

St John's Downshire Hill

Design, Access, and Conservation statement

Site Address: Downshire Hill, London NW3 1NU

Ref: 2132-MEB-XX-XX-RP-A-3-900

REVISION D 12.07.2023 DRAFT



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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This statement supports a further listed building consent application to install an Audio and Visual System in St John's Church, Downshire Hill.

The proposal entails the installation of a projector at mezzanine level and a retractable screen at the east end.

The objective of the scheme is to both minimise any impact on the significance of the heritage asset and to meet the needs of the Church to effectively communicate in the 21st Century with adults and children of all ages.

This Statement demonstrates the following:

1. The building's heritage is outstanding and needs to be protected.
2. There is a justified need for an AV system.
3. Sustaining the building into the future depends upon continuing to attract the involvement of local people from the community.
4. The church has a message to convey and it must be well communicated, suitable for the 21 Century, readily available, and understood by all - including those seated at the sides (under or in the galleries) and at the back of the building.
5. Five possible options have been identified, exhaustively examined and tested - with consultants and AV specialist on site.
6. The choice made does 'less than substantial harm to the building' and is reversible.

A pre-planning application reference 2019/0113/PRE was submitted in 2019, for the proposal to install projecting screens (among other works) for officers' review.



Image 1: Site plan



Image 2: Site plan of Hampstead conservation area

1.2 Location and Site Description

The Church belongs to the conservative Evangelical Anglican tradition of churches.

It is a Proprietary Chapel of the Church of England, located in Downshire Hill, Hampstead on the junction with Keats Grove - part of the London Borough of Camden, and within the conservation area of Hampstead which has considerable quality and variety.

A range of factors and attributes come together to create the special character of the Hampstead conservation area. These are principally; its topography; the Heath; the range, excellence and mix of buildings; the street pattern and Hampstead's historical association with clean water and fresh air.

St John's Downshire Hill is one of only seven Grade I listed buildings in the Hampstead Conservation Area. It forms the centre-piece of the Downshire Hill character area which is noteworthy within the conservation area for its high number of early 19th century listed buildings, the use of stucco and the diversity of styles.



Image 1: Site plan



Image 2: Site plan of Hampstead conservation area

2. UNDERSTANDING THE HERITAGE

The Proprietary Chapel of St John's was built in 1823 and is Grade I listed (refer to list entry in appendix). The building arose as a result of housing development in the area of Hampstead at the time, and has gained high heritage significance. The handsome simple classical exterior of the building is matched internally with a high quality classically detailed interior which remains largely original.

The church building has been subject to changes and adaptation over the years - principally involving pews for reasons not always known; but in 2005, a major extension of the building at undercroft level was completed to provide better facilities in anticipation of congregational growth. Changes were made mostly below the building, whilst the Grade 1 listed fabric was simultaneously restored.

The current proposal, which is to carry out internal work to the original building, follows this long tradition of change and adaptation. It will enhance the life of the church community, and allow the accommodation to respond to contemporary needs, particularly now churches have got used to using electronic means of communication following the Covid pandemic.

The values of the building's founders, and what was important to them, are expressed through the building's form and its architectural features.

- Symmetry - a clear straight line runs right through the building, from the entrance door through the position of the original pulpit, on to the reredos beyond.
- Focus - The building focused on a pulpit which was originally tall and visible from all pews in the gallery and Ground Floor. Such focus was on the 'word' as preached - backed up by texts and writing forming parts of the decoration on the reredos and gallery fronts. This focus is strong. There is no altar recess for it was not necessary to encounter God in a special place. The pulpit hid any altar.
- Simplicity - Original elements of the building are few - porch, lobby, bell tower, barrel vault, gallery, pulpit and vestry - and their composition is easy to understand. The building is an auditorium simply reached and simply but elegantly stated. Volume does not overpower; the building is about a message and its best means of delivery, which this proposal continues.



Image 3: Interior of the Church

3. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Following the categories outlined in Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance, English Heritage (2008) the summary of heritage values of the separate elements of the building are set out below.

Significance Value			
Evidential	Externally the form and appearance of the main building remain intact. Most of the interior detailing is also original.	Local	Very High
Historical - Illustrative	Example of 19th century church	Regional	High
Historical - associative	Leslie Wright leased it to the congregation for a nominal rent and requested it should not be sold so long as there was a congregation to support it. St John's remains the only proprietary chapel in the diocese of London which is self-supporting.	Regional	Very High
Aesthetic	Classical style expressed through symmetry, focus and simplicity, both externally and internally with fine detailing.	Regional	Very High

Based on the table above it is clear that the St John's Downshire Hill is of very high heritage value.



Image 4: West facade of the Church



Image 5: South facade of the Church

4. AUDIO VISUAL NEEDS OF THE CHURCH

Throughout its 200 year history, St John's has had a strong focus on Biblical teaching and communication of the Christian message. St John's church is a fully functioning living and operating local church community. Current activities facilitated within the building include Sunday services and coffee after, weddings/wedding receptions and funeral services, occasional concerts, crèche, Sunday School teaching for children, congregational meetings, Lay training, conferences, weekday groups for children and carers, After School' clubs, English language classes, administration office, counselling and study/research. Any 21st century church now needs to use a variety of communication methods to communicate effectively to 21st century people.

