Manchester City Council

Parsonage Garden's, Didsbury

Parsonage Gardens,
Stenner Lane,
Didsbury,
Manchester
M20 2RQ

Heritage Statement

Project Reference: AMP44657.3

Project Title: Fletcher Moss Botanical Gardens - Stenner Lane Boundary Walls

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this Heritage Statement is for to demonstrate the requirement for the provision of rebuilding requirements identified to sections of the boundary wall to the boundary of Parsonage Gardens/Fletcher Moss Art Gallery on Stenner Lane, Didsbury. The works have been identified as essential to prevent further ongoing damage occurring to the wall and to safeguard the public.

2. The Site and Historic Overview

The Old Parsonage building, on Stenner Lane, was designated a Grade II listed building on 3rd October 1974, and is still referred to by Historic England as Fletcher Moss Art Gallery, Stenner Lane.

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest. All works should have cognisance to the listed status of the building and Conservation Area.

The Parsonage is a Grade 2 listed building, within the St James' conservation area. The first record of the house is from 1646, the home of Thomas Walker, when it is called Ash House, and referred to as 'the home of the minister'. It is probably the second oldest building in Didsbury after St James' Church.

Prior to 1761, it was owned by the Tatton family, again as a home, and John Davenport also lived there as did William Hesketh, presumably not all at the same time. Between 1761 and 1795 it was lived in by the Bamford family and then in 1795 Sam Bethell lived there until 1804. The next occupant, up to 1829, was Miss Twyford, landlady of the Cock Inn until 1824.
[https://www.didsburyparsonagetrust.org.uk/history-of-the-parsonage]

In 1865 Fletcher Moss, then aged 22, moved in with his parents and siblings and he subsequently bought the house in 1885. The Moss family made their money from being corn factors and had their offices at the Corn Exchange in Manchester. He died in 1919 after an active life of public service and was renowned for his in-depth writing on local history, travel, flora and fauna and local people.

On his death in 1919 Alderman Moss bequeathed the house and gardens to the City of Manchester because he wanted the house and its contents to remain, as far as possible, intact “to show what a comfortable house of the olden times was like”. Unfortunately, the house became difficult to maintain and in 1922 many features, including stained glass and fireplaces, were removed.

The house became a branch of Manchester Art gallery containing much of the Fletcher Moss Collection which included several Turner paintings (now with Manchester Art Gallery). The emphasis of the displays was on items made in or associated with Manchester.

As an ‘economic measure’, the City of Manchester closed the gallery in 1978. It was then used as council offices until 2011. Didsbury Civic Society started a fundraising effort to raise the money to renovate the house and formed a separate charity (owned by the DCS). Over £160,000 was raised and the house was opened in September 2012 as a community space. It is leased to the Trust by Manchester City Council. It has been a major success as a centre for the community, housing classes from children’s drama to art, from lacemaking to yoga. Many of the U3A classes take place in the building. It also hosts business seminars, weddings, and arts events. In the spirit of its time as a much-loved Art Gallery there are ever changing art exhibitions by local artists. As a community space it provides rooms for local group meetings, hosts community events and is now an integral part of the Didsbury community. Its gardens have won several local and national awards having been restored and maintained by the Friends of Fletcher Moss Park and Parsonage Gardens.

[https://www.didsburycivicsociety.org/the-old-parsonage/]

