

# 24 John Street

## Heritage Statement

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24 John Street  
Bloomsbury  
London  
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London Borough of Camden  
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## Executive Summary

This brief heritage statement has been prepared by Hugh Cullum Architects in support of listed building consent for minor maintenance and repair to the Georgian terrace at 24 John Street.

The purpose of this document is to set out in simple terms the work that is proposed and to offer justification and evidence for those works, without going into unnecessary detail. The proposed works are very simple and uncontroversial in nature, closely following the relevant Historic England guidance.

The following is a summary of the works proposed.

### **Damp remediation works to the basement**

p5

*Removal of cementitious internal render, replacement with lime plaster, and panelling up to 1.1m height.*

### **Minor maintenance, repair, and alteration works**

p12

*A range of very minor alterations, including installation of an electric vehicle charging point, infill of a modern lightwell, replacement of degraded entrance steps, etc*

The property is Grade II listed and therefore of special historic and architectural interest. The site also falls within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. In following paragraph 194 of the NPPF 2021, this statement '*describes the significance of the heritage assets affected [...] the level of detail being proportionate to the assets' significance, and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.*'

It is considered that the works as part of this application are all uncontroversial in nature and either have no negative impact upon the heritage asset or bring benefit to its conservation. Given the minimal nature of the interventions proposed, a proportionately limited assessment of significance has been pursued. Further clarifications and reports can be provided if necessary, but it is anticipated that local authority conservation officers will be very experienced in dealing with buildings of this type.

We can be contacted directly for any clarifications or queries via telephone, email, or in person on the details below.

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## 0.1 - Summary

24 John Street is a Grade II listed Georgian terraced house situated in the eastern range of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. It falls within the area first designated as a conservation area in 1968, making it part of one of the oldest conservation area designations in England.

It is listed under Historic England listing reference 1379157, which dates the terrace to 1800-1819, listed in 1951.

In very simple terms, the significance of the building is considered to mainly derive from its state of good preservation as a late Georgian terraced building, and its setting within an array of long, planned Georgian streets, all of which retain the majority of their original Georgian terraces in a good or excellent state of preservation.

Preserving and safeguarding the historic appearance and fabric of the building should therefore be at the core of any approach to modification or repair of this heritage asset. In simple terms, this means identifying what is historic or original to the building, and retaining or repairing that where possible. It also means recognising ways in which the building has been unsympathetically altered, and seeking to undo those harmful changes to better reveal the building's core significance.

This 'common sense approach' to conservation has been a guiding principle for the alterations proposed as part of this application. It is recognised that a whole report could be composed in attempting to set out every aspect of this heritage asset's significance. In following paragraph 194 of the NPPF 2021 as set out in the introduction, a proportionate approach to identifying significance has instead been followed. Given the simple and unintrusive nature of the works proposed, this simple guiding principle is considered proportionate.

### 1.1 History & Assessment

The lower ground floor has historically suffered from damp. This is evident in peeling and discolouration of the wall surfaces, mainly towards the bottom of the wall, rising to a height of 1m in places. Photographs are provided on the following pages.

The presence of damp has been reported as an ongoing problem since the current owners' purchase of the property in the 1990s. Damp-proofing works have been carried out at various points in the building's history, mainly utilising injection of silanes into the mortar, lining of the walls in impermeable plastic, and rendering of the walls in cementitious render.

A comprehensive history of the treatments and associated results has not been undertaken, although the clients were interviewed as to when and where certain parts of the damp began to manifest. These treatments have been successful in reducing the problem, but the majority of the walls still appear damp in places, and the air in the lower ground floor has been noticeably humid and 'stuffy' on site visits.

The problem appears to be a typical case of rising damp, exacerbated by a lack of proper ventilation. As damp proof courses ('DPCs') only became common in London from c.1870 onwards, the brickwork and plaster on the walls is in direct contact with the moist ground below via the footings to the foundation. This allows capillary action to draw up water from the ground through the brickwork and plaster, where it evaporates into the drier and warmer interior of the house.

