

Donald Insall Associates

Chartered Architects and Historic Building Consultants

King Edward VII Galleries, British Museum

Heritage Statement (Waterproofing Works)

For the British Museum

March 2022

Contents

1.0	Summary of Overview Historic Building Report	3
2.0	Assessment of the Proposals	5
	Appendix I - Statutory List Description	7

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1.0 Summary of Overview Historic Building Report

1.1 Introduction

Donald Insall Associates was commissioned by the British Museum to assist them in the development of proposals for waterproofing works to the King Edward VII Galleries at the British Museum, London WC1. The investigation has comprised historical desk-based research and a site inspection. The proposals are explained in Section 2. The specific heritage constraints for this building and its context are summarised below.

1.2 The Building, its Legal Status and Policy Context

The King Edward VII Galleries is a Grade I listed building which forms part of the British Museum but has its own list entry. It is located in the London Borough of Camden's Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Alterations to a listed building generally require listed building consent and justification regarding their impact on heritage significance; development in conservation areas or within the setting of a listed building or conservation area requires local authorities to assess the implications of proposals on built heritage.

The statutory list description of the listed building is included in Appendix I and a summary of guidance on the Bloomsbury Conservation Area provided by the local planning authority is in Appendix II, along with extracts from the relevant legislation and planning policy documents.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the legislative basis for decision-making on applications that relate to the historic environment. Sections 16, 66 and 72 of the Act impose statutory duties upon local planning authorities which, with regard to listed buildings, require the planning authority to have *'special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'* and, in respect of conservation areas, that *'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'*.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan applicable to the site comprises the Camden Local Plan (2017) and The London Plan (March 2021).

The Camden Local Plan has policies that deal with development affecting the historic environment, in particular Policy D2: Heritage, which states that *'The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm'*.

Policy HC1 Heritage Conservation and Growth of The London Plan (March 2021) stipulates that *'(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....Development proposals should avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process.'*

The courts have held that following the approach set out in the policies on the historic environment in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 will effectively result in a decision-maker complying with its statutory duties. The Framework forms a material consideration for the purposes of section 38(6). At the heart of the Framework is *'a presumption in favour of sustainable development'* and there are also specific policies relating to the historic environment. The Framework states that heritage assets are *'an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations'*. It states that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, that any harm to their significance requires 'clear and convincing justification', and that 'less than substantial harm' to heritage significance should be outweighed by public benefits.

1.3 Assessment of Significance

The **King Edward VII Galleries**, constructed as an extension the British Museum in 1906-1914, are of exceptional architectural and historic special interest, and this is reflected in their listing at Grade I, a separate list entry from that of the British Museum. The building is an important work by the prominent architectural practice of J. J. Burnet, later Burnet and Tait, and then Burnet, Tait and Lorne, whose designs, many in London, are amongst the best classical and modern buildings in inter-war England. The King Edward VII Galleries is the only executed building of a comprehensive masterplan by Burnet to enlarge the British Museum to fill the entire city block and replace all surviving terraced Georgian houses around the Museum's perimeter with museum accommodation. Whilst the masterplan did not come to pass, the King Edward VII Galleries were built, and housed part of the expanding museum's collection, namely British and Medieval Antiquities, the print room, the map room, and, inset to the south, the North Library.

The areas that are the subject of this small application are back of house spaces that are not seen by the public, namely in the basement and to the rear. These areas are utilitarian and have low heritage significance.

The **British Museum** is a building which is, somewhat surprisingly, separately listed at Grade I. Its heritage significance as the nation's foremost museum of archaeology, ethnography and artefacts from across the world is of exceptional value, both for its collections, its history and architecture. The relative significance of the various parts of the museum is set out in the Conservation Management Plan by Purcell Miller Tritton (2008) and does not need to be replicated here. The elements of the museum that face the rear elevation of the King Edward VII Galleries, the north elevations of the north wing of Smirke's building, are unadorned and partly altered stock brick elevations designed to be hidden from view. They are of no more than medium significance.

The **Bloomsbury Conservation Area** is large and takes in Georgian terraced streets and garden squares developed by the Earl of Bedford, large university buildings of the 20th century, and commercial buildings including hotels on Southampton Row leading to Euston Station. The site is in sub-area 3 which includes the British Museum and university buildings including Senate House, and this is defined by large-footprint, handsome buildings in a variety of styles which clearly express their function and stand in contrast to the tighter grain of surrounding terraced Georgian houses which otherwise dominate Bloomsbury.

2.0 Assessment of the Proposals

2.1 Description of Proposals and their Impact

The proposals have been drawn up by Nex Architects and are shown in their application drawings and explained in their Design and Access Statement. The proposals would entail the renewal of failing waterproofing surfaces in back-of-house areas. They entail cavity membranes, new central drains to be cut into the floor, the rebuilding of modern partitions to enable the works, minimal changes to modern fire curtains, and small changes at the top of the two circular staircases and in an outside back of house area.

The Proposals:

The works primarily relate to two tunnel areas in a back-of-house area in the basement (public areas are on the levels above).

In the tunnels, which have been cement rendered and have an asphalt floor, mould has built up due to water ingress and water pooling. This would be removed through a chemical spray which would only be applied to modern surfaces, leaving any historic finishes intact.

