

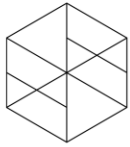
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Heritage Appraisal  
No. 30 Leighton Road, London, NW5 2QE  
August 2021

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 The following Heritage Appraisal has been prepared in support of proposals for a new nursery at no. 30 Leighton Road, London, NW5 2QE (the site). As part of the proposed new use, alterations to the existing listed building are required and this report address those alterations and their effect on the significance of the listed building.

1.2 No. 30 Leighton Road was listed at grade II in 1995 with an amendment to the list made in 1999. The list description for the building reads as follows:

*Royal Mail sorting office. Dated 1903. Red brick with stone dressings. Hipped slated roof with central tall panelled brick chimney-stack set above a segmental pediment and flanked by brick pediments with ball finials above Diocletian windows with keystones. Symmetrical design. Lower single storey facade projects forward beneath the Diocletian windows to give a segmental-arched entrance with pilasters having enriched capitals and frieze inscribed "Postmens Office", above which a pediment with carved royal coat of arms; original part-glazed double doors. Left hand bay with 2 sashes, upper halves with glazing bars; right hand bay with 3 smaller sashes, upper halves with glazing bars. Both bays with brick parapets, corresponding to doorway frieze, and having central segmental headed plaques carved with royal GR monograms. Original rainwater head and pipe to left hand bay. INTERIOR: not inspected.*

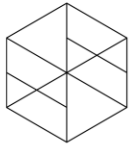
1.3 The listing of the building is predicated on the architectural and historic special interest of its principal street elevation. Indeed, it is acknowledged in the list description that the interior of the building was not inspected and therefore not necessarily a determining factor in considering the eligibility of the building for statutory listing. It is of course the case that the building remains listed in its entirety but there is potential for areas of the building to make different levels of contribution to its significance.

1.4 In previous decision making, LB Camden has agreed that the focus of the existing building's significance is in its principal elevation: '*The significance of the listed building comes from the detailed ornamental front façade of the building with its layered gable forms. The front boundary treatment, with its railings passing over the postbox, also contributes to the significance of the building*' (Committee Report, 04/06/20, 2020/0644/P and 2020/0784/L).

1.5 The significance of the existing building is discussed in more detail in Section 2 below. In short, the existing building was constructed as one of a series of Edwardian sorting and post offices designed by Jasper Wager of the government's Office of Works. Other examples include the Winchmore Hill and the West Ealing Sorting Offices. As a sorting office, these buildings all had the space for dealing and sorting mail. What made them distinct was the powerful architectural expression and treatment of the principal elevations of what were otherwise rudimentary and prosaic buildings.

1.6 In each case, the principal elevations of Wager's buildings were unique to their context and while all form part of an architecturally themed group, they all have their own external character and interest, a fact reflected in their individual listings (where statutory listing applies). Examples of Wager's work include Winchmore Hill, Finsbury Park, Hanwell, Tooting, Clapham, Upper Edmonton and West Ealing, all built in the period between 1902 and 1904.

1.7 There are a number of listed buildings close to the site. As the proposed changes to the existing building are largely internal, it is considered that the settings of these nearby listed buildings would not be affected by the proposed scheme as described below. The existing building is also within the Kentish Town Conservation Area. No significant external alterations are proposed to the site other than renovation and refurbishment. In this regard,



the proposals would preserve and enhance the conservation area as set out in Section 3 below.

1.8 This report will therefore focus on the effect of the proposed scheme on the significance of the existing listed building at no. 30 Leighton Road.

### Research

1.9 This appraisal has been prepared following research into the historic development of the listed building and of similar listed and unlisted examples of Postmen's or sorting offices. This research has been complemented by site assessment and a full review of the most recent applications for planning permission and listed building consent

1.10 Research has been undertaken using a number of online sources such as *The Builder*, *British Post Office Architects*, *British Newspapers Online*, the catalogue of the National Archives and LB Camden's Local Studies and Archives Centre.

### The proposals

1.11 The proposed scheme involves the alteration of the existing building for nursery use. Only very minor demolition is proposed (a glazed link to the rear of the site) and all parts of the former sorting office are retained (including the kitchen, postmen's rest room and WC block that were removed as part of the consented scheme). The new nursery will be run on a long lease by N Family Club, a highly regarded nursery provider running several sites across London, several in historic and/or listed buildings.

1.12 The proposed scheme involves the retention of a mezzanine (there is an existing mezzanine and a larger version with double stair access has been recently approved as set out below).

1.13 Repairs and renovation will enhance the exterior of the building and its overall

character and appearance and long-term sustainability.

1.14 Inside the building, some subdivision is proposed in the form of two vertical partitions that would be partially glazed at the upper levels. These, in common with the existing and consented mezzanine, are entirely reversible. Introducing new fabric can be reversed while demolition, as per the consented scheme, means a fundamental, irrevocable alteration. The proposals are considered in more detail in Section 3 below.

### Recent planning history

1.15 As referred to above, there is an existing listed building consent and planning permission associated with the existing building, approved in 2020 (2020/0784/L and 2020/0644/P) for site wide office use.