- Videos and slides and online information need to be incorporated into sermons and services to aid communication to adults within the building (sometimes in different rooms) or live streamed.
- Videos and slides are also often used to connect with children. They now expect this means of communication. The church relies on handmade visual aids of varying quality. However visual aids produced on a computer and projected are much more effective in communicating with young people.
- Currently a weekly service sheet is produced containing song/hymn lyrics and items of liturgy. This once involved printing 6 sides x 200 A4 sheets of paper - but now has reduced to 6 sides x 50 because of the temporary screen. These are used once and then thrown away. The church will always need to provide some large font printouts for those with sight impairments but introduction of a screen will mean even less paper, is required for a church' with an ongoing commitment to be more sustainable.
- The use of AV is used to display songs in corporate worship and lifts people's eyes out and up from a piece of paper so they look up and sing, creating a better liturgical experience for all.
- St John's now supports and funds 10 overseas mission partners. Regularly news from them is often supplied in video or photographic form. There is currently no way of sharing this during Sunday meetings.
- Things that happen "at the front" of the church are far away from someone sitting at the back and difficult to see. A camera that can zoom in on something significant and magnify it via a live stream on the screens for all to see is needed.

To do nothing about this, will in time have a significant impact on the church's mission and ability to attract new people.



Image 6: Interior of the Church

5. PROPOSED WORKS

5.1 Options Appraisal

The congregation is seeking to install a permanent screen to replace the temporary screen, which currently sits (mostly permanently) on the dais in front of the east end, and hides the inscribed reredos. It is also not tall enough. The objective is to restore a clear view of the reredos, so the contribution this historic feature to the quality of the building and its primary purpose as a place of worship and teaching, can be better enjoyed. The view down the central aisle of the reredos draws in passers by and the church benefits from encouraging the wider public to visit, whether they are interested in the architecture or church activities.

Five options have been explored to assess how and where an AV system can best meet the needs of the Church and minimize possible impact on the building.

Option 1: two retractable screens located at balcony level

Option 2: two screens using the east wall at higher level

Option 3: two screens using the east wall at lower level

Option 4: one central retractable screen

Option 5: screens independent of existing fabric

The siting of options 1-4 in plan and related sections are shown in Appendix 2.

OPTION 1 (see page 18)

The first option is to install two retractable screens at balcony level suspended from arm mechanisms attached to the balcony floor, using a bespoke lever system designed for this specific situation. Refer to image 8 and 9.

This option has been discounted because it was not supported by the local authority who refused the application for listed building consent (ref: 2022/2289).

It is worth noting in the context of this application, the siting of these screens maximises visibility from almost every seat in the church while also minimising visual impact on the building when not in use, and reducing requirements for permanent fixings to small bolts in the floor of the balcony for the screen levers.



Image 7
Existing arrangement



Image 8: Option 1
Precedent picture of a bespoke lever system mounted on a wall, shown in resting position

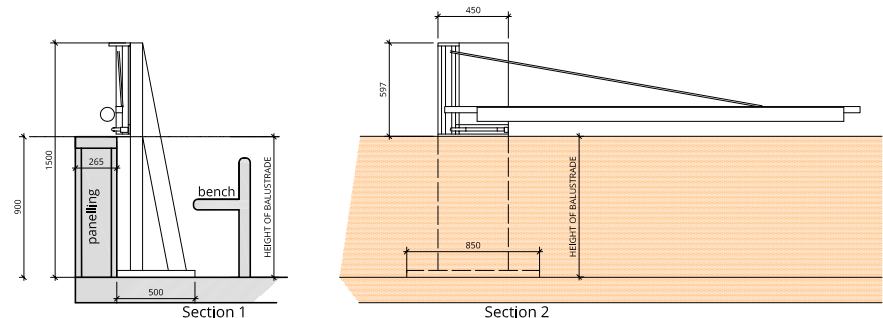


Image 9: Option 1
Details of the base to be mounted on the mezzanine floor and the bespoke lever system of screen case

OPTION 2 AND 3 (see pages 19 and 20)

The second and third option, suggested by Camden officers during the pre-planning application process is to project directly onto internal walls. This would prevent any kind of intervention.

To test this option the Church simulated projections onto the GF walls using current equipment. Refer to images 10 and 11. The feedback was as follows:

Option 2 (higher level):

- Screens are not properly visible for many seating positions located under the Galleries on each side.
- Horizontal sightlines are well beyond recommended comfortable angles for the front rows.
- Screens are more distant from a speaker and less comfortable when gaze needs to flit between speaker and screen (disconnecting speaker and audience).
- Bigger screens are needed for text to be legible, and this would result in some sightlines being obstructed, or would raise the vertical sightlines further.

Option 3 (lower level):

- The musician's group, readers and / or minister obscure sightlines to lower projection position when everyone is standing, (Image 10).
- Columns obscure views from many positions.
- Bigger screens are needed for text to be legible, where there is already a restriction on height imposed by the galleries.

These 2 options have also been reviewed by API Communication (the provider of the AV system). Feedback was similar: each area of wall used as a possible background cannot be directed to all sitting areas without obstructions either by the pillars or the balustrade, as illustrated.

Additionally all 4 locations will be needed at once. So four long throw projectors would therefore have to be sited in the balcony next to the current sound desk, requiring small bolts into the floor to prevent movement of the projectors.



Image 10
Option 2 and 3



Image 11
Options 2 and 3: Wall surface used as background for projecting

OPTION 4 (see page 21)

A permanent screen in a central position is also unsatisfactory. Although it is an obvious position and visible to most seats if located high enough, it will cover the Creed and 10 Commandments. However in light of the refusal by the Council of the application for Option 1, this position has been reviewed. If the screen does not have to be a permanent installation, and can be housed in, and retracted into a small box located on top of the reredos in front of the window sill, the idea has merit.

This is the option preferred by the church and proposed. The retractable screen position is shown red in Image 12. It is at the same good height as option 1.

- It is the best combination of sightlines from all positions.
- It will draw the whole congregation together - good for longer video content.
- Height when standing is satisfactory and it is wide enough.
- Some management of those standing on the raised area may be necessary to avoid obscuring part of the screen for some viewers.

One long throw projector would be sited in the balcony next to the current sound desk, requiring small bolts into the floor to prevent movement of the projectors.

