

**FRIENDS HOUSE**  
EUSTON ROAD, LONDON

## **DESIGN, ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT**

**ALTERATIONS AND REFURBISHMENT WORKS TO SECOND FLOOR TOILET FACILITIES &  
COMMS ROOM**

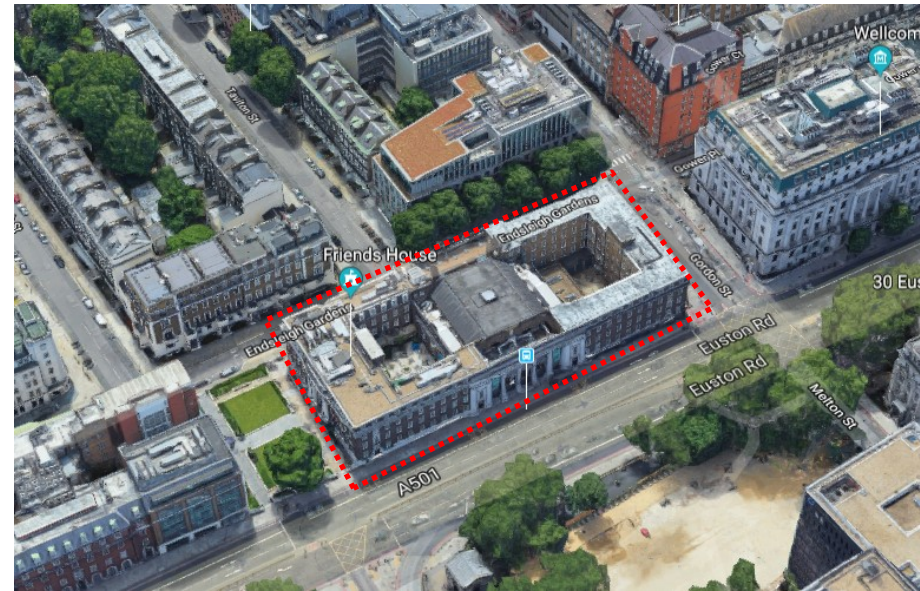
SEPTEMBER 2024

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Friends House is a Grade II Listed building which stands on the south side of Euston Road, opposite Euston Station. It is home to the head offices of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. The building is in use as offices, meeting rooms and conference space. This application seeks listed building consent for alteration and refurbishments works to the toilets and data room located at second floor level.
- 1.2 The existing toilets primarily serve the meeting rooms and conference space at this level. There are three female toilets, one male (plus two urinals) and one accessible cubicle. The proposals reorganise this space and incorporate a small additional area currently part of the adjacent 'Comms room' to provide seven gender neutral cubicles, two accessible cubicles and one fully wheelchair accessible cubicle. This delivers an increase in the number of toilets available, their quality and accessibility.
- 1.3 The existing toilet facilities are of reasonably modern origin having been installed in 2011. The floors, walls, ceilings, doors and dividing partitions are all modern. No original fabric would be impacted by the application proposals.
- 1.4 The proposed refurbishment works do not therefore have any adverse impacts upon the special character or significance of the building. However, this application has been prepared to avoid any potential future concerns regarding the extent of works undertaken given the listed status of the building and the realignment of the partition between the spaces.
- 1.5 This statement is set out as follows:
- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 2.0 | : | Site Description & Assessment of Heritage Significance |
| 3.0 | : | Relevant History                                       |
| 4.0 | : | Relevant Planning Policy                               |
| 5.0 | : | Analysis   |
| 6.0 | : | Conclusions  |

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION & ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

- 2.1 Friends House (173 – 177 Euston Road), is a three storey plus attic and basement building which stands on the south side of Euston Road opposite Euston station.
- 2.2 It was built around 1927 to the design of Hubert Lidbetter who won the RIBA bronze medal for “best building erected in London” as a result. It is of steel construction, clad in brown brick with Portland stone dressings. The building takes the form of a long rectangular block, divided into three sections by two internal courtyards as highlighted in the aerial photograph opposite. The Euston Road elevation is dominated by a Portland stone tetra style in anti-portico whilst the garden facing east elevation is centred on a slightly projecting style in antis portico.