1.16 The 2020 consented scheme involved internal and external demolition of parts of the listed building, including the demolition of all buildings to the rear. The plan form of the listed building was to be altered through the provision of a corridor through to the rear of the site within the listed building's envelope (figure 1). In a way, part of the listed building was effectively partly reduced to a 'means to an end.'

1.17 The historic arrangement of the building would be fundamentally altered and the historic rear access on the rear elevation removed. The significant alterations to the listed building were necessary because of the wider office use of the site. The existing listed building effectively blocks access to the rear for multiple users – tenanted offices within the listed building could not be used as a through route for occupiers of other office space to the rear of the site.

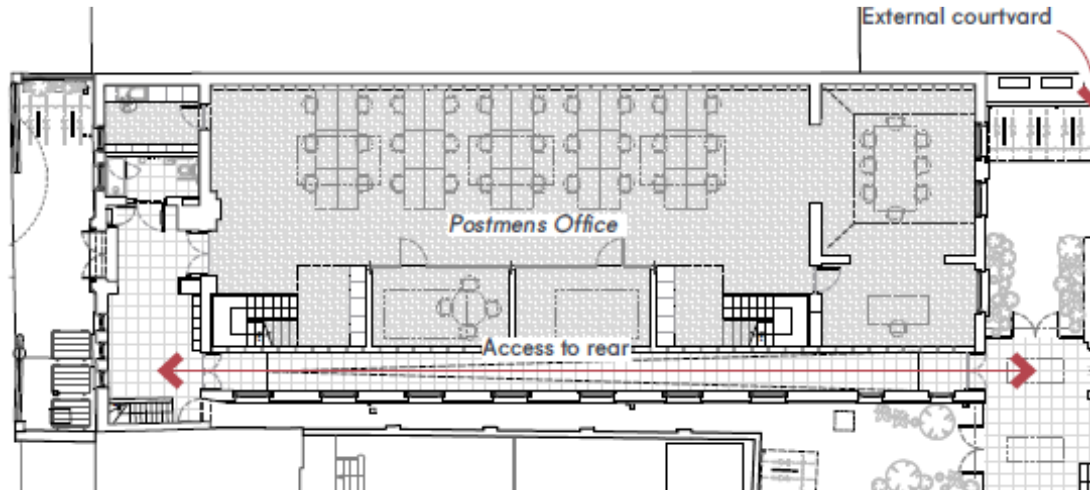
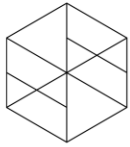


Figure 1: 2020 approved layout with corridor and alterations to the plan form of the listed building.

1.18 The 2020 LBC consent were partly based on a 2015 permission for the redevelopment of the rear part of the site for residential use. The 2015 approved applications (2015/4778/P and 2015/4856/L) also necessitated similar changes to the layout with a comparable corridor running front to back. The corridor reduced the significance of the listed building but was required in order to provide access for the residential occupants.

1.19 LB Camden ultimately determined that the partitioning for the corridor was reversible (Committee Report, 2016, paragraph 6.18). However, while this may be the case in theory, once residential and further office use for multiple occupants is developed and established on the site, it is highly unlikely that the corridor would ever be reversed because of the necessity to unlock uses at the rear of the site for multiple occupiers.

1.20 The *Planning and Heritage Statement* that accompanied the application noted at paragraph 7.44 that the 2020 scheme caused harm to the listed building:

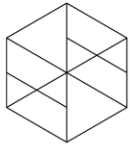
*Whilst there will be an element of minor harm to the listed building through these alterations, these are necessary to support the long-term vitality and preservation of this heritage asset,*

*on balance it is considered that the harm is 'less than substantial'. There is a clear tangible public benefit to securing the use of the Postmens Office in the future. The proposals will restore and repair the listed building, preventing further damage in the future through better building design and removal of degraded elements. This harm is considered to be outweighed by the public benefit resulting from the survival of this asset and its key features.'*

1.21 The scheme for the listed building now proposed demonstrates that the consented invasive and harmful alterations are not necessary to support its long-term conservation. The benefit of the proposed scheme is that there is a single occupier who will have access to and occupation of all parts of the site. This therefore removes the need for a corridor of the type previously consented and the same level of demolition. It retains the integrity of the building's original envelope and historic plan form. This is discussed in more detail in Section 3 below.

### Report structure

1.22 The following report provides an overview of the historic development and significance of the site and considers the effects of the proposal on significance and against



relevant historic environment policy. Section 2 summarises the historic development of the site and Section 3 considers the proposals and their effects on the historic environment. This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the drawings and other documentation provided by Kennedy Woods Architects.

### Author

1.23 This appraisal has been prepared by Kate Graham of The Heritage Practice. Kate Graham (MA (Hons) MA PG Dip Cons AA) has extensive experience in dealing with proposals that affect the historic environment having in recent years been Design and Conservation Manager at the London Borough of Islington and Senior Historic Buildings at Areas Adviser at Historic England. She also has an extensive background in research, in policy analysis and in understanding historic buildings and places. She has trained as a historian and has a specialist qualification in building conservation. Kate is also a member of the London Borough of Islington and the London Borough of Hackney Design Review Panels.