OPTION 5

A fifth option is to install temporary screens and projectors. This could be achieved either by raising screens from box stands on the floor (or boxes inset into the floor) OR by installing free standing screens on poles. This option has been discounted.

- The box stands required to raise screens or TV's to a suitable height for visibility both downstairs and upstairs are cumbersome; and nothing on the market is available to achieve the height necessary. The boxes will also take up floor area on the dais, or impact chair space, and trailing wires would likely present a health and safety issue or be covered over in unsightly tape.
- Screens on independent stands would be permanently in position and hard to move when not in use, which impacts ability to use the building for concerts and other events. Even though they would not be permanently fixed to the building they would also have far greater permanent visual impact on the building than screens proposed in option 1 and 4, which when not in use would not be visible.

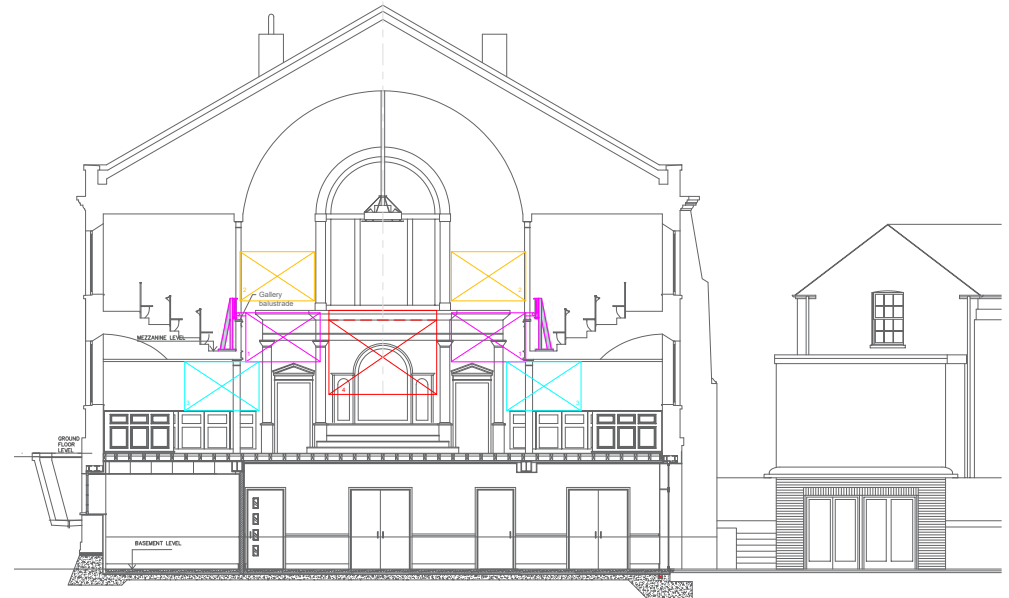


Image 12: Possible screen positions with option 4 shown in red

5.2 Design of Preferred Option 4

This projection system will comprise a motorised retractable screen and housing sited on top of the reredos (refer to Image 13), which when in use will move forward from its resting position so the screen can drop from its housing in front of the reredos, then retract back inside when not in use (see detailed section).

The motorised box when closed will in effect extend the cill of the East Window forwards, and the finish of the box painted in a suitable RAL colour so the system blends in with the interior colour of the window and limit any visual impact as much as possible.

A bright long throw projector will be used from the rear gallery. It will just peep over the lip of the gallery upstand so it is not obviously visible from below. This will be mounted on robust stands bolted to the floor. Refer to image 14.

The input connection for the system will be routed to the sound desk where a multi-format switcher with wireless functions will allow the connection of a computer with multiple ports. Power points will be required at the projector and screen locations.

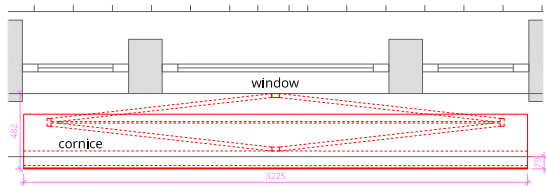


Image 13: timber ledge over Reredos

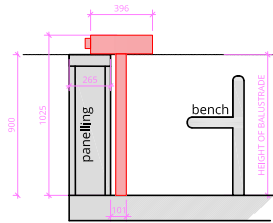


Image 14: Stand supporting the projector behind the gallery upstand

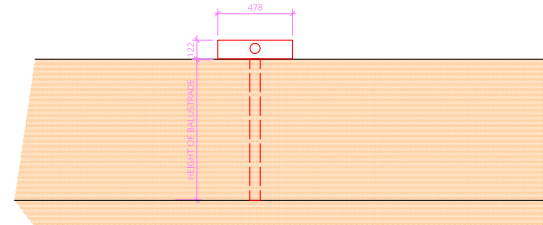
Proposed Layout and Details of Screen System (OPEN)