**Aerial view of Friends House from the north looking south**

- 2.3 It was originally designed to host the Quaker annual gatherings and so its layout included a large Meeting House to seat at least 1,500 Friends (Quakers) for these yearly meetings, a library and several rooms for meetings and worship.
- 2.4 Today, Friends House is the central offices of Quakers in Britain and still welcomes the annual meeting during Spring bank holiday weekend. The building has had many renovations and improvements since 1927. The most significant was the renovation of the main Meeting House. This was subject to a year of work and relaunched as ‘The Light’, a 1,000-seater auditorium in 2014. It now includes a glass roof light to provide natural light and a 200m<sup>2</sup> flat floor for exhibition layouts.



**View of friends House following construction in 1927**



**Refurbished meeting space 'The Light'**

2.5 In 1996 the building was listed (Grade II). The listing description states:

*"Includes: No.30 Drayton House GORDON STREET. Central Offices of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, including offices, meeting halls and library; separate lettable office accommodation incorporated in Drayton House to the west of block, completing the symmetry of the main facade. Completed in 1927 to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter, ARIBA; Grace and Marsh Ltd. General Contractors. Steel construction sheathed in brick laid in English bond and Portland stone dressings; metal framed windows to rear elevation, otherwise wood sashes, all of original design. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys and attic over basement. Long rectangular block divided in 3 by 2 interior courtyards; large meeting house at the centre, square in plan; library at south-east corner of block; small meeting house, formerly double height now subdivided, to rear of centre block, windows to south. Long elevation to Euston Road dominated by tetrastyle in antis portico, itself framed by bays; this central section, which marks the extent of the large hall, in Portland stone, with recessed ranges leading to hall's foyer. Slightly recessed side ranges of 10 windows each. All openings flat arched unless otherwise stated. The penultimate ranges to either side marked by the use of Portland stone, having a semicircular windows to ground floor, balconied window to first floor set in moulded architrave, and keyed roundel to second floor. Cornice band continuous to entire block and separating second from attic storey. East and west elevations identical and centred about a distyle-in-antis portico, slightly projecting from side ranges of 5 windows each. To east elevation series of terraces and walls lead down to garden, which is enclosed on north and south by a low Portland stone wall with railings similar in design to those enclosing*

basement areas. South elevation features projecting range of 5 bays, the openings round-arched with metal framed windows; bays one and 5 are separated from the centre 3 bays by a recessed range. The latter 3 windows mark the extent of the former small meeting house. INTERIOR: main entrance to offices through east elevation, into low lobby with stairs to second floor; this overlooks the east courtyard with circular brick fountain and French doors opening from corridors to north and south. Most of the ground-floor corridors and stairs retain original fixtures and finishes; committee rooms, some of them with moveable partitions, also retain original panelling, door furniture and fittings. The library is double height, 3 x 4 bays at east corner to Endsleigh Gardens. It was sensitively refurbished in 1993, retaining much of the original woodwork, and galleries to west and north. Great Hall with flat roof coffered, carried on square piers and pilasters, with galleries on three sides. Drop acoustic ceiling from line of architrave hides original ceiling, but this is said to survive intact above. Railings and fitted furniture to hall also intact. 3 entrances to hall foyer from Euston Road; these doors of original design. Small meeting house of 3 bays to rear, south, has been divided to provide committee rooms on ground floor. Courtyard between Drayton House and central block has been partly filled in by recent 2-storey addition providing extra toilet and other facilities for Great Hall. The addition has been sensitively designed. The interior of Drayton House not inspected. It is said to retain much of its original finishes. The building retains most of its original character, fittings and finishes. The interiors are well designed and detailed, particularly in the east block around the courtyard. Hubert Lidbetter designed many buildings for the Society of Friends; this is the most ambitious. (The Builder: 24 June 1927: 1008)."

