

The Existing Building

14 Great James Street is an early eighteenth-century house on the east side of Great James Street and within the London Borough of Camden. The house is Grade II* and lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.



(Site view, showing the property with a red outline)

14 Great James Street was constructed in the early 1720's. The external walls were originally of brown brick with red brick surrounds to the segment-headed windows. All the principal rooms would have originally been panelled with timber box cornices and at plaster ceilings. The 1951 listing of the building has preserved a large amount of the interiors including the staircase and a considerable amount of panelling. Alteration to suit various tenants has led to changes and replacement to some of the internal door openings as well as, wall and ceiling finishes.

Possible WWII bomb damage and tenant change has led to the entire loss of the original rear facade re constructed in its entirety in 1965. Part of the front facade also shows some later brickwork but retains a number of the original Georgian sash windows.

In considering the historical records and evidence provided, it is clear that this building was built originally as a residential house.

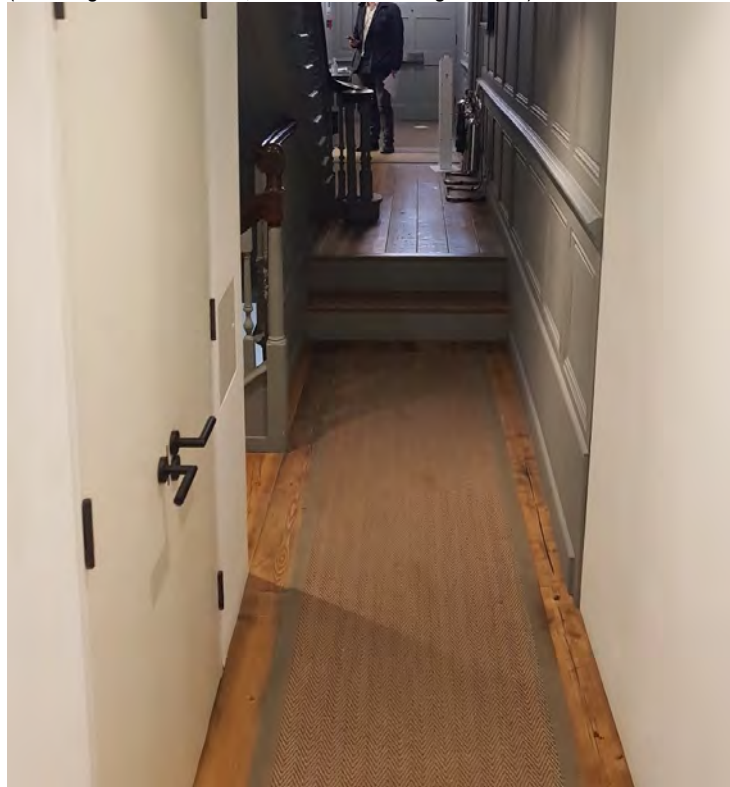
In August 2015, permission was granted to restore and repair many areas of the existing interior details, as well as a new rear basement extension, rear extension, and new rear façade. These works were carried out, and the results are in situ currently.

See planning ref: 2015/3046/P (for previous permission)

Existing photos



(current ground rear area, with staircase and glass wall)



(current ground floor rear hallway, looking back towards the main front door, blank doors on the left proposed to be changed to a 4 panel style door, with architrave)



(current ground entrance hall, with view of staircase)



(panelling and fireplaces now installed, to front reception)



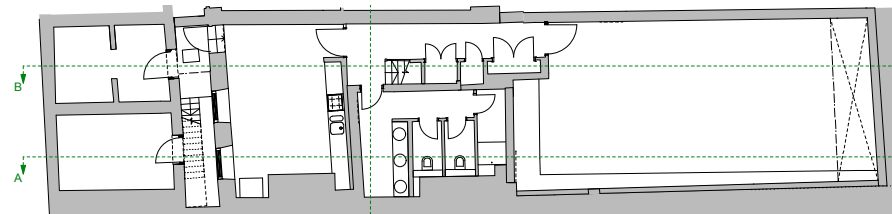
(current ground floor front room, showing panelling, floors and shutters etc)