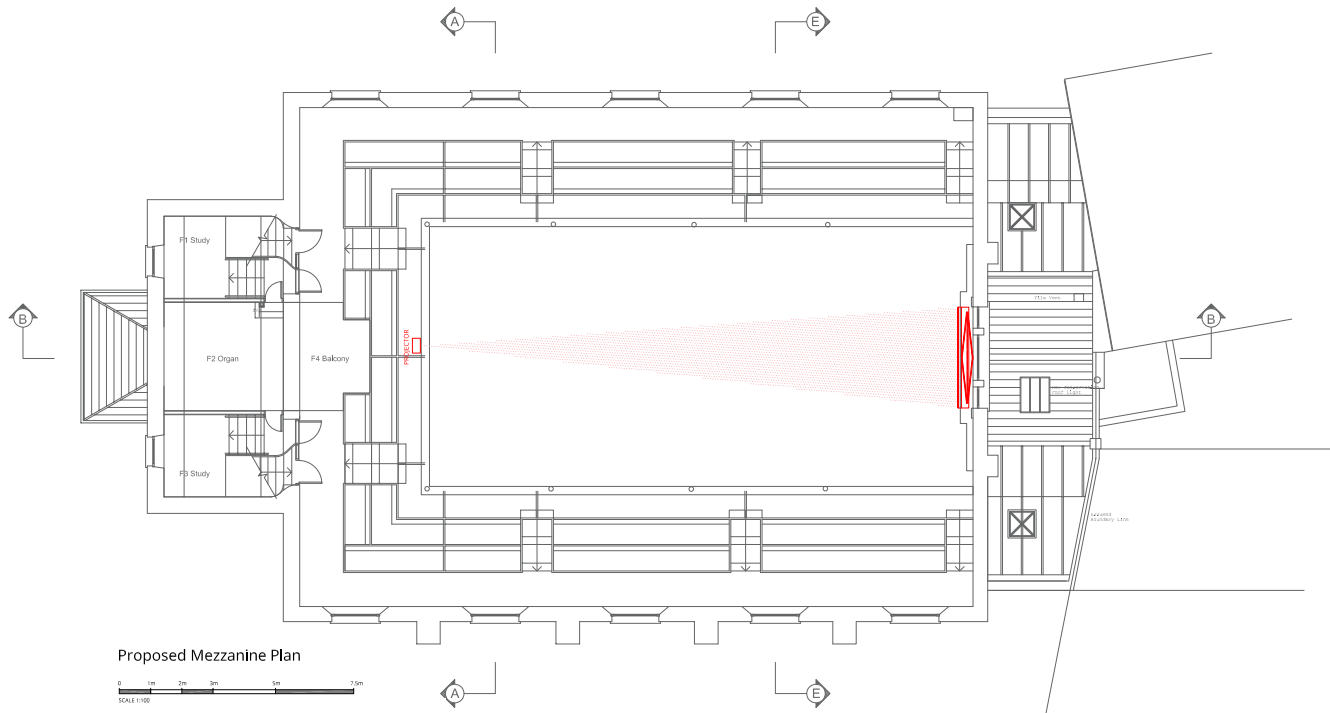
Proposed Screen System - Plan - Closed



Projector Section



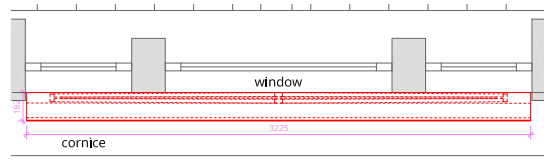
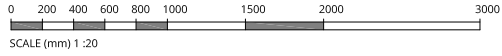
Projector Elevation



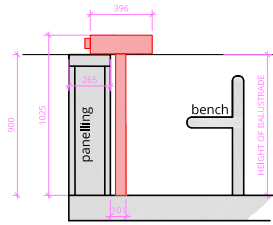
Proposed Mezzanine Plan

0 1m 2m 3m 4m 5m 6m 7m
SCALE 1:100

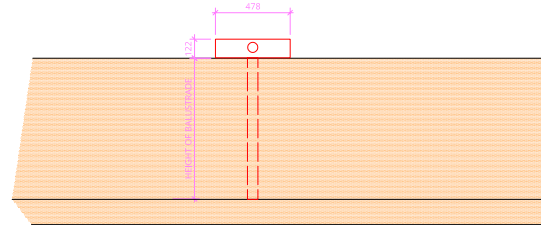
Proposed Layout and Details of Screen System (CLOSED)



