

Studio Charlotte Harris

17 Bloomsbury Square
Design & Access Statement
Listed Building Consent Application
for Internal Alterations
Reference number: PP-13623137

December 2024

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1.0 Introduction

This document has been prepared by Studio Charlotte Harris on behalf of the German Historical Institute in connection with the listed building consent application for proposals for alterations and refurbishment of No 17 Bloomsbury Square.

Accompanying this listed building application are documents prepared by Stephen Levrant Heritage Architecture which provide details of the building's architectural history and an illustrated Heritage Impact Assessment.

This design and access statement will demonstrate that the architectural proposals for No. 17 Bloomsbury Square Grade II listed building are necessary, and that the works which alter the fabric of the building do not negatively affect its character and that the design is of a very high standard.

It will demonstrate that the design principles as regards scale, layout and appearance are the result of an in-depth study of the listed structure. It will demonstrate that the proposals will make a positive contribution to the existing situation while exhibiting a sensitive approach to the character of this significant building.



Aerial view of Bloomsbury highlighting the German Historical Institute at 17 Bloomsbury Square with site boundary

1.1 Summary

The German Historical Institute London aims to upgrade its facilities for conferences, seminars and exhibitions, and to improve its circulation spaces, in order to provide a more welcoming, functional, and accessible building for its visitors, academics and staff.

The project proposes a series of internal refurbishments and alterations, including:

- New low level fixed joinery to the reception room.
- Installation of double doors to separate the twin elliptical staircase and reinstate planform of former terrace house.
- Removal and replacement of later doors and partitions in ground floor circulation spaces and introduction of storage lockers.
- New design for doors in reception room (received consent in 2023 to be replaced with contemporary design).
- Structural support to Audiovisual (AV) Unit in first floor conference room (AV unit received consent in 2023).
- Removal of non-original partition wall between existing kitchenette and central office on second floor to enlarge staff kitchenette.

This report concludes that the historically-sensitive, yet modern, contemporary architectural approach adopted for the proposed alterations are highly positive and enhancing. It is considered that the proposals will significantly improve the functionality of the building as a public institute, while also enabling the recovery and repair of this historically important building.



1.2 Background

The original permissions for the main works associated with the GHI was granted on 3 July 2023. The proposals for enlargement of door openings and associated removals at ground floor level of the building have already been assessed and approved under application reference number 2023/1044/LBC. The GHI now seek revisions to proposed joinery as part of a new LBC in the Reception room and Hallway. This application will supersede some of the details within these rooms that have been submitted as part of the earlier application. The proposals for AV fixed joinery unit to the first-floor conference room has already been assessed and approved under application reference number 2023/1044/LBC, however details of the structure to support the joinery were not included in the original application as they were subject to further considerations and recommendations from the Structural Engineer. The details have now been finalised and listed building consent is now sought for the works.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The aims of this project are as follows:

- to enhance the experience of the German Historical Institute offered to all visitors, (“visitors” being the public, academics and staff).
- to provide visitors with the best possible experience by matching the best that other institutions can now provide.
- to increase the ease of visitor flow and improve access to facilities while maintaining the distinctive character of the GHI at No. 17 Bloomsbury Square.
- to improve the functionality and usability of the building for conferences, seminars, exhibitions, etc.
- to improve the accessibility and safety of circulation spaces.

The benefits of this project are as follows:

- improve GHI’s operational facilities.
- improved visitor experience.
- improve visibility and circulation space within the GHI.
- repair previous harmful alterations and reinstate historic layouts, elements, materials and paint schemes.

1.4 Heritage Significance

The German Historical Institute project aims to serve the Institute's operational interests and its academic responsibilities to researchers and visitors. However, it is also driven by a desire to enrich the public realm and by a duty of care to the building itself. We are aware of the historical significance of the building at 17 Bloomsbury Square and the obligation we carry to preserve it. The project focuses on resolving the usability of spaces and circulation, while also pursuing the GHI's ambition of returning the spaces to a more appropriate and representative character. We are promoting this scheme because we believe it provides a large number of benefits, both in terms of the building's usability for the Institute as it continues to evolve and develop, but also in regard to the building's preservation and heritage, including the reinstatement of key historic spaces, elements, materials and paint schemes. We therefore very much hope for Camden Council's full support.