The passage of water through the walls is exacerbated by the presence of a concrete slab throughout the lower ground floor, which prevents any migration of water through the slab. Moisture trapped below the concrete slab is drawn up through the walls.

As the water originates in the ground and travels through the brickwork, there are usually salts dissolved into the water, particularly nitrates. Upon evaporation at the wall surface, these salts are left behind in increasing amounts on the wall and in the brickwork. The presence of these salts, which can be observed visually or tested for chemically, is the main symptom of rising damp.

These salts are visible on all damp wall surfaces.

Given the evidence we have observed, we are content with the diagnosis of rising damp. An independent survey was also commissioned in 2021, which included 'readings' of dampness in the walls and testing of salts present on the wall surfaces. Nitrates were found at all tested sites. This independent surveyor was also satisfied with a diagnosis of rising damp.

The following pages contain illustrative photographs of the dampness.

A simple survey of the damp can be found as part of the planning application, drawing number S100.

**Figure 1**

Typical example of dampness present in the basement. The dampness is most severe at the base and decreases in severity further up the wall. The moisture and salts gradually disintegrate the paintwork and eventually the gypsum plaster.



**Figure 2**

Another example of the effects of dampness. In this case the modern skirting board has begun to detach from the wall surface



### Figure 3

One of the worst affected areas of damp, just below the entrance. Here there is quite serious damage to the finishes and corrosion to the steel plasterboard bead.



## 1. Damp Remediation Works

### 1.2 Proposals

There are many 'solutions' to the problem of rising damp.

It is the unfortunate reality that most of these do not work, or if they do work, they are quick to fail following any subsequent refurbishment work, no matter how small. The installation of traditional impermeable dry-linings and cementitious render can be seriously compromised simply by the installation of a nail for hanging a picture frame. Traditional 'impermeable' damp-proofing methods are also heavily dependent upon the quality of installation. As these methods work by 'holding back' the moisture within the wall, a single point of failure can lead to dramatic amounts of moisture escaping through the penetration.

These traditional methods have been attempted at the property and despite guarantees they have repeatedly failed.

The approach we propose to take through most of the basement is to pursue a traditional 'breathable' construction, which would allow moisture to freely travel through the walls and into the basement, before being ventilated away by a mixture of passive and mechanical ventilation.

We propose to do this by removing all cementitious render and linings back to brickwork, and subsequently replastering in traditional lime plaster applied directly to the wall. The lime plaster would then be panelled up to a height of approximately 1.1m, and painted above in breathable clay mineral paint.

