

2.1 Character and special interest

- 2.1.1 The aim of Management Guidelines is to promote good stewardship of significant buildings and sites through a well-informed consensus of all stakeholders. This is more likely to be achieved if there is general agreement on why the object of this attention – the ‘heritage asset’ – is of special interest and therefore why it requires special care in its maintenance, repair and alteration.
- 2.1.2 The term ‘special interest’ derives from The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 7, which prohibits demolition, alteration or extension of a listed building “in any manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest, unless the works are authorised”. The Listed Building Consent procedures required to obtain such authorisation are described in Volume I of this document.
- 2.1.3 The cornerstone of good conservation management practice is the establishment of understanding among all stakeholders and their agents of the ‘heritage asset’, in order to identify the nature and appreciate the value of its special interest. From this understanding an informed approach can be developed to guide future works of repair, alteration or upgrade that extend beneficial use, and therefore sustainability, without detriment to the asset itself.
- 2.1.4 By the same token, the identification of the types of change that would not affect its character can streamline the Listed Building Consent process by eliminating the need for formal application procedures for insignificant works or alterations that do not impact on the special interest.
- 2.1.5 This section of the document therefore seeks to identify the character and special interest of the residential buildings of the Barbican Estate and it is from this assessment that the guidance in Section 3 of this document is derived.

- 2.1.6 A dictionary definition of ‘character’ refers to “a combination of traits or qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing”. In the case of a building or place, its character or special interest may reside in a variety of aspects including its intrinsic architectural, aesthetic, spatial or material qualities, its rarity or pre-eminence as an example of its type, its contribution to a larger urban unity or building group. It might also consist of cultural significance or historical association. Alternatively, technical or scientific attributes might constitute the principal special interest of a site or structure. An example of the former is the Grade I house in Ebury Street, London, where the 8 year old Mozart composed his 6th Symphony, while in the latter case the Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank is listed Grade I on account of its pivotal significance in the development of radio astronomy.

- 2.1.7 In the case of the Barbican, which has been described as one of the most ambitious urban reconstruction projects in Europe, special interest may be said to reside in its historical, social and architectural significance – the latter also including several technical aspects of its realisation. A resumé of the historical and social background to the Barbican project is included in Volume I. This section accordingly focuses on its special architectural interest.

2.2 Significance of the residential buildings of the Barbican

- 2.2.1 The residential buildings of the Barbican constitute the dominant component of the overall complex both in the forms of the buildings themselves and also in the spaces of the Estate that they contain. However a defining and pre-eminent aspect of the Barbican’s special interest is that it is not merely a ‘housing estate’ but was envisioned and planned as a whole piece of city fabric. Thus in addition to the residential buildings are schools, library, cinema, arts centre, exhibition halls, theatre, concert hall, youth hostel, shops, restaurants, pubs and diverse external landscape amenities (walkways, bridges, terraces, lakes, planting, etc) – all combining to create an overall social and spatial urban composition. Accordingly equal understanding and care is required in the stewardship not just of the residential

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buildings but of all the other components of the estate as a whole.

2.2.2 The layout of the Barbican Estate is characterised by offset open courtyards visually connected by water on an east-west axis with an implied central counter-axis defined by Frobisher Crescent and the Arts Centre to the north and the City of London School for Girls and St Giles Church to the south. A third axis is created by the east-west oblique line of Beech Street which with Ben Johnson House and its smaller neighbours reconnects the geometry of the Barbican Estate with the city fabric to the north. The residential buildings create various types of urban space between, under and around them, while the three towers (whose triangular plan forms reflect the three Estate axes noted above) provide a vertical scale commensurate with the scale of the Estate on plan. There is rare special interest in the group value of the buildings and spaces as a complete and coherent urban ensemble.

2.2.3 This asymmetrical yet formal quality of the building organisation and the resulting partly contained, partly interpenetrating, spatial character is a unique urban achievement of its period and suggests that it is unlikely to be possible to add to, or subtract from, what was clearly intended as a finite architectural composition without detriment to the ensemble as a whole. In other words the open areas around and between the buildings are to be understood as positive spatial reservoirs, or 'void', rather than as development opportunities, or 'room' that could be infilled.

