

## HERITAGE DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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<b>Project:</b>	Provision of ramped access and new doorways to rear of 2 and 3 Gray's Inn Square to provide step-free access.	<b>Ref/File No:</b> HK 2265/3.1
<b>Applicant:</b>	The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn	
<b>Content:</b>	Introduction Background Proposals Access Statement	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 (Revised to incorporate Heritage Statement)</b>	

### INTRODUCTION

This application is for Planning Consent for the introduction of new doorways at rear elevation basement level together with ramped access route to provide step-free access to Nos 2 and 3 Gray's Inn Square. The necessary alterations to the railings attached to No 1 also require Listed Building Consent

### BACKGROUND

2 and 3 Gray's Inn Square are part of a terrace (Nos 1 to 4 inclusive) enclosing the east side of the square. The rear of the terrace directly abuts and overlooks the gardens (known as The Walks). No 1 dates from c.1676 and was restored c.1948 following war damage and is listed Grade II\*. Nos 2, 3 and 4 were completely destroyed and the current buildings date from 1953. The Inn as a whole lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is included on Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

Both buildings have steps to the front door from Gray's Inn Square. In addition, the interior planning of the entrance lobby to Nos 2 and 3 is split level with a further set of steps immediately inside the front door leading to the raised ground floor level. Both buildings have a lift, which whilst not of sufficient size to be fully DDA compliant, does allow those unable to use the stairs to access all floors. However as noted, there are two separate flights of steps which have to be negotiated to allow access to the lift from street level.

The levels and layout of the pavement and roadway approach from South Square preclude any adjustment of levels or introduction of ramps at the entrance to No 2 in particular, to overcome these steps. Similarly the interior planning of the entrance lobby does not permit room for a ramp. Solutions involving two separate stair chair lifts are not considered appropriate. Similarly solutions involving a new entrance at pavement level would not be sympathetic to the overall appearance of the Square and whilst these particular buildings are not listed, the design does reflect the architectural concept of the original Square albeit in what is now recognisably a 1950's classical idiom of interest in its own right.

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No 2 Entrance showing external steps to front door



No 2 Entrance level showing internal steps to raised ground floor level



Attached railings to rear of No 1 Gray's Inn Square



No 2 Rear Elevation showing asphalted drainage channel below basement windows

## LISTING DESCRIPTION (1 GRAY'S INN SQUARE)

*CAMDEN GRAY'S INN (West side) Gray's Inn Square No.1 and attached railings 24/10/51 GV II\* Terraced chambers. c1676, restored c1948. Brown brick with red brick dressings. Brick bands between floors. Tiled roof. Four storeys and cellar. Double-fronted with eight windows. Stone doorcase with consoles and broken segmental pediment with ball in centre. Gauged red brick flat arches and dressings to flush frame windows with boxing and glazing bars. Wood block bracketed eaves cornice.*

*INTERIOR: panelled with wood cornice and turned balusters with square newels to dog-leg stairs.*

*SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached cast-iron railings with torch flambe finials to rear.*

## SPECIAL INTEREST

At the date of listing (1951), the List Entry was intended solely to identify the historic asset, not to set out the principle reasons for designation as is the current practice. Nevertheless, the special interest of the building can be said to rest on two principle attributes:

- Historic interest: as late 17<sup>th</sup> century Barristers chambers still in their original use.
- Architectural interest: exhibiting late 17<sup>th</sup> century plan form, architectural features and detailing; as part of the terrace enclosing the west side of Gray's Inn Square and prominent backdrop / enclosure to Gray's Inn Gardens (The Walks).

## SIGNIFICANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) notes that significance may be *archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic* and *derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting*.

The term "*setting of a heritage asset*" is defined in the NPPF as '*the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced*'.

English Heritage, now Historic England, suggest that significance might be understood through one or all of the following "*values*":

1. "*Evidential value*": *relating to the potential of a place to yield primary evidence about past human activity*
2. "*Historical value*": *Relating to the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present*
3. "*Aesthetic value*": *relating to the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place*
4. "*Communal value*": *relating to the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, and whose collective experience or memory it holds.*

Having regard to the above values, the significance of the 1 Gray's Inn Square has the following principal attributes:

- As part of the historic fabric of Gray's Inn, a site owned and occupied by The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn for some 700 years
- As an example of late 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture still in its original use.
- As part of a terrace enclosing and forming the western boundary of The Walks, originally laid out in 1597 by Sir Francis Bacon, the basic layout of which is still readable today albeit simplified, possibly by Capability Brown in 1755.
- As a component of the development of the Inn and the memories it holds for its members, over the 700 years that it has occupied the site.



## BLOOMSBURY CONSERVATION AREA

The Conservation Area Appraisal (Para 5.152) summarises the character of Gray's Inn as follows:

*The whole area has a private, internalised feel, hidden from the main surrounding streets except at key locations where there are glimpsed views into the larger gardens. Historically, the north side of Gray's Inn Gardens was left undeveloped to provide views to Highgate. Today, the gardens are screened from Theobald's Road by tall cast-iron railings, planting, mature trees and lawns which slope down from street level. The sense of privacy of the Inns of Court is reinforced by continuous enclosed street frontages with gateways or arches. Indeed, it is the interrelationship between the varying sizes and types of spaces and the high quality of the environment which contributes to the distinct character of the sub area.*

## PROPOSALS

Having explored options for introducing level access to the front of the building, we concluded that this was not possible without unacceptable alterations to the appearance of the building. It also wrote off significant space on two levels. We therefore examined whether level access could be achieved to the rear of the building at basement level as the existing ground levels here are closer to building floor levels than at the front.

Wheelchair access requires a paved surface and, where ramped, a gradient of appropriate inclination. The garden to the rear is only open during specified hours (generally weekdays 12.00 – 14.30Hrs)). DDA access to the building is necessary 24 hours so any route through the garden must be separated from it.

The proposals involve the introduction of an inclined pathway immediately to the rear of the terrace set behind a retaining wall with railings to the garden side. Access is achieved from Field Court by introducing gates into the existing railings to No 1. The small basement 'lightwell' at the southern end which does not serve any windows will be bridged across by a steel mesh walkway to maintain air circulation below. Beyond that the path will continue in York stone.

The path is set down below the existing ground level of the garden behind a dwarf retaining wall topped with railings. The railings are required to prevent access to the gardens when closed and at the northern end to provide guarding where the new path is set more than 600mm below the garden level. Viewed across the gardens, the introduction of the DDA ramp will be barely perceptible. As such the proposals will have no impact on the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. At close quarters it will improve the visual junction of building with the ground which is currently somewhat unresolved with an asphalt drainage channel. The introduction of path and railings will also have a secondary benefit of preventing summer lunchtime picnickers from sitting too close to open windows and causing disturbance to occupiers.

We do not consider that the alterations to the railings to No 1 to introduce gates and the installation of a mesh walkway to the small lightwell has any impact on the historic significance of the listed building which is therefore maintained.

In the event that it was considered that the proposals caused an element of 'harm' this is clearly 'less than substantial' and should be weighed against the public benefits of providing DDA access into the buildings.

## **ACCESS STATEMENT**

The proposals will provide step free access to the basement level of the buildings from where it is possible to access the passenger lift providing lift access to all floors and parts of the building.

The Clerks Room for No 2 and No 3 are located at Basement Level so will become immediately accessible for wheelchairs users entering via the new rear entrance

Prepared by Richard Young Architect RIBA  
(Amended 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to include Heritage Statement)