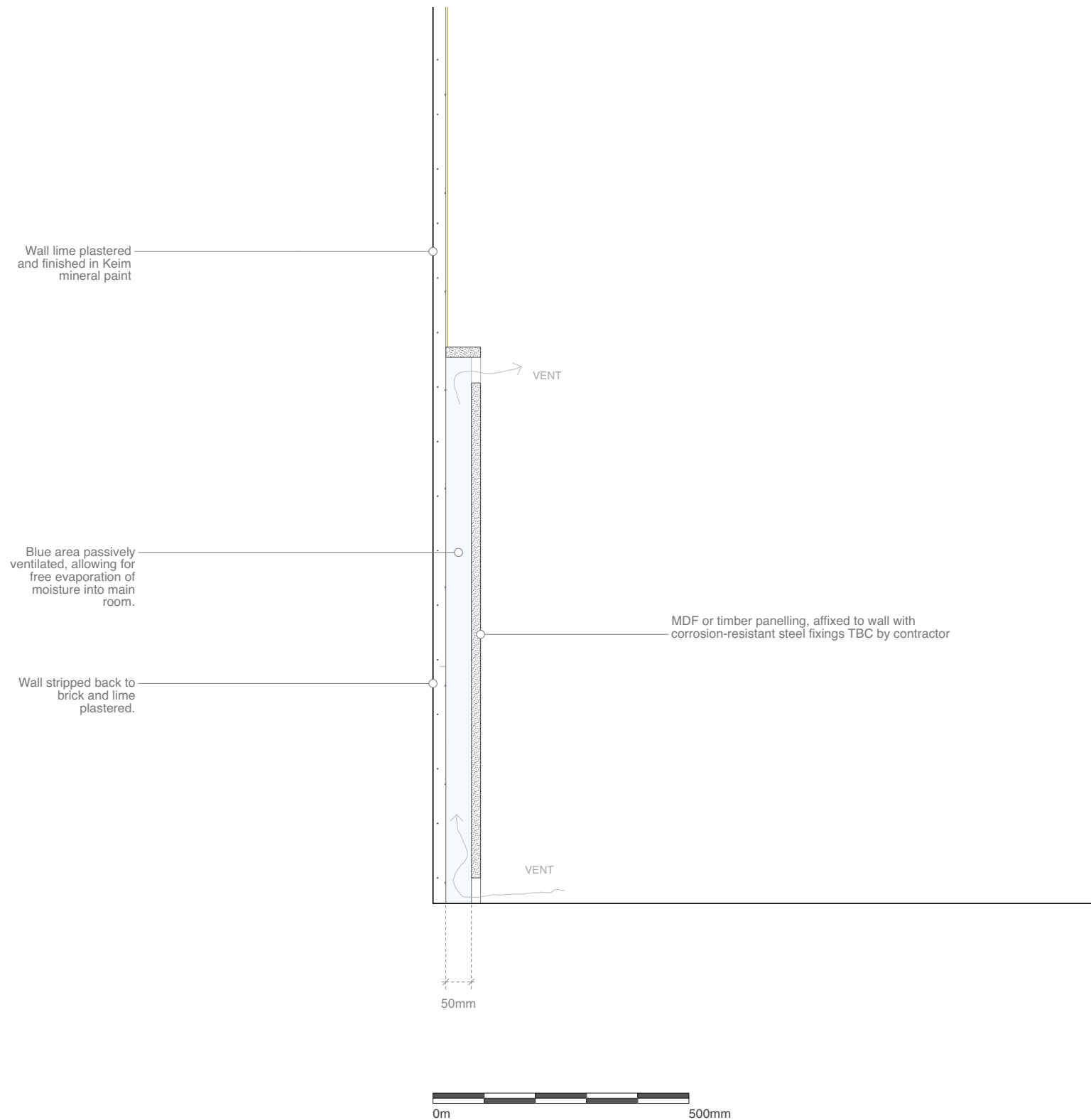
The panelling would contain ventilation gaps at the top and bottom to allow passive ventilation into the room via the stack effect.

The intention is that any evaporation of moisture will occur behind the panelling at the base of the wall, and then be carried away into the main body of the wall. Unpainted lime plaster, as a breathable material, would allow this passage of moisture without degradation of the surface. At the same time, the finished surface of the panelling would not be in contact with the wall, removing any possibility of damp degrading the finished painted surfaces.

A french drain would also be installed just in front of the front elevation to the house. This is because the internal dampness is particularly severe in this location, and severe dampness at this location appears to be common to Georgian houses in this area.

The following page (fig. 4) shows the panelling detail in section. It is anticipated that detailed design, if considered relevant to the LPA, would be secured by condition.

Figure 4  
Ventilated panelling detail



## 1. Damp Remediation Works

### 1.2 Proposals

At the front of the building, beneath the pavement, is an interior 'vault' space.

As this is underground, there is little option but to use a traditional impermeable tanking system.

As there is a tanking system in place currently, albeit failed, it is not considered that this has any effect upon the significance of the building.

The location of this area can be found on drawing number P100. Photographs can be supplied if necessary.