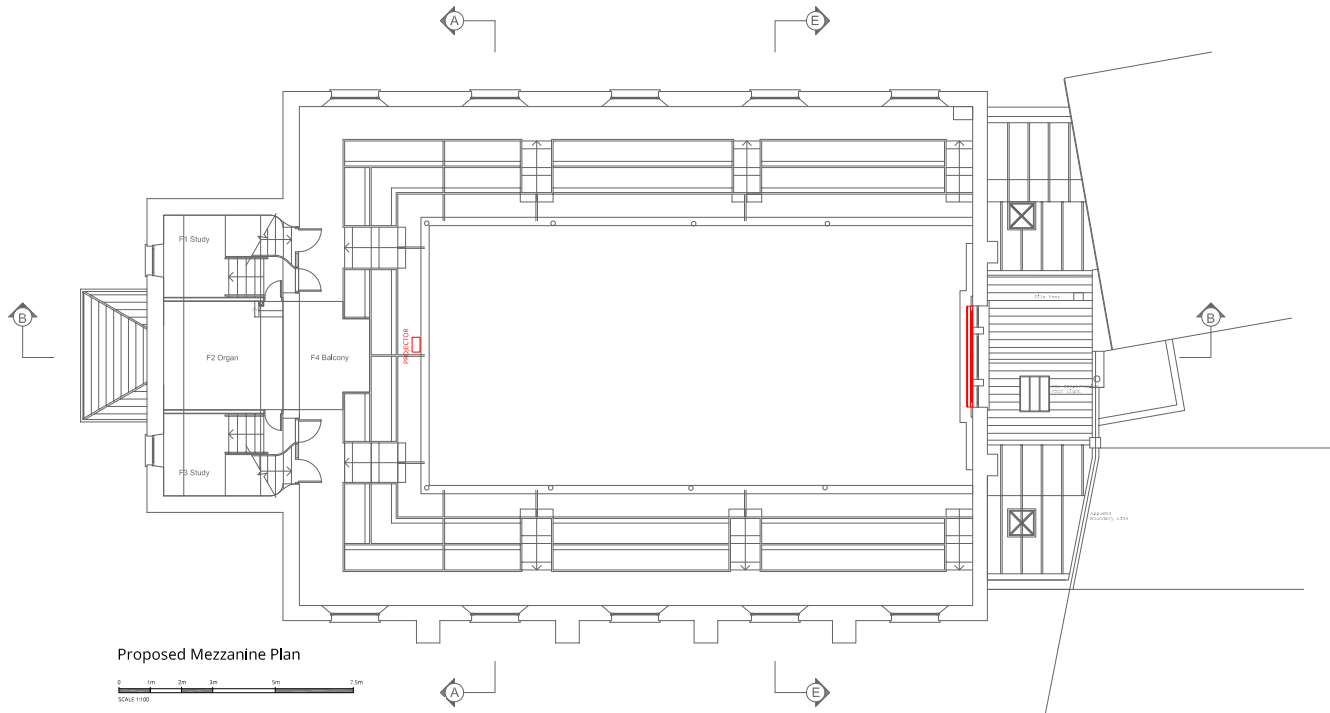
Proposed Screen System - Plan - Closed



Projector Section



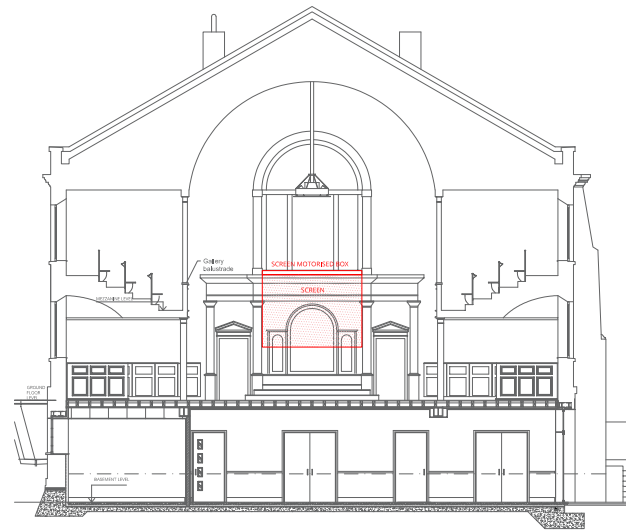
Projector Elevation



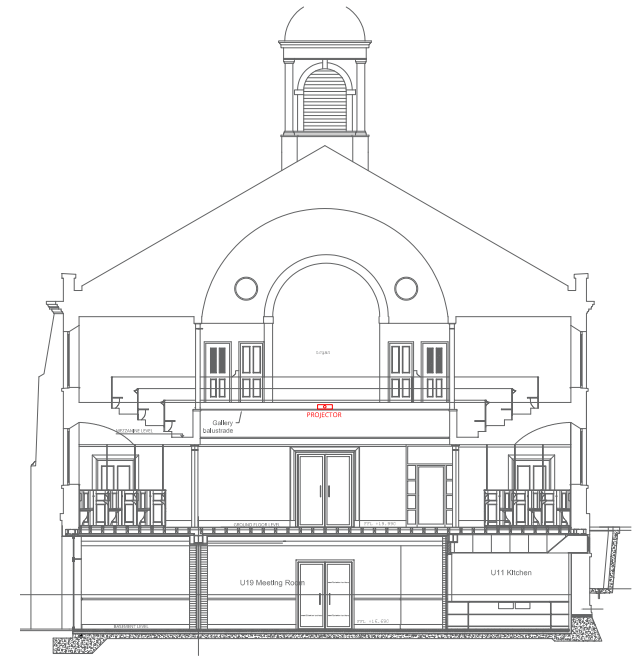
Proposed Mezzanine Plan



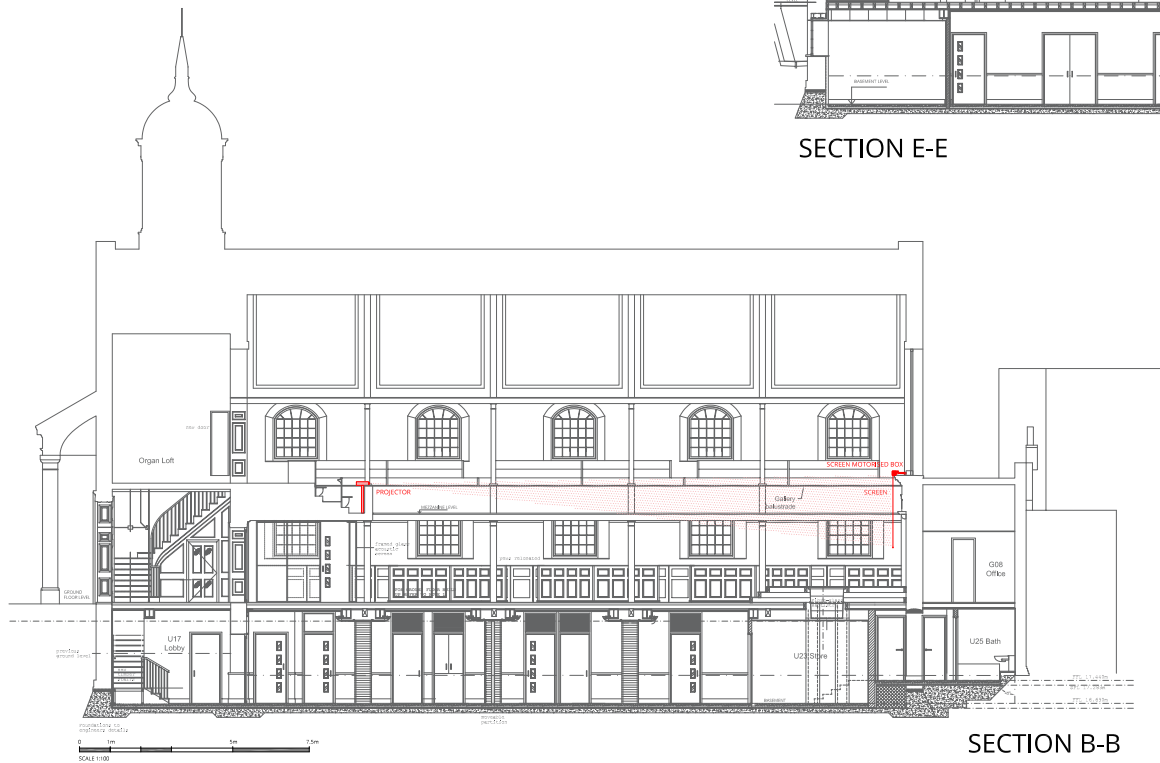
Proposed Sections



SECTION E-E



SECTION A-A



SECTION B-B

6. ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACT

6.1 Schedule of Works and scale of change

No	Item and Impact description	Scale of Impact
A	<p>Installation of motorised screen system within a metal motorised box mounted on top of the reredos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fixing of the unit will not result in any loss of or change to existing fabric. The motor will be hidden in a long box whose width matches the width of the window cill and whose height matches the height of the window cill. The colour of the box will be chosen to match the colour of the window The box will project over half the width of the top of the reredos but the distance will only be obvious to those sitting close to the east end wall in the gallery. The installation will be fully reversible without damage of removal 	Minor change
B	<p>Installation of projector with base mounted on mezzanine floor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fixing of the base will not result to any substantial loss of fabric. The visual impact on the interior is minimum due to the small scale of the equipment and the fully hidden base behind the gallery upstand. 	Negligible change
C	<p>New route for hiding existing wires, through a single drill in the ceiling: the existing wires are part of the system that API installed for live streaming/cameras/sound system during Covid and which are currently loose pending approval to neatly direct them through the ceiling. Refer to images 14 and 15.</p>	No change



Images 14 and 15 - Item C
Current loose cables hanging over the mezzanine balustrade, proposed to be neatly arranged.

6.2 Conclusions

1. The need for an AV system has been justified.
2. There has been a full analysis of possible options to identify the best solution. Option 4 is the best.
3. The solution protects the building's heritage.

Items listed in the table above (page 14) result in a range of impacts from 'minor' to 'no change'. Proposed works are fully reversible, with loss of historic fabric limited to occasional timber fixings.

The severity of impact of the proposed works can be classified as 'slight to moderate'. And taking into account the variation of the proposed changes, the overall scale of impact is considered to be 'minor beneficial'.

The proposal does not affect the character of the asset or its setting in a permanent way. In fact, it improves the view of the chancel which will now be uncluttered by removal of the projection screen that sits in front of the inscribed tablets, and impairs the view of the east end. (Refer to image 7).