2.6 The building also stands within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Appraisal Statement comments:

*"5.10 Friends' House (grade II listed), Nos 161-167 (odd) and a late 20th century office building form the principal frontage to Euston Road to the south of the square. The main entrance to Friends' House is expressed in a neo-classical style as a three-storey Doric colonnade. With its neighbour at Nos 161-167, it is constructed in red brick with Portland stone detailing and rises a total of four storeys. However, Nos 161-167, which reads as a single block, has a larger scale than Friends' House owing to its taller storey heights and its mansard roof punctuated by small attic windows which align with the openings below. The small, formal garden to the east of Friends' House (designated as a public open space in the London Borough of Camden Local Development Plan 2010) provides an attractive, comparatively peaceful space, defined by Portland stone boundary walls and decorative entrance gates. It is the only surviving element south of Euston Road of the original Euston Square, and provides a pedestrian link through to Endsleigh Gardens. There are vistas of the grandly-scaled terrace on the south side of Endsleigh Gardens which once formed the southern edge of Euston Square (located in Sub Area 2). The mature tree within the gardens is an important element in the Euston Road streetscape."*

2.7 Internally, the building has been the subject of refurbishment and modernisation over time. The following photographs show the toilets, associated lobby / landing area from which they are accessed and the adjacent meeting and conference areas which they serve.

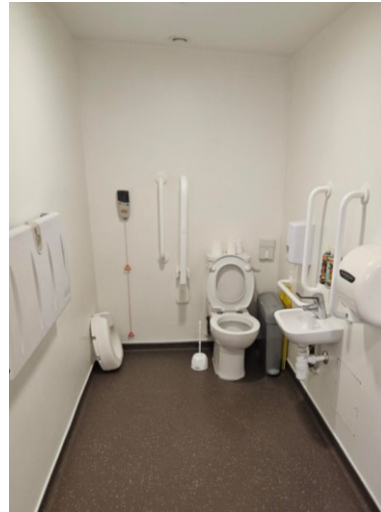




View showing the lobby area outside of the toilets and Comms room



View showing the entrance to the meeting and conference facilities and toilets



Various views showing the current modern toilet and basin facilities proposed to be replaced



**Comms room**



**Adjacent conference breakout area**



**Adjacent conference / meeting facilities**

- 2.8 As will be evident from these photographs apart from the original wooden doors which separate the lobby from the conference areas (and are not proposed for alteration) the spaces comprise modern fabric, fixtures and fittings. There are no original or historic architectural features within these areas.

#### Description of Heritage Significance

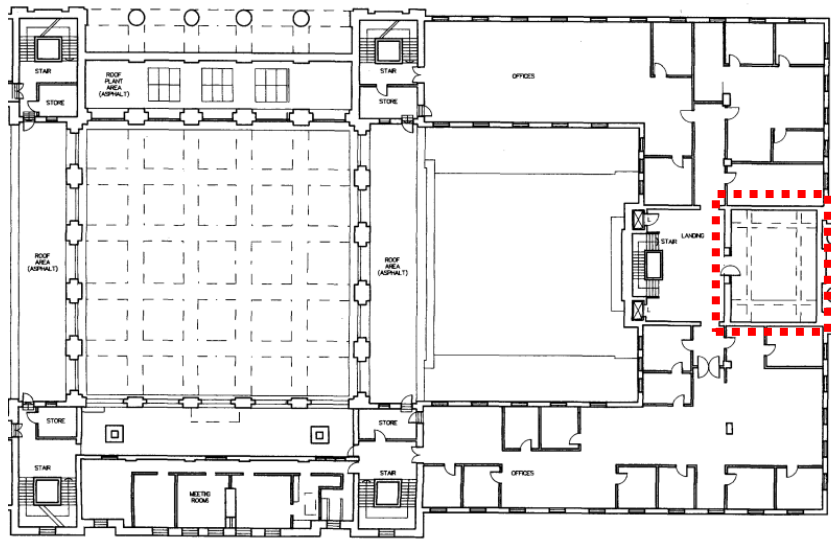
- 2.9 Friends House was constructed in 1927. Its fabric is not therefore of particularly historic origin nor is the use of a steel frame construction an example of a rare or unusual building technique.
- 2.10 The building was not listed on this basis. Rather it is considered that the special significance of the building derives from two main aspects.

