

480 London Road, Isleworth



On Behalf of Sara-Int

November 2015

Project Ref: 2127

HeritageCollective

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Introduction

- 1. This Heritage Statement has been produced by Ignus Froneman, a Director at Heritage Collective, on behalf of the applicant, Sara-Int, and in consultation with Michael Jones Architects and James Llyod Planning Consultants. The report supports applications for planning permission relating to the conversion of the ground, first and second floors from a restaurant (A3) with associated offices to offices (B1) including Radio Station (B1) and associated alterations to the windows at ground, first and second floor together with new signage and external lighting.
- 2. This report should be read alongside the Design and Access Statement, the application drawings, Planning Statement and all other submitted information.

Heritage assets

- 3. Spring Grove House, now part of the West Thames College, along with its separately listed entrance gate and piers are the closest listed buildings to the application site (**Figure 1**). However, the nature of the extent of the West Thames College buildings, the nature of the application site and the relationship between them in combination with the nature of the proposed alterations would preclude any potential effects on the listed building and its piers/gate. These are not assessed any further in this report.
- 4. 480 London Road is the frontage of a c. 1934 former cinema (taking in 480-484 London Road), believed to have been designed for Odeon by either George Coles or Arthur Percival Starkey. The building was converted from a cinema to its present mixed used following planning permission in 2002 (Ref.: 00707/C/P8). This involved the restoration of the Odeon frontage on London Road, demolition of existing studios/offices, and the erection of 16 flats and 18 live in work units, retaining the corner offices, with associated parking. Only the frontage is therefore of heritage value/interest, the remainder of the building being a recent development. The building is unlisted but it falls within the Spring Grove Conservation Area, the boundary of which is shown on the map overleaf, from The London Borough of Hounslow’s website (**Figure 2**).

Purpose, scope and structure of the statement

- 5. The purpose of this document is essentially twofold. It firstly provides an assessment of the special interest of the conservation area, to a proportionate degree of detail to enable an understanding of the potential impacts, in accordance with paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The character and appearance of the conservation area is not covered in great detail as the nature of the proposed alterations, which is almost completely internal, will entail very little change to the appearance of the building. The contribution of the building to the conservation area is also considered.
- 6. The impacts are then assessed against the significance of the area, in accordance with NPPF paragraphs 128 & 129. According to paragraph 129 “*Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal [...] They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset [...]*”

- 7. To this end the remainder of this report is structured into four sections, each with a separate heading but with continuous paragraph numbering throughout.
- 8. The relevant legislation, national and local heritage policy framework is set out in the next section. That is followed by an assessment of the relative significance of the conservation area and the contribution of the former cinema, informed by the Spring Grove Conservation Area Statement, produced by the London Borough of Hounslow. The following section contains an assessment of the impacts of the proposed development and the final section summarises the conclusions.

Site visit and research

- 9. The assessment was informed by site visits, in October 2015. The building was inspected internally and externally. Desk based research was carried out to source pictorial evidence of the original building for comparative purposes.



Figure 1: Listed buildings (blue triangles) in the vicinity of the application site, from Historic England’s National Heritage List.

Introduction



Figure 2: The Spring Grove Conservation Area boundary, from the Spring Grove Conservation Area Statement, produced by the London Borough of Hounslow.

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

Legislation

10. Legislation relating to listed buildings and conservation areas is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. For the purposes of this application, the only relevant considerations are Sections 66 and 72 of the 1990 Act. These place a duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings as buildings of special architectural or historic interest, and a similar duty with respect to conservation areas.
11. The Act does not require the preservation of listed buildings and conservation areas *per se*, but rather it is a duty on decision makers to ensure that their special interest is properly taken into account as material considerations when determining applications.

The National Planning Policy Framework

12. The National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) was published in May 2012 and constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision makers. Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the local development plan, unless it is silent or material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration.
13. Section 12 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment, in paragraphs 126 to 141. The NPPF places much emphasis on heritage “significance”, which it defines in Annex 2 as:

“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.”
14. Paragraph 126 of the NPPF encourages local planning authorities to recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. One of the factors to be taken into account is the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. On the other hand, the same paragraph recognises the fact that new development can make a positive contribution, which is one of the factors to be taken into account.
15. Paragraph 128 of the NPPF requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal to a proportionate level of detail. Paragraph 129 requires essentially the same from local planning authorities: to identify and assess the “*particular significance*” of any heritage asset. It is the significance of the heritage asset that should be taken into account when considering the impact of a proposal.
16. According to paragraph 131, a number of considerations should be taken into account, first of which is the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Paragraph 132 applies specifically to designated heritage assets, such as listed buildings and conservation areas.