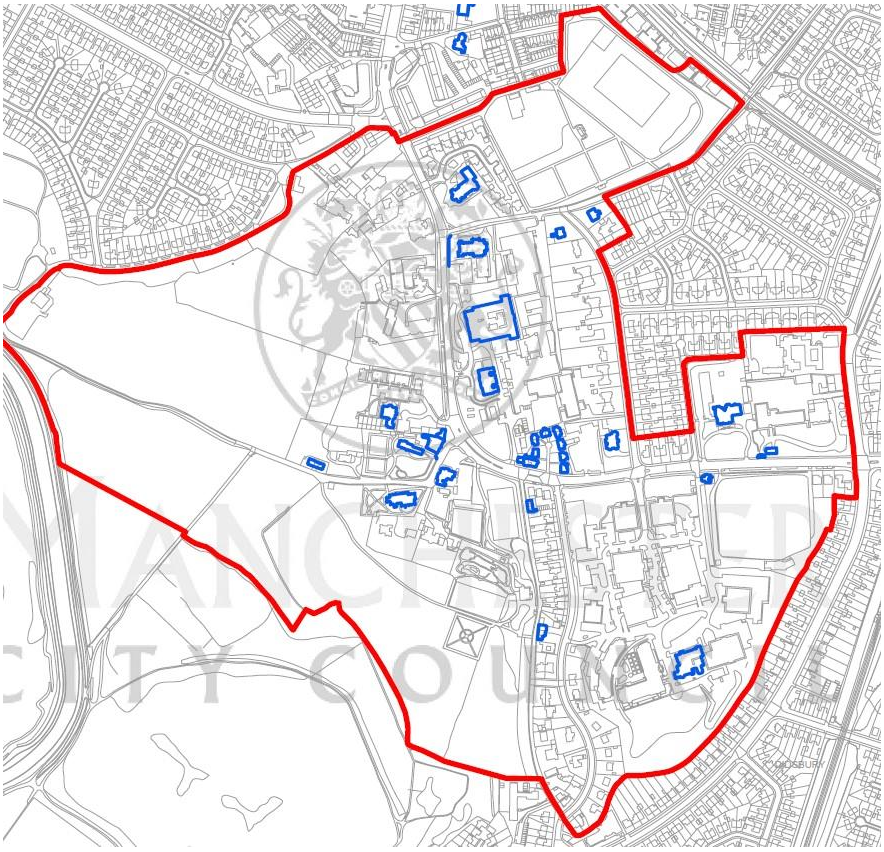

Fig.1 Didsbury, St James Conservation Area

Fig.2 Site Location Plan, Fletcher Moss Art Gallery, Stenner Lane, Didsbury

3. Listing Details

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1254682

Date first listed: 03-Oct-1974

Statutory Address: FLECTHER MOSS ART GALLERY, STENNER LANE

4. Background & Proposed Works

The boundary wall at Parsonage Gardens located on Stenner Lane adjacent The Didsbury Public House has shown signs of significant movement and cracking over the past 24 months. This damage to the wall is due to a conflict of interest between the brick boundary wall and the four Lime trees running parallel with the wall. Fletcher Moss Art Gallery is a Grade II* Listed Building, and is in the Conservation Area of St James, Didsbury. All works should have cognisance to the listed status of the building, its grounds, and the conservation area.

The boundary wall at Parsonage Gardens is a solid free-standing masonry retaining wall built from common brick units arranged in English Garden Wall bond i.e., 3 or 5 courses of stretchers between header courses. The joints have been finished with a flush mortar joint. Wall thickness varies from 225mm at the top to 340mm at the lower section. Additional 110mm deep piers have been provided at varying centres on the inside of the wall. In consideration of the history of the site and condition of the wall it is estimated that it dates to Victorian times i.e., circa late nineteenth century.

There are pronounced vertical and diagonal fractures that have propagated through both mortar and brick. These fractures appear to be associated with tree growth where the tree roots and the trunk has impinged the rear face of the wall. Gradual tree movement and growth will have produced adequate force to overstress the brickwork and cause the type of cracking visible.

Some emergency works were undertaken in June 2021 to remove the potential for the top section of the boundary wall falling onto the pavement. The wall was reduced in height by 9 courses of brickwork and by approx. 1800mm at the front of the one of the lime trees. This section of the wall has been temporarily enclosed.

Front Elevation - Immediately noticeable is the differential out-of-plane ‘lean’ of the wall across the movement joint adjacent to the stone arch entrance wall elevation. The top of the wall to the left-hand side of the joint is leaning forwards approximately 70mm beyond the bottom of the wall at pavement level.

Rear Elevation – The four Lime trees growing in the retained earth are located very close to the rear wall face. At two locations, the wall has been locally reduced in thickness by cutting out one leaf of brickwork to allow the trees to occupy the additional space. The worst case occurs at the point where the very tall lime tree impinges on the rear of the wall. After altering the wall, it is assumed that the tree grew and quickly occupied the additional space created and likely continued to apply force on the wall and cause the fractures currently visible. An application has been submitted to planning department to have this tree removed as is it is causing the wall to continuously move and to have the wall rebuilt to the required thickness on the same boundary line would not be physically possible.