- 2.11 Firstly the building holds significance due to its association with the Quaker movement and its use as the annual meeting place since construction in 1927 and also the development of the use over time as a more general meeting place and conference venue for a variety of groups and organisations. Its location adjacent to Euston Station assists in this regard with those visiting from outside of London gaining a sense of arrival upon exit from the station and viewing the building immediately to the south.
- 2.12 The design and architecture of the building also holds significance. As noted above the design was awarded the RIBA bronze medal award for the best building erected in London in 1927. The building commands a significant presence in the Euston Road street scene and so the Bloomsbury Conservation Area with the Portland stone façade dominating significant lengths of view along the south side of the road. The building's presence is accentuated by the fact that it stands apart from its neighbours with the garden space to the east side and the gap created by Gordon Street to the west.
- 2.13 Internally, the building retains some significant features. Most of the original layout remains at ground level, albeit modern alterations have provided a more open plan café area to the north east corner and the library specifically highlighted in the list description has been subject to renewal in 1993 and most recently in 2022. The upper levels have been refurbished to provide meeting rooms and conference facilities. These areas, floors, fixtures and fittings etc are of modern origin and appearance and hold very limited significance. The basement level is similarly comprised of modern fabric and a layout defined in the early 1990's and then reorganised more recently in 2018 / 2019.

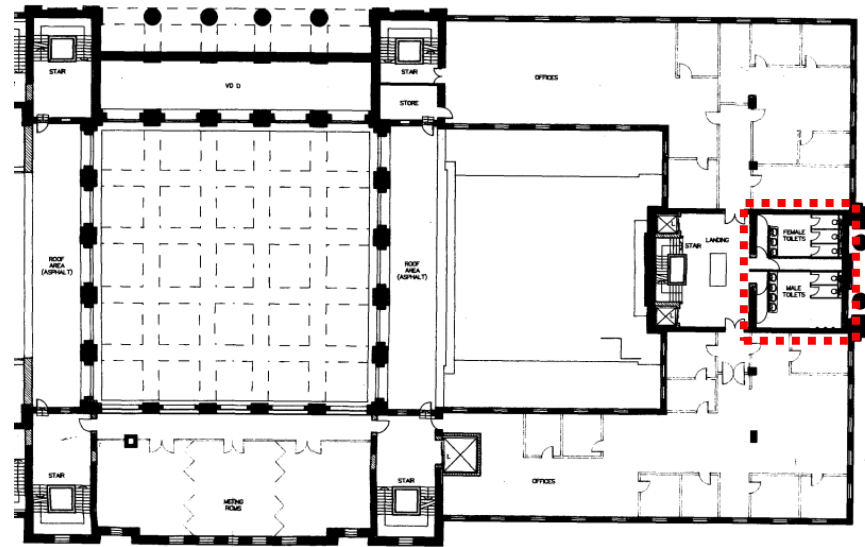


### 3.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 3.1 The Council's planning records show a fairly extensive planning history dating back to the 1980's. Upon review there is limited information regarding the second floor toilet and Comms Room area.
- 3.2 However in May 1991 permission was granted to form the spaces that the toilets and Comms Room occupy (Reference PL/9000336).



