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Introduction

This planning application Design and Access Statement sets out proposals for works to number 16 Kensington Palace Gardens by 6a architects, working alongside Alan Baxter & Associates (Historic Building Consultants), Savills (Planning Consultant), Price & Myers (Structural Engineering), Dan Pearson Studios (Landscape), Ritchie Daffin (M&E) and Sizebreed Construction. It should be read alongside the 6a drawings, the Heritage Statement prepared by ABA, the Planning Statement prepared by Savills, the Construction Method Statement and engineering drawings prepared by Price & Myers, landscape design proposals by DPS and the Construction Traffic Management Plan by Sizebreed. A Site Investigation Report prepared by GEA, and a Construction Environmental Management Plan prepared by A2 are also submitted in support of this application.

This application follows from the withdrawal from the planning application made in June 2015, addressing issues raised by RBKC. The original application followed an initial pre-application made on 3rd December 2014, a follow up pre-application submitted in March 2015, and subsequent consultation with Conservation Officer, Sophia Bix. The proposals had been carefully revised in response to written feedback from RBKC as set out in Kevin Savage’s letters dated 16th January and 16th April 2015, and email correspondence with Sophia Bix.

Number 16 Kensington Palace Gardens is a Grade II listed property, built in 1848. Kensington Palace Gardens is located in the heart of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and is part of the Crown Estate. Originally named The Queen’s Road, the street is sited on the former kitchen gardens of Kensington palace. The original development was deemed an unlikely location due to smells from the nearby kitchens and stables, but today the street is home to some of the most desirable residences in London.

The wealth and status of subsequent residents has led to the many alterations that can be seen along the street. Some alterations are to the detriment of the original designs, whilst others reflect the changing nature of the street. A number of alterations were made to no. 16 in the early 20th century, in part to improve the connection between the house’s interior and its gardens; these include the introduction of a grand entrance portico on the main street elevation, a new external terrace wrapping around the south and west elevations at upper ground floor level, and the replacement of a sash window with a pair of glazed doors opening out onto that terrace. The house suffered significant neglect during its continuous occupation by the Russian Embassy between 1941 and 1998, and although there were few internal alterations during this period, essential maintenance was not carried out. As a result, the house was severely dilapidated when it was finally vacated in the late 1990s, and an outbreak of dry rot destroyed a great deal of historically significant material.
After decades of neglect, works began in 2005 on a major refurbishment to return the property to use as a single family house. Designed by ABA (International), an underground swimming pool was created beneath the stable building, whilst above basement level the historic building plan was largely retained. The roof of the main house was completely rebuilt in a new form based upon earlier (unbuilt) designs for the house. Where untouched by dry rot and other damage, the historic features and details of the house were retained. The major refurbishment works were completed in 2008.

Since acquiring the property, the current owners have secured listed building consent for minor alterations to the house. It is now proposed to make a small number of key interventions that are sensitive to the historic layout of the property whilst creating a better quality of environment and facilitating improved family use of the house.

Firstly, it is considered important to return primary family occupation to the upper ground floor rooms, and to create improved connections and access to the garden from these spaces. Unlike other properties on the street, 16 Kensington Palace Gardens benefits from a side garden to the south of the property in addition to the garden at the rear; as a result the house is surrounded by greenery, providing welcome hideaway from the city beyond. However, this is currently poorly accessed from the primary ground floor rooms. By modifying existing window openings to accommodate glazed doors, introducing new openings and widening the existing terrace, the garden will become a more important presence in the house and bring delight to the main family spaces.

Secondly, it is proposed to improve circulation routes through the house by extending the main staircase down to the basement, and adding a new connection between the main house and the stable block. Finally, a new vaulted underground swimming pool is proposed beneath the garden to the south of the house and outside the footprint of the listed building. Top-lit through discreetly positioned rooflights set within stone water troughs, the pool will create a special new interior that speaks to the rich history of subterranean structures across the city.
The following overview of the history of the property should be read in conjunction with the ‘Heritage Statement’ prepared by Alan Baxter.

In the mid-19th century the Crown Estate chose to develop the area to the rear of Kensington Palace to raise funds for a new kitchen garden at Windsor. The decision to develop the kitchen gardens provided a new opportunity to add to the fledgling fashionable suburb of Kensington. However, initial developments were unsuccessful as the area was afflicted by smells emanating from the stables and kitchen at the palace. Later, with the removal of the palace kitchens, the street and area became one of the most desirable residential quarters in London - an accolade that it still holds today.

The property was originally designed in 1846 by T H Wyatt and David Brandon, architects known for their Victorian country houses. Both architects were also responsible for the master planning of Kensington Palace Gardens as well as the gate houses that still stand at each end of the street.

In the following decades, the property became home to several different owners including the Argentine Republic Legation between 1886 and 1901. Minor alterations were made to the house, most notably the addition of a two story extension to the West of the house around 1855, the columned entrance porch and terrace (1902), and multiple changes to the stables. A further series of extensive alterations were carried out in the 1930s, including the dismantling and reconstruction of the terrace, the creation of lightwells to the servants’ quarters at basement level, and the insertion of a small passenger lift.

