

Planning Design and Access Statement

53 Gordon Square & 45 Tavistock Square

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of
London

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1. Introduction

This Planning, Design, and Access Statement (PDAS) has been prepared on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in support of Listed Building Consent. This application supports proposals for essential internal works of 53 Gordon Square and 45 Tavistock Buildings (Grade II Listed & Grade II* Listed) which are used by SOAS. Specifically, this PDAS requests Listed Building Consent for the reconfiguration of internal spaces comprising: Removal of partition walls; construction of new partition walls; installation of platform lift and refurbishment of toilets.

This document outlines the design rationale, planning policies, and the approach to accessibility for the proposed development.

This document includes the following sections:

Introduction

- Context
- Planning Policy Framework
- Planning History
- Pre-Application Engagement
- Proposed Scheme
- Design
- Access
- Planning Assessment
- Conclusion

2. Site Context

2.1 Background

SOAS is home to leading research and expertise on the global issues of today. Students engage with academics on these issues throughout their study.

It is uniquely placed to inform and shape current thinking about the economic, political, cultural, security and religious challenges of our world.

Its decolonial outlook on education allows it to strive for a more equal and just world through its teaching and research. It is committed to building bridges within the global communities and forging equitable global partnerships.

It challenges perspectives, broaches debate, and empowers its students to question the global status quo and find solutions to the issues facing the world today.

Its programmes are taught by respected international academics with inter-disciplinary expertise. These scholars are engaged in fieldwork and research that influences governments, industries, and communities across the world.

SOAS has a very diverse student base, from over a hundred different countries, and has a number of unique courses.

SOAS cater for approximately 5,400 students on campus with a further 1,500 distant learning students - Supported by 1,180 academic and professional services staff.

2.2 Site & Surroundings

Located at 53 Gordon Square, the Doctoral School of SOAS University of London occupies a historic six-storey Georgian Grade II-listed building. This structure, initially renovated by the renowned British architect Charles Holden, received further modifications in the 1950s. 53 Gordon Square comprises basement, four principal storeys and attic accommodation. It is within education use with ancillary office and an ancillary fourth floor flat.

Part of the proposed scheme includes part of the lower ground floor of the Grade II* Listed Building, 45 Tavistock Square. 53 Gordon Square is Grade II-listed, and 45 Tavistock Square is Grade II*-listed. The properties are internally connected at basement level, the educational use of 53 Gordon Square extending to the basement of 45 Tavistock Square.

Both buildings are part of the SOAS campus which is associated with the University of London and includes: the Philips Building (Grade II*); the Brunei Gallery; the Paul Webley Wing of the Senate House (Grade II*).

Both buildings sits within the Sub Area 3 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and 53 Gordon Square (Grade II), which sits within Sub Area 2 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Please refer to the accompanying Heritage Statement for further details.