**Second floor plan as existing in 1991**

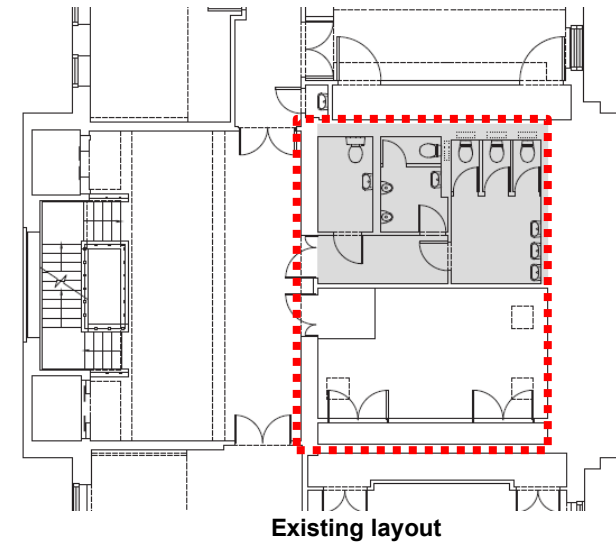


**Second floor plan as approved**

- 3.3 As will be noted it appears that this 1991 consent created the two areas from one larger open space.

3.3 There are no further obvious entries showing alterations in this area to create the Comms Room which now exists. It seems likely that a view was taken that consent was unnecessary because there were no changes to the actual room layouts i.e. the W.C's were simply removed from what is now the Comms room and the layout of the cubicles re-arranged in the retained area.

3.3 It is understood that the current arrangement (shown opposite dates from 2011).



## 4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2023

4.1 The NPPF provides the governments guidance on the way in which the planning system should approach the delivery of sustainable new development. We highlight the following aspects.

- The purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development (p.7)
- Planning decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area. (p.9)
- Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way so that application for sustainable development can be approved wherever possible. (p.38)
- Planning conditions should be used in order to enable permission to be granted where possible rather than simply seeking to refuse development which could be made acceptable. (p.55 & 56)

4.2 Chapter 16 is entitled “Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment”. It advises:

*200. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require **an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting**. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.....*

*201. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.*

*203. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

*205. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.*

*208. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*

### **Camden Council Development Plan**

- 4.3 Policy D2 states that the Council will seek to preserve and where appropriate enhance heritage assets and their setting. In terms of designated heritage assets D2 confirms that:

*“.....The Council will not permit the **loss of or substantial harm** to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:*



- a. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;*
- b. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;*
- c. conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- d. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.*

*The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.....*

*Listed buildings are designated heritage assets and this section should be read in conjunction with the section above headed 'designated heritage assets'.*

*To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:*

- i. resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;*
- j. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and*
- k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.*

## 5.0 ANALYSIS

5.1 As described in Section 1, listed building consent is sought to enable alterations to the layout and a general refurbishment of the toilet facilities located at second floor level within Friends House.

5.2 The main aspects are:

1. A minor extension of the toilet facilities – amending the existing partition alignment to take space from the adjoining Comms room.
2. The re-organisation of the toilet cubicles within the extended area to provide greater capacity and accessibility.

