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Project ref: **383**

Site address: **139 Fortis Green Road, London, N10 3LX**

# HERITAGE STATEMENT & ASSESSMENT

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Crafted Architecture and Planning Ltd is registered in England and Wales.
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# 1.0 The Application

1.1 A Listed Building Consent application has been submitted by others and is *Under Consultation*. The application reference is: HGY/2023/2514.

1.2 The application property is a single level ground floor flat, addressed as 139 Fortis Green Road, and is located within the building referred to as Birchwood Mansions.

1.3 The application proposal is described as: *Listed Building Consent for internal alterations for electrical and mechanical services, addition of thin layer of insulation matting and new floating timber floor above floorboards. Addition of conservation style removable secondary glazing and addition of kitchen and bathroom fittings (AMENDED DESCRIPTION).*

Latest revision of the proposed floor plan layout – note room labels.

1.3 We understand there has been some confusion regarding the scope of the proposed works. For clarity: no structural alterations or works are proposed and no walls are proposed to be relocated or opened through.

# 2.0 History and Appearance

2.1 Fortis Green Road stretches around 800m in the east-west direction. To the west is East Finchley and to the east is Muswell Hill. The road comprises a mix of *Use Classes* and building typographies including residential, religious and commercial retail. The residential properties are characterised by flats either purpose built or in conversions above high street retail shops.

2.2 The application property is situated within Birchwood Mansions. The building was designed by WJ and W Collins and was completed in 1907. Its statutory address covers 123 – 169 Fortis Green Road. It has been completed in the Arts & Crafts style.

Front of Birchwood Mansions.

2.3 The building is listed and the Historic England listing details are as follows:

Grade II Listing

List Entry Number: 1358882

Date Listed: 28th May 1987

List Entry Name: BIRCHWOOD MANSIONS

Details:

*Block of flats. 1907 by W J and William Collins in an Arts & Crafts style. Red brick with some tile-hanging and some pebble dashing. Plain tiled roofs. 3 storeys and attics. The building is symmetrical about the centre but in an irregular way. The main features of the front are three entrances, over the central of which are strip windows on first and second floors divided by mock-framing and with the roof swept down on brackets over. This bay is flanked by two stacks, the chimney-breasts of which project from the wall face. This is flanked by double-gabled stretches with a variety of windows including canted oriels on the third floor, triangular oriels on the second floor and a pair of two-storey square bays on ground and first floors. Either side of these are a pair of entrance bays with second floor tile hung gabled jetties over strip windows on the first floor over wide segmental brick entrance arches. Both these bays, like the central bay, are flanked by stacks on chimney-breasts which project slightly from the wall-face. The outermost bays are of plain brick work with windows on the second floor turning the corner of the building. The windows are all original, and where not of oriel, square-bay on strip type, are almost all of cross casement type with segment heads. The doors are panelled and half-glazed.*

Listing NGR: TQ2839089599

2.4 The building contains a ground, 1st, 2nd and finally a 3rd floor within a large roof space.

2.5 The exterior of the building is a mix of red brick and grey pebble dash. There are three shared access points into the building that are sheltered under low lying brick arches. Within the front façade there are decorative brick and tiles details. All of the windows appear to be original timber casement with some featuring decorative lead work. The external window frames are painted green. The front elevation features upper level projecting gable ends and bay windows. The building is set back from the public footpath by around 2m.

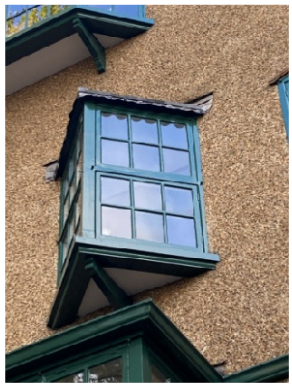
Window detail

Window cill detail

Decorative brick detail

Tiled detail

Timber frame detail


Projecting bay window

2.6 The exterior of the building is largely in good condition, however there are small select areas of brickwork that have been re-pointed in mortar offering a poor match. There is also evidence of some window cill tiles having been replaced offering a poor match with existing.

