

# 125 Shaftesbury Avenue

## Design and Access Statement

Prepared by DSDHA

Submitted on behalf of VREF Shaftesbury SCS

November 2024



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## Executive Summary

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of VREF Shaftesbury SCS and sets out the vision for the proposed remodelling, refurbishment and extension of the existing building at 125 Shaftesbury Avenue to provide Use Class E commercial and retail space, amenity terraces, a new pedestrian route, relocated entrances, cycle parking, servicing and rooftop plant along with associated highway, landscaping and public realm improvements and other associated works.

The site is currently occupied by an 11-storey building with a single basement, clad in low-quality brick-faced pre-cast panels, that was completed in 1982. The façades of the existing building have structural issues and require renewal. Temporary measures have been installed to address safety concerns related to falling bricks. The site is bounded by Charing Cross Road to the southwest, Shaftesbury Avenue to the southeast, Stacey Street to the northeast and Phoenix Street to the northwest.

In 2018, DSDHA (together with the wider design team) secured planning permission (2016/5202/P) for the refurbishment and extension of 125 Shaftesbury Avenue for a previous owner. That permission has since lapsed facilitating the need to submit this application for the current owner, VREF Shaftesbury SCS. The proposals that form this application build on the design principles of the previous scheme while enhancing the environmental performance.

Through an extensive retrofit and extension of the existing building, the proposals seek to create a high-quality, low-carbon, mixed use scheme that is both historically and environmentally responsive. The scheme also proposes to reinstate the historic connection between Old Compton Street and New Compton Street that once ran through the centre of the site as a new pedestrian route, which would increase active frontage, natural surveillance and permeability through the site.

The public realm would be enhanced through the creation of two new public spaces – one on Caxton Walk and the other on Stacey Street – with further amenities provided for tenants through generously planted and biodiverse balconies or terraces at each level.



Aerial view of the site and surrounding context

# 1.0 Introduction



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of Report

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared on behalf of VREF Shaftesbury SCS by DSDHA in support of the application for the remodelling, refurbishment and extension of the existing building to provide Use Class E commercial and retail space, amenity terraces, a new public route, relocated entrances, cycle parking, servicing and rooftop plant along with associated highway, landscaping and public realm improvements and other associated works.

The previous Planning Permission for the site from 2018 (2016/5202/P) has lapsed. The design team that has prepared the current proposal, worked on the permitted scheme, ensuring continuity in the design, knowlEdge of the area and neighbouring stakeholders' needs. The proposed design builds on the approved scheme principles but with significantly enhanced sustainability ambitions, both in terms of operational and embodied carbon targets, as well as greater biodiversity enhancement through an improved urban greening factor. The public benefit associated with providing a new pedestrian passageway through the site is also enhanced through the creation of a wider and taller route.

The site is owned by our client, VREF Shaftesbury SCS, which is which is owned by a joint venture between Edge and Mitsubishi Estate London, who have identified the opportunity to refurbish and extend 125 Shaftesbury Avenue to create a contemporary, high quality, commercial-led scheme with retail at ground floor level.

Given the location of the site, the proposed scheme has been carefully designed with an understanding and analysis of the historical context being fundamental to the architectural response. We have taken into consideration the existing building's position within prominent local views, its relationship to neighbouring listed buildings, and its proximity to a number of Conservation Areas.

In conjunction with providing an uplift in high-quality flexible commercial space in this central London location, the scheme is designed to provide greater activation at ground floor level; a new pedestrian route through the centre of the scheme; improved public realm at the junction of Phoenix Street and Stacey Street, as well as on Charing Cross Road; and a sustainable, low energy and responsive building fabric with increased biodiversity through green roofs and generously planted terraces.

The scheme has also been developed in the context of

national, regional and local planning policy, and has been informed by a significant number of consultation events with local residents, community groups and stakeholders, and through a series of pre-application meetings with the London Borough of Camden.

A number of elements of the design, including particulars of the facade, space planning, lighting, security and landscaping are planned to be finalised at the detailed design stage and therefore, if the permission is granted, would be the subject of planning conditions to be agreed with the London Borough of Camden. Where these details are shown within the Design and Access Statement, they are included for illustrative purposes only.

The Design and Access Statement should be read in conjunction with the application drawings and other consultant reports. The structure and content of this report is designed to:

- Describe the existing site and building, including the challenges and opportunities for development.
- Provide a review of the project's immediate and wider context in terms of its physical, social and economic characteristics and explain how the local context has influenced the overall design.
- Provide a rationale for the development's design based on the above.
- Explain and illustrate the design principles of the proposed alterations, including the proposed layout, uses and appearance.
- Explain how the consultation has influenced the design process.
- Illustrate how public/private landscape spaces are designed in the proposed development.
- Explain how future users of the building, including disabled people, would be able to access the development from the existing transport network and why the main access points to the building and the layout of access routes have been chosen.