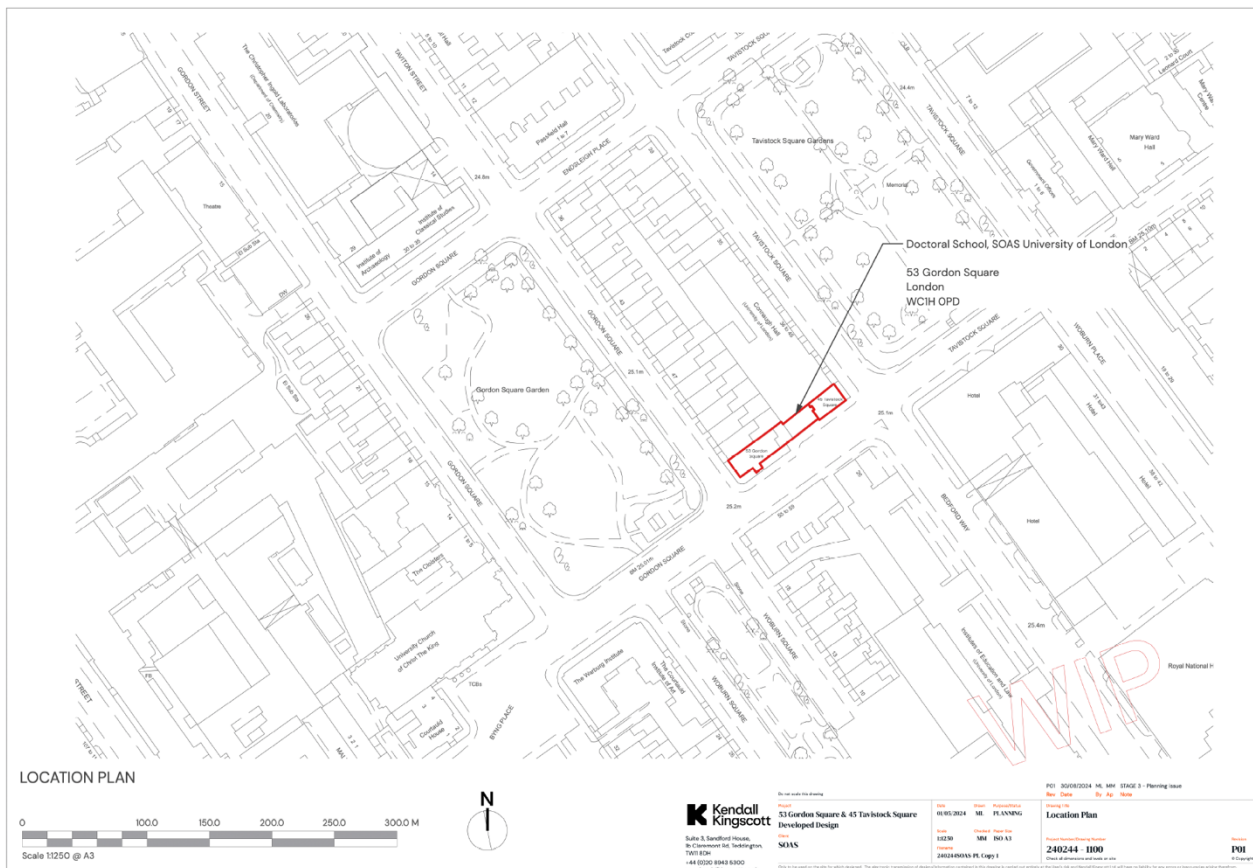


Figure 1: Location of 53 Gordon Square and 45 Tavistock Square

3. Planning Policy Framework

This proposal must be determined in accordance with the local development plan and national planning policy. The following key documents and policies apply:

- London Plan (2021)
 - Policy D5 Inclusive Design
 - Policy HC1 Heritage
- Adopted Camden Local Plan (2017)
 - Policy C6 Access for all
 - Policy D2 Heritage conservation and growth
- Camden Core Strategy 2010-2025
 - Policy CS14 - Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage
- English Heritage 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' 2008
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework 2023
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy - Adopted 18 April 2011

4. Planning History

Please refer to the Heritage Impact Statement that provides full detail of the site.

53 Gordon Square: Relevant Planning History

Application Number	Development Description	Status	Date Registered	Decision
2012/3582/P	Details pertaining to condition 4 (external elevation fittings) of planning permission ref. 2009/5727/P for the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1), decided 12/03/2010.	FINAL DECISION	17-07-2012	Granted
2012/2152/L	Installation of an external ramp and steps with balustrade to provide an accessible entrance to building in education use (Class D1).	WITHDRAWN	26-04-2012	Withdrawn Decision
2012/2151/P	Installation of an external ramp and steps with balustrade to provide an accessible entrance to building in education use (Class D1).	WITHDRAWN	26-04-2012	Withdrawn Decision
2012/2033/P	Removal of condition 5 (details of proposed external cleaning of brickwork) of listed building consent granted 12/03/10 (Ref: 2009/5734/L) for internal works and work associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	16-04-2012	Granted
2012/1347/L	Details pursuant to condition 4 (written specification/method statement of damp proofing and tanking works) of Listed Building Consent dated 12/03/10 (Ref 2009/5734/L) for internal works associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	16-04-2012	Granted
2009/5734/L	Internal works and work associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	21-01-2010	Granted
2009/5727/P	The installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	21-01-2010	Granted
2004/4869/L	Installation of lighting and fire alarm system throughout building	FINAL DECISION	24-05-2005	Granted
2005/0501/L	Internal alterations involving the removal of a stud partition and 2 doors and insertion of 2 new stud partitions and doors to form disabled persons wc and store room at rear ground floor level.	FINAL DECISION	17-02-2005	Granted