2.7 Internally, over the years it would appear from publically available data that many of the flats have been modernised and have been altered. There is evidence showing that bathrooms and kitchens have been modernised to meet current living standards which is to be expected. There is also evidence of internal doors being changed. Some rooms in flats appear to have retained key details such as plaster cornices, picture rails and dado rails. We are unable to confirm whether or not any of these alterations have been granted Listed Building Consent.

# 3.0 The Property and Original Condition

3.1 The application property and site falls within the Muswell Hill Conservation Area.

3.2 The application property is Grade II Listed, as per the above Listing of the overall building.

3.3 Internally, as the submitted photos indicate, prior to any site works taking place, there were a number of original features that offer both historic and architectural value to the building. We would list them as follows:

- The original location of internal partitions (ie: general form and layout) with a number of oblique/45 degree angles that link to corner fire places that contribute to the charm and character of the flat.
- Flat front door including 2no. lead framed windows and lead lined skylight above have been beautifully crafted.
- Generally windows, stiles, frames, window architraves and ornate lead lined glass work in a room facing the road are in maintainable condition and retain some original fixtures. The preservation of these also contribute to a well maintained and consistent public frontage.
- Decorative plaster cornices that remain. Original photos do not show any cornice detail in the following rooms: proposed kitchen, proposed study/office, proposed bathroom, proposed utility room.
- Original cast iron and timber fire place surrounds, although many inserts were not present.

- Some select decorative and particularly ornate skirting boards, only present in large road facing dining/living room.

3.4 Inspecting photos prior-to works taking place, aspects that we do not consider of particular architectural or historic significance are the square edge skirting boards that were not original, as well as the plain skirting boards with a staff bead detail that can be seen in the rear bedroom. No ceiling roses can be seen in the photographic evidence prior to strip-out works taking place.

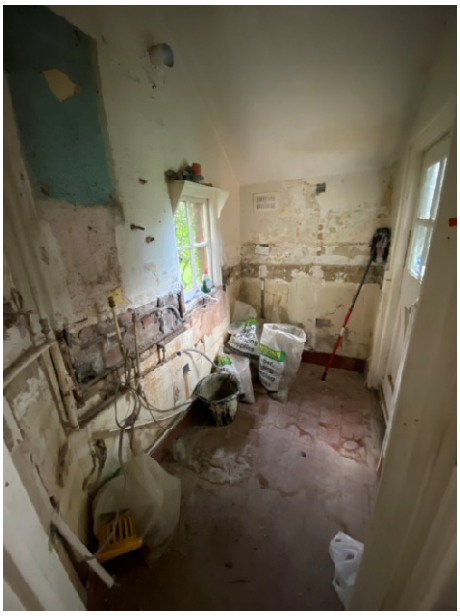
3.5 Given the buildings continued use as residential accommodation it is clear that internally flats need to be adapted in a sensitive manner to meet current UK Building Regulations and modern living standards.

# 4.0 Internal Inspection and Recommendations

4.1 The property was inspected on 26th October 2023. Stripping-out works have been undertaken in the property.

4.2 At the rear of the property, where a small kitchen was located [ROOM A], this has been stripped-out exposing pipework that has been altered over the years as well as a mix of plaster finishes, tile adhesive and paints on the wall. As this space is located within a lean-to structure with a low lying vaulted ceiling there are no plaster details observed. We understand that the vaulted ceiling, small window and door providing access into the rear garden are to be retained in their original form.

Non-original kitchen prior to strip-out



Current status

4.3 Given the alterations that have previously been made to this room and the existing condition we do not consider the proposed alterations to be detrimental to the Listing.

4.4 In the original dining room [ROOM B] previous photos show a timber paneled ceiling and a partial picture rail. Section of the picture rail appear to have been removed to allow for the installation of service pipework.

Dining room prior to strip-out

Current status

4.5 Following the removal of the ceiling there are clear indications that historic alterations have been made to the ceiling structure through the presence of polystyrene and fiberglass type insulation.