### NOTE:

Unless specifically noted, all images and sketches are for illustrative purposes only and are not verified views.



View of proposed scheme from Old Compton Street

## 1.2 Project Team

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.3 DSDHA

DSDHA are delighted to be working on this exciting scheme alongside the wider design team and our client representatives, Edge and Mitsubishi Estates London Limited.

Founded by Deborah Saunt and David Hills in 1998, DSDHA are an architecture, urban design and research practice. DSDHA's work spans from crafting beautiful and sustainable buildings, welcoming landscapes and whole new neighbourhoods, through to writing the brief that will shape how a space might be used long into the future.

The studio's aim is to foster positive change and empower communities through its projects, creating social value through collaboration and meaningful engagement, often looking at how relationships and partnerships can make the best use of the city's latent spatial potential.

Our work in Camden spans more than 15 years and includes both built and ongoing architectural, urban and public realm projects, such as Corner House and Suffolk House in Fitzrovia, 1 Museum Street, landscape and public realm for the British Library and the Euston Tower, Strategic Masterplanning for the University of London in Bloomsbury, and both the Central Somers Town Masterplan and the West End Public Realm Project with Camden Council.

Our work has been recognised with 20 RIBA Awards, and has twice been nominated for the European Union Mies Van Der Rohe Prize for Contemporary Architecture, and shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize.

A selection of DSDHA's recent work in Camden is included opposite.



Corner House, Charlotte Street, London Borough of Camden



West End Project, London Borough of Camden



Somers Town Masterplan, London Borough of Camden



1 Museum Street, London Borough of Camden



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.4 Development of the Previously Approved Scheme

The Applicant's strategic brief builds on the previously consented 2018 scheme with enhanced sustainability and well-being targets for the scheme. Through an extensive refurbishment of the existing building, the proposal seeks to achieve the below:

- **High Quality Contemporary Building -** Delivering a high quality scheme, which responds to the evolving context, whilst taking the learnings from the previous scheme, but further improving the design.
- **Carbon Reduction in Structure -** The previously approved scheme had generous floor to ceiling heights and a widened column grid at the upper levels. This required more demolition and a carbon hungry transfer structure. The proposed 2024 scheme would aim to retain large elements of structure and avoid the need for transfer slabs by retaining the current slabs, therefore providing a significant decrease to the embodied carbon.
- **Carbon Reduction in Facade -** The previously approved scheme successfully responded to the context. The team would maintain this positive townscape response, whilst further reducing the carbon impact of the new facade with lower embodied carbon materials and high facade performance resulting in lower operation carbon.
- **Terraces and Greening -** The proposed scheme would aim to improve the quality and biodiversity of terraces with greening while offering better biodiversity and a more democratic workplace with terraces accessible to all tenants.
- **Healthier workplaces -** The proposed scheme would aim to take the positive elements of the approved scheme, whilst bringing enhanced daylight deep into the plan by creating a new atrium that also offers generous space to work and socialise at the heart of a vibrant biophilic system.
- **Ground Floor Passage -** Through benchmarking successful schemes, create a welcome public benefit connecting Soho to Bloomsbury, and additional active frontages on all elevations. The new pedestrian route through the site would improve the connection to The Phoenix Garden and St Giles High Street, helping to re-establish St Giles in-the-fields Church as the heart of this quarter.



Bird's Eye View of the Proposal

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.5 Project Objectives

### Responsive to the existing building and site constraints

An extensive audit of the existing building has been undertaken with a preference for retention where possible. This approach seeks to minimise the cost and carbon intensity whilst additionally contributing to the character of the completed development.

A detailed survey of existing elements was completed by Material Index in order to ensure existing building components which cant be retained in situ can be re-used or recycled as much as possible.

### Sustainable economic use

Current planning policy seeks to protect existing employment on site. The existing building provides good slab to slab levels, flexible column grid and access to daylight which provides the opportunity for future adaptability. To ensure the quality and longevity of the proposal, the site must be developed with uses that have a strong business case, ensuring it is managed to a high standard in use with continued investment.

### Environmentally sustainable

The Applicant brief seeks to deliver a sustainable development fit for the future, which meets our ambitious environmental and social sustainability targets utilising a circular economy approach. The scheme is designed as a car-free development and encourages more sustainable forms of transport to and from the site. It is therefore imperative to design for long life and flexibility of use to ensure maximum benefit from embodied carbon "invested" in the redevelopment.

