
Issue	Date	Comment
01	13/11/2023	Issued for discussion

Background

This statement has been prepared in the context of John Wood Architect Limited taking over design responsibility for the proposed conversion of a vacant weaver's cottage, 33 Thomas Street, M4 1NA into a cafe and dwelling, works which have previously received planning consent (135615-FO-2022) and listed building consent (135616-LO-2022).

Following a due diligence review a significant non-compliance with the building regulations has been identified which also has significant implications for fire and life safety due to the limited space available and overlapping of door swings and circulation routes at the bottom of the existing ground floor stair. It is proposed that the relocation of this stair would significantly improve fire safety to the building and should therefore be seriously considered by the client and client team.

Accuracy

This statement has been produced with reference to the work carried out by previous consultants and a visual inspection of the property. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the statements represented in this document are accurate, it is possible some information could have been misinterpreted. The information is offered in good faith in order to support a conversation about the conservation of the building. Any inaccuracies should be brought to the attention of the author in order for them to be rectified.

Significance

The existing ground floor to first floor stair is a non-original pine stair. The position of the two stairs within the property are believed to be original. The building is relatively uncommon in its plan form with the ground floor to first floor stair rising from the front to centre of the property and the first floor to second floor stair rising from the centre to the rear (refer to '1661-001 Existing Plans'). The plan form is therefore considered significant to the historic character of the building.

Proposed development

The purpose of this statement is to consider an amendment to the proposed works as previously approved in order to significantly improve regulatory compliance and enhance fire and life safety for occupants of the building. The proposed amendment is that the existing, non-original ground floor to first floor stair be removed and replaced with a new stair to the rear corner of the property, rising through a newly formed opening in the first floor. The proposed works are set out on demolition drawing '1661-011 Demolition and Builders Work' and proposed layouts '1661-101 Proposed Plans'.

Care has been taken in developing these proposals to minimise impact on historic fabric and character - notably the retention of the first floor to second floor stair which is believed to be original and retention of the plan form of the first floor which retains much of its original character unlike the ground floor of the building.

Mitigation of impact

Due to the significance of the plan form outlined above, the removal of the non-original ground floor to first floor stair is considered to have a negative impact on the historic character of the building. In order to mitigate this impact it is proposed that the position of the existing stairs is reflected in the interior of the building. Some examples of this approach are shown on the drawing '1661-X02 Alternative stair concept for discussion'.

There is an aspiration from the applicant to retain a sense of the time-worn character of the building fabric so far as practical. For example through leaving visible the layering of historic lime plaster repairs, paints and washes (ref. '1661-V01-02 Staircase photographs'). The precise approach to this will need to be tested but for example the application of a breathable masonry sealer to the internal surface of the wall is one option under consideration.

Two options for preserving a trace of the stair position have been considered:

Option 1 - Mark the profile of the stair using applied finishes to the face of the plaster.

Option 2 - Remove a strip of plaster where the existing stair stringer is in contact with the wall leaving a line of exposed brickwork as shown on drawing '1661-X02 Alternative stair concept for discussion'.

Although both approaches would be considered acceptable in principle from the applicant's perspective, there is a risk that option 1 would be easily lost if future occupants of the building didn't fully understand the significance of the markings. It is therefore considered preferable to proceed on the basis of option 2, the removal of a strip of plaster.

The removal of a section of the first floor, approximately 0.75m wide x 2.70m long, which is assumed to be constructed of original floor joists, boards and plaster, could also be considered to have some impact on the historic fabric of the building although it is noted that this loss would be localised and of limited significance. The removed boards and structural members will be retained for reuse in repairs and / or interior fittings.

Appraisal of impact

While it is accepted that the proposed works will have some impact on the historic character of the building it is considered that the proposed mitigation will significantly limit this impact. Furthermore it is considered that the benefits to securing a sustainable use for the building which is aligned to modern safety standards far outweighs the negative impact of the proposed alterations.