Implementation of the proposals enhances the original aim of the building (which lay behind its architecture) as a means to deliver the same 'word' as 200 years ago but now into a modern digital context.

4. The solution means the building will be better sustained into the future as it will better attract the involvement of local people from the community as a result.

7. ACCESS STATEMENT

No access statement is required since the proposal concerns the improvement of methods of communication to members of the public and not the use of this equipment by members of the public.

Significance / Scale of Impacts table

VALUE OF HERITAGE ASSET	SCALE & SEVERITY OF CHANGE/IMPACT (EITHER ADVERSE OR BENEFICIAL)				
	No Change	Negligible Change	Minor Change	Moderate Change	Major Change
Very High (Grade I/Scheduled Monument)	Neutral	Slight	Moderate/Large	Large/Very Large	Very Large
High (Grade II*)	Neutral	Slight	Moderate/Slight	Moderate/Large	Large/Very Large
Medium (Grade II/ Conservation Area)	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate/Large
Low (Locally Listed)	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Neutral/Slight	Slight	Slight/Moderate
Negligible (Non-Designated)	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral/Slight	Neutral/Slight	Slight

Definition of types of change

No Change	Negligible Change	Minor Change	Moderate Change	Major Change
No material change to the heritage asset or its setting.	A small change or alteration, but unimportant. Having no visual or indirect impacts on the asset or its setting. Slight changes to use or access.	A small change to an element of fabric or setting that results in a noticeable difference. Limited indirect impacts or changes to character.	Changes to an element, including replacement, or insertion of a new element, where the asset or its setting has clearly been modified. Noticeable indirect impacts.	A change of great extent, including the complete removal of an element. Changes to most or all of the asset or its setting. Total alteration of the asset. Extreme indirect impacts.

9 point scale of impact

Major beneficial	Moderate beneficial	Minor beneficial	Negligible beneficial	Neutral	Negligible adverse	Minor adverse	Moderate adverse	Major adverse
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8. APPENDIX

8.1 Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: I

List Entry Number: **1078270**

Date first listed: **11-Aug-1950**

Statutory Address 1: **CHURCH OF ST JOHN, DOWNSHIRE HILL**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/>)

[Corrections and minor amendments](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/>)

Location

Statutory Address: **CHURCH OF ST JOHN, DOWNSHIRE HILL**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: **Greater London Authority**