2.2.4 The City Corporation's original decision to prioritise good quality housing (as distinct from potentially more lucrative commercial development) as the principal element of the Barbican project in order to repopulate the City has already been mentioned in Volume I, and in architectural terms this is manifested in the way that the formal composition of the residential buildings, with their strong sense of enclosure, impart the sense of a 'city within a city'.

2.2.5 This distinct identity is reinforced both by the scale and spaciousness of the development – atypical in the intricate grain of the City generally – and also by its material and stylistic consistency in contrast to the diversity of building forms and types surrounding the Estate. The three towers for example are unique as a group composition in the City, in contrast to the many other high-rise buildings, which read as individual unrelated one-off structures of different heights, girths and styles. The absence of any through-roads (an earlier scheme for a central north-south link having been abandoned) and what turned out to be only limited continuation of the high-level walkway system beyond the Estate boundary further defines the Barbican as a discrete, self-contained and coherent urban enclave. (This notwithstanding, there are well-used routes through and across the estate that provide functional connections to the neighbouring areas of the City.) Specifically, the high-level links that were achieved, even where not designated, should be understood and retained as an intrinsic part of the original vision.)

2.2.6 The other components of the complex – including the Barbican Centre, the City of London School for Girls, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the YMCA Hostel, the historic church of St Giles Cripplegate and fragments of Roman walling, the expanses of landscaping and water – are of vital significance in diversifying and enriching the amenities and social facilities of the Estate. Yet these are all contained within the residential framework. The significance of this is that much of the character and formal identity of the Barbican is vested in its residential buildings and the spatial interrelationship between them and these other components.

2.2.7 The limitation and effective control of any change in the external fabric of these buildings, and the exterior spaces they contain and define, is therefore of the utmost importance in preserving the special character and architectural integrity of the Barbican Estate as a whole.

2.3 Strategic design – building typology, urban space, podium

- 2.3.1 One of the most distinctive aspects of the Barbican, given its size and the extended history of its construction, is the conception and implementation of its design as an integrated totality. All the key design ideas are strategically interrelated and the Estate is presented as a single coherent organism. As such there is special interest in the Estate in its entirety as possibly the largest example of post-war central urban infill of any major world city.
- 2.3.2 The achievement of high density living, in combination with the overall sense of spaciousness is dependent upon both built form and land design. The use of multi-storey buildings enables the requisite density to be achieved within a limited building footprint. The creation of an artificially raised ground level – the podium – allows segregation of pedestrian and vehicular movement, discreet servicing and extensive under-block car parking, while liberating large areas of the site to remain open for landscaping and amenity. The concept of ‘urban megastructure’ enjoyed a wide currency among architects and planners during the period that the Barbican was being conceived, but there is particular interest in the successful and humane application of such ideas (more often associated with alienating urban interventions) in the heart of an historic city like London and on such a scale.
- 2.3.3 The residential building typology effectively uses just three architectural forms – towers, slab blocks and terracing units i.e. accommodation below podium level. One exception is where the slab block is formed as a crescent (Frobisher Crescent) immediately north of the Barbican Arts Centre, which provides the anchoring focus to this part of the estate. (See below para. 2.6.16) The three key types are exploited respectively to act as urban markers, as precinct containers and as ground level edging. They also offer three types of residential experience – high-rise living with long views over London (the towers), medium rise apartments raised on pilotis (columns lifting the main buildings above pedestrian level) with localised views over generous landscaped courts (the slab blocks), and ‘mews style’

living with immediate outlooks at, or near, natural ground level (the plinth units). Below podium space is also used for other, non-residential, purposes – most notably the Barbican Exhibition Halls below Ben Johnson House. The combination of this limited set of generic building types and the considerable diversity of individual dwelling plans provided within them constitutes a key aspect of the Barbican’s special interest and character, especially in the contemporaneous context of monolithic and repetitive local authority housing.