L9601929	Internal alterations comprising damp-proof works and various external alterations, as shown on drawing numbers 4471/1 to /4, and 4702/1 to /3.	FINAL DECISION	26-06-1996	Grant Consent with Conditions	L B
8770258	Internal alterations to create a seminar/meeting room on 3rd floor. As shown on drawing numbered SVE 46.6.	FINAL DECISION	29-05-1987	Grant List.Build. or Cons.Area Consent	
8570258	The erection of a metal framed poster display case 4' 8" x 3' 4" to be fixed to the railings to the left of the entrance. ^As shown on drawing nos:CW/PDF/1 & 1A.	FINAL DECISION	15-08-1985	Grant List.Build. or Cons.Area Consent	
8580194	The erection of a metal framed poster display case 4' 8" x 3' 4" to be fixed to the railings to the left of the entrance. ^As shown on drawing nos:CW/PDF/1 & 1A. ^Period of consent:1st November 1985 - 31st October 1990	FINAL DECISION	02-08-1985	Grant Approval for Advertisement	
HB2596/R1	The creation of a second storey in the gallery involving alterations to the entrance hall at 53 Gordon Square and raising the wall of the gallery between the properties.	FINAL DECISION	14-01-1981	Conditional	
31734/R1	The erection of a second storey in the gallery, involving alterations to the entrance hall at 53 Gordon Square, and raising the wall of the gallery between these properties.	FINAL DECISION	14-01-1981	Conditional	
M13/16/E/737	The use of the third floor of No. 53 Gordon Square, Camden, for university purposes.	FINAL DECISION	29-07-1965	Permission	

45 Tavistock Square: Relevant Planning History

Application Number	Development Description	Status	Date Registered	Decision
TP/80645/NW/17793	The erections, of additions to Nos. 37-45 (consecutive) Tavistock Square, St. Pancras,	FINAL DECISION	--	Permission
2010/1233/L	Internal alterations to existing Grade II* listed building to convert vacant rooms in order to provide 22 study bedrooms, 15 with ensuite toilet facilities; additional toilet facilities along with new partition walls, and alterations to mechanical and electrical service installations.	FINAL DECISION	30-03-2010	Granted

2010/0142/L	Works associated with the refurbishment alterations and renewal of the existing roof to a hall of residence (Class C2).	FINAL DECISION	12-01-2010	Granted
2010/0119/P	The refurbishment, renewal and alteration of the existing roof to a hall of residence (Class C2).	FINAL DECISION	12-01-2010	Granted
2007/5220/L	Works associated with the installation of a new platform lift within the front lightwell between basement and ground level for the educational hall of residence (Class C2) incorporating alterations to the existing railings/gates and the removal of an existing lift.	FINAL DECISION	23-10-2007	Granted
2007/5219/P	The installation of a new platform lifts within the front lightwell between basement and ground level for the educational hall of residence (Class C2) incorporating alterations to the existing railings/gates and the removal of an existing lift.	FINAL DECISION	23-10-2007	Granted
2004/2827/L	Installation of cable and termination box in front lightwell area to provide communication services to the University of London.	FINAL DECISION	07-07-2004	Granted
HB3280	Alterations comprising the installation of a fuel service tank in the rear basement area and the extension of the western vault wall into the front basement area and relocation of staircase access from pavement to front basement area.	FINAL DECISION	25-07-1983	Listed Conditional
HB2596/R1	The erection of a second storey in the gallery involving alterations to the entrance hall at 53 Gordon Square and raising the wall of the gallery between the properties.	FINAL DECISION	14-01-1981	Conditional
22947	Alterations to the external appearance of No. 45 Tavistock Square, St. Pancras, in connection with its use as a men's hall of residence.	FINAL DECISION	05-01-1961	Permission
18/11/57	The use of the ground floor and basement of 45 Tavistock Square St. Pancras for University Purposes (Department of Chinese Art and Archaeology).	FINAL DECISION	18-09-1957	Permission

5. Pre-Application Engagement

We have maintained ongoing collaboration with Camden Council's case officer since 25th June, ensuring continuous alignment throughout the planning process.