District: **Camden (London Borough)**

Parish: **Non Civil Parish**

National Grid Reference: **TQ 26982 85697**

Details

CAMDEN

TQ2685NE DOWNSHIRE HILL 798-1/27/341 (South side) 11/08/50 Church of St John

GV I

Church. 1818-23. Possibly by CR Cockerell or designed by its builder, William Woods. Stucco. Slated roof. Classical style. EXTERIOR: 5-bay aisled nave. Symmetrical west front with slightly projecting central pedimented bay having pilasters at angles and flanked by small wings with blind windows and parapets upswept towards the central pediment. Prostyle portico with penthouse roof and panel above inscribed "St. John's Downshire Hill"; architraved doorway with panelled double doors. Flanking the entrance, architraved round-arched windows to ground floor and architraved oculi above. Pediment with clock. Appearing above the pediment a rectangular bell cupola with columns at angles carrying entablature and round-arched louvred openings. INTERIOR: particularly fine, with panelled galleries on 3 sides having 2 orders of slim cast-iron columns with enriched capitals. Tunnel-vaulted roof with simple coffers. Distyle-in-antis Corinthian reredos with inscribed entablature and architraved and pedimented doorways in outer bays. East window above of Venetian type with pilastered architrave and patterned stained glass including the eagle of St John. North and south walls have segmental-arched windows with splayed soffits above and below galleries; rear of galleries has corresponding round-arched openings to allow light through. Box pews with umbrella stands on doors. HISTORICAL NOTE: built to serve the new middle-class surrounding development. In 1916 the freehold was bought by Leslie Wright who leased it to the congregation for a nominal rent. At his death he requested it should not be sold so long as there was a congregation to support it. St John's remains the only proprietary chapel in the diocese of London which is self-supporting.

Listing NGR: TQ2698285697

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: **477140**

Legacy System: **LBS**

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. This copy shows the entry on 24-Feb-2022 at 13:06:22.

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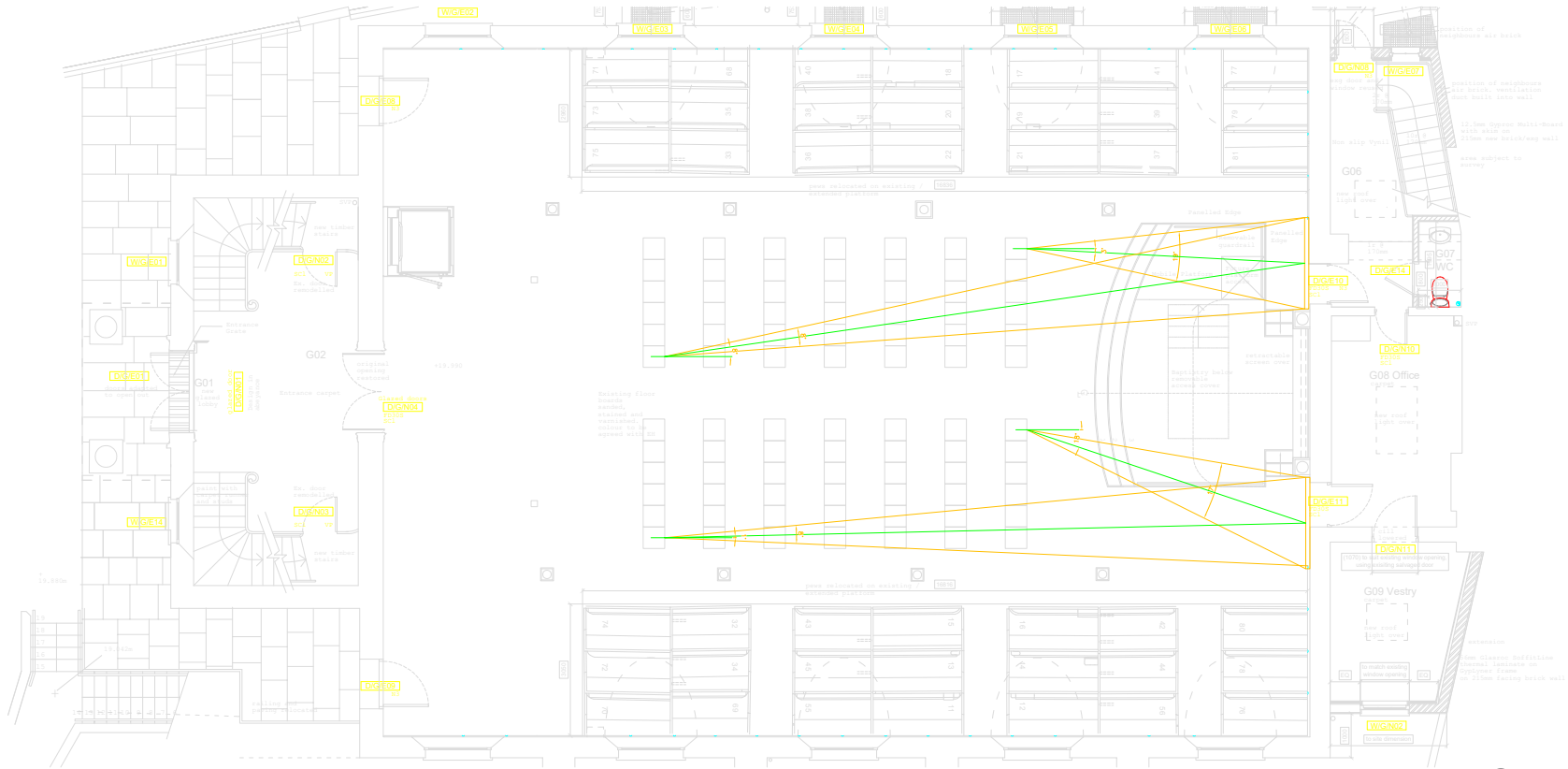
Use of this data is subject to **Terms and Conditions**
(<https://historicengland.org.uk/terms/website-terms-conditions/>).