1.23 Additional historical research for this report was undertaken by Dr Ann Robey FSA, a conservation and heritage professional with over twenty years experience. She has worked for leading national bodies as well as smaller local organizations and charities. She is a researcher and writer specialising in architectural, social and economic history, with a publication record that includes books, articles, exhibitions and collaborative research.

## 2 The site and significance

2.1 The following section provides an overview of the historic development of the proposed site and considers its significance in its own right and as part of a group of widespread buildings that were constructed as

part of the post office's expansion in the Edwardian period.

2.2 The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of enormous expansion for the Post Office. As noted in English Heritage's *Purpose Built Post Offices*, the expansion came '*Against a backdrop of population increase, rising adult literacy (resulting in an upsurge in the volume of mail) and the spread of the railways, the reforms championed by (Sir) Rowland Hill in 1840 – 'of a uniform rate of postage, regardless of distance, and prepayment of postage by means of adhesive stamps sold by the post office'5– laid the foundations for today's postal system.*'<sup>1</sup>

2.3 The spread of the railways became a particularly significant factor in the selection of post office sites and it is no accident that sorting offices are often found in close proximity to the railway and railway stations.

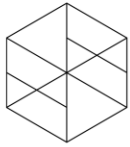
2.4 At Leighton Road, the existing sorting office is located in very close proximity to Kentish Town Station and it is clear that this attracted the Post Office to the site (as well as being central to the Kentish Town residential and commercial areas). Wager's Winchmore Hill and Finsbury Park sorting offices are similarly located.

2.5 Historically, the Post Office was not responsible for the design and construction of its own buildings. Until the arrangement for procurement changes in the 1980s, it was the architects working within the Office of Works during the period 1851-1940 who were responsible for late Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings.<sup>2</sup>

2.6 The architect of no. 30 Leighton Road was Jasper Wager, an architect employed by the Office of Works. Wager was somewhat prolific in the field. He designed approximately

<sup>1</sup> *Purpose-built Post Offices: A Rapid Assessment and Suggestions for Future Work*, English Heritage, 2008, Jonathan Clarke.

<sup>2</sup> [www.britishpostofficearchitects.weebly.com](http://www.britishpostofficearchitects.weebly.com)



twenty post offices and twenty-one sorting office (or Postmen's Offices) in Greater London. His work included the substantial sorting office and post office to the west of Islington's Upper Street (now converted for residential use) that was constructed between 1904 and 1906.

2.7 Prior to the construction of the sorting office in 1903, the site of the existing building was occupied by two houses (figure 2). One was much larger than the other and had a large garden that extended further to the south than neighbouring properties. It was obviously of a size that lent itself to a more commercial use.

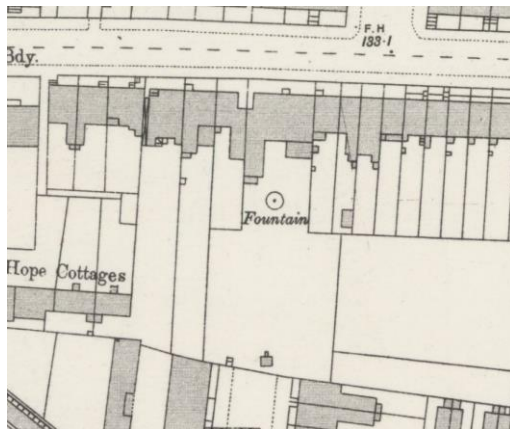


Figure 2: OS map extract of 1895. The sorting office was built on the site of the house with a fountain in the garden and of the property immediately to the west.

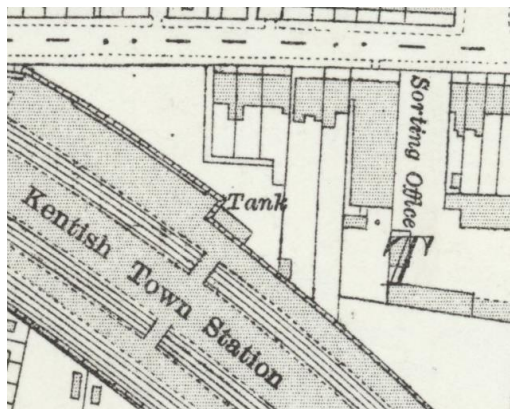


Figure 3: The sorting office in 1913 with small WC block to the south.

2.8 Wager's sorting office was built as a single block with a small, partially detached WC

block to the south (still *in situ*) (figure 3). A plan of 1954 shows that the layout of the building at that time with a rest room, 'overseer's' office, kitchen and WC block (figure 4), all typical requirements of a sorting office layout. Comparing plans of Wager's sorting offices, Leighton Road has a typical arrangement with the main entrance, lobby and office to the street (in the prime positions) with the sorting office, kitchen, rest room and WCs to the rear (figure 5).