2.4 Architectural language, formal composition, structure

- 2.4.1 The above typology is expressed clearly in the architectural language of the Estate. The height of the towers (the tallest residential buildings in Europe when built) is emphasised by the dominance of their vertical over their horizontal structural elements, i.e. the piers projecting proud of the floor slabs that rise up the full height of the elevations. Conversely the horizontality of the slab blocks is emphasised by recessing their columns behind the building line and expressing the projecting strata of the apartment balconies as a series of continuous layers. Meanwhile the ‘grounded’ identity of the terraced dwellings is expressed in their individual punched windows and the continuity of brickwork for both paving and walling.
- 2.4.2 Each of these building forms is given a distinctive architectural signature – the exo-skeletal framework and serrated silhouette of the towers with their ‘boat profile’ or saw tooth balconies; the longitudinal use of this same profile in the podium parapet; the white barrel-vaulted rooflines of the apartment blocks; and the counter-arch motif of the below podium dwellings.
- 2.4.3 Architectural modelling also plays an important part in the character of the buildings. The rooflines of the towers, the penthouse units crowning the terraces, the deep brick reveals of the podium windows all impart a strong sculptural quality to the respective residential buildings. The architects themselves characterised the roof as ‘the fifth façade’ of the development. Likewise the visual detachment of the apartments from the podium by means of deeply recessed enclosure at podium level

is crucial in representing the slab blocks as 'raised structure' and the podium as 'ground'. Together these constitute the architectural language of the Barbican and are all key features of special interest that could not be altered without impacting on the character of the listed buildings.

2.4.4 The influence of the great modern architect Le Corbusier -an influence freely acknowledged by the architects themselves- is evident not only in the urban strategies indicated above, most of which he had worked out in the inter-war period, but also in many detailed aspects of the scheme - the powerful expression of building structure, the monumental character of the exposed concrete fabric, the use of natural materials, notably timber, and the counterpoint of rectilinear and curved forms in the plan and modelling of the composition. Special interest accordingly lies in the way this continental provenance is anglicised and assumes an identity that now seems indigenous to London.

2.4.5 The Barbican represents the high point of mature modernism at its most serious and urbane in Britain. At a time when large public housing schemes in the modern idiom were being widely pursued in this country and elsewhere, often on a minimum cost basis, the Barbican is notable not only for its size, site, and its enormous commitment of intellectual and financial resources, but also for the sustained consistency and quality of its architectural design and detail, over decades of building.

2.5 Materials and components

2.5.1 The materials and components employed at the Barbican contribute another element of its character and special interest. Its visual consistency stems from the highly disciplined use of a limited vocabulary of materials, components and finishes – uncoated concrete, finished with as much care and attention as fine stone, rich engineering brick, quality hardwood, white painted soffits, and roof coverings and architectural metalwork in a limited number of sober colours. Specifically the pick hammered monolithic concrete of most of the built structure assumes a monumental quality, such is the ubiquity and conviction of its use.

2.5.2 The careful gradation of scale is also an important consideration, ranging from the massive monolithic concrete infrastructure down to the domestic sized planter boxes, which sit within the balcony balustrades. The latter vitally introduce both the lightening effect of innumerable 'ornaments' against the darker tone of the concrete, and also the humanising foil of nature to the man-made artifice of the buildings. The Barbican vocabulary thus encompasses the full range of contrast, from the collective to the individual, from the urban to the natural, within the fabric of the Estate.

2.5.3 The sheer strength of the Barbican means there may be legitimate ways of embellishing the Estate through public art, sculpture, temporary installations, further planting, flags, banners and the like, provided any such interventions are carefully and sympathetically judged. However, the essential gravitas of its buildings and legibility of its landscape should be preserved from makeovers, prettification or camouflage as otherwise the essential character of the Barbican will be compromised or obscured.

2.6 Domestic design

2.6.1 A large part of the character of the Barbican as a work of special architectural interest consists in the way in which the original architects' vision of a new way of urban living is pursued throughout the whole project, from macro to micro scale. The character of the flat interiors is a product of a consistent and continuous design intelligence that embraces major urban planning at one end and fine domestic detailing at another.