The Proposals

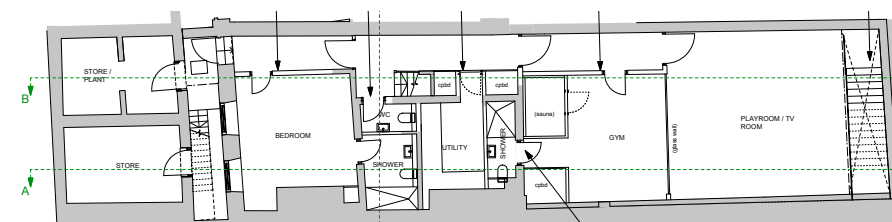
The building has been sensitively and fully refurbished and extended to the maximum that the heritage asset and plot would allow, beyond a serious engineering works (eg a basement). As such it has inherent insurmountable accessibility and inclusivity issues as a workplace that we will discuss in detail and how these are mitigated through change of use to residential use.

Lower Ground

(Existing and proposed plans shown here)



(Existing)



(Proposed)

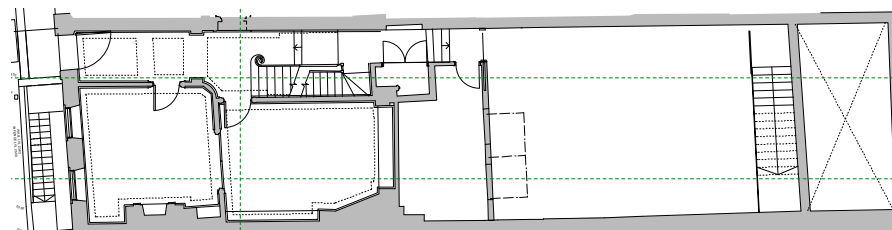
The current lower ground floor is laid out as an office space, wc and basins area, plant rooms and a kitchen to the front. There is street access for less formal entry eg in full wet cycling gear, but we encounter the limited space for showers and change with the mixed gender wc. This does present inclusivity issues for persons requiring change facilities that are not mixed for reasons of faith, gender identity or personal safety/preference/medical issues.

The open plan office area to the rear is ideal for an office layout that is flexible and allows for good circulation in this room, however access to this floor for those less mobile is restricted, the floor itself is not wheel chair accessible, however the floor plate is level and is the only one where work, toilets and break-out are on one level. Sadly it is limited with natural daylight and natural ventilation which presents issues for visually impaired.

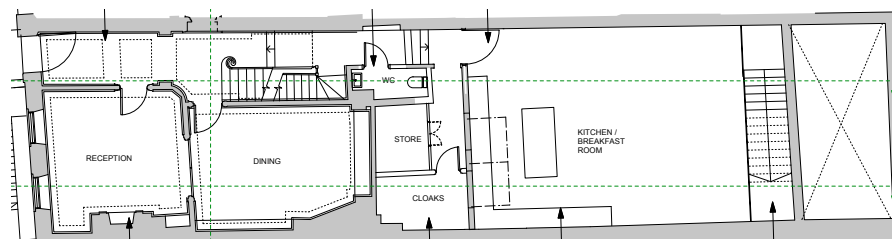
The proposed layout for residential use, provides an ensuite bedroom to the front lower ground reception whilst maintaining street access to the rest of the house. This would allow a carer to have their own separate living area and access to provide the care required for the resident to continue to live independently in their own home. It also facilitates multi generational living eg a grandparent or relative to move in long term or temporarily whilst for example recovering from an operation. The proposed floor is wheel chair accessible being all on one level with sleeping, cooking (utility), wash and recreation faculties all together with wide doors and corridors. The user would only require assistance to leave the property. Thus lifetime homes compliant.

