

Application Name: Former Bank at 218 Upper Street, Islington, London**Number:** 1465631**Type:** New**Heritage Category:** Listing**Address:**

218 Upper Street, London, N1 1RR

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

Recommendation: Reject**Assessment****BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

Historic England has received a listing application for the former bank at 218 Upper Street, Islington, London. The building is under the threat of partial demolition. It is not located in a conservation area, but is opposite the Grade II-listed Compton Terrace (National Heritage List for England (NHLE) reference 1293221), a group of C19 town houses.

HISTORY AND DETAILS

The former bank at 218 Upper Street, replaced an earlier bank of 1873 which was destroyed during the Second World War. Constructed of reinforced concrete to the basement and ground floors with a steel-framed structure above, the bank was built around 1953 for the National Provincial Bank and was designed by the notable bank architect B C Sherren. It was the first bank branch in London to be rebuilt after the Second World War, a period when materials were scarce and planning controls were encouraging modern, stripped-back designs which eschewed the inter-war, neo-Georgian style. It was possibly the first designed by Sherren during his tenure as Chief Architect for the National Provincial Bank, and he went on to design the former National Provincial Bank, Plymouth, Devon of around 1958 (NHLE reference 1393429), which is listed at Grade II.

In the later C20, the ground-floor plan of 218 Upper Street was opened up and the banking hall fixtures and fittings were largely removed, leaving the vestigial remains of a door case and some low-level wall panelling. Externally, two of the three principal ground-floor windows were foreshortened. The name of the bank and signage indicating the function of the entrances, has also been removed.

The former bank at 218 Upper Street has the typical, stripped-back elevations which are characteristic of many 1950s commercial buildings. It has three visible storeys, plus a set-back, flat-roofed attic storey on the roof. It is primarily constructed of mixed-stock brick in English bond above a tall ground floor, which is formed of five bays, framed in Devon grey-granite. The regular teak-framed, ground-floor fenestration is multi-paned and has a horizontal emphasis, except for the vertical, double-margin lights. The paired entrance doors to each side are constructed of teak and each has a circular door handle, embossed with the design of an ancient coin; respectively, a swan preening its wing with Greek lettering spelling 'IIP ARAE KAAIO', a hen and her two chicks, a man riding a dolphin carrying a bow and arrow, and Taras

astride a dolphin carrying a cornucopiae, with Greek lettering spelling 'TAPAL'. The doors stand within white, marble-faced architraves. The fenestration on the first and second floors, follows the five-bay arrangement below, however the windows are crittal-style, in plain surrounds. There is a group of three to the centre (separated by brick pilasters) and single windows to the outer bays. Above the windows on the second floor, there are three stone roundels; respectively, a floral pattern, a star, and ears of wheat. They also carry the Greek letters 'META'.

The interior of the former bank is plain and functional, having largely lost its original banking hall fixtures and fittings. The plan at ground-floor level has also been altered by the removal of the divider between the two principal customer-facing rooms and sub-division to the rear. The staircase has a metal handrail and balusters, and the vault remains in situ.

CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT

The Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings (DCMS, November 2018) states that from 1850 to 1945, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary. Furthermore, careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945, another watershed for architecture. Factors such as the quality and interest of materials, composition and detailing, virtuosity or innovation in design, construction or planning and level of survival will be relevant to the assessment of architectural interest.

For more recent buildings in particular, the functioning of the building (to the extent that this reflects on its original design and planned use, where known) will also be a consideration. Artistic distinction can also be a factor relevant to the architectural interest of buildings and objects and structures fixed to them. To be able to justify special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's history and / or have closely substantiated historical associations with nationally important individuals, groups or events; and the building itself in its current form will afford a strong connection with the valued aspect of history.

In addition, reference is made to the Historic England Listing Selection Guide for Commercial Buildings (December 2017), which identifies that post-war banks of note are few in number, with the former Barclays Bank, Maidstone, Kent (1956-60, by Sir William Holford), and the former National Provincial Bank, Plymouth, Devon (1956-8) by B C Sherren, being notable exceptions to this, being designed with a high-level of craftsmanship and architectural flair. Both are listed at Grade II.

While it is acknowledged that the former bank at 218 Upper Street is a well-constructed and relatively early example of post-war design, in many respects, it is a typical 1950s commercial building. The elevations are rather austere, even though they have been enlivened with thoughtful detailing such as the circular door handles and plaques, with their representations of ancient coinage. However, this application of traditional detailing to a more stripped-back design is by no means unique, having been used as early as 1935, at the Halifax Bank in Kingston-Upon-Thames, which was assessed in 2016 but not found to meet the bar for listing. Furthermore, the alterations to the fenestration on the ground floor at 218 Upper Street have negatively impacted the principal elevation's character.

Overall, the former bank at 218 Upper Street does not display the high level of architectural interest required for listing buildings of this date. This is particularly apparent when compared with Sherren's Plymouth design, where the high-quality of design referencing Scandinavian Modernism and classical features is matched by the good quality materials used throughout, such as the bronze windows, balustrades and handrails, as well as the integration of artistic features such as mosaic, worked-bronze doors, and sand-blasted glass.

Internally the building did not have an innovative plan when constructed and has subsequently been opened up on the ground floor, masking the original layout of two principal customer-facing rooms and therefore any real sense of its former banking function. The former banking hall also lost its streamlined, timber finishes, counters and detailing.

Based on the information provided and judged against the criteria and the considerations in our

supplementary guidance, the former bank at 218 Upper Street, Islington, is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

Degree of architectural interest:

* although designed by the notable bank architect B C Sherren and enlivened with thoughtful details, it is a typical example of a 1950s commercial building and does not compare well with the best examples from the post-war period;

* the later alterations such as the reduction of the windows, the loss of the plan and the removal of the banking hall fixtures and fittings, have further diminished the architectural interest.

Degree of historic interest:

* although an early example of a 1950s bank, it is one of many such commercial buildings and it cannot be said to have special historic interest.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information provided, whilst possessing claims to local interest, the former bank at 218 Upper Street, Islington, does not meet the criteria for listing in the national context.

SOURCES

Booker, J, Temples of Mammon - Architecture of Banking (1991) pp unknown

The Builder, Volume 187 (1954), pp 174-175