2.6.2 In addition to the manifest importance of the exterior character of the Estate, which listing is intended to safeguard, the statutory designation of the Barbican means that alterations to the common parts of the residential buildings and interiors of the flats themselves also need to be considered carefully to assess whether the works being contemplated might affect their character as buildings of special architectural interest.

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- 2.6.3 This character may reside in particular features of the flats – including their general arrangement or specific details– but it may also reside in the totality of a single domestic interior where it survives in an intact, or nearly intact, state and thereby stands as an authentic and complete record of the original design in its entirety.
- 2.6.4 Examples of the former may include: the essential plan and/or sectional organisation of the interior; the position, size and shape of kitchens and bathrooms; the incorporation of double height space; the use of internal staircases as an architectural statement; barrel-vaulted spaces; principal windows and doors; and sliding partitions and screens. It is equally important that private open space/ patio/ balcony/ terrace designed to serve the dwelling type of which it is a part is retained in the form originally intended.
- 2.6.5 These features occur in a variety of formulations throughout the residential buildings and the special interest of the Barbican Estate lies in how within the simple typological strategy of towers, slab blocks and terrace units, such a very considerable range of flat types is accommodated. This arises in large part from intelligent exploitation of the differing orientation of the various blocks and in the way the unit plans were tailored both to the aims of the brief and to the circumstances of the site and its environs.
- Towers**
- 2.6.6 The multiple orientation of the towers to suit their differing site locations demanded type plans that could work in any of the three rotated positions in which the blocks were placed. There is special interest in the resulting layouts whereby the service rooms of all flats are placed along the inner ‘blind’ sides of the units while the habitable rooms are arranged along the outside with living rooms at the three extremities where they always gain sunlight from one or other direction. The kitchens are located on the outer ends of the service room run in such a way as to link with and serve out to the dining/living room spaces. One of the three flats on each floor is given the distinctive triangular point

that lends a directional identity and saw-tooth profile to each of the tower blocks.

Raised Slab Blocks

- 2.6.7 The slab blocks are the principal containers of residential accommodation within the Estate and accordingly needed to provide flat plans for north-south as well as east-west orientation. Additionally, they needed to be able to take account of the varying neighbouring context immediately beyond the Estate boundaries.
- 2.6.8 There are many layout permutations of special interest. One type uses a central core access arrangement to serve paired entries on each level and flats with south-facing living rooms and north-facing bedrooms (e.g. Speed, Andrews, Thomas More and Defoe Houses). A feature of interest in these types is the use of internal glazed screens to denote a separation of the social areas from the private areas of the plan.
- 2.6.9 Another layout type uses a corridor access system with entrance doorways on either side serving flats facing east or west in a bi-lateral block plan (e.g. Gilbert, Seddon, Mountjoy and John Trundle Houses.) In the case of Willoughby House, where it was necessary for living rooms to face into the Estate, the plan incorporates an ingenious ‘up-and-over’ section allowing bedrooms to be placed on the other side of the corridor.
- 2.6.10 Of particular significance are the units at the top floor levels which typically incorporate double height and barrel vaulted spaces that are a key element of the building character both internally and externally.
- Sub-Podium terraced flats and Mews units**
- 2.6.11 These units employ various type plans to deal with differing edge conditions around the perimeter of the Estate or the landscaped courts. In Sub-Podium cases the accommodation is typically of single aspect design where it backs onto car parking areas. In Mews units an independent structure is formed.

There is special interest in the variety of layout arrangements, including split level and double height spaces and internal staircases that are developed to suit the various locations. Except in specialised cases, such as the metal framed glazing and panelling employed for such areas as the Exhibition Halls, the common exterior material of brick is used to express the plinth of the Estate as a whole.

2.6.12 In this way flats, penthouses, duplexes, studios, maisonettes and town houses with a wide diversity of internal layouts were evolved to suit the location, aspect and orientation of the various blocks. This has resulted in the creation of a range of dwelling types unique to the Barbican Estate. This degree of care and inventiveness in the design of dwelling types is rare for the period, which tends to be characterised by the anonymity and standardisation of public housing. In fact some 140 different flat types are used throughout the scheme.