The Upper Ground

(Existing and proposed plans shown here)



(Existing)



(Proposed)

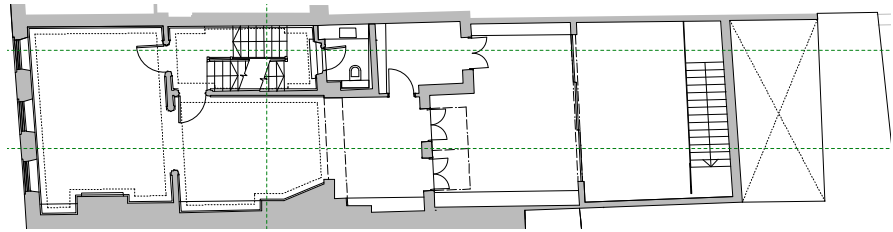
This floor is again not wheel chair accessible, but access can be managed with a assistance and a temporary ramp. Only the front two receptions are wheel chair accessible. The rear office space and meeting room have stepped access and the corridor width

The property being listed, doesn't allow for the stairs to be replaced for ones that can fit a stair lift, for a ramp to the front entrance, or for a lift to be fitted (that is step free) without causing substantial harm to the heritage asset or conservation area.

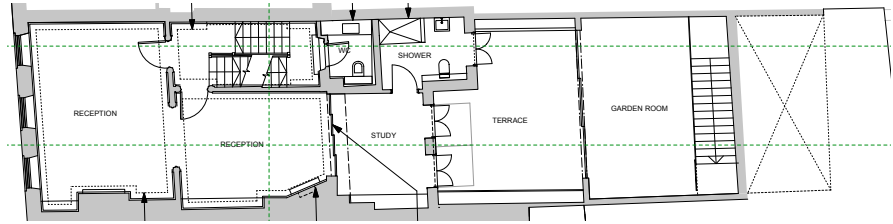
The proposed layout, although not step free allows for a WC compartment at entrance level, a large area for cloaks (push chairs, aides) and large kitchen. Guide a rails or ramps, all of which temporary could be fitted to allow the home to be used by wheelchair but this would not be possible as office use.

First Floor

(Existing and proposed plans shown here)



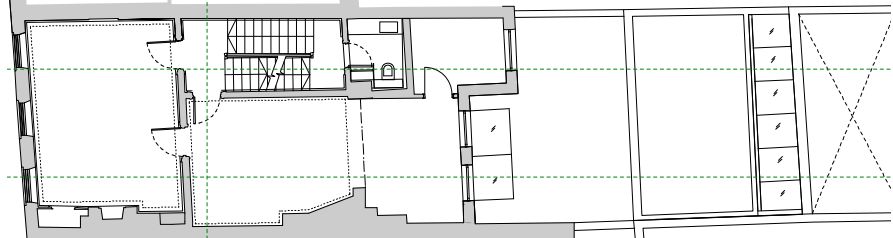
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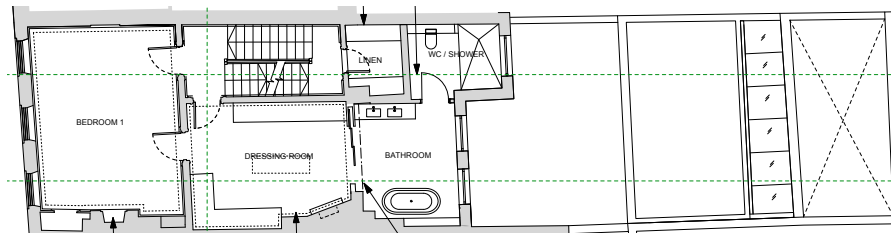
(Proposed)

Second Floor

(Existing and proposed plans shown here)



(Existing)



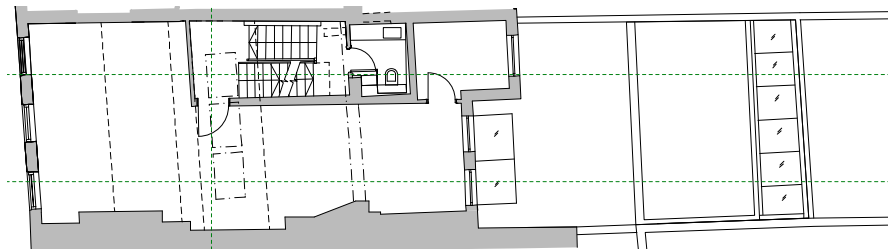
(Proposed)

First and second floor again have open plan office spaces that due to their shape are a poor fit for office furniture and for navigating the spaces if one is less able. The WC is only accessible on the half landings.