It states that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets and it propagates a proportionate approach (i.e. the more important the asset, the greater the weight attached to its conservation).

17. Paragraph 133 deals with substantial harm to, or total loss of significance of, a designated heritage asset and it is not relevant to this application, which could not reasonably result in the magnitude of harm. Paragraph 134, on the other hand, deals with less than substantial harm. Harm in this category should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal – such as replacing unsympathetic alterations with more appropriate ones, carrying out restoration, or simply by removing unsympathetic alterations. The National Planning Practice Guidance¹ (NPPG) describes public benefits as “*anything that delivers economic, social or environmental progress*”.
18. According to paragraph 137, local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development in conservation areas to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.

Local Plan

19. The London Borough of Hounslow’s Local Plan ‘Working Adoption Version’ was adopted at the council meeting on 15 September 2015.
20. Policy CC1 deals with context and character and seeks to ensure that all new development conserves and takes opportunities to enhance the special qualities and heritage of the Borough.
21. Policy CC4 deals with heritage and requires conservation and enhancement of the significance of the borough’s heritage assets as a positive means of supporting an area’s distinctive character and sense of history. In relation to conservation areas the policy requires new development within conservation area to conserve and take opportunities to enhance the character of the area, and respect the grain, scale, form, proportions and materials of the surrounding area and existing architecture. It also requires the retention and reuse of any building in a conservation area which makes or can be adapted to make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

¹ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment/why-is-significance-important-in-decision-taking/>

Assessment of significance and contribution

Spring Grove Conservation Area

22. The London Borough of Hounslow's Spring Grove Conservation Area Statement describes the "Special Architectural and/or Historic Interest" of the area as follows:
- "... the special interest of Spring Grove derives from an estate planned to be a grand Victorian suburb. The Davies original estate planning still remains, albeit in an evolved form, in much of its splendour, with the prevailing pattern of development mostly being respectful. Tall classical-style villas standing in spacious gardens, the grandiose Italianate stuccoed mansion of Campion House, the characteristic Gothic structure of Lancaster House, and more subtle Arts and Crafts styled semi-detached properties, along with others amalgamate into the whole."*
23. The same section notes that the conservation area has "many other components" in terms of its built form, which were not envisaged in the original Davies scheme "but still form an essential part of the area". By way of general history it notes that the Great West Road (now London Road) was built in 1925 and, as industries developed, traffic increased in the Isleworth area. In the building boom of the 1920s and 30s most of the remaining open spaces in Spring Grove were developed.
24. London Road is discussed under the various 'character areas':
- "When the Davies estate was conceived, London Road was known as Great Western Road. Development on the northern side was confined to the areas on either side of the Spring Grove House, the two entrances to The Grove. Shops and a Post Office were in existence by 1865 at the junction with Thornbury Road, opposite the Milford Arms, and remain to-day. The conservation area also includes Isleworth station, in LSWR's early 'house style', which together with the bridge and high-level platforms forms a local landmark. The station has historic links with the estate, as residents were offered season tickets at a reduced rate due to Davies' links with the railway."*
25. The omission of reference to the former Odeon cinema building does not imply that the building is of no merit, or that it makes no contribution to the area, although that does indicate that it is not a building of great importance.

The former Odeon cinema building

26. The adjacent photo (**Figure 3**) shows the former cinema in its original state in 1935, the year after it was completed. It is interesting to note that the façade has remained very similar, although of course the building behind it at the rear has now been replaced. The prominent eaves advertising is also notable, together with the display boards at the curved corners at ground floor level.
27. The building forms part of the interwar boom in the area and the slick Art Deco design fits the period and the modern feel of a contemporary cinema, but also the roadside architecture characteristic on the period. Although very different from the Victorian suburban development of the area, it is a striking building that illustrates another phase in the development of the area and the distinctive architectural treatment and eye-catching design of the cinema makes a positive contribution to the area.



Figure 3: Photo of the cinema in 1935, by John Maltby, from RIBApix (Ref.: RIBA59404).

Assessment of significance and contribution



Plate 1: Photo of the area in front of the new addition behind the cinema.



Plate 2: Detail of the façade, showing fenestration and redundant signage areas.



Plate 3: The façade, showing a similar view as the 1935 photo on the previous page (**Figure 3**).