2.6.13 This interest is further enhanced by the character of original detail - whether achieved through the design of customised fittings and components or through the imaginative and careful use of ordinary materials and specification. The detailing of the Barbican has been compared to the quality of design found in luxury cars of the same period, with such incidental items as the locks and forms around the window apertures all contributing to the experience of the Barbican as an 'architectural *gesamtkunstwerk*'. It is important therefore that even where a minor alteration that would not involve Listed Building Consent is undertaken, consideration is nevertheless given to its impact on the original character of the building, and the cumulative effect if repeated more widely

2.6.14 Considerable attention and ingenuity was devoted to the development of kitchen and bathroom layouts, finishes and fittings that were progressive for their time. The size of the development meant that there was scope for the production of new standard fittings for use across the Estate. Some of these – the Barbican Basin for example – became classics of their type.

2.6.15 The design of domestic interiors at the Barbican is thus an integral part of the original architects' lifestyle vision for the Estate as a whole and as such is part of the character and special interest that listing seeks to protect. This design quality has ensured that the basic domestic order of the apartments has generally remained intact. Not surprisingly however it is some of the detailed internal arrangements and fittings of individual flats that have been most subject to pressure for change over the years. This is due partly to the need to replace broken or worn out items, and also to changing patterns of living.

Frobisher Crescent

2.6.16 The design of this block formed an important part of the development as a whole. It was curved around the back of the Arts Centre, facing inwards onto an open space that was intended to be used for sculpture or other exhibitions associated with the Arts Centre. In the original scheme, Frobisher Crescent was designed as residential units, but towards the end of the development, Phase V (1971-82) it was decided that office space for the Arts Centre was required. The design was executed as originally approved, but only up to a point. The residential unit divisions were installed as designed, but no internal partitions had been inserted and the design for internal fixtures and fittings (kitchens, bathrooms, internal wardrobes, cupboards) was never implemented.

In June 2008, an application for Listed Building Consent was granted permission to convert Frobisher Crescent Levels 7,8 and 9 to residential units. New partitions were inserted imposing a new plan form on the units. Kitchens, bathrooms and other fixtures were installed. The corridor running along the outside curve of the block was subdivided with glass partitions to form private balconies. This new adaptation of the existing shell has resulted in these levels of Frobisher Crescent coming under the residential 'umbrella' of the Barbican Estate. As such, it will now become subject to the Listed Building Management Guidelines for the Barbican Estate, Vol II. Following consultation with English Heritage it has been agreed that any alteration to the internal portions of Frobisher Crescent, including alterations to partitions, will not require LBC.

However, works affecting the External Elements, Common Areas, Private Terraces, Balconies, will all now fall under the relevant section of the Management Guidelines and residents and landlord should consult the guidelines before undertaking any works.

2.7 Domestic design - Management Guidelines strategy

2.7.1 These Management Guidelines seek to address the practical issues raised by listing in relation to the above description of character and special interest in the interiors of the flats. The attempt has been made to strike a balance between the statutory obligations imposed by listing on the one hand, and on the other, the reasonable need for the exercise of individual choice within the private domestic domain.

2.7.2 Thus, the detailed guidance included in Section 3 aims to differentiate the key features of special interest (those which will be the subject of Listed Building Consent procedures) from other items of repair or alteration work. Meanwhile, protection of the special interest inherent in the intact survival of original interiors in complete detail is proposed by means of the various conservation strategies, including the 'heritage flats' initiative, described in Section 5. These strategies are also intended to assist residents preferring to retain, or reinstate, elements of their apartments in an authentic original manner.

Summary

2.7.3 The range and distinctive quality of flat types and interiors is part of the special interest of the Barbican Estate as a whole. It is important that the essential character and diversity of the flats is retained, with any significant modifications being regulated by the Listed Building Consent procedure. Allowance must also be made for the reasonable alteration, replacement or upgrading of fixtures, components and finishes that may be required to cope with wear and tear or changing lifestyles.