wear and tear of use, and people's responses to social, economic and technological change'. We believe that the proposed works are necessary to secure the continuous occupation of the unit in the short and long term, and the impact is considered generally beneficial.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

This section provides supplementary information about the extent of the impact of the proposals on the significance of the heritage assets affected in accordance with National and Local Policies.

Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act - Section 66 & 72

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that when considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the decision maker shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possess. Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also provides that, in respect of development affecting conservation areas, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

- No changes are proposed to the exterior of the building since the upgraded plants will be located within the service areas already in use; hence the character and appearance of the asset and conservation area will not be affected. There are no historic or architectural features of interest in the office floors excluding the stairs cores which are out of the scope of this application.

National Planning Policy Framework March 2012

126 - Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account:

- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- *the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;*
- *the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
- *opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.*

128 - In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to 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 [...]

131 - In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

132 - 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. [...]

134 - Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

- No external works are proposed, hence there will be no impact on the historic fabric of the building and the character of conservation area as a whole.
- It is our belief that the MEP upgrade will lead to a more practical and friendly use of the offices, therefore contributing to secure its future.

The London Plan March 2016

The London Plan defines the overall strategic plan for London, setting out an integrated economic, environmental, transport and social framework for the development of London over the next 20–25 years.

Policy 7.8 - Heritage assets and archaeology

Strategic

A - London's heritage assets and historic environment, including listed buildings, registered historic parks and gardens and other natural and historic landscapes, conservation areas, World Heritage Sites, registered battlefields, scheduled monuments, archaeological remains and memorials should be identified, so that the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance and of utilising their positive role in place shaping can be taken into account.

B - Development should incorporate measures that identify, record, interpret, protect and, where appropriate, present the site's archaeology.

Planning decisions

C - Development should identify, value, conserve, restore, re-use and incorporate heritage assets, where appropriate.

D - Development affecting heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.

E - New development should make provision for the protection of archaeological resources, landscapes and significant memorials. The physical assets should, where possible, be made available

to the public on-site. Where the archaeological asset or memorial cannot be preserved or managed on-site, provision must be made for the investigation, understanding, recording, dissemination and archiving of that asset.

Supporting text

4.29 - London's built and landscape heritage provides a depth of character that has immeasurable benefit to the city's economy, culture and quality of life. [...] Ensuring the identification and sensitive management of

London's heritage assets in tandem with promotion of the highest standards of modern architecture will be key to maintaining the blend of old and new that gives the capital its unique character.

4.30 - Crucial to the preservation of this character is the careful protection and adaptive re-use of heritage buildings and their settings. [...]

7.31A - Substantial harm to or loss of a designated heritage asset should be exceptional, with substantial harm to or loss of those assets designated of the highest significance being wholly exceptional. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimal viable use. [...]

- It is considered that the upgraded services will facilitate the continuous occupation of the floors; and given the lack of historical features, it is our belief that no harm will be caused to the heritage asset at large.

Draft New London Plan

Consultation for the Draft New London Plan ran from 1 December 2017 to 2 March 2018. The Examination in Public (EiP) is targeted for autumn 2018, and adoption of the plan in autumn 2019. Although not yet adopted, the Draft Plan policies are a material consideration as they hold weight, albeit limited weight, in decisions going forward. As such the proposal has taken into account the Draft Plan policies. Policy HC1 Heritage Conservation and Growth

(c) Development proposals affecting heritage assets, and their settings, should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to the assets' significance and appreciation within their surroundings. The cumulative impacts of incremental change from development on heritage assets and their settings, should also be actively managed. Development proposals should seek to avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process.

(d) Development proposals should identify assets of archaeological significance and use this information to avoid harm or minimise it through design and appropriate mitigation. Where applicable, development should make provision for the protection of significant archaeological assets and landscapes. The protection of undesignated heritage assets of archaeological interest equivalent to a scheduled monument should be given equivalent weight to designated heritage assets.