1.5 Planning Legislation, Policy & Guidance

The assessment in this document was carried out in consideration of up-to-date national and local policy, including:

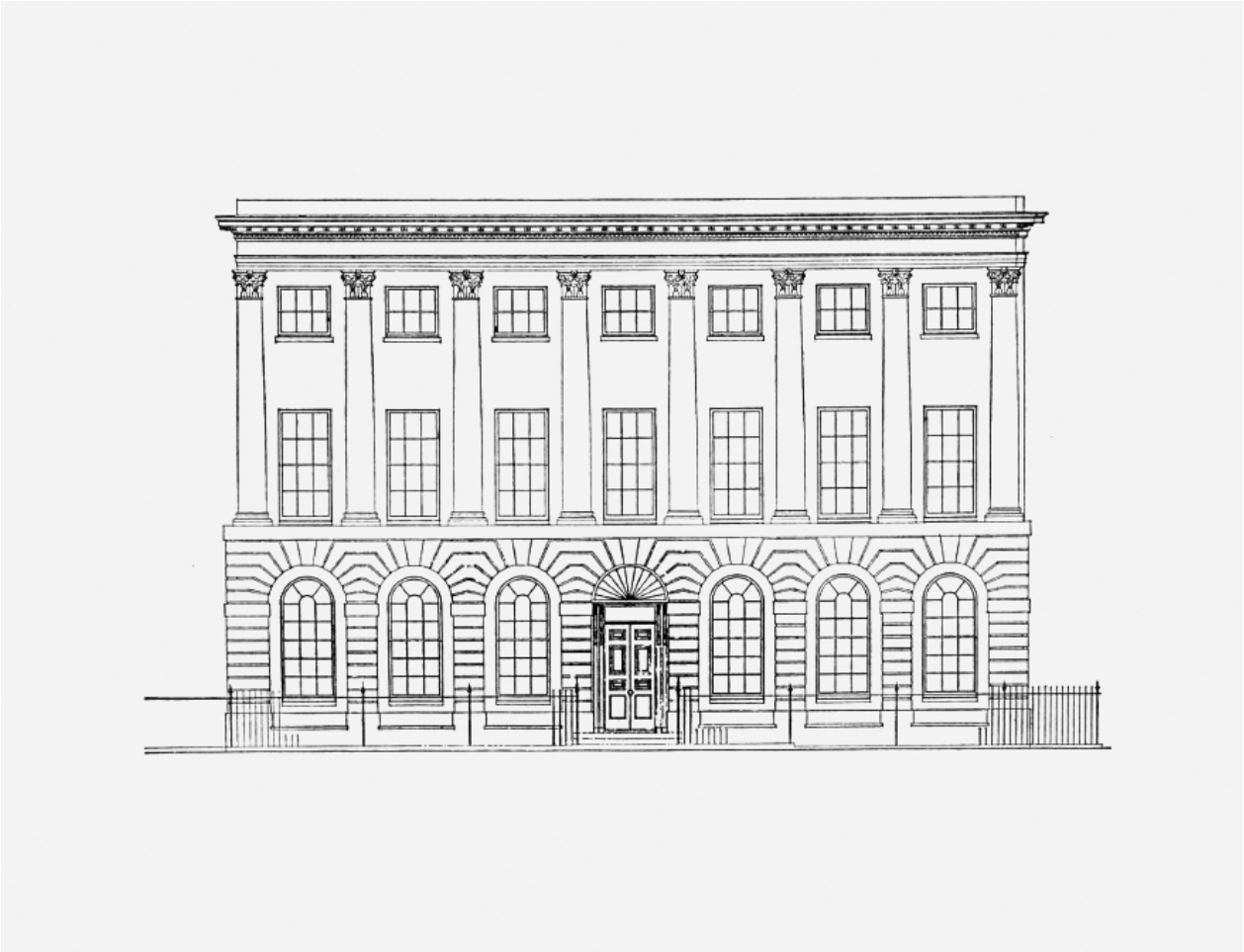
- Planning (Listed Buildings And Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)
- National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) (2024)
- Conservation principles, policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment, English Heritage, April 2008
- Good Practice Advice in Planning, Historic England (GPAs):
- Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment (March 2015)
- Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (December 2017)
- Advice Notes, Historic England (HEANs)
- Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (February 2019)
- Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets (October 2019)
- The London Plan (March 2021)
- Camden Local Plan (July 2017)
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (April 2011)

2.0 Context Research Site History

The development of Bloomsbury was first begun in the 1660s, under the auspices of the 4th Earl of Southampton. He erected Southampton House and leased surrounding plots of land for building a residential square, Southampton Square. The lands passed to the Russell family through marriage in 1669, becoming part of the Bedford Estate. Southampton House and Southampton Square were renamed Bedford House and Bloomsbury Square respectively soon after construction. A large London townhouse was erected on the site in towards the late seventeenth century, which is depicted in a topographical view by Sutton Nicholls published for a 1754 edition of Stow's Survey.¹