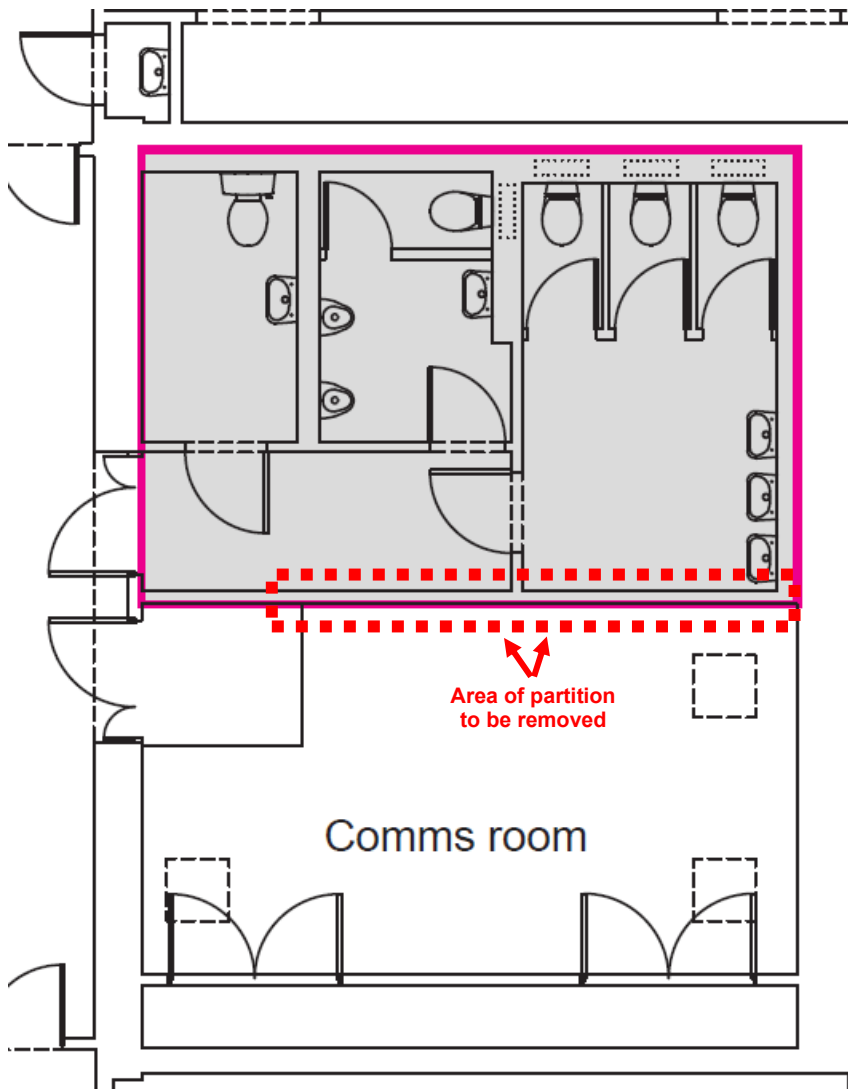
### ***Extension to toilet facilities***

5.3 As highlighted in Sections 2 and 3, the existing toilet area and Comms room were created from a single open space back in 1991. The space was effectively divided in half with male W.C's on one side and female on the other.