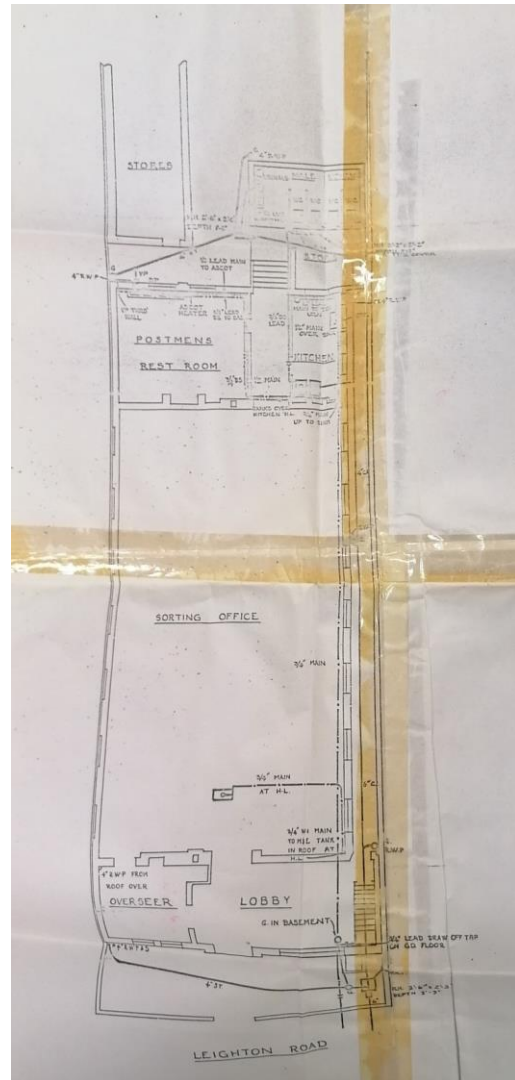
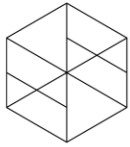


Figure 4: Drainage plan, 1954



2.9 The building was constructed very simply as effectively a brick box with subdivision to create the principal rooms. The rear and west elevation are simple and modest in comparison to the exuberant principal elevation (figure 6), a characteristic of many of Wager's sorting offices. The front elevation is constructed in red brick with stone dressings – the central doorcase is particularly impressive



Figure 5: Original WC block to the rear of the site.



Figure 6: Principal elevation.

with 'Postmens Office' in relief above the door and the royal coat of arms. Two cartouches either side of the door have the initials ER or Edward Rex. This highlights the origins of the building as crown property that was leased to the Post Office (as all Post Offices and associated structures were).

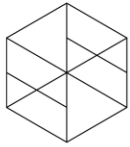
2.10 Beyond the single storey front entrance and office block is the volume of the sorting hall behind, picked out in the street elevation with a segmented pediment and with brick pediments either side with Diocletian windows. The various functions of the building are therefore expressed architecturally in the building's principal elevation.

2.11 The west elevation is faced in red brick over a rendered plinth. Timber sash windows run the length of the building (figure 7). The south elevation has been internalised and is now partly rendered over (figure 8).



Figure 7: The simplicity of the west elevation.

2.12 Internally, the building is plainer than the principal elevation. There are no longer any of the fittings that relate to the former sorting



office use. An overseer's window is at first floor level, accessed via a ladder in the ground floor office. This appears to have been a regular feature of Edwardian and later sorting offices, allowing a degree of supervision over the work being undertaken on the sorting hall floor. As shown in figure 11, Stanmore sorting office had a similar overseer's window.



Figure 8: South elevation now rendered over with brick shown about the glazed roof.



Figure 9: Ealing sorting office, Jasper Wager, 1935.

2.13 Photographs of similar sorting halls indicate the likely extent of fittings within the hall at Leighton Road and highlight the general

similarities between the interiors of different sorting office buildings (figures 9-11).

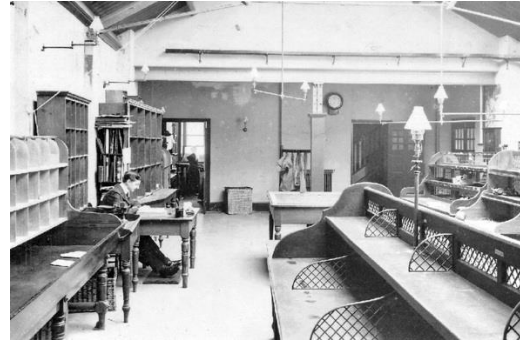


Figure 10: Unidentified sorting office interior. This shows the sorting desks and general character of a typical interior.



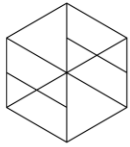
Figure 11: Stanmore sorting office in an undated photograph. This building also had an overseer's window at one end and similar Diocletian windows to those seen at Kentish Town.

2.14 The sorting office interiors were relatively generic with top lighting and high level fenestration to the walls (where present). The simple interior effectively allowed for flexibility of space for the various sorting office fittings and the work of its employees.

2.15 By 1954, a store had been built within the rear yard (as shown on figure 4). This building still forms part of the site. Applications to extend the buildings further were made during the 1970s and 1980s to create additional space for welfare use.

2.16 By 1995, the sorting office had closed and a change of use application for studio/office/workshop use with associated storage (9500344). It was at this point that the





building was listed, presumably the application for change of use triggered the listing decision. In 1997, applications were approved for the demolition of an existing pre-fab building and the construction of a single storey studio. The existing garden room at the rear of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century store was approved in 2003 (2003/2999/P).