Assessment of significance and contribution

28. However, as can be seen from the photos on the previous page, the concreted-over area in front of the new development (**Plate 1**) has created something of a rubbish collecting point and an area of antisocial behaviour. The empty signage areas on the façade (**Plate 2**) also give the building a somewhat neglected and dead feel. However, overall the building still makes a valuable contribution to the area as a distinctive example of its age and type, and of the changes to the Victorian suburb at the beginning of the 20th century.

Impact assessment

29. The Design and Access Statement by Michael Jones Architects sets out the proposed changes in detail. This has not been rehearsed in full in the Heritage Statement but instead the focus here is on those elements of the proposal that could affect the character or appearance of the area, or the contribution of the building to the conservation area. The key relevant changes in this respect are:
- Like-for-like replacement windows on the London Road frontage at the first and second floor levels.
 - Like-for-like replacements of the ground floor doors.
 - Moving the ground floor doors on the London Road frontage forwards to remove the recesses to prevent on-going problems with antisocial behaviour.
 - Enclosing the concrete area in front of the new part of the building (immediately behind the original curved building) with a wall and railing to match the existing.
 - New signage.
30. **Like-for-like replacement windows on the London Road frontage.** The windows have already been replaced and so this is a retrospective element of the proposals. However, the fact that the new windows are in situ does help to illustrate just how well the new windows have been matched with the existing ones (which were installed as part of the 2003 conversion works, and were therefore modern). It is plain to see from the original 1935 photo (**Figure 3**) that the windows match the original ones very well and that the integrity and contribution of the building has remained unaffected.
31. **Like-for-like replacements of the ground floor doors.** Like the windows, the doors will be made to match the exiting ones but with improved performance (insulation and security). The matching design means that the character and appearance of the area be remain unaffected, and likewise the contribution of the building to the area.
32. **Moving the ground floor doors on the London Road frontage forward.** This will very slightly change the appearance of the building. The reason for the change is to prevent antisocial behaviour in the disused spaces left in the now redundant doorways. The number of doors serving a small space internally reflect the requirements for cinema use (i.e. escape and having to accommodate large numbers of people at peak times, especially at the end of screenings). However, with a different use the amount of doors are no longer necessary and these have become functionally redundant, and the recessed doorways ultimately become disused spaces that tend to attract antisocial behaviour. For this reason the small change in the appearance pf the building is justified; the doors at the curved corners would remain recessed. The effect of this change in terms of the overall character and appearance of the area is so marginal as to be altogether inconsequential.
33. **Enclosing the concrete area in front of the new part of the building.** There is nothing historic or original about this space, which was created in c. 2003. In fact the historic photo at **Figure 3** shows that originally this part of the building projected beyond the line of the curved ground floor doorway, which means the present recess is an altogether artificial creation.

Impact assessment

- 34. Whilst the recess helps to articulate the junction between new and old, the little leftover space at street level does nothing by way of enhancing or revealing the significance of the building or the area. Continuing the boundary wall and railing as proposed would appear logical and improve this area, while leaving the character of the wider area and the integrity of the former cinema unaffected.
- 35. **New signage.** The proposed new signage would fit the building and the historic precedent of advertising affixed to the building—the striking design of which was no doubt itself intended as a form of advertising, as is well illustrated below on the night time photo showing the ‘halo’ effect of the parapet lighting, and the illuminated wraparound advertising to the canopy eaves (it is interesting to note how the upper level windows were also illuminated).
- 36. The proposed signage is appropriate for the building and would leave the integrity and contribution of the former cinema unaffected.



Figure 4: Night time photo of the cinema in 1935.

Summary and conclusions

- 37. The Spring Grove Conservation Area is of significance as a planned speculative Victorian development of considerable character and coherency, but with some interwar infill and examples of later redevelopment. The former Odeon cinema is a striking building in an eye-catching Art Deco design that contrasts markedly with the Victorian townscape. It was built in the years after the creation of London Road, the Great Western Road, and is a good example of the period. The curved corner of the entrance tower, illuminated in a halo-effect as it would have been at night, with a strip of ‘apron’ lighting around the canopy indicates that the building itself was designed as a form of self-advertisement.
- 38. The frontage of this part of the former cinema has retained much of its original character although the replacement modern development behind it has changed its contextual appreciation somewhat. The redundant signage and poster spaces on the building detract from its appearance but it is nevertheless a building of merit and one that contributes in a positive way to the conservation area.
- 39. The proposals are minor in nature and will retain the essential character and quality of the building. Its contribution to the conservation area will be unaffected, while the environmental performance of the building will be upgraded and areas that attract antisocial behaviour will be rationalised in order to avoid the issue in the future.
- 40. Accordingly the proposed development accords with local policy and national policy, and the provision of s.72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.