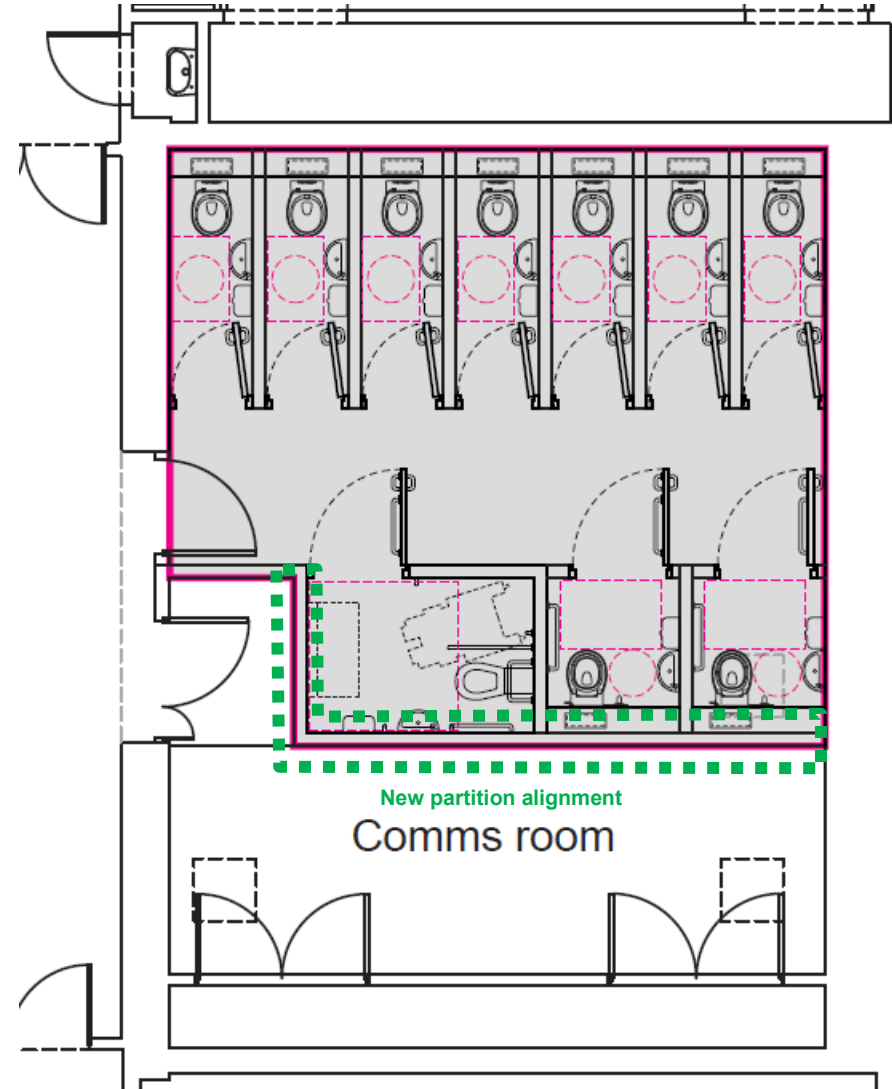
5.4 However in 2011 a Comms room was created in one half of the toilet area as shown on the existing plans.

5.5 It is now proposed to re-align the dividing wall between the two spaces to take an area of approximately 1.37 metres wide by 5.1 metres in length from the Comms room and include this as part of the toilets space.

5.6 The plan extracts on the following page show this proposed change. The dividing wall is clearly non-original / modern and of no heritage significance. Similarly the existing doors to these spaces are modern as shown in the photographs in Section 2 and so will be replaced at the same time.



Layout as existing



Layout as proposed

### ***Re-organisation of the cubicle layout***

- 5.8 As shown above, by extending the toilet area this allows seven cubicles to be set against the north side wall with two accessible and one wheelchair cubicle to the south side. A generous accessway is retained in between.
- 5.9 This provides a 'gender neutral' facility and increases W.C capacity for the conferencing facilities.
- 5.10 As demonstrated by the pictures in Section 2, the existing internal partitions and fixtures and fittings to be removed and replaced are all modern elements.
- 5.11 The works do not require any additional opening up or cutting through original fabric to facilitate services, drains etc. The existing service runs are retained and to be re-used.

### **Summary / Assessment**

- 5.12 The proposed works would not result in any loss of original or historic building fabric or any features of merit.
- 5.13 The heritage significance of Friends House is derived from its historic relationship with the Quaker movement and also the grand external façades with Portland Stone dressings that create an imposing presence in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The proposed changes for which permission is sought through this application would preserve the overall significance of Friends House.
- 5.14 The proposal therefore complies with the guidance set out in Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy D2 of the Camden Development Plan and will assist the applicant in providing the additional and enhanced facilities required to support the continued successful operation of Friends House.



## **6.0** **CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The works proposed by this application for listed building consent are confined to the existing modern toilets and Comms room located at second floor levels within Friends House and relate primarily to the re-organisation and re-planning of the space to provide additional capacity and accessibility for users.
- 6.2 As demonstrated in this statement, on the supporting plans and as the Council will readily note when undertaking a site visit, no original or historic fabric or plan form would be impacted.
- 6.3 The proposals would have no adverse impact upon the heritage significance of Friends House but would improve the facilities that can be offered to staff and visitors. Officers support for this application is requested.