2.17 In 2015 an application was submitted for the demolition of all buildings to the rear, redevelopment for residential use and alterations to the listed building (2015/4778/P and 2015/4856/L). The consented works to the listed building were amended by application 2016/6361/L. These applications resulted in a substantial mezzanine with two staircases at either end (figure12).

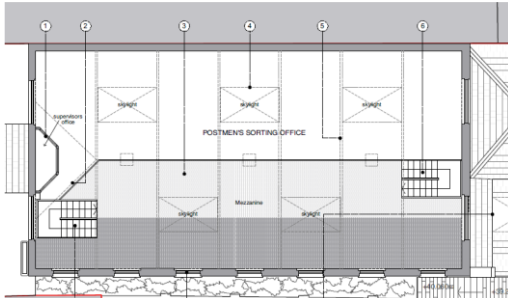


Figure 12: Approved layout 2016.

2.18 As referred to at 1.15-1.21 above, applications for planning permission and listed building consent for office use were approved in 2020. This resulted in the approval of a slightly reduced mezzanine with a staircase at either end. The most fundamental alterations were the new corridor providing access to the rear of the site and the removal of the plan form at the southern end of the building, including the pair of historic doors that led out to the rear yard.

### Significance

2.19 The former Postmen's Office forms part of a group of similar buildings designed by Jasper Wager of the Office of Works in the Edwardian period. Other examples include Ealing, Winchmore Hill, Finsbury Park, Tooting

and Lee Green (figures 13-21). The same hand in all of the buildings is clear and there are some stylistic similarities between Kentish Town and other comparable examples.

2.20 The massing of the Kentish Town example is broadly similar to other examples with a single storey block and a taller sorting hall behind. This distinction in spaces is therefore clear in the principal elevation which reveals more about the building beyond its ornamental appearance.



Figure 13: Finsbury Park Sorting Office, 1904.



Figure 14: Chingford, 1910



Figure 15: Lea Green, 1900.

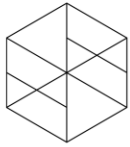


Figure 16: Tooting, 1904.



Figure 17: Streatham, 1906



Figure 18: West Dulwich 1906



Figure 19: West Ealing, 1904

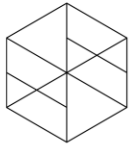


Figure 20: Doorway, Winchmore Hill, 1904.

Figure 21: Kentish Town, 1903.

2.21 There is a clear and distinctive language applied to Wager's sorting offices that tie the widely spread numerous members of the group together. The signage and coats of arms that form important components of the overall architectural expression are effective in making





clear the purpose of the building and how they have originated as crown property, designed and built by the Office of Works. In this way, the legibility of this history contributes to the significance of the listed building.

2.22 The group value and association with Wager also contributes to the significance of the listed building. Wager was an architect with the Office of Works responsible for many Post Office buildings, large numbers of which survive.

2.23 The architectural quality of the principal elevation marks the status of the building within the local community. The Post Office was a prominent and important organisation and its buildings have a municipal and civic quality that recognises its social, cultural and commercial value. In this regard, the building (and others built for the purpose) have a strong identity and architectural generosity that can also be seen in police stations, town halls and magistrates courts. The architecture of the building reveals its purpose, status and historic interest.

2.24 Internally, the building has a simple and functional layout with smaller rooms either side of the larger hall. The overseer's window is an indication of the former sorting office use and the requirement for supervision. Otherwise, there are no other fixtures or fittings within the building that relate to the building's former use. The simple interior contrasts markedly with the principal elevation. The exuberance and expense of the building was clearly concentrated on external appearance.

2.25 The simplicity of the interior has some value in that it is a more work-a-day area for genuine reasons.

2.26 The principal interest of the listed building is in its reflection of the expansion of the Post Office in the Edwardian period, its association with Wager, the Office of Works and a series of related structures.

2.27 Sorting offices are not rare and there are large numbers of similar examples across London. What makes the building distinct is the composition, language and articulation of the principal elevation, a feature that aggrandises a relatively prosaic and commonplace function. Obviously the remainder is not without value but the form and layout of the building is not unique or rare. The building's historic associations and architecture of its street elevation contribute most substantially to its significance and special interest. It is these attributes that make the building special and distinct within the local area and within the group of similarly dated sorting office buildings.

### 3 The proposals and their effects

3.1 The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the proposals and consider their effects against the significance of the listed building and relevant historic environment policy (Appendix A). This section should be read in conjunction with the detailed submission prepared by Kennedy Woods Architects.