Some surface areas have cracks and other damage, including to brickwork, and like for like repairs are proposed. Such works do not ordinarily require listed building consent.

The tunnel floors would be covered in Collecta Screed Board laid over a fire resistant membrane which in turn would sit on the existing asphalt finish. The cavity membrane, a fully reversible addition, would also cover the tunnel walls. The membrane would have small fixings to attach it to the walls which are substantial and robust structures that can easily withstand such intervention. Where there are joints in the tunnel walls it is proposed to insert joint reinforcement in the form of Newton Overtape, a sealant tape. Steel columns in the tunnels would receive a cementitious coating and fire proof sealant around their lower sections. The tunnels would also receive new drains in the floor which would take away any water captured by the membranes. The current surfaces are not fulfilling their purpose and there is substantial water ingress and pooling in the tunnels. The areas that would be affected by these works already have modern finishes. They do not feature historic finishes or fittings which would be impacted.

Further, it is proposed to remove two localised back of house partitions between the staircases and tunnel, so that the waterproofing works can be carried out, and rebuild partitions on the same plan once the waterproofing is in place. For the eastern partition this will include new fire doors, at the west partition existing doors are to be reused.

In the location of existing modern fire curtains, the stopping would be removed and replaced in Rockwool. This minor element of work to a modern insertion does not affect the special interest of the listed building.

At either end of the basement level are two circular secondary staircases. Their bottom flights are enclosed by rendered walls, a later alteration. It is proposed that this render, which is failing, is renewed in similar materials. This would not affect the special interest of the listed building.

At ground floor level, there is an alley to the rear of the building which has a small section at its lowest end to the southeast where two pipes discharge water into an area which leaks because of insufficient falls. It is proposed to break out the modern failing screed and relay new screed to proper falls. This would not affect the special interest of the listed building.

The Impact:

The works are located in modernised, plain back of house areas which have low or no heritage significance; the tunnels are not identified in the Purcell Miller Tritton 2007 CMP, and it is clear from site inspection that their heritage significance is at best low. The lower end of the circular stairs and the small outside area are also altered and of low significance.

The areas that are the subject of these proposals have failed and are now subject to water ingress which poses a threat to the long term survival of the building. The proposals are essentially repair works, specified to be long-lasting to avoid further water ingress. They are necessary, and they would not cause harm to heritage significance because of where they are located. Some of the works are like for like repair or replacement works which ordinarily do not require listed building consent.

The works would not impact on the special interest of the listed building, and they would also not impact on the setting of the British Museum or the character or appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

2.2 Justification of the Proposals & Conclusion

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) sets out a duty by the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability to preserve listed buildings and their settings, and preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas (sections 16, 66 and 72 of the Act). This is reflected in the London Plan (policy HC1). The Camden local plan (policy D2) and the NPPF (paragraph 202) both allow for harm to heritage significance to be outweighed by public benefits, with the proviso set out in the NPPF that 'great weight' has been given to the conservation of affected heritage assets, and that harm has been addressed with 'clear and convincing' justification.

The heritage significance of the King Edward VII Galleries would be preserved, and there would be no harm to the setting of the British Museum or the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. However, these proposals are necessary in order to stop water ingress and keep the building in good maintenance and useable. There would be very limited intervention to historic fabric, and the installation of the proposed membrane and tanking works will help to safeguard the entire building in the long-term. Such maintenance is an obligation to the building owner and will also benefit the long term beneficial use of the building as one of the nation's foremost museums.

For these reasons, the proposals would preserve the special interest of the listed building and conservation area, and comply with the Camden Plan (policy D2) and the NPPF (paragraph 199), the requirements of the 1990 Planning Act (sections 16, 66 and 72) and the London Plan (Policy HC1).

Appendix I - Statutory List Description

The British Museum King Edward VII Galleries and attached wall and lions (Formerly Listed as: GREAT RUSSELL STREET (North side) King Edward VII Gallery, British Museum)

Grade: I

List Entry Number: 1322129

Date first listed: 24-Oct-1951

Date of most recent amendment: 11-Jan-1999

Statutory Address: THE BRITISH MUSEUM KING EDWARD VII GALLERIES AND ATTACHED WALL AND LIONS,
MONTAGUE PLACE

GVI

Museum gallery forming part of The British Museum (qv). 1905-14. By Sir John Burnet, assisted by Thomas Tait. Portland stone and marble.

EXTERIOR: 2 storeys and semi-basement, 21 bays. Symmetrical Edwardian Beaux Arts facade with a screen of attached Ionic columns on a podium and flat, higher square erections at the angles. Commercial metal framed windows, on both floors, between the columns. Granite door frame with inner frame of enriched marble. Above this an inscribed foundation stone and gilded wreaths on the flanking columns. Cornice with protruding carved lions' heads at intervals. Deep blocking course with guttae at intervals and parapet above having, at intervals, carved crowns with the initials ER under.

INTERIOR: in fine neo-Classical style. Low top-lit hall. Stair lined with Greek marble; a pair of black columns with a large Buddha between in the well and a gilt bronze lift cage to one side. Galleries in trabeated Smirke style; stripped Classical detailing. North Library, behind the stair, altered from Burnet's original mannerist concept.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached stone wall to areas terminating at either side of the main entrance with carved stone lions, having crossed front paws, by Sir George Frampton.

Listing NGR: TQ2997681722

