

Application Name: City University London

Number: 1464897

Type: New

Heritage Category: Listing

Address:

City University, 10 Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Islington	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

Recommendation: Reject

Assessment

BACKGROUND

We have been asked to consider the buildings by Richard Sheppard, Robson and Partners at City University, Northampton Square, for listing. A planning application for building an extension on the roof of the block now known as the University Building was approved on 4 July. The complex is not included in the Northampton Square Conservation Area.

HISTORY AND DETAILS

City University has its origins as the Northampton Institute, founded in the late C19. The Institute's original 1894 building, by EW Mountford, is in French Renaissance style, and is listed at Grade II. The college became the Northampton Polytechnic Institute in 1906, and the Northampton College of Advanced Technology in 1957; in that year Richard Sheppard & Partners became the college's architects. In 1962, with Gordon Taylor as the partner in charge, plans were made for expansion across four acres, with the site stretching to Goswell Road; a number of Georgian houses on Northampton Square were demolished to make way for the scheme. A public enquiry delayed construction, which commenced in 1966, the year university status was granted.

The buildings of City University were realised in two phases, between 1966 and 1974. The permitted height of the complex was limited, and a deep basement was created covering the whole site. All the buildings, including the 1890s Institute building, were linked by a circulation route at first-floor level, where the common rooms were situated. The buildings were constructed of reinforced concrete, the majority clad in brown Crowborough brick.

In 1966-70 a series of rectangular blocks of varying height was built along Spencer Street, housing the electrical engineering department; these included the idiosyncratic High Voltage Engineering Laboratory – a windowless box of board-marked concrete – and the tall centre block facing Northampton Square – now the University Building. In 1971-4 the quadrangular Tait Building was built for the departments of civil and mechanical engineering, enclosing an octagonal lecture theatre. In 1993-4 the High Voltage Laboratory was extended and converted to lecture theatres; there have been many other changes to the buildings

internally, and to the circulation plan, including the infill of the University Building's open ground-floor, remodelled as the new main entrance in 2017 by NBBJ.

Richard Sheppard, Robson and Partners, as the firm became, made their names with school buildings and moved on to design colleges for higher education and teacher training. A number of their most distinguished buildings have been recognised by listing, including those at Churchill College, Cambridge (1960-8), and their lecture theatre block at Brunel University (1965-7). Financial and planning limitations affected the design and realisation of the City University buildings, which have not enjoyed a warm critical reception: in 1975 the Architects' Journal noted ergonomic shortcomings in the use of the site, whilst the Buildings of England (London 4: North, 2002) observes the lack of alleviating open courts or greenery, commenting that 'the heavy masses do little to lift the spirits'.

ASSESSMENT

Based on the information provided and with reference to the Principles of Selection (DCMS, November 2018) and our Selection Guides, the Sheppard Robson buildings at City University are not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

Degree of architectural interest:

- * as a development of 1966-74 the buildings would be expected to show a higher degree of architectural or historic interest, as well as intactness, to justify listing;
- * the buildings do not compare well with Richard Sheppard, Robson and Partners' best educational buildings, a number of which have been recognised by listing;
- * the effect of the massing is rather forbidding, and the buildings do not show the level of detailing and finish of which the firm was capable, whilst the planning of the complex seems never to have provided unfettered circulation;
- * the buildings have received a number of significant alterations, eroding the integrity of the original design.