#### The proposed scheme

3.2 As noted above, the proposed alterations relate to the new nursery use. N Family Club is a high quality nursery provider with numerous locations across London set in historic and/or listed buildings. The existing site lends itself well to nursery use and has a good quality outdoor space. There is no intention to demolish any existing structures. The proposals therefore represent a lower-key intervention into the site as a whole than previous consents. As noted above, these resulted in the demolition of all buildings to the rear of the former sorting

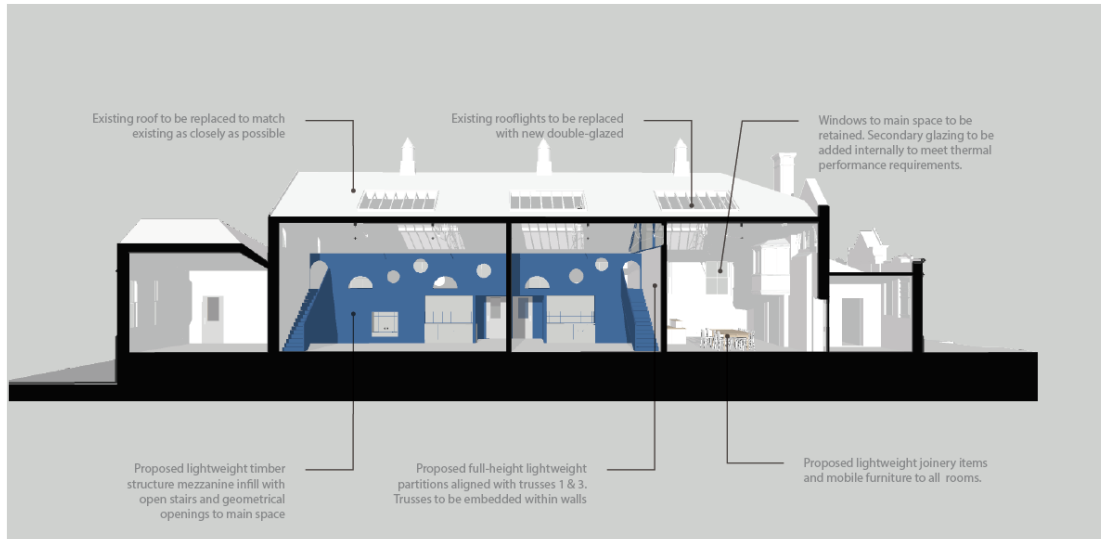
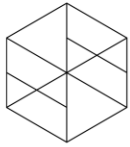


Figure 22: Section through the building showing proposed alterations.

office and fundamental changes to the character and special interest of the listed building.

3.3 The proposals involve the following (as illustrated in figure 22):

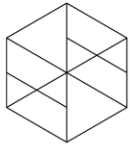
- Restoration and refurbishment of the existing building include renewal and repair of the existing roof and skylights (as per the recently consented 2020 scheme);
- Use of all buildings on the site as a single occupier nursery;
- Subdivision of the sorting hall into three volumes, maintaining the full height of the hall and incorporating two reversible, partially glazed partitions;
- Removal of existing inappropriate mezzanine and introduction of a lightweight timber mezzanine, smaller in scale than the existing and previously consented mezzanines;
- Windows to sorting hall retained and secondary glazed; and,
- All security bars and grilles removed.

3.4 The proposals as they relate to the listed building are a departure from the consented scheme of 2020. The consent

separated out part of the listed building's footprint so as to create a corridor that allowed the unlocking of the site to the rear. If implemented, the corridor would result in the permanent subdivision of the sorting office. The 2020 consented scheme also proposed alterations to the west elevation and the permanent reconfiguration of circulation and access and historic plan form.

3.5 LB Camden acknowledged in relation to the residential scheme of 2015 that while the corridor was not normally appropriate, there was a need to secure access to the rear of the site and the council compromised over the effects of the special interest of the listed building. The council observed that harm would be caused to the listed building's special interest but that this harm would be less than substantial (2015 Committee Report, paragraph 6.21).

3.6 In line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the council gave great weight to this harm and considered it alongside the public benefits that would be derived from the proposals. These benefits include the survival of the asset and its key features, the continued use of the listed building and the beneficial use of the backland site for an



alternative use (2015 Committee Report, paragraph 6.23).

3.7 In consideration of the 2020 scheme, the council found that the approved scheme, similar to the 2015 consent, caused no harm to the significance of the listed building and therefore did not consequently weigh the proposals against relevant public benefits.

3.8 The applicant however acknowledged that the consented scheme would cause harm. The Planning and Heritage Statement set out at paragraph 7.44 that harm to the listed building was necessary in order to secure the long-term sustainability and preservation of the asset.

3.9 In short, the council has previously accepted compromises with regard to the special interest of the listed building in order to trigger the sustainable reuse of the site. The 2015 scheme has lapsed and the 2020 scheme is unlikely to be implemented.

3.10 The scheme now proposed is a better proposition for the existing building and its special architectural and historic interest. There is no need to separate out parts of the building to unlock the site to the rear and the underlying historic plan form remains. The current applicant intends to restore and repair the existing building as necessary which will secure its ongoing preservation/conservation without having to demolish and redevelop parts of the site. The proposed use for the building is a sustainable one and will be implemented, the end-user is the applicant and therefore the occupier is already fully secured. This is not a speculative development.

3.11 The proposals do require a degree of subdivision of the original sorting hall but this is entirely reversible and maintains an appreciation of the historic height and volume of the hall, particularly to that area adjacent to the overseer's window which has no vertical or horizontal subdivision. It also allows for the integrity of the building's envelope and footprint to remain intact.