**We would recommend that these materials are removed as they do not reflect the building's heritage and present a fire hazard. We would suggest these are replaced with a more natural acoustic insulation such as a sheep's wool or hemp based insulation.**

4.6 The timber floor boards have been exposed in this room. They would not have historically remained exposed therefore they can be overlayed with a modern floor finish to suit the owners requirements. The skirting boards in this room appear to be square edge without any detailed profile. Some sections of skirting have been removed.

**Removed skirting boards should be replaced with a solid natural wood skirting, ie: not an MDF or other similar composite material.**

4.7 We understand that this room is proposed to be fitted with a kitchen and a dining table. We do not deem this to detrimentally impact the Listing. Indeed the room would have originally hosted some food preparation and dining.

4.8 In the hallway [ROOM C] there appear to be original simple black and white octagon and dot tiles. We understand these remain in situ under site floor protection, with a small area having been lifted to repair a leaking water pipe. The original tiles that were removed have been retained on site and we understand will be re-instated. The original flat entrance door remains in situ and will not be altered. The plain staff bead skirting has been removed as well as the dado and picture rail. The decorative plaster cornice remains in situ.

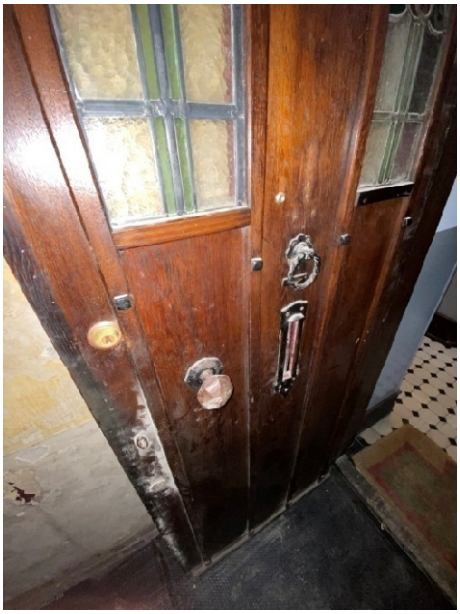
Flat front door and hallway prior to strip-out

Current status

4.9 Our assessment of the hallway is that the key aspects that are of considerable historic and architectural interest are the partition walls that denote the circulation space and separate the front (road facing) and the back (garden facing) rooms ending with the two internal oblique doors positioned at around 45 degrees. The original floor tiles also feature a simple decorative boarder that aligns with the original wall partitions. Internal clear storey panes of glass above the doors also allow for natural light to enter the otherwise windowless hallway and while the glass in these openings does not appear to be original the opening itself and design feature is an aspect that we would deem of interest and worth preserving. Original door openings, doors and architraves all remain in situ and we understand are to be preserved.

**We would suggest that the skirting, dado and picture rail is replaced with a design in keeping with the period in a traditional material such as solid timber.**

Original flat front door with lead framed glass



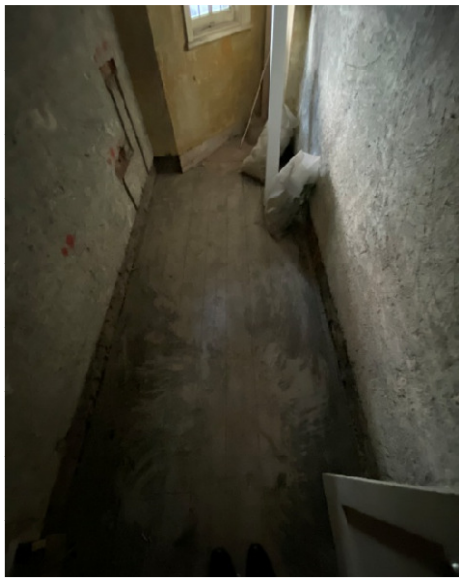
Original ironmongery of historic interest:

- knocker
- letter box
- square fixings

Oblique doorways with clear storey window integrated into door opening

4.10 Adjacent to the flat front door is [ROOM D]. A non-original carpet has been stripped-out, as well as the plaster top coat to the walls and a dado rail that may not have been original. An original timber window facing the main roadside common entrance remains with the original lead lined glazing and an original monkey-tail window handle and window stay.