### 1.3 Heritage Impact

The works proposed would involve the stripping of all wall surfaces, and their replacement with lime plaster and panelling.

As set out in the introduction to this statement, the basic guiding principle has been to assess whether any elements of original or historic fabric are being altered or affected by the works.

All wall finishes are modern, with the original (assumed) lime plaster finishes having been replaced long ago. The existing use of cementitious render functions by trapping moisture and salts within the historic brick wall, which over time can lead to serious degradation to historic fabric as the salts build up and eventually dissolve the brick-work, in extreme cases even leading to structural failure.

The proposed works would remove the cementitious render, which is both an inappropriate modern material, and harmful to the historic fabric of the building. This would be replaced with traditional lime plaster, allowing free movement of water out of the brick-work.

The works would safeguard the integrity of historic fabric in the long term and also restore the building closer to its intended state, using traditional materials and workmanship. As such this is considered to be beneficial to the conservation of this heritage asset.

It should be noted that there are some elements of joinery which appear to be historic and possibly original to the building, including architraves and skirting boards. These are all to be retained where identified as being historic, being carefully removed and re-instated in the same location following the replastering works. A treatment is proposed to be applied to these items of joinery to help them better resist moisture ingress and thereby reduce the risk of dry rot.

A draft schedule of works is included in the drawing set, setting out the proposed works in rough order and precautions to be taken by contractors during the works to protect historic fabric (P100).

### 3. Minor Maintenance, Repair, & Alteration

## 3.1 Summary

While works to the basement are carried out, it is proposed to implement a number of incidental maintenance and repair jobs, and a handful of minor improvements to the building. None of these are considered to be of a controversial nature, and are listed and explained here mainly for the avoidance of doubt.

1. **Front Lightwell Alterations.** The existing lightwell is painted brilliant white on all four sides. These walls are discoloured and encouraging algal and moss growth due to excessive moisture in the soil behind the retaining wall. It is proposed to strip the paint on all sides excepting the building itself, which will be kept white to match neighbours. It is also proposed to install an electric car charging point in the lightwell, and a tap for watering the plants at the entrance. If considered of importance, the location and design of these items could be secured by condition.
2. **Replacement of Security Grilles.** The lower ground floor basement has an unsightly internal security grille attached to the window. It is proposed to remove this and to install railings on the outside to match the existing. It is expected that details will be secured by condition.
3. **Modern Internal Lightwell Infill.** The modern double height lightwell space is proposed to be 'filled in' to provide a small reading and storage space. This is in a modern extension accessed directly off a half-landing. As such this is considered to cause no impact to the significance of the site. See drawing number P300 of the submitted drawing set for further detail.
4. **Boarding of a Disused Chimney Vent.** It is proposed to board over a small hole in the wall where it is assumed a fireplace was once found, shown in figure 8 on the following page. This is similarly considered to have no impact upon the heritage significance of the building.
5. **Refurbishment of Entrance.** The entrance steps have suffered from delamination, and as such it is proposed to replace them in bull-nosed York stone. It is also proposed to install dim lighting at the entrance. It is anticipated that details will again be secured by condition.
6. **Building up of rear wall.** This is to preserve privacy between the occupants of the site and the mews house opposite. It is considered acceptable in principle as the work has been granted permission previously. It is included again in this submission mainly for the avoidance of doubt as to the works that will be carried out as part of this project.
7. **Basement Refurbishment.** As the basement walls will be stripped back to brick, it is proposed to make a number of minor alterations including installation of joinery and shelving. These are shown in the drawing set.
8. **New Joinery to First Floor.** New traditional-style joinery is proposed in the first floor living rooms and study for storage. An indicative drawing of the proposed 'style' is shown in drawing P300 on the lower ground floor.

Figure 5

Discolouration etc of retaining wall in front lightwell. Railings to street seen above.