3.12 As noted in the Design and Access Statement, the overall intention is to enhance the listed building and its overall significance while providing a nursery that incorporates high quality design and finishes. This brings with it enhancements to the principal elevation, windows and the roof. Proposed repairs will make the building wind and weather tight – neglect and ongoing vacancy have exacerbated water ingress and associated issues.

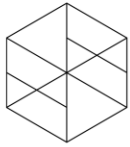
3.13 N Family Club has a solid track record in dealing with historic and/or listed buildings and have successfully secured new and sustainable uses at the following sites:

- No. 47 Tulse Hill, Brixton – Grade II listed;
- Queens Road, Twickenham – locally listed in a conservation area;
- Woodchurch Road, Camden – locally listed in a conservation area;
- Hanover House, Tunbridge Wells – grade II listed in a conservation area;
- Atkins Road, Balham – grade II listed in a conservation area;
- Ockham, Surrey – grade II listed;
- Weybridge, Surrey – positive contributor in a conservation area;
- Rectory Road, Hackney – grade II listed (currently in planning); and,
- Highgate, Camden – locally listed in a conservation area (currently in planning).

### Effects

3.14 Finding a sustainable new use of the existing site is not necessarily straightforward. The existing building is no longer a sorting office and will never be so again. In addition, two unimplemented schemes for development have demonstrated that an element of compromise is required in order to appropriately conserve the listed building.

3.15 As established in Section 2 above, what makes the listed building truly special is its external architectural character and its historic



associations. The interior also contributes to its significance as it signposts a previous use but does not make this explicitly clear. Indeed the interior is generic and economically and efficiently built. That it was a sorting office is actually made most clear through the building's principal elevation through its signage (internally, the building could have any function and there is nothing rare or exceptional here). This legibility would continue to be appreciated, remaining unaffected by the proposals. The front elevation has the appropriate signage and the volume of the sorting office can be clearly appreciated.

3.16 The proposals as they relate to the existing listed building and the recently consented scheme are comparatively benign. The footprint of the building remains intact and as a result of the proposed single occupancy of the site, a separated off access corridor to the rear of the site is not required. This in turn means the historic corridor through to the rear yard is retained together with the rooms either side. The original WC block is also retained together with the buildings and garden to the rear.

3.17 The proposed mezzanine is lighter and more subtle and modest than the existing. It extends approximately two thirds of the length of the building and is set well away from the overseer's window at the north end allowing the window to be appreciated in a volume with no vertical or horizontal subdivision. With respect to the overseer's window, this is an improvement on the existing situation.

3.18 The proposals also involve the introduction of two vertical partitions, one of which is partially glazed, allowing view through from the northern end and middle section of the building. The partitions will be lightweight in form and structure and are completely reversible. They allow the underlying structure, plan form and footprint of the historic building to remain intact.

3.19 While it is appreciated that LB Camden has reportedly resisted vertical subdivision in the past, presumably in order to maintain a single volume in the sorting hall, it has accepted some vertical and increased horizontal subdivision which have their own effects on the volume of the hall. As noted above, if the rear part of the site was developed for residential of additional office use, the consented corridor within the building would become permanent and the vertical and horizontal subdivision would then have a fundamental affect on the character and interest of the building. It would lose its integrity and authenticity.

3.20 The proposed partitions allow for the appreciation of the building's full height and a sense of its original volume, albeit in three parts. This would reduce the legibility of the original interior to a degree but the proposed retained visual permeability at higher level would assist with this matter. Importantly, the hall and ancillary offices are not the most significant part of the site and the partitions are entirely reversible. The building will retain its integrity and footprint.

3.21 The applicant and proposed occupier will undertake restoration works to the building as soon as possible. Works to the roof in particular are clearly becoming more urgent and areas of the roof are failing. The building needs a good use for the site that does not result in the subdivision of the building for different uses or in introducing features that means that the listed building becomes a way of unlocking unlisted buildings at the rear of the site.

3.22 The vertical partitioning should therefore be seen against an otherwise benign scheme that ultimately protects the integrity of the listed building.

3.23 The 2020 consent secured permission for the construction of two substantial blocks of a scale comparable to the listed building. The consented scheme challenges the primacy of the listed building on the site and permanently effects its historically open setting (figure 23).

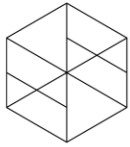


Figure 23: The consented scheme (DAS).

3.24 The area to the south of the former sorting office was an open yard until the construction of additional outbuildings from the 1990s. While additional development has infilled the yard to the degree, the listed building retains an open setting and there is a degree of separation between the modern additions and the original building. This retains a sense of the site's former openness and character, allowing the listed building some breathing space.

3.25 The proposed scheme is a less intensive use of the site and retains this open quality, allowing the listed building to retain its visual and historic primacy. The consented scheme infilled the rear yard almost entirely. Combined with the separation out of part of the listed building to provide access to the rear, the development as a whole challenged the importance of the listed building and failing to make the new development recessive. As a through route, the listed building almost becomes ancillary to development at the rear.