Room D prior to strip-out



Current status

**We deem the window, window ironmongery and internal architrave to be of significant interest and should be preserved. The plaster skim to the walls and ceiling should be re-instated.**

4.11 In the smaller spare room / study [ROOM E] finishes have been stripped-out including the picture rail and skirting boards. Looking at photos prior to the strip out the skirting boards appear to be plain square edge either modern or not of any particular merit or interest. The picture rail that has been removed can be replaced however again within the context of the building we do not feel that this is of significance in this small room.

**The key aspects of merit that must be retained and preserved are the original windows and ironmongery that mostly appear in adequate order. As well as the simple plaster cornice and of most significance the small cast iron fireplace with simple heart motifs which is very likely to be a Thomas Elsley design.**

Room E prior to strip-out

Cast iron fireplace

4.12 In the principle room of the flat [ROOM F], which faces the road side, photos prior to the strip out do not show a dado rail present, however there is clear horizontal 'ghost' line in the current photo indicating that a dado rail did originally exist. This confirms that the wallpaper that has been removed, while appears faded and in the Arts & Crafts style is not original. While this previous wallpaper did appear to have charm we understand that the owners intend to re-instate similarly appropriate William Morris wallpaper. However, in the context of the Listed building whether the walls are papered/lined or not we do not feel that this detrimentally impacts the significance of the structure.

Room F prior to strip out

Current status

4.13 An original skirting board (at 330mm/13 inches high), that is not particularly decorative and appears to have been over-boarded at some point in history to create an additional square profile remains in situ and is worth preserving.

Skirting board detail with likely 220mm high add on

50mm / 2 inch picture rail

4.14 The 2 inch picture rail that has been removed offered a pleasing addition to the skirting board, however we do not feel that this is essential to preserve the heritage of the overall Listing. We understand that the owners intend to re-instate the picture rail.

4.15 A significant architectural and historic feature of this room is the shallow arched recess. Being located within the principle room and referencing the three external brick arches that can be observed on the front elevation this feature should not be permanently altered.

**We deem the arched recess in the wall, the windows and window ironmongery to be of interest and should be preserved. The plaster skim to the ceiling should be re-instated.**

4.16 The final aspect that requires preservation is the simple hardwood fire place surround located in the corner of the room and obliquely orientated to reflect the oblique room door. This orientation and simple timber surround should be retained as its removal would have a detrimental impact on the room and Listing.

Room F fire place surround

4.17 In the rear garden facing bedroom [ROOM G] the level of strip out is similar to the adjacent room F. This room benefits from a feature window recess framed by an architrave. This along with the windows should be retained as it is a distinctive feature of the property. Similarly, an original fireplace installed on an oblique wall should be retained as it mirrors the fireplace in room F as well as the oblique room door entrance.

Room G prior to strip-out

Current status

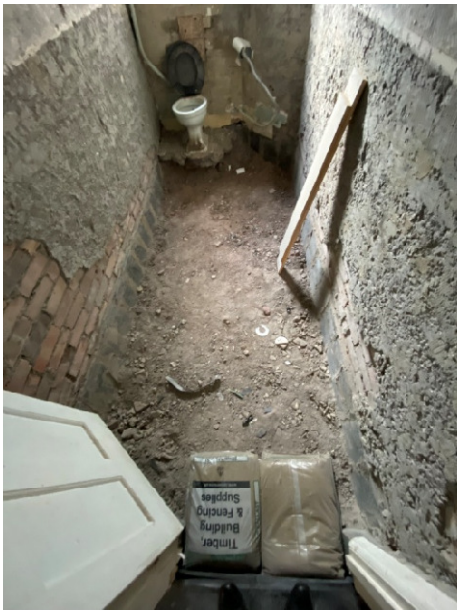
Room G fireplace surround

**The plaster skim to the ceiling should be re-instated.**

4.18 The bathroom [ROOM H] has had the most significant strip-out including the removal of the floor structure. We understand that the floor tiles have been stored on site and can be re-instated. Prior to the strip-out works there also appears to have been a dado rail, wall paper and painted tiles. There was no ceiling details or plaster cornice. The dado rail appeared to be quite poorly installed and likely suffered from moisture ingress from the bathroom

use. Given the flats continued operation as a private dwelling we do not feel that upgrading this small room to meet modern standards to have an impact on the Listing. As with the other rooms, the window should be retained and restored.

