

LABS VICTORIA HOUSE

VICTORIA HOUSE Ground Floor Refurbishment HERITAGE STATEMENT



Victoria House Public Hall 1943

INTRODUCTION

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

Listed building consent is sought for a light refurbishment of the entrances and central public areas at upper and lower ground floors.

THE BUILDING

- Victoria House was built in 1926-32 as the headquarters for The Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company
- The building has eight storeys, a sub-basement and basement. 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.

PLANNING OVERVIEW

The upper and lower ground floors of Victoria House were altered for the first-time following consents reference PSX0004957 and LSX0004958 dated 21st January 2001.

These applications covered the refurbishment of the listed building including alterations at roof level; alterations to the shopfronts; the formation of an internal vehicular loading bay at the north end of the Bloomsbury Square elevation; the erection of a roof over the two existing two light wells to form atria, with new internal walls, and the insertion of pods in the atria.

There is only one other application related to the interior of the building that has been approved to date for alterations involving the insertion of new glass doors into existing south atrium glass wall at the upper ground floor entry level. This Listed Building Consent was granted on 29th August 2006 under reference 2006/3092/L.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUND FLOOR

The four entrance lobbies from Bloomsbury Square, Southampton Row, Vernon Place, and Bloomsbury Place retain their original stone flooring and are faced in Subiaco marble with classical decoration. Handrails and balustrades and service grilles are in decorative brass work and located throughout the staircase and landing areas.

The central public area is open through three floors to an elaborate coffered suspended ceiling. The original floor remains in relatively good condition under a raised frosted glazed floor. To the sides of the glazed floor two sections of original chequered marble floor remain; one in the north lift lobby and a smaller section in the south side.

The original marble reception desk for the building was removed and stored during the refurbishment works; however, it has not been possible to locate it to date.

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 in the Ground Floor

The refurbishment works internally were very extensive within the office accommodation areas and included major alterations that created new space arrangements.

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 biomorphic '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 over the existing covering and steps to allow for disable access to the lift lobbies.

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

PROPOSALS

This application seeks approval to replace the 2001 flooring (glass and grey tiles) with a combination of travertine and terrazzo. The proposed materials are part of the original palette of the building; the purpose of utilising them in a contemporary pattern is to soften the transition between old and new, enhancing the 'grandeur' of the central hall without diminishing the visual impact of the contemporary intervention carried out by Alsop within the atria.

The cladding of the lift lobbies, currently in plaster finish, is proposed in Jesmonite, a cementitious composite material used to make decorative moulded objects, matching the travertine and terrazzo colour. The current plasterboard soffits of both lobbies are to be made new as part of the finishing works.

A new glass screen with bronze coloured frames is also proposed between the lift lobby and the south atrium.

The atrium floor replacement is intended to continue through the stairs towards Vernon Place, currently clad in the same grey tiles. The walls to this stair are also proposed to be clad in the Jesmonite panelling.

It is also proposed to repair and stain all the later timber doors in the building to match the darker tone of the original ones situated by the lift lobbies. These later doors have been stained to a lighter tone with orange hue that is unfitting of the original features.

A light cleaning and minimal repair of all the historic stone surfaces is proposed to improve and enhance the historic finishes. A mix of distilled water and neutral pH soap will be used to such scope.

The existing lighting scheme will be upgraded to provide better environmental illumination and extended MEP connections will be done under the raised central lobby floor to allow the introduction of a coffee counter/bar.

Minor electrical interventions are also proposed to extend power services. The new south atrium floor will incorporate floor sockets and power distribution along the glass elevations edges allowing for multiple uses to be brought into the currently unused space (i.e. seating area, exhibition space). In the Bloomsbury Square entrance new sockets will be installed inside the timber panelled ducts by the access doors, to be accessed by the existing flapping grilles.

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.

The 'high-tech' 2001-2003 intervention by Will Alsop OBE created a juxtaposition with the original Charles Long's neo-classical style that has become inherent to the building as a whole. The design intent of this refurbishment is to create a better interaction between these two styles without detracting from their particular attributes.