During the Second World War, the cost of upkeep and the loss of staff to the war effort meant that these large properties became untenable for the existing owners. The continued rationing of building materials up until 1949, combined with a limited workforce, resulted in many of the properties becoming dilapidated.

In 1945, the property was sublet to the Russian Embassy, and the house remained in diplomatic use until 1998. During this period, minimal maintenance was carried out and, unlike many of the houses on the street, the property did not benefit from the revived economy of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Repairs to the building fabric were very basic; in some cases damaged lath and plaster ceilings were repapered with old newspapers. The failure to properly maintain the building resulted in significant damage, including extensive dry rot and water damage from the leaking roof of the main house.

With the departure of the embassy, the house was left empty until its purchase in 2003, and the building suffered five further years of neglect and deterioration. In 2003 ABA (International) Ltd. began work on proposals for a full refurbishment of the property. The scheme aimed to preserve as much of the historic fabric as possible and bring the house back into full use as a single family home. Despite ABA’s best endeavours, the deterioration of the building fabric in certain areas of the house over the latter half of the 20th century means that the presence of historic building fabric is at best piecemeal.
**Planning History of No. 16**

1846  Site sold by developer John Marriott Blashfield to John Sperling
      New owner submitted plans prepared by Wyatt and Brandon to the Crown Estate
          (19th May)

1847  Successful application for extension of plot by 23ft to South East

1848  House certified as complete
      99 year lease dating from Oct 10th 1843
      1851 census lists John Sperling, wife, son and 6 servants

1855  2 storey extension to South West approved by Crown Estate

1865  OS map shows plan differing from 1845 and substantially different from later
      configuration of north side and stables

1877  Lease purchased by Stuart Rendel
      Architect Charles Barry Jr proposes scheme (£3000 for house and £1500 for stables).
      The scheme was approved but not carried out. Some smaller alterations completed later
      on designed by Halsey Ricardo.

1887  Argentine Republic Legation take up residence in the house.

1893  OS shows stable block rebuilt to different footprint.
      Evidence of extension to front porch and rear of South Wing

1902  Plans submitted for alterations to the house, designed by P. Morley Horder
      for Sir William Mather
      Surviving plans show:
      Additions at rear including billiard room over stables
      Elaborate Ionic column entrance porch on front elevation.
      Dumb waiter but no lift shown on drainage plans
      East elevation - New terrace, smaller panes in windows, wide steps to front door, extra
      storey on old stable house
      South elevation – Smaller panes in windows, new terrace, window turned into
      doorway.
      West elevation – extensive changes, extra storey to stables, fenestration much altered.

1911  Robert Norton resident

1931  Lease surrendered.
      New lease granted expiring 10 October 1990

1932  Repairs and alterations designed by Horace Farquharson submitted on behalf of Sir
      Berkeley Digby George Sheffield showing:
      Upgrading drainage and sanitary facilities
      Installing washbasins in bedrooms
      Re-arranging doors in main rooms and 1st floor bedrooms
      Re-flooring entrance and other rooms with parquet flooring or parquet boards.
      Enlarging servants’ hall in southeast corner of basement by changing location of the
      larder.
      Removal of partition in stables to form large single space garage.
      Passenger lift (probably)

*Ordinance Survey Maps chart developments of the house and grounds at 16 KPG*
1940s  Minor blast damage to No. 15a KPG on war damage maps
1944-54  No occupants listed in directories
1945    Sublet to Russian Embassy
1955    Lease transferred to Soviet Ambassador (24th Nov)
1969    Listed Grade II (15th April)
1974    Consent by Crown Estate for works to railings (details unknown)
1986    Report and valuation prepared
1999    Schedule of Dilapidations prepared; feasibility studies; concepts; settlement of
dilapidations through Foreign Office.
2005    RBKC grant permission from change of use of former Russian Embassy to single
family dwelling.
2005    RBKC grant permission for extensive refurbishment including reconstruction of
the roof to a new profile, new underground basement swimming pool and external
landscaping works.
2011    RBKC permission granted for minor internal alterations (listed building consent only)
2012    RBKC permission granted for alterations to the main entrance door on the front
elevation at ground floor level and replacement of two external doors to the rear and
side elevations at ground floor level and lower ground floor levels.
2012    RBKC permission refused for installation of external Victorian blinds and blind boxes
to the side and rear elevations.
2013    RBKC permission granted for removal of 1 glazed single door and sash window to
courtyard. Widen door opening and installation of painted timber French windows.
2015    Planning application submitted for construction of basement pool, Lower Ground
Floor extension and refurbishment of the house. Planning application withdrawn.

Drawings submitted for planning permission in 1932.
The front facade remains as today as it was then.
Historic Development of the House