Figure 6

General accumulation of sludge in front lightwell due to lack of proper drainage etc



**Figure 7**  
Modern lightwell at rear to have platform installed



**Figure 8**  
Chimney breast to be boarded over in master bedroom. Skirtings to match.



**Figure 9**

The front entrance steps have degraded unusually quickly. This is thought to be due to an inferior stone.



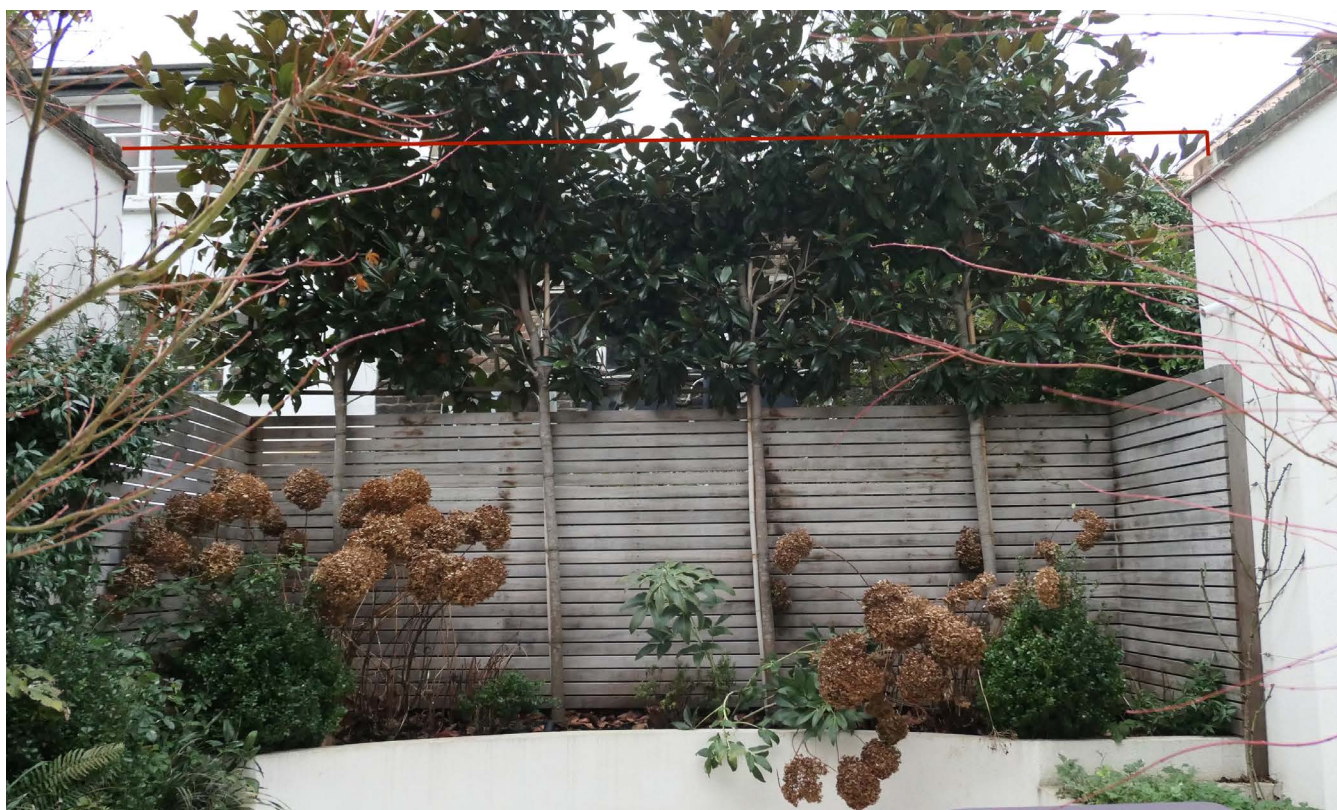
**Figure 10**

Delamination of entrance steps at threshold.



**Figure 11**

Rear wall to be built up to match existing. Note this already has permission. Red line indicates proposed height.



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