Significance Plans

The varying degrees of significance are best captured on the Significance Plans included in Appendix I. The proposed works have been informed by the significance of the building from their inception.

The plans identify the relative sensitivity of parts of the upper and lower ground floors, grading from High to Low, with the most important areas indicated in red, with gradations through to areas of low significance in green. The level of significance has been identified as follows:

HIGH SIGNIFICANCE: Primary elevations, important historical or architectural features and/or historical association. For example: external facades, central lobby, main staircases. Noted in red.

SIGNIFICANT: Architectural character or quality and/or notable features. For example: High Significance elements that have been altered by previous intervention but contribute to the understanding of the heritage asset. Noted in orange.

SOME SIGNIFICANCE: Some surviving decorative finishes of historic interest. For example: as above but degraded, structural items. Noted in yellow.

LOW SIGNIFICANCE: Little or no historic or architectural significance, including areas of lost significance through major alteration or loss of finishes. For example: the retail units facing Southampton Row. Noted in green.

Proposed works and impact on the significance of Victoria House

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'.

The proposed use of flooring materials original to the building construction it is aimed to achieve a more pleasantly aesthetic interaction between old and new. This is a subtle yet significant intervention to embrace and enhance the original elements without detracting from the intended 'high-tech' impact of the 2001 features.

The glass floor and common dark floor tiles will be replaced with traditional materials in a contemporary manner, facilitating an improved transition through the refurbished lift lobbies to the core of the Alsop intervention in the atria.

The refurbishment and upgrade of the light fittings and redecoration of the later timber doors will contribute to the enhancement of the historic spaces at large, as will do the proposed cleaning of the stone surfaces.

The minor MEP improvements have been incorporated within the new fabric or have been designed to improve existing connections without causing further harm to the historic fabric and are considered necessary to bring these spaces to current standards.

We believe that the proposed works will improve the appreciation of the historic features and are necessary to secure the continuous occupation of Victoria House in the short and long term. The impact is therefore 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 hence the character and appearance of the asset and conservation area will not be affected. The historic features in the upper and lower ground floor will be fully preserved and enhanced by the proposed cleaning. It is our belief that intervention will contribute to an improved appreciation of the retained original areas of Victoria House.

National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 revised June 2019

16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

185. Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

b) the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;

c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and

d) opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Proposals affecting heritage assets

190. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

192. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and

c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Considering potential impacts

193. 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 (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

-The impact of the aesthetic improvement of the Ground Floor of Victoria House and the associated cleaning and repair of the historic fabric is considered largely beneficial;

-It is our belief that the Ground Floor refurbishment will lead to a more practical and friendly use of the building, 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 proposals will improve the transition between the historic architectural features and the modern intervention already part of the building and no harm will be caused to the heritage asset at large.

Draft New London Plan 2019

The 2019 'consolidated' version of the London Plan shows all of the Mayor's suggested changes following the Examination in Public (EiP) of the draft Plan. Although not yet adopted, the New Plan policies are a material consideration as they hold weight, albeit limited weight, in decisions going forward. As such the proposal has considered this version of the Plan policies.

The new London Plan sets out the concept of Good Growth. Good Growth is about working to re-balance development in London delivering a more socially integrated and sustainable city, where people have more of a say and growth brings the best out of existing places while providing new opportunities to communities.

Chapter 1 Planning London's Future (Good Growth Policies)

1.0.7 This London Plan takes a new approach. It plans for growth on the basis of its potential to improve the health and quality of life of all Londoners, to reduce inequalities and to make the city a better place to live, work and visit. It uses the opportunities of a rapidly-growing city to plan for a better future, using each planning decision to improve London, transforming the city over time. It plans not just for growth, but for Good Growth – sustainable growth that works for everyone, using London's strengths to overcome its weaknesses.