3.26 The proposed scheme retains an open garden, essential for nursery use and provision, and this helps to preserve the listed building and its setting. It also ensures that the listed

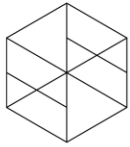
building remains the principal building on the site with structures to the rear clearly having an ancillary relationship.

#### Policy compliance

3.27 The general thrust of national and local historic environment policy (Appendix A) is to avoid causing harm to the special interest and significance of designated heritage assets, in this case a grade II listed building.

3.28 As described in Section 2 above, the significance of the listed building derives from its external appearance and its historic associations. The building is one of many sorting offices that were erected during the Edwardian period in London – the use isn't rare but the architectural expression used in the principal elevation is truly unique.

3.29 The proposals will enhance the physical appearance and condition of the listed building and its fabric while ensuring that at last, the building has a sustainable new use that does not involve the level of subdivision or demolition previously consented. As a package of works, the proposals enhance the listed



building overall and deliver significant public benefits.

3.30 Paragraph 202 of the NPPF directs the decision maker to consider the public benefits of the proposal where 'less than substantial harm would be found.' If any harm was perceived by the proposed scheme, this would certainly be considered at the lower end of less than substantial harm. This is because of the reversibility of relevant works, their lightweight nature and that they overall retain the integrity and footprint of the building and secure its condition and long-term use.

3.31 In addition to this, the proposal is guaranteed to provide 30+ jobs (with a focus on employing local people) and to deliver 115 much-needed childcare places (see London Plan Policy S3 which protects childcare facilities and identifies that an additional 100,000 childcare places will be needed between 2016-2041).

3.32 The proposal therefore delivers a series of heritage and public benefits that overall result in a package of works that responds to the significance of the listed building. It also acknowledges that the listed building is the most important part of the site and the rear part of the site is secondary. Previous applications have placed the greatest emphasis on development to the rear, thus partly reducing the importance of the listed building by turning it into a through-route. The deliverable scheme now proposed places the greatest emphasis on the listed building and it continues to form the principal structure on the site.

### Conclusions

3.33 The proposed scheme allows for a sustainable new use of the existing listed building and the wider site. This new use does not require extensive demolition or redevelopment and would only have a positive effect on the character of the Kentish Town

Conservation Area through works of repair and restoration to the building.

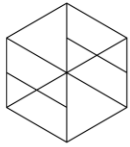
3.34 The new use would be delivered by a provider with a solid background in dealing with historic buildings and who can secure a viable use for the former sorting office. This is not a speculative development for a more intensive residential or office use that reduces the primacy of the listed building but is a deliverable scheme that will secure the restoration and a viable long-term use of the building while retaining the status quo of the wider site.

3.35 The focus of the building's significance lies in its principal elevation and historic associations. The sorting hall and ancillary rooms have lesser interest as it is not these which add substantially to its significance. These areas have none of the rarity or visual interest of the principal elevation.

3.36 The proposals overall will enhance the listed building and improve upon the harm that would be caused by the previously consented scheme if implemented. If any harm were perceived through vertical partitioning, this would be undoubtedly at the lower end of less than substantial and the heritage and public benefits identified above – particularly in securing a viable and deliverable use for this redundant and vacant building – will certainly outweigh this level of harm. This is a use that does not require fundamental compromises to inhabit the building.

3.37 For these reasons and for other identified above, it is considered that the proposed scheme would accord with the relevant national, regional and local historic environment statutory and policy provision. The proposals are acceptable in historic environment terms.





## Appendix A

### Relevant Policy Context

The following paragraphs briefly set out the range of national and local policy and guidance relevant to the consideration of change in the historic built environment. The relevant statutory provision for the historic environment is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

#### National Planning Policy & Legislation

Section 16 of the **Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** requires that:

*"In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State 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 possesses."*

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that:

*"...special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area."*

The revised **National Planning Policy Framework 2021** (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies and how these are expected to be applied. There is a general presumption in favour of sustainable development within national planning policy guidance. Paragraphs 189, 190, 192 and 193 are relevant to this application.

#### Paragraph 194

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. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record

should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.

#### Paragraph 195

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.

#### Paragraph 197

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

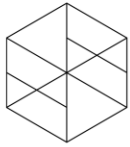
- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability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

#### Paragraph 199

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.

#### Paragraph 200

Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:



- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

#### Paragraph 202

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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

#### **The London Plan**

The London Plan 2021 is the Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London. It sets out a framework for how London will develop over the next 20-25 years and the Mayor's vision for Good Growth. Policy HC1 Heritage conservation and growth part C is relevant:

*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 avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process.*

**Policy S3** of the London Plan (referred to within this appraisal) relates to the protection and delivery of nurseries and nursery spaces.

#### **London Borough of Camden Local Plan**

Camden's Local Plan was adopted in June 2017. The most relevant policy in this case is Policy D2: Heritage.

With regard to Conservation Areas, the policy states that the Council will:

- Require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character and appearance of the area.

With regard to Listed Buildings, the policy sets out that the Council will:

- 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.

The proposals have also had regard to the following:

*Camden Planning Guidance: Community uses, leisure facilities and pubs* (January 2021)

*Camden Planning Guidance: Design* (January 2021)

*Camden Planning Guidance: Energy Efficiency and Adaptation* (January 2021)