2022/2246/L (associated application 2022/1635/P)

5 Bloomsbury Place

Replacement of existing gas fired boiler with Air Source Heat Pumps, including 3 external units and 19 corresponding internal units

**Site and significance**

The site is a GII listed building in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Its significance includes its architectural design and materials, floorplan, townscape value and its evidential value as a late seventeenth and nineteenth-century terraced building. The Council has a statutory obligation to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, to which the subject site makes a strongly positive contribution.

**Assessment of proposals**

**Justification**

The proposals for the replacement of the exiting gas fired boiler with Air Source Heat pumps.

**Impact**

The indoor units have largely been located in the same position as the redundant radiators so that the condensate pipework to and from the VRV units will be run between existing floor joists. Where they cross joists, they will run within redundant notches where the heating pipework is removed.

There is an existing riser in the rear staircase of the building, currently housing redundant heating pipework. This pipework will be removed and the new pipework will be run in its place, negating the need for any further risers. Existing, redundant pipe work running across the joists will be removed and a repair will be made as detailed in the timber notch repair drawing.

It will be necessary to install external condensing units to serve the cooling for the offices and the communication room as detailed above. The external plant will be located within the rear garden within an acoustic enclosure. This has been designed to match the acoustic enclosures within the gardens of 2,3 & 4 Bloomsbury Place, all of which have been recently consented, and given it will be lower than the garden wall, it will not be visible from the adjacent public highway.

**Recommendation: Grant listed building consent with standard conditions**

The proposal has very limited material change on the fabric of the building as existing routes will be reused for the required pipework/ductwork.

The proposals do not better reveal or enhance the significance of the heritage asset, nor do they enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. However, internally the proposed scheme is in a broadly equivalent location to the existing radiators. The proposed internal units will be encased in timber joinery to match the historic joinery profiles of the interior, and will not require the loss or alteration of the historic dado and skirtings.

Given the nature of the site and the location of the plant the public visibility of the plant would be nil, so the character and appearance of the conservation area would be preserved. There is some harm to the setting of the listed building, arising from the plant (and enclosure) in the rear yard, but this is at the lowest end of ‘less than substantial’ and the public benefit which outweighs that harm is clearly identified:

*The installation of Air Source Heat Pumps will ensure the sustainability of the existing building, allowing the building to be heated and cooled with renewable energy. The Air Source Heat Pump will also be considerably more efficient than the original outdated gas fired boiler, further improving the sustainability of the building. In summary, it is considered that the proposals comply with both national and local guidance on the protection of designated heritage assets and the conservation area while ensuring that the building provides a sustainable asset.*

i.e. the replacement of a less environmentally sustainable heating system with a more environmentally sustainable heating system. The external enclosures have been located as far away as possible from the listed building, and it is clear that effort has been made to minimise harm.

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Act) requires special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting. In addition, Section 72(1) of the Act requires that with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. The proposals do not preserve the extant setting of the listed building and do not enhance the conservation area. However, the harm which they cause to the listed building is at the lower end of ‘less than substantial’ and there are public benefits to outweigh that harm and it is clear that efforts have been made to minimise the low level of harm cause. The scale and location of the external units does not cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area, expect in the sense of being visible from upper windows, and therefore effectively preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area in terms of its public appearance.

David McKinstry

15.06.22