An initial on-site pre-application meeting was held on 28th August, followed by an online follow-up meeting to discuss revisions made to the scheme after the pre-app meeting.

These discussions focused on ensuring that the proposed design aligns with the case officer's expectations, particularly regarding heritage considerations.

The following table provides a summary of the feedback provided by the Conservation Officer, with an explanation of how the scheme has evolved.

Item	Comment	Feedback
Lift Location	Initial proposals for lift within historic part of the building was considered harmful. Further justification required.	Scheme revised to relocate lift within 1970s extension.
Front Room Partition	Complete removal of historic wall was considered harmful.	Scheme revised to retain historic wall. Existing space sensitively partitioned.
Lower Ground Floor – Partial Removal of Existing Wall to form disabled access to accessible toilet and washroom	Partial removal of historic wall considered harmful.	Further justification for removal of historic wall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessible toilet required on lower ground floor, to ensure that entire floor is accessible. Whilst there is an existing accessible toilet on the Ground Floor, it is poor practice to not provide an accessible toilet on each accessible floor and this adheres to Policy C6 Access for all. - Accessible washroom required to service the building. - In order to make these elements accessible, door opening need to have a minimum clearance of 30mm from the wall as set out in the AD M2 regulations. must have a 300m offset from wall (as set out in Building Regulations).

Table 1: Summary of Feedback

6. Proposed Scheme

6.1 Design Principles

The primary aim of the proposal is to enhance the Doctoral School while preserving the building's historic character.

Firstly, scheme seeks to create more useable space for the doctoral students. In recent years the school has seen a growth in the numbers of doctoral students, in line with the greater focus on research. Demand for space with 53 Gordon Square has therefore been increasing and there is a need for the building to perform more efficiently and to remain a viable part of the academic estate of SOAS.

Secondly, the proposal is important on an inclusivity standpoint. SOAS is a firm believer of inclusivity and their vision for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is focused on sustaining an environment where all staff and students achieve their full potential through an inclusive culture and community.

Currently, disabled access is limited to the ground floor, restricting the overall usability of the building. To improve accessibility, the proposal includes the installation of a platform lift, allowing access to both the lower ground and ground floors, which will be fully accessible. While the upper floors (1, 2, 3, and 4) will remain inaccessible, this is considered a balanced approach, ensuring enhanced access while preserving the historic character of the building.

In accordance with Section 7.61 of the Camden Local Plan ('Access in listed buildings'), which stresses the importance of considering disabled access in alterations, we have carefully balanced the need for accessibility with historic building priorities. By focusing access improvements on the ground and lower floors, we ensure that the proposal adheres to both accessibility goals and the preservation requirements of a listed building,

6.1.1 Existing Layout

Lower Ground Floor

The lower ground floor features a lobby, a kitchen with an adjoining dining area, and a hallway leading to study spaces, breakout areas, toilets, and washrooms.

Ground Floor

The ground floor consists of the main entrance, a reception area, and two rooms on the left: the top-front room, serving as an informal meeting, study, and seminar space, and the top-bottom room, currently underutilised and functioning mainly as a passageway. To the right of the reception, there is a hallway with seating, which leads to the SOAS gallery, used for events by staff and students. There is an existing ramp and disabled lift allowing access into the building.

First Floor

The first floor has two large, interconnected study spaces and a kitchenette.

Second Floor

The second floor mirrors the layout of the first, featuring three interconnected study rooms.

Third floor

The third floor comprises of a hallway, a separate kitchen, toilet and three separate rooms that act as study spaces.

6.1.1.2 Proposed works and finishes

The proposal comprises a better reorganisation of space within the building, comprising:

Lower ground floor

Removal of internal partition walls (front room kitchen) to open up the kitchen/ eating space, installation of platform lift, removal of masonry to allow refurbishing toilets, including the provision of a disabled access toilet, associated minor internal works and redecoration.

Ground floor

Partial removal of internal partition wall (front room) to allow the creation of two meeting rooms in the current underutilised top bottom room, installation of platform lift to allow access to the ground and lower ground floors, associated minor internal works and redecoration.

First floor

Masonry wall to be demolished to open the kitchen/ tea point area, associated minor internal works and redecoration.