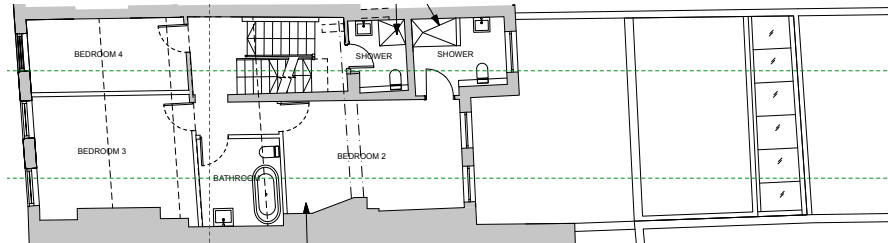
The proposed plans return the rooms to their original function with the additional of bathroom on the new extension. These bathrooms would be accessible however for the office use these are not possible as doors would open directly into the office or terrace and to add in further door would render the WC smaller than the existing at half landing.

Third Floor

(Existing and proposed plans shown here)



(Existing)



(Proposed)

The third floor has the same issues as the first and second for office use, for residential use three large bedrooms are proposed with two generous bathrooms.

Conclusion

The existing office building is a converted residential historic house that has been modernised and refurbished to a very high standard, further improvements to increase the accessibility and inclusion of the workspace would cause substantial harm to the heritage asset and the conservation area, as well as not be cost efficient with regard to the return financial benefits.

The property is not wheelchair accessible. A managed solution can be implemented which would be suitable for a resident but not for a busy office, at best a visitor but they would require assistance to use the WC which is non-inclusive. Internally circulation to the open plan offices are limited for wheelchairs due to the cellular floor plans. Circulation from floor to floor is not possible as the existing stairs would not adapt for a chair life nor would it be possible to install a lift without step free access. For home use the lower ground can be used as a self-contained wheel chair accessible flat, only with assistance to access the floor from street level.

The great majority of mobility issues are for ambulant users. The corridors are not wide enough for assisted walking nor are the historic panelling good for guide rails. The entrance floor is multi-level and other than the lower ground all floors have a WC at half landing. For a home use, we have discussed how a carer's flat is possible and the challenges to the layout are overcome by familiarity, assistance and implementation of aides that do not harm the historic fabric.

The property is not adaptable for an office for hearing impaired with restrictions of surface treatments that would make it easier to hear. This is not an issue in ones home.

The office, despite lacking in daylight to the two major office spaces, is well lit so the

visually impaired can work at a desk. However, the confusing layout of rooms doesn't make navigation easy and contrasting colours and textures are not able to be implemented for example nosing on the stairs, carpet tiles that would assist the visually impaired without causing harm. Again the tightness of circulation space makes assisted navigation in a busy workspace fraught. This is not an issue in a home environment where it is generous and familiar.

The layout of cellular unusual rooms shapes makes it very un-adaptable for an office environment eg as the workforce's needs change. However, as the home is large the open plan rooms are good for adapting to the lifetime needs of a family. It has been discussed how temporary ramps and rails could be used to allow residents to continue living in their own home and not require residential care, whereas this is not possible for a busy office.

As an office space the building is not inclusive with the majority inaccessible to those with a disability. For the wellness of the workers there are lacking facilities for a building of this size as so much is given to poor circulation space, for example no cycle changing areas, staff showers, multi-faith room, and no area for storage of belongings to enable a larger workforce to desk share. The layout forbids an optimum use of space and the location being on a residential street places undue stress on local transport infrastructure not being by a readily accessible hub and places undue stress on the local residents whose right to peaceful enjoyment of their homes is punctuated by a busy office.

As an office the property has reached the end of its useful life, despite considerable investment and sympathetic extension and refurbishment. The needs of its diverse workforce cannot be met and are harmful in its exclusive design. Returning the property to its residential use can and will meet the lifetime needs of its users in providing an accessible and inclusive home that will adapt as their needs change without placing burden on the state or local community.

PEEK Architecture and Design Ltd.