



31 Southampton Row, London WC1B 5HJ: heritage appraisal

Contents

The existing building.....	1
The heritage significance of the listed building.....	2
The proposed scheme for the first floor and its effect	3
The policy context.....	3
<i>The National Planning Policy Framework</i>	3
<i>Camden Council's Local Development Framework</i>	4
Compliance with policy	6
Appendix A: List description	8

- 1 This note assesses the impact of proposals for the interior of the fifth floor of 31 Southampton Row, and should be read in conjunction with the drawings and Design & Access Statement prepared by Brimelow McSweeney Architects.

The existing building

- 2 31 Southampton Row forms part of the Sicilian Avenue development for the Bedford Estate, completed by 1910. It created a new street linking Southampton Row and what is now Vernon Place, forming a triangular block to those two streets. It is in a florid 17th century style, with a two storey enclosed Corinthian colonnade contain shops, canted bays on the three storeys above and a tourelle at the junction of Southampton Row and Sicilian Avenue. The building is in red brick with white terracotta dressings.
- 3 The list description is attached to this note at Appendix A.
- 4 Sicilian Avenue was designed by RJ Worley, a prolific Victorian and Edwardian architect. Other Worley projects can be found at 66–67 St. James's Street, the junction of Shaftesbury Avenue and Grape Street, Holborn, at the south-east corner of Grafton Street and Albemarle Street and at the north-west corner of Harley Street and Wigmore Street.
- 5 The interior of 31 Southampton Row is now entirely modern throughout, whether within the shop units or on the floors above. The building is used mainly as serviced office accommodation with a language school located at first floor level. The top

floor (5th) - the subject of this application - is used as residential accommodation with access only through the office reception and via the main stair and lift core. The entire internal arrangement of the 5th floor of 31 Southampton Row is of recent modern construction, with the exception of one stair which is not affected by the proposed scheme

The heritage significance of the listed building

- 6 31 Southampton Row, the listed buildings in its vicinity and the conservation area are all 'designated heritage assets', as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF 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'. The English Heritage 'Planning for the Historic Environment Practice Guide' puts it slightly differently – as 'the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest'.
- 7 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment' (English Heritage, April 2008) describes a number of 'heritage values' that may be present in a 'significant place'. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.
- 8 As the submission material and an inspection of the listed building make clear, the interior of the listed building is now entirely modern in character. This is the case on the fifth floor of the building, the location of the proposed works, as well as elsewhere in the building. The building and the fifth floor have been altered in recent years and the interior has a generic appearance and is made of principally modern materials. What historic fabric remains is located in the external walls, the stairs and possibly within the structure of the building. The plan has been radically altered, and walls, partitions, doors, etc on the fifth floor are of recent date.
- 9 The heritage significance (or its special architectural and historic interest) of the listed building now lies almost fully in its external appearance and the architectural design of its facades, and in the evident contribution that it makes to the character and appearance of Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The building also has significance for its historic associations, both in terms of its original uses and the organisations and individuals associated with it (such as its architect Worley).
- 10 The listed building thus has evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value, but in varying degrees. It provides evidence of the development of this part of Bloomsbury from the Edwardian period onwards, and by remaining a prominent corner building and a landmark in the area, possesses communal value. Its historical value has been described above, and its aesthetic value analysed – that value is largely external and internal only to an extremely limited degree.

The proposed scheme for the first floor and its effect

- 11 The proposed scheme seeks to convert the 5th floor of 31 Southampton Row from residential to flexible office accommodation as part of a wider scheme in relation to 15 Southampton Place. The proposals for 15 Southampton Place seek to convert offices and a top floor flat to wholly residential use. The loss of employment space is thus compensated with new office space at 31 Southampton Row. Further details are provided in the Planning Statement.
- 12 The proposal is to strip out modern partitions in the residential accommodation to leave an open space ready for incoming office tenants. No works are proposed to the external fabric of the listed building.
- 13 The heritage significance described above will therefore not be harmed in any way by what is proposed. The scheme avoids interfering with anything that forms part of that significance. It sustains the listed building in use and provides it with an on-going purpose. The listed building will be preserved and enhanced by what is proposed.

The policy context

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 14 The NPPF says at Paragraph 128 that:

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.

- 15 An outline description and analysis of the heritage significance of 31 Southampton Row is provided above.

- 16 At Paragraph 131, the NPPF says that:

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.*

17 Paragraph 133 says:

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- *the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and*
- *no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and*
- *conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- *the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.*

18 Paragraph 134 says that '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.

Camden Council's Local Development Framework

19 Camden Council adopted its Core Strategy and Development Policies on 8 November 2010. Core Strategy Policy CS14 deals with 'Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage' and says:

'The Council will ensure that Camden's places and buildings are attractive, safe and easy to use by:

a) requiring development of the highest standard of design that respects local context and character;

b) preserving and enhancing 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;

c) promoting high quality landscaping and works to streets and public spaces;

d) seeking the highest standards of access in all buildings and places and requiring schemes to be designed to be inclusive and accessible;

e) protecting important views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster from sites inside and outside the borough and protecting important local views'.