Supporting Text

7.1.3 Ensuring the identification and sensitive management of London's heritage assets in tandem with promotion of the highest standards of modern architecture will be essential to maintaining the blend of old and new that gives the capital its unique character.

7.1.7 Heritage significance can be represented in an asset's form, scale, materials and architectural detail and, where relevant, the historic relationships between heritage assets. Development that affects the settings of heritage assets should respond positively to the assets' significance, local context and character to protect the contribution that settings make to the assets' significance. In

particular, consideration will need to be given to impacts from development that is not sympathetic in terms of scale, materials, details and form.

Camden Local Plan 2017

The Camden Local Plan sets out the Council's planning policies and replaces the Core Strategy and Development Policies planning documents adopted in 2010. The Local Plan will cover the period from 2016-2031.

Policy D2 Heritage

The Council will preserve and, where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens and locally listed heritage assets.

Designated heritage assets

Designed heritage assets include conservation areas and listed buildings. The Council will not permit the loss of or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss [...]

Policy D2 Listed Buildings

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

- i. resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;*
- j. 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; and*
- k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.*

The proposed works are considered to fully comply with the requirements of Camden's Local Development Framework. They are considered to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building in line with the statutory duty. The proposals also accord with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, in particular ensuring that the significance of the listed building is sustained and that it is put to viable uses consistent with its conservation.

APPENDIX I

LIST ENTRY

VICTORIA HOUSE AND ATTACHED RAILINGS

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1378788

Date first listed: 04-Dec-1990

Date of most recent amendment: 11-Jan-1999

Statutory Address: VICTORIA HOUSE AND ATTACHED RAILINGS, 37-63, SOUTHAMPTON ROW

Details

TQ3081NW 798-1/100/1481

CAMDEN SOUTHAMPTON ROW(West side) Nos.37-63 (Odd) Victoria House and attached railings

(Formerly Listed as: SOUTHAMPTON ROW Nos.37-67 Victoria House and attached railings)

04/12/90 GV II Commercial building with ground floor shops on east side. c1926-32. By Charles William Long. For the Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company as their headquarters. Sculpture by Herbert William Palliser. Ornamental brasswork by the Bromsgrove Guild. Steel frame clad with Portland stone, bronze infill panels and copperlite glazing surrounds. Green slate mansard roof with dormers. EXTERIOR: eight storeys, sub-basement and basement on a rectangular island site with facades to Bloomsbury Square, Bloomsbury Place, Vernon Place and Southampton Row. Long sides, 15-window bays; returns five-window bays. West facade to Bloomsbury Square with tall channelled ground floor, central distyle-in-antis Ionic (Erechtheion) portico through first to fourth (attic) floors. Attached columns as far as projecting end bays with paired pilasters. Ground floor to third floor windows tripartite with small panes; second floor with relief pediments. Attic windows, with small panes in plain rectangular recesses, grouped in trios in the frieze (corresponding to window beneath). Tympanum with sculpture of central robed figure with arms outstretched flanked by other figures expressing the bounty of the natural world. To either side, cornice surmounted by parapet with panels of open ornamental brasswork behind which a further attic storey with trios of windows slightly offset from parapet openings. Mansard dormers slightly offset again; all echoing shape of triangular pediment. Central two storey feature above mansard. East facade similar but with shops at ground floor level (originally recessed but now with projecting C20 shopfronts) and tympanum sculpture on the theme of navigation and new forms of industry. Returns similar in style with distyle-in-antis centres, paired pilasters and no tympana. Entrance doors on all sides of panelled bronze. INTERIORS: virtually unaltered. Entrance lobbies on all four sides faced in Subiaco marble with Greek style decoration and much decorative brasswork. Central ground floor public area, open through three floors to elaborate coffered suspended ceiling. Basement meeting/dance hall with coloured glass light fittings, door furniture and surrounds in polished steel and radiator grilles embossed with VH monogram. Extensive mahogany panelling to third floor offices. Some rooms with C18 fireplaces from houses previously on the site.

Listing NGR: TQ3039381709