Second floor

Masonry wall to be demolished to open the kitchen/ tea point area, associated minor internal works and redecoration.

Third floor

Removal of internal partition walls, to open the study spaces and reflect the same room layout as the first and second floor, associated minor internal works and redecoration.

This reorganisation will enhance the existing gallery on the ground floor, it will also provide a variety of study environments to cater to different needs, connecting the upper floors with a central kitchen and social space, and ensuring consistent study spaces with equal provisions across all floors. Further, the colour palettes for each floor are carefully selected to complement the existing period features and create a warm and inviting atmosphere.

7. Design

Use

The use of the building will remain the same, an academic building.

Appearance

The proposed works are expected to enhance the interior of the building and make every effort to keep within the character of the building.

The lift would be encased in plasterboard and a wall and door would be introduced adjacent.

in the north front ground room a period-appropriate chimneypiece will be restored, and the historic opening from the hallway would be restored, with architrave to match existing mouldings.

Timber Stud Wall to provide panelling effect (period moulding).

Landscape

The proposed works do not incorporate any external landscaping works.

8. Access

Currently, access to the building is through the main stepped entrance. There is also side entrance that allows disabled access for the ground floor only. SOAS is a firm believer of inclusivity and their vision for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is focused on sustaining an environment where all staff and students achieve their full potential through an inclusive culture and community.

SOAS wants to enhance the level of inclusivity at Gordon square and therefore have proposed a new platform lift and ramp that allows access to the lower ground floor as well, which provide accessible toilets and showers.

9. Planning Assessment

9.1 Heritage

The scheme has sought to minimise impacts on the significant historic fabric.

A Heritage Assessment has been undertaken to identify the historic significance of the building. Please refer to this document. In summary, the proposal has been developed with a full understanding of the significance of the buildings and specifically the affected areas. Vitally, the proposals focus on areas of lower significance to enable the fundamental improvements to accessibility. Where changes are proposed in areas of significance, they have been designed to mitigate any harm and to ultimately to be reversible.

The impact of the individual elements of the scheme are set out below:

Lift:

Currently, disabled access within the building is restricted to the ground floor, limiting the overall usability for individuals with mobility issues. To address this, the proposed development includes the installation of a platform lift that will provide access to both the lower ground and ground floors, making these areas fully accessible. Although access to the upper floors (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th) will remain limited, this is viewed as a balanced approach. It adheres to Section 7.61 of the Camden Local Plan 'Access in Listed Buildings' as we have sought a careful balance between improving accessibility and respecting the heritage of the site. By concentrating access improvements on the ground and lower ground floors, the proposal meets accessibility goals without compromising the preservation requirements essential for a listed building. As stated in the Heritage Impact Statement the alterations here:

“The rear extension linking to 45 Tavistock Square is a modern space which was formed in the early 1950s and since adapted. The alterations here would not affect any significant fabric. These proposals would have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed building and would importantly enable the building to be more accessible.” (HIA, p34).

The location of the proposed platform lift has been fully informed by an audit of conservation constraints. Following engagement with the case officer, the lift is now located in a less harmful area within the 1970s extension of the building. This revision

aligns with Camden Local Plan Policy D2, which requires that changes to listed buildings incorporate disabled access where possible while minimising harm to their historic fabric.

Front Room Partition:

The original proposal included the removal of a historic wall, which was assessed as potentially harmful to the building's historic fabric. Therefore, in response and engagement with the Conservation Officer the revised scheme is to retain the historic wall and the existing space will be sensitively partitioned.

The proposals also seek to subdivide the smaller room to create two meeting rooms; in the existing dividing wall one opening would be enlarged and another formed. A plasterboard partition and a dropped ceiling would be introduced. This would conceal the cornice, but would avoid bisecting it with a partition. The chimneybreast niches would be built out with timber stud and finished with timber panelling, to conceal services. The opening leading to the hallway would be glazed and the doors leading to each room would be glazed, with further glazed panels adjacent. The larger room to the north would have a period-appropriate chimneypiece restored, and the historic opening from the hallway would be restored, with architrave to match existing mouldings. As stated in the Heritage Impact Statement the alterations here:

“would have a minor adverse impact on the legibility of the planform and volume of the smaller room and would concealing its decorative cornice (although a later addition) – which overall would result in a minor adverse impact – considered to be very much less than substantial harm. The improvements to character and planform in the northern room would result in a moderate beneficial impact”. (HIA p35).