Chapter 7 Heritage and Culture Policy HC1 Heritage conservation and growth

A - Boroughs should, in consultation with Historic England, local communities and other relevant statutory and relevant organisations, develop evidence that demonstrates a clear understanding of London's historic environment. This evidence should be used for identifying, understanding, conserving, and enhancing the historic environment and heritage assets, and improving access to, and interpretation of, the heritage assets, landscapes and archaeology within their area.

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.

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.

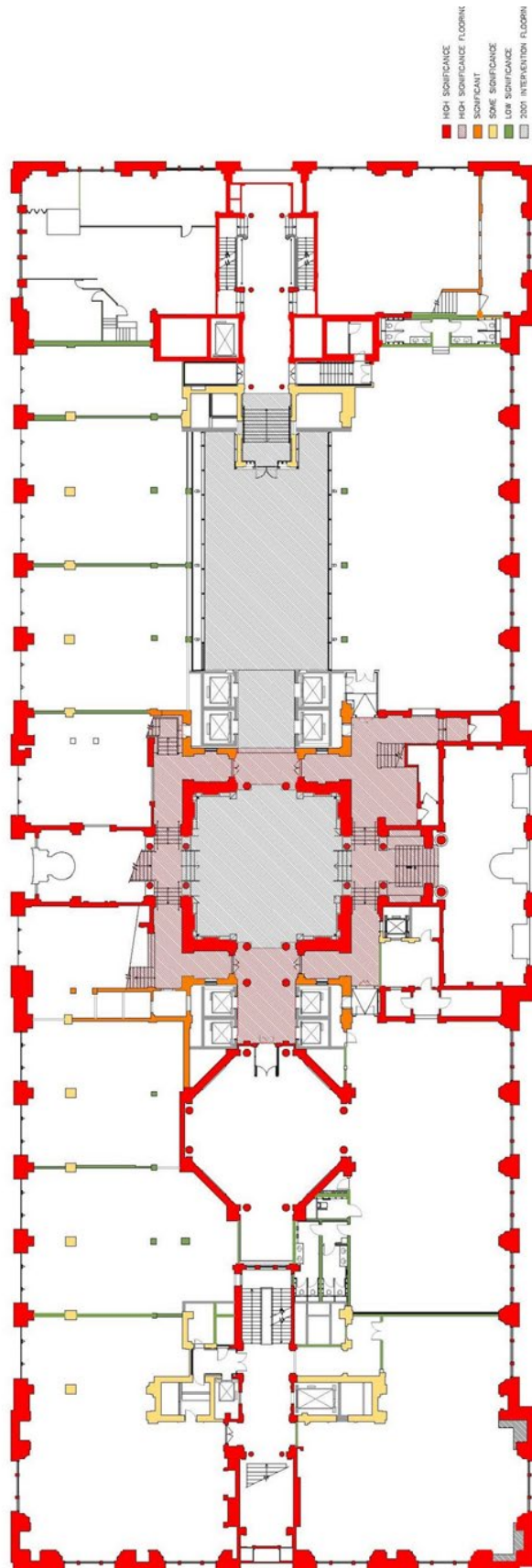
APPENDIX I

SIGNIFICANCE PLANS

Lower Ground Floor



Upper Ground Floor



APPENDIX II

STONE CLEANING METHOD

- Ventilate the area, if appropriate.
- Protect skirting boards and wall coverings using low tack tape, waterproof plastic or waxed paper where required.
- Area to be treated to be dry mopped collecting all dry soil.
- Apply diluted Neutral soap (pH7-7.5) as per manufacturers instruction to stone surface and allow dwelling time
- Manual clean/scrub until all residue removed.
- Using Vacuum suction remove all residue / dirty water from floor.
- Allow drying time.
- Neutralise all stone.
- Application of water-base seal as per manufacturer's instruction.

SAMPLES



Before



After

APPENDIX III

IMAGES from Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society Centenary Celebration 1843-1943



Access to Central Hall



Central Hall Public Office



One of the Head Office Departments

APPENDIX IV

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