

HERITAGE STATEMENT

RELATING TO

WATES - CAPITAL WORKS PLANNING

AT

ACTON STREET
CAMDEN
LONDON WC1X 9LX

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1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Potter Raper, in support of an application for listed building consent in connection with redecoration works to Acton Street, Camden, Central London (figure 1). The proposed works form part of a comprehensive programme of works that are being carried out on the freeholder’s housing stock.

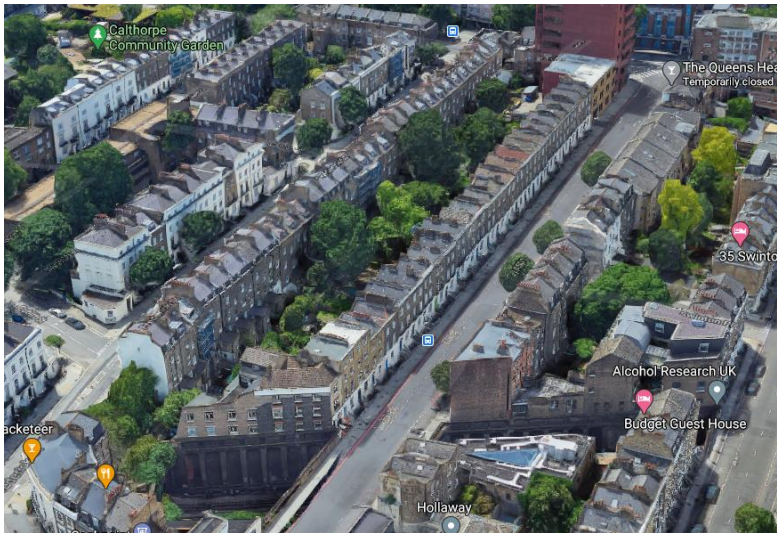


Figure 1: Satellite view of the Application Site (Source: Google Maps)

The buildings, hereafter referred to as the Site, is listed Grade II. It was formerly known as Acton Street. The Site lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and the full property list is as follows:-

15 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	27 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ	37 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
17 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	28 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	41 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
19 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	29 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ	43 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
21 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	30 Acton Street, WC1X 9NE	45 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
23 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	31 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ	47 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
24 Acton Street, WC1X 9ND	32 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	49 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
25 Acton Street, WC1X 9LX	33 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ	51 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
26 Acton Street, WC1X 9ND	35 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ	53 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ
		55 Acton Street, WC1X 9LZ

The Site is on the east side of Gray's Inn Road, connecting it with King's Cross Road.

The Site compromises a total of twenty-five terraced houses. Each house is divided into three storeys plus a basement. All terraced houses are characterised by yellow stock brick on first and second floors, and with rusticated stucco on ground floors and plain 1st floor sill band. On each property and each floor there are two windows, recessed sashes with glazing bars, those on ground floor with round-arched openings. Doorways with fluted quarter columns, fanlights and panelled doors. First floor windows have a cast-iron balcony. Fine wrought cast-iron railings to areas.



Figure 2: The Site viewed from Acton Street (odds numbers)

This Heritage Statement has been developed to provide sufficient information to allow the Council to gain an informed understanding of the building, in order to gauge the suitability of the proposals. It is considered that the special interest and significance of the building would not be harmed and that the alterations proposed would further reveal and reinforce the significance of this building.

2.0 Architectural and Historical Appraisal

2.1 Historical Development of Local Area

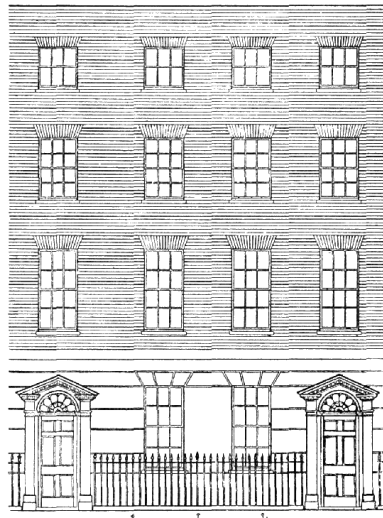
Acton Street is on the east side of Gray's Inn Road, connecting it with King's Cross Road. The western end was first built as a short cul-de-sac. The earliest building leases which have come to light are those of 1778, when the Swintons let building land for three houses here to William Todd and refer to abutments on houses already built. These, including one erected by Mr. King, a painter, were probably built in 1776, since there is a reference to "a new street called Acton Street" in December 1777. In Horwood's map of 1799, and also in Britton's map of 1834, Acton Street is shown still unfinished, and its subsequent development was contemporary with that of Swinton Street, six houses being added in the late 1830's. The remainder of the street was completed by 1845. The earlier buildings of the 1776–1780 period are of simple Georgian type, with fine wooden door-cases. The eastern end, where the street was extended later, is similar to Swinton Street in its principal features and may be the work of the same builders. The houses are numbered from east to west, odd numbers on the south side and even on the north. All, unless otherwise described, have stucco facing to the ground storeys, and areas with railings except where shop fronts have been put in.

3.0 Assessment of Significance

3.1 Site Assessment

Location and Setting

The Application Site occupies a prominent location near Swinton Street and Acton Street. Those streets are somewhat blighted by traffic as they are busy thoroughfares on a westbound gyratory system between King's Cross Road and Gray's Inn Road which has led to the elevations being heavily affected by soot. The majority of terraced properties retain residential uses and are interspersed with public houses. The use of yellow brick is widespread, together with increasing amounts of stucco from around 1820 which is evident in the rusticated ground floors. The special interest of the architecture of the area is highlighted by the high number of listed buildings.