The wall has a stepped design i.e., it gradually reduces in height as it progresses westwards along Stenner Lane i.e., 2.075m tall at the start of the boundary wall near the stone arch entrance reducing to 1.775m tall at the other end. The wall appears to have been constructed to retain earth on the inside based on the following observations.

a) Existing weep holes located near pavement level were provided to allow water in the retained material behind the wall to drain away.

b) Increasing wall thickness towards the base as can be seen on the inside face to provide weight and stability.

c) The height of retained soil to the rear of the wall is approximately 1m above pavement level.

An elevation drawing of Stenner Lane boundary wall provided (001 Stenner Lane Boundary Wall) shows the level of retained earth behind it and significant fractures on the front face.

The existing weep holes are formed from cutting parts of a full brick during construction at approximately 1.5m centres. The weep holes do not appear to be allowing water to

drain away from the retained material and flow onto the pavement. They are most likely to be blocked.

Fletcher Moss Art Gallery is fully accessible to the public. During the project the Contractor will make full allowance for adequate segregation and security to prevent unauthorised access into the site and theft of materials and/ or plant and equipment.

The section of wall adjacent to the stone arch entrance that is leaning outwards towards the path it is proposed this section of wall be carefully dismantled down to the pavement level and rebuilt, with those bricks either beyond repair or missing, replaced on a like-for-like basis. The newly built wall will be built to the height of the adjacent boundary wall reducing its original height by 5 courses of brick. An expansion joint will be required were the newly built wall meets the existing wall. New coping stones will be required to the tops of all new and existing wall heads.

Some additional works are required to the boundary wall on Stenner Lane adjacent to Fletcher Moss Park (Botanical Gardens), this includes rebuilding and repointing sections of the wall where vegetation and tree growth has caused cracking and damage. All sections of walls to be repointed with a lime-based mortar and re-installing any removed copings in a lime-based mortar.

5. Impact Assessment

The boundary wall on Stenner Lane at Parsonage Gardens has suffered from neglect in its most recent history and the lack of maintenance has resulted in its current poor state of repair. Much of the damage has been caused by the juxtaposition of the Lime Trees adjacent to the boundary wall.

As a local authority we have the responsibility to conserve our heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution of life of this and future generations.

In carrying out the repair works, as detailed in the supporting documents, every effort will be made to ensure the materials used to rebuild and repair sections of the wall match the existing in both colour, appearance and texture to minimise the visual

impact the repairs might cause as they will be visible from Fletcher Moss Botanical Gardens and the church graveyard.

A heritage contractor will be chosen to undertake the works as they have previous experience working on similar projects. They also appreciate the quality of workmanship required and are sympathetic in their approach.

It is requested to allow the proposals to proceed to help benefit the user groups which frequently benefit from the use of these gardens as which is a focal point of their community. The works will help safeguard against the demise of the sections of wall and allow the boundary walls to be viewed as they should be from the adjacent Stenner Lane.

Rebuild Boundary Wall – Parsonage Gardens, Stenner Lane, Didsbury

The Section of wall located on Stenner Lane adjacent The Didsbury Public House, shows the boundary wall which had the upper nine courses of brickwork removed due to heath and safety concerns due to the amount of wall movement caused by the growth of the adjacent tree and tree routes, this section of wall is to be removed and rebuilt with a new foundation back on its original line, pointing up of all joints to brickwork and copings will also be undertaken to match existing.

The Section of wall located on Stenner Lane is the boundary wall which is proposed for removal and rebuilding. This section of wall will be rebuilt to the existing height to

have continuity of the wall height at the boundary and to reduce the likelihood of future leaning and movement.

6. Conclusion

The rebuilding and repairing of this boundary wall are considered vital to safeguard the public and to restore a part of a heritage asset at Parsonage Gardens. Due to the continuous growth of the adjacent lime trees this wall has become vulnerable to significant movement and concern for future failure.

Best efforts will be made to reduce the visual impact that the repair and rebuilding of this boundary and retaining wall will have on key lines of sight or approaches to the area.

Parsonage Gardens is inside Didsbury, St James Conservation area, therefore, proposals to reuse the existing bricks and coping stones and to best match the existing mortar in appearance should not affect the significance of the local listed asset. The proposals set out in this statement will ensure the repair works will not have any negative impact on the area and it’s surrounding areas.