20 The commentary to the policy says:

'Our overall strategy is to sustainably manage growth in Camden so it meets our needs for homes, jobs and services in a way that conserves and enhances the features that make the borough such an attractive place to live, work and visit. Policy CS14 plays a key part in achieving this by setting out our approach to conserving and, where possible, enhancing our heritage and valued places, and to ensuring that development is of the highest standard and reflects, and where possible improves, its local area'

21 It goes on to say

'Development schemes should improve the quality of buildings, landscaping and the street environment and, through this, improve the experience of the borough for residents and visitors'

22 Regarding Camden's heritage, the Core Strategy refers to Policy DP25 in Camden Development Policies as providing more detailed guidance on the Council's approach to protecting and enriching the range of features that make up the built heritage of the borough

23 Policy DP25 deals with 'Conserving Camden's heritage', and is as follows:

Conservation areas

In order to maintain the character of Camden's conservation areas, the Council will:

a) take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans when assessing applications within conservation areas;

b) only permit development within conservation areas that preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area;

c) prevent the total or substantial demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area where this harms the character or appearance of the conservation area, unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;

d) not permit development outside of a conservation area that causes harm to the character and appearance of that conservation area; and

e) preserve trees and garden spaces which contribute to the character of a conservation area and which provide a setting for Camden's architectural heritage.

Listed buildings

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

e) prevent the total or substantial demolition of a listed building unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention;

f) only grant consent for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where it considers this would not cause harm to the special interest of the building; and

g) not permit development that it considers would cause harm to the setting of a listed building.

Archaeology

The Council will protect remains of archaeological importance by ensuring acceptable measures are taken to preserve them and their setting, including physical preservation, where appropriate.

Other heritage assets

The Council will seek to protect other heritage assets including Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest and London Squares.

Compliance with policy

- 24 When taken together, the drawings, Design & Access Statement and the analysis provided above make it clear that no 'harm' will be caused to the heritage significance of the listed building by what is proposed for the fifth floor.
- 25 This report has provided a description and analysis of the significance of the development site and its heritage context, as required by Paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 26 The scheme very definitely strikes the balance suggested by Paragraph 132 of the NPPF – as shown earlier, it responds to the listed building at 31 Southampton Row in a manner commensurate to its overall significance and of that its context. In overall terms, the impact of the scheme on heritage significance, when weighed against the heritage significance that is preserved and the benefits of the scheme in economic and commercial terms, is modest but positive.
- 27 The proposed development complies with Paragraph 133 of the NPPF. It does not lead to 'substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset'. It also complies with Paragraph 134 for the reasons given in detail earlier – it cannot be considered as causing 'less than substantial harm'. However, any 'less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset' - i.e. the

conservation area or the listed building - that can be ascribed to the scheme is outweighed by the benefits generated by the scheme in economic and heritage terms.

- 28 For the same reasons, the scheme complies with Camden's Local Development Framework. The scheme will 'not cause harm to the special interest of the building', nor any harm to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

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Friday, October 19, 2012

The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation. Kevin Murphy was included for a number of years on the Heritage Lottery Fund's Directory of Expert Advisers.

Appendix A: List description

NUMBERS 25-35 AND 35A AND ATTACHED SCREEN TO SICILIAN AVENUE, 25-35 AND 35A
SOUTHAMPTON ROW (west side)

CAMDEN TOWN, CAMDEN, GREATER LONDON

Date listed: 14 May 1974

Date of last amendment: 14 May 1974

Grade II

CAMDEN TQ3081NW SOUTHAMPTON ROW 798-1/100/1480 (West side) 14/05/74 Nos.25-35 AND 35A (Odd) and attached screen to Sicilian Avenue GV II Shopping parade with offices, formerly flats, over, forming the north-east return to Sicilian Avenue (qv). 1906-10. By RJ Worley. For the Bedford Estate. Red brick with white terracotta dressings and 1st floor. EXTERIOR: 5 storeys 8-window bays plus a 4-storey tourelle, with 2 light transom and mullion windows, from 2nd floor level on the left hand return to Sicilian Avenue. Ground floor with later C20 shopfronts separated by Corinthian columns on plinths carrying an entablature with plain terracotta frieze at 2nd floor level. Pilasters at angles. 1st floor with square-headed 4-light casement windows. 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors some canted 5-light bay windows and some groups of square-headed windows, all with terracotta transoms and mullions. All windows with small, leaded panes, some with shields. Central pedimented gable with, to either side oriels rising from the 3rd floor. Modillion cornice. The 4th storey of the tourelle is above the cornice and topped with a conical roof. INTERIORS: not inspected. Attached to No.25 is a Classical screen across Sicilian Avenue. 3 Ionic columns on plinths carrying an entablature with the words "Sicilian Avenue" on the frieze, surmounted by a balustrade with urns on the 2 central piers. Nos 25-35 (odd) and 35A Southampton Row form a homogeneous development with Nos 1-29 (odd) and 6-20 (even) Sicilian Avenue (qqv), Nos 15-23 (odd) Southampton Row (qv) and Nos 1-6 (consec) Vernon Place (qv). (Harwood E and Saint A: Exploring England's Heritage, London: -1991: 121-22).