End of official list entry

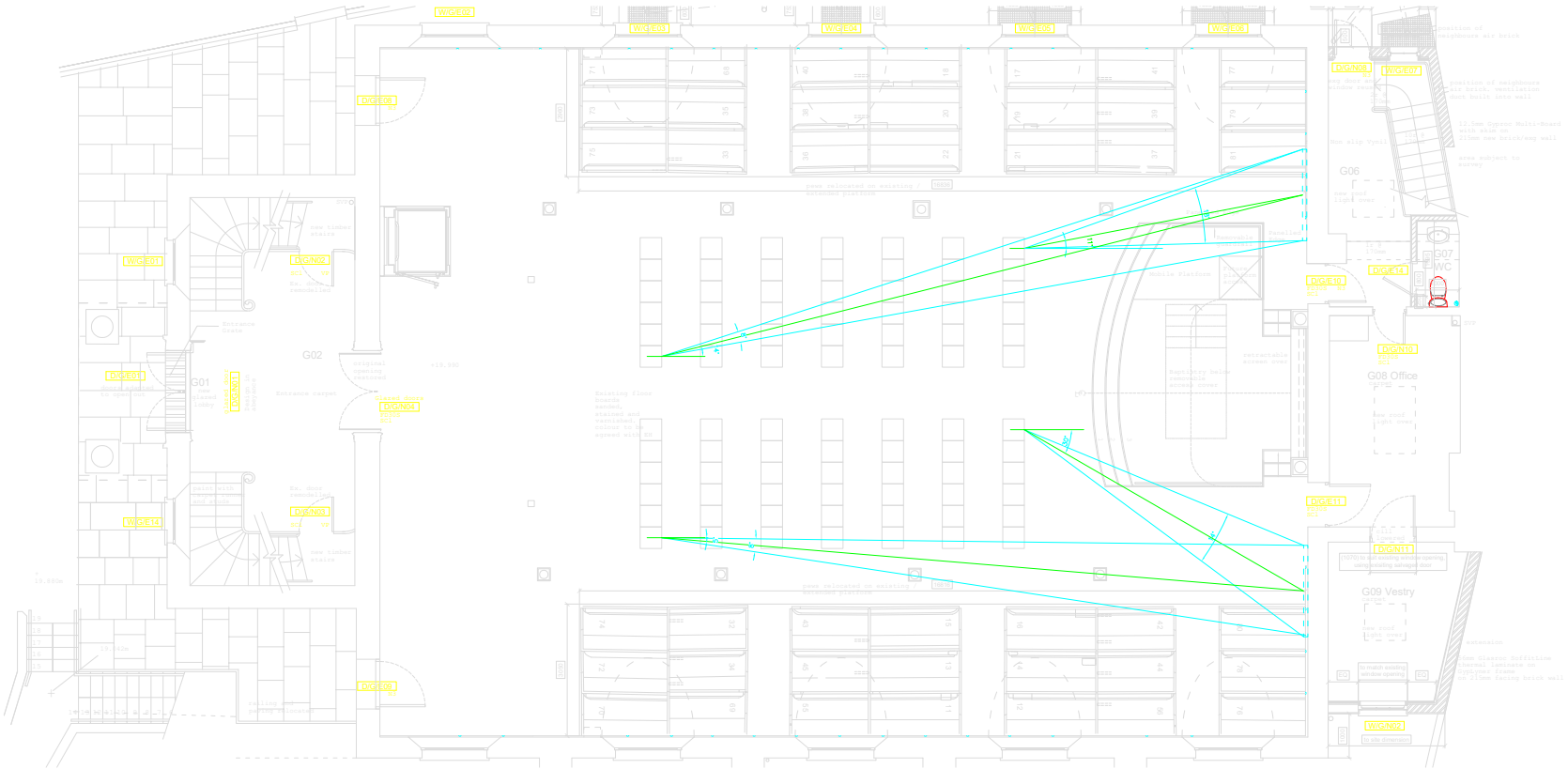
8.2 Screen options plans and sections



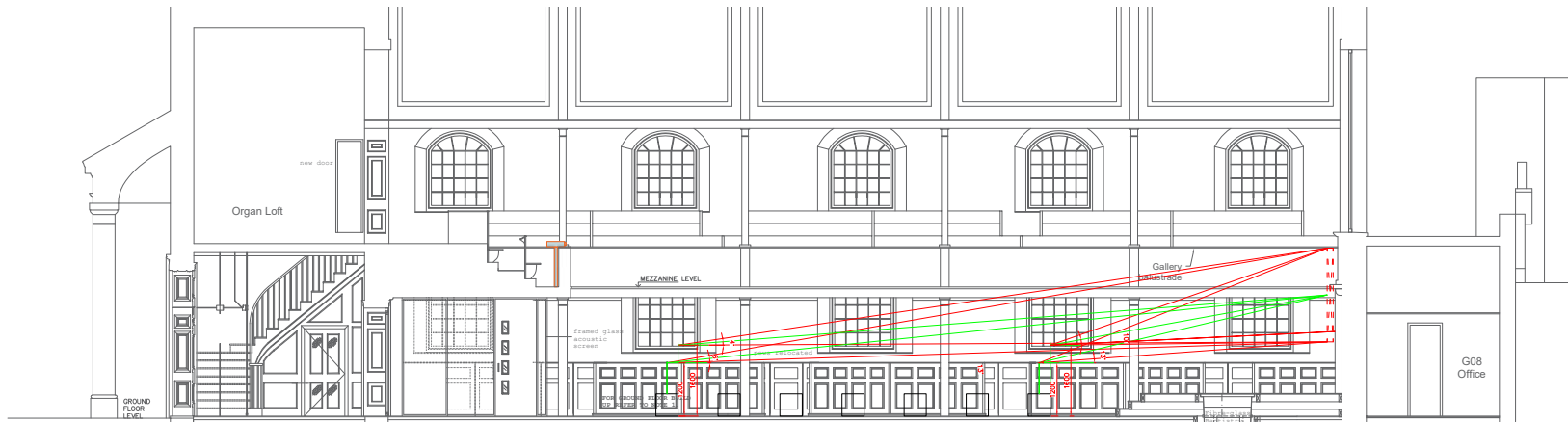
Screen Option 1



Screen Option 2



Screen Option 3



Screen Option 4

London Office

30 St Johns Lane
London EC1M 4NB
Offices also at: Oxford and Kent