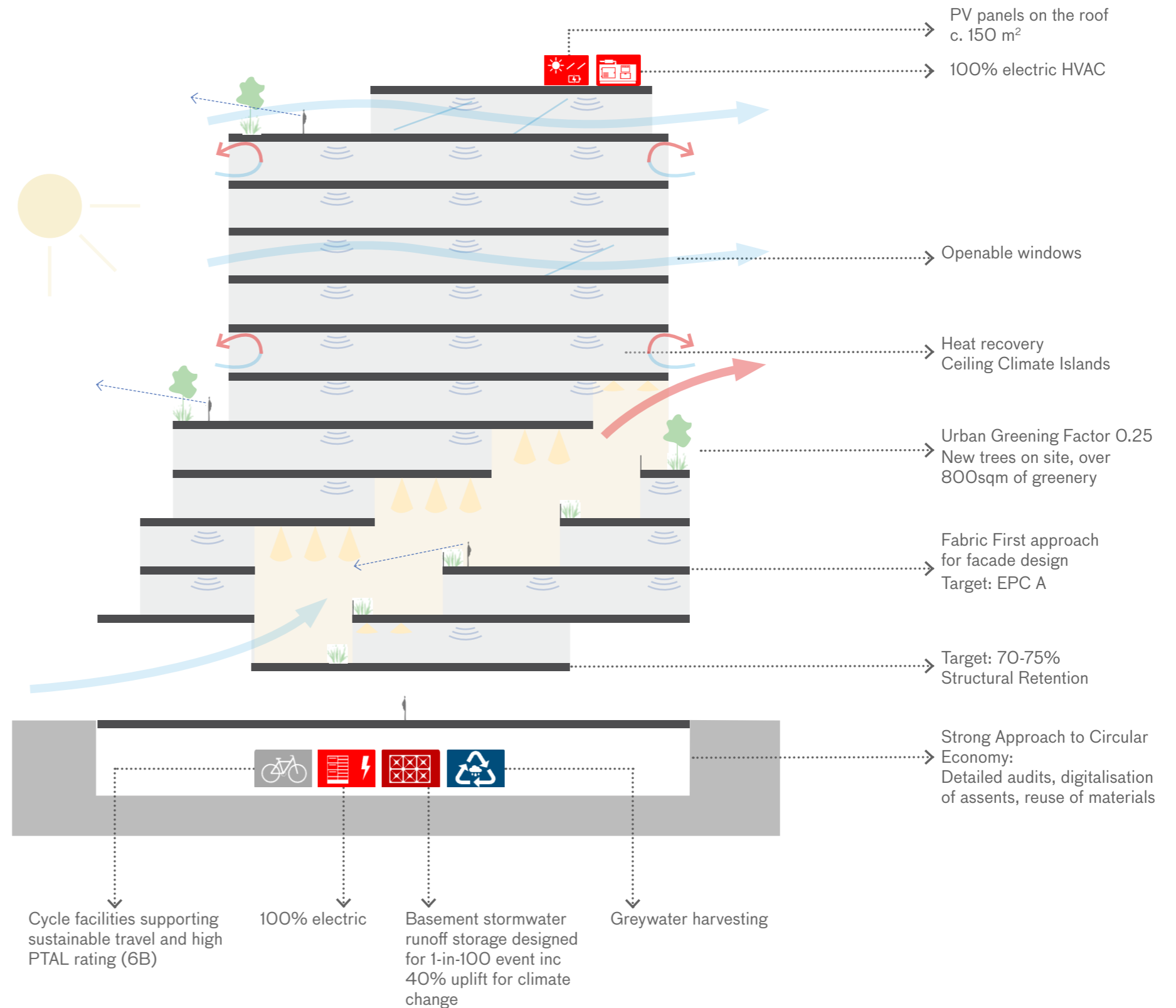
Key metrics to pursue:

- Very low carbon development in use and embodied;
- Target BREEAM outstanding rating; and
- Adaptable and flexible structure to enable future adaptability.

### People Focussed

The brief outlines the creation of a safe and inviting environment for building users, residents and visitors to the area. The design includes a high quality and considered public realm with an active ground floor frontage to create permeability at this level. The open ground floor increases passive surveillance onto the public realm, especially at Stacey Street, increasing perceived security and safety this should have an impact on the actual safety of the space.

Throughout the upper levels building users are provided with generous outdoor spaces and openable windows for access to fresh air.



Schematic diagram of the proposal