Room H prior to strip-out



Current status

Current status

4.19 In general there are rooms that have had their surface plaster skim removed, however the original lath and plaster backing remains intact. There is also evidence of chasing into the wall fabric for the insertion of wires and light switches. On observation it would appear that some of these chases have been done as part of the most recent work, and others have been done prior to works. On inspection of the exposed plastered substrates, given their finish it is likely that some of the plaster skim was losing its bond and likely required replacing to retain the integrity of the walls in any case. In regards to any chases in the walls, as long as these are infilled using a suitable plaster as

part of the replastering of other walls where required, we not deem this to detrimentally affect the building's significance.

**Please be aware that the use of plasterboard to infill lath and plaster should be avoided.**

4.20 Given the age of the building it is inevitable that works are required to maintain its fabric. In line with above recommendations, any upgrades, adaptations and works to the **existing fabric**, ie: walls, ceilings, woodwork should be done using traditional materials and practices avoiding cement based adhesives and covers, plastic pipework and composite timber such as MDF, OSB, chipboard etc. In regards to installing isolated flooring overlay systems, freestanding furniture, removable kitchen units etc these can be modern as they are deemed reversible and would not impact the fabric of the Listing.

4.21 Finally there are a number of other small detailed observations. Not all, but some of the original crafted monkey-tail window handles and stays remain in situ. These should be preserved. We understand that the owners are looking to reinstate matching window handles and stays were required. No original door handles or hinges were observed on site. As expected, given the mechanical nature of these fittings it is not uncommon for these to have been replaced over time. We understand the owners are looking to reinstate new Arts & Crafts style door ironmongery.

Original monkey-tail window lock

Poor quality historic alteration that will be replaced

Poor quality internal door ironmongery to be replaced

# 5.0 The Proposal

5.1 We are aware of a Listed Building Consent application under consideration for the proposed works to the property.

5.2 Separately the owners have provided a schedule of proposed finishes and fittings for the interior as included in the appendix (383_03_Works planned_FILE).

# 6.0 Conclusion

6.1 There are no proposed changes to the external appearance or fabric of the building, indeed the external fabric falls outside of the property demise in any case and therefore cannot be changed by the applicant.

6.2 The flat layout and door openings that are particularly representative of the period of the building and require preserving remain intact. The finishes of the flat that are of historic and architectural interest by and large remain in situ, including plaster cornice work, fire place surrounds, windows and associated ironmongery and key woodwork.

6.3 There are features that have been lost as part of the strip out, including some picture rails and dado rails that require reinstating. This should be done in accordance with the recommendations above.

6.4 Further to our site inspection and discussions with the owners we are satisfied that through careful management of the works moving forwards the proposed renovation can be executed in a way that preserves the most important features. We understand that the owners have a keen interest in the Arts & Crafts movement and have separately presented their proposals for appropriate and in keeping design adaptations as well as restoration of existing features.

# 7.0 Appendix

- 383_01_BIRCHWOOD MANSIONS 1358882 Historic England
- 383_02_Photographic record pre-strip-out works
- 383_03_Works planned_FILE 071123
- 383_04_127, Fortis Green Road, Hornsey, Haringey, London, N10 3LX
- 383_05_129, Fortis Green Road, Hornsey, Haringey, London, N10 3LX
- 383_06_137, Fortis Green Road, Hornsey, Haringey, London, N10 3LX
- 383_07_167, Fortis Green Road, Hornsey, Haringey, London, N10 3LX