Lower Ground Floor Accessible Toilet/Washroom:

In 45 Tavistock Square, the partial removal of a historic wall on the lower ground floor is necessary to create access to an accessible toilet and washroom. Although this was initially viewed as potentially harmful to the building, further justification has been provided. The need for an accessible toilet on the lower ground floor is crucial to ensure that all accessible floors offer appropriate facilities, as outlined in Policy C6 'Access for All'. While there is an existing accessible toilet on the ground floor, each accessible floor should have its own accessible facilities.

The proposed accessible washroom is also a necessary amenity for the building, and to achieve the required clearance for disabled access, a door opening with a minimum 300mm offset from the wall must be incorporated, in accordance with AD M2 Building Regulations. These considerations ensure that the alterations are compliant with building standards while improving functionalities for all users. As stated in the Heritage Impact Statement the alterations here:

“The impact on planform in these heavily altered spaces would be nominal, though it would result in loss of a small portion of historic wall fabric, potentially causing some very minor harm. This harm would be considered very much less than substantial, whilst importantly enabling this WC / wash area to be fully accessible.” (HIA p34).

First Floor, Second Floor, Third Floor Reorganisation:

The reorganisation of the upper floors involves minimal intervention, as these areas contain limited historic fabric. The focus here is on light reorganisation to improve internal layouts without significantly impacting the building's historical value. As stated in the Heritage Impact Statement the alterations here:

“The alterations here would have a minor impact on the legibility of the planform and volume of the rear room [first floor] – which would result in a minor adverse impact - very much less than substantial harm.” (HIA p35).

“The proposals here would affect only areas of low significance as the planform has been altered, and so the impact in the significance of the listed building would be neutral.” (HIA p35).

9.2 Public benefit

The main public benefit of the scheme are as follows:

Firstly, making an existing academic building more accessible to a wider range of users and thereby reducing discrimination at the University level. As mentioned above, currently, disabled accessibility is limited to the ground floor, restricting usable space.

Therefore, the implementation of the platform lift allows access to both lower and ground floor providing more user-friendly space.

Secondly, the proposal is vital to allow the creation of more useable space for the doctoral students and therefore this scheme is essential for the building to remain a viable part of the academic estate of SOAS which responds to the growth of doctoral research and changing needs.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, this PDAS has outlined the rationale and necessity for the internal reconfiguration of the SOAS 53 Gordon Square Building (Grade II Listed) and the lower ground of 45 Tavistock Square (Grade II* Listed). The proposal addresses the removal and construction of partition walls; installation of a platform lift; and refurbishment of toilets all while preserving the building's historical integrity.

This scheme is grounded in a design approach that balances heritage conservation with the practical needs of a University. The proposed works align with the SOAS vision of creating an inclusive, functional, and equitable environment for its diverse academic community. The design reflects the University's commitment to addressing the growth of doctoral research and ensuring that spaces within the building remain adaptable and relevant to evolving educational needs.

In regard to heritage, please refer to the accompanying Heritage Impact Assessment, which identifies the historic significance of the building. In summary, the proposals focus on areas of lower significance to enable the fundamental improvements to accessibility. Where changes are proposed in areas of significance as noted in the section above, they have been designed to mitigate any harm and to ultimately to be reversible. The proposal responds to and celebrates the character of the building and enables the University to ensure the ongoing viability of this Grade II-listed building.

The public benefit of this project is substantial. By improving accessibility, the proposal contributes to SOAS's commitment to inclusivity and ensures that more of the building's spaces can be used by a wider range of students, staff, and visitors. The introduction of the platform lift, and reconfiguration of spaces will allow users with different needs to access the lower ground and ground floors, addressing current limitations and reducing discrimination. This aligns with policies Policy D5 of the London Plan and Policy C6 of Camden's Local Plan, which emphasise inclusive design and accessibility in heritage buildings.

In summary, the scheme provides a balanced solution that secures the long-term viability of 53 Gordon Square and the lower ground of 45 Tavistock Square as a key academic facility for SOAS, while respecting and enhancing its historical character