63 Acton Street and 306 Gray's Inn Road

Figure 3: 63 Acton Street and 306 Gray's Inn Road

Architectural Interest and External Features

Brick is the predominant building material used across the Conservation Area as it was the cheapest locally available material. Red brick is seen in some of the earlier brick-built developments of the Tudor and Georgian period, whereas London stock was used from circa 1800.

Brick, stone and stucco are all used as contrasting detailing in the articulation of frontages. The use of stucco is seen more commonly in buildings dating from the early 18th century, initially at ground floor level to mimic rusticated stone, and from the 1820s over entire facades of a classical design.

The terraced townhouses have a number of characteristic details in their design including the repeated pattern of windows. Windows are mainly sliding sashes, which range from the earliest examples set close to the face of the building and with thicker glazing bars. Other common elevation details include segmented heads, rubbed brick arches, delicate cast iron balconies and intricate fanlights. Roofs are mainly covered in natural slate, but clay tiles can be found on earlier townhouses.

3.2 Conservation Areas

The Site lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area situated in the London Borough of Camden; which covers an area of approximately 160 hectares. It is extending from Euston Road in the north to High Holborn and Lincoln's Inn Fields in the south and from Tottenham Court Road in the west to King's Cross Road in the east.

Despite Bloomsbury's size and varying ownerships, its expansion northwards from roughly 1660 to 1840 has led to a notable consistency in the street pattern, spatial character and predominant building forms. Today, the area's underlying townscape combined with the influence of the major institutional uses that established in the district and expanded over time is evident across the large parts of the Conservation Area. Bloomsbury is also internationally known as a result of its association with the literary Bloomsbury Group whose main proponents including Virginia Woolf were based in Gordon Square in the early 20th century.

The initial designation of Bloomsbury as a Conservation Area in 1968 sought to protect elements of development from the Georgian and earlier eras, but excluded areas where there had been significant later redevelopment. There have been numerous subsequent extensions that have mostly reflected a growing appreciation of Victorian and Edwardian and high-quality 20th century architecture.

On all redevelopment, extensions and refurbishment schemes the Council will expect to see the use of appropriate materials such as brick, stone, render, timber windows and slate roofs, which will blend with and reinforce the existing appearance and character of the area. Many properties in the area still have original external and internal architectural features, such as fanlights, cast-iron balconies, timber sash windows, panelled front doors, moulded window surrounds and door cases, marble fireplaces, window shutters and ceiling cornices. These features contribute to the character of the area as a whole and should be maintained and, where necessary, repaired. Where renewal is unavoidable or features are missing, these should be reinstated with traditional and matching designs.

4.0 Proposals and Assessment of Impact

It is being proposed that the building will undergo a full redecoration of external elements, including those that form part of the external railings. All previously painted areas will receive any necessary repairs, if required, prior to being decorated in colours to match the existing finish. These redecoration works will have a positive impact on the building's aesthetic appeal and will go a long way to restore and protect the fabric of the building.

4.1 Existing and Proposed Painted Sections and Brickwork

Details of the materials used for this project are included in detail in our design and access statement. With regards to the painted surfaces and brickwork, the aim of the project is the repair, and to prolong the expected life of the products, which should contribute in a positive way to the appearance of the heritage asset, and to the Conservation Area. At present, these elements appear worn and weathered, and the proposals should improve this. Where the soot from the road congestion has affected the brickwork and stucco, in particular to the front elevations, we plan to replicate this by use of a mild soot-wash (to brickwork only). This will retain the rustic appearance that the bricks currently have, rather than highlight the repaired with a brightly coloured London stocks.

Lime-based products will be used on all appropriate surfaces, and will replace cement-based repair work where and if it exists. This will improve the heritage, and lower the impact that previous repair work may have had on the character.

4.2 Front Entrance Steps

The properties have a mixture of covering to the front steps, many of which are modern and unsympathetic to the breathable masonry beneath. Our proposals is to retain the existing steps, suitably cleaned and repaired with concrete fillers. Where other finishes, such as tiles or bitumen, have been applied, these may be removed.

4.3 Replacement of Soil and Vent Pipes (SVPs) and Rainwater Pipes (RWPs)

Soil and Vent Pipes and Rainwater Pipes will be repaired where feasible and replaced with cast iron, this will have a significant impact on the heritage of the buildings.

4.4 Railings

The proposals for the railings to the street scenes are to improve the condition, whilst maintaining the character. Where spindles are missing, these will be replaced to both to restore the original character and also improve any health and safety risk. The redecoration of these will also improve the longevity and appearance, contributing to the character.

4.5 Main Roof

The main roof is not visible from the street, and the materials proposed are to replicate the original, with lime mortar for flaunching, Code 4 leadwork, and natural slates. Again these proposals are to improve and enhance the character and longevity of the relevant building components.

4.6 Timber Windows

The timber windows will be repaired rather than proposed for replacement. The proposed repairs aim to improve the life of the windows by preventing rot from penetrating the timber, and the redecoration will ensure that the timber is protected from the elements.

5.0 Conclusion

Based on the above assessment, it is considered that the proposals will not harm the significance of Acton Street and its refurbishment will preserve the building's special architectural and historic interest. The proposals would give rise to modest economic and heritage benefits by making the property fit for purpose and improving its capacity to sustain a beneficial use. The consolidation and, where possible, restoration of the historic fabric is also an integral part of the proposal.

The justification for the proposal presented in this Heritage Statement refers to enhancing the significance of heritage assets by putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation and the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality.

It is our view that the proposals are entirely in keeping with all national and local legislation and policy relating to the historic environment and there are, as such, no heritage reasons why the proposals should not be supported. Accordingly, we invite the Local Planning Authority to treat the proposals favourably and commend the approval of this application for listed building consent.