The next phase in the history of the building arrived in the 1770s. John Nash, agreed with Sir John Rushout, to redevelop his townhouse at No. 17 Bloomsbury Square with adjoining land to the rear on Great Russell Street. The development divided No. 17 into two large houses, with six smaller terraced houses on Great Russell Street. The divided form resulted in one entrance off Bloomsbury Square, in the original position of the door, and a new entrance to the second dwelling off Great Russell Street. Nash designed the buildings with the type of stuccoed front that later became synonymous with his designs, but at this date was novel. The stucco allowed for an easy and decorative response the requirements of the 1774 building act and the use of external timbers. Nash introduced two striking cantilever stairs into the house, one for each dwelling. The southerly house, the one with the entrance off Bloomsbury Square, was intended as the more refined dwelling, where Nash experimented with an octagonal room, and highly decorated ceilings in the two principal first floor rooms. In spite of the decoration and quality of the redevelopment, the houses failed to sell and Nash himself is recorded as living in one of the empty houses on Great Russell Street. The Adam Brothers' firm was engaged for the stucco fronts, and it is likely that the firm was also involved in the creation of the ceilings in the current Common room and Seminar rooms. At some time in the early nineteenth century the house to the north appears to have been subdivided further, with the entrance that is still extant inserted. This then formed houses No 72 and 73 Great Russell Street.²

2.0 Elevation of No.17, showing Nash's design for stucco pilasters and rusticated base of 1778, as it appeared before later alterations. Drawing by John Summerson.
2.1 View of Bloomsbury Square in 1787 with no.17 visible at the top left of the square.



2.0



2.1

2.0 Context Research Site History

The next major phase in the building’s life was in 1841, when the newly established Pharmaceutical Society (later Royal Pharmaceutical Society) took the lease of No.17. Initially taking on the southern of the Nash houses, the Society expanded with the establishment of the School of Pharmacy and acquired Nos. 72 and 73 Great Russell Street in 1857. The Society set about re-joining the buildings into one, which had not been the case since Nash’s alterations. The Society added an extra floor in 1859 to house new chemical laboratories along with the fitting out and rearrangement of the library and museum, lecture theatre, examination rooms, committee rooms, and secretarial offices. Whilst the use of the rooms were much changed, the overall plan-form of the building(s) remained much the same as Nash had designed. On the exterior the entablature frieze was inscribed with “The Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain” to both the Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street fronts, and “Incorporated AD 1843” along the string course separating the ground floor rustication from the first-floor. In the 1880s the Society leased property in Pied Bull Yard and rebuilt No.16 Bloomsbury Square as an extension to the premises.³



2.2

2.2 The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (photograph 1930s). The RPS added the porch and the third floor attic in 1869. Image: © 2021 Royal Pharmaceutical Society

2.0 Context Research Site History

Photographs from the early 1930s show the Society's use of the building at this time. Particularly notable are the extensive number of fitments for electric lighting on the ceiling of the current seminar room and the extent of cabling hung around the room. As regulations for pharmacists increased demand on the Society increased, and it was concluded that new and larger premises was required. The pharmaceutical department moved to a new building in 1955, whilst the headquarters remained at 17 Bloomsbury Square until September 1976. During the early 1970s, the building was threatened with demolition to make way for a new British Library building. At this date the British Library formed part of the British Museum site. Residents joined together to form The Bloomsbury Association, which campaigned to save the area. The Bloomsbury Association won their case and a compulsory purchase order for the site fell through. As a vacant property the building was used by a community of artists and craftspeople known as the Bloomsbury Cooperative. The German Historical Institute was formally founded in 1976. In 1980 17 Bloomsbury Square was adopted as its formal home. Planning consents for alterations and refurbishment were granted in 1981. With generous support from the Volkswagen Foundation the building was purchased, restored and officially opened in December 1982. The Institute now occupies the whole of No.17 with its extensive libraries.⁴



2.3



2.4

2.3 Histological Laboratory at first floor (front room), current conference room in 1926.
2.4 Ground floor museum (current reception) in 1903. Note the high shelving on both walls.

2.1 Morphology

In summary, the site has evolved five phases over 350 years:

- Original Phase, 17th Century (c.1670): 17 Bloomsbury Square was originally constructed as one large house, including 72–73 Great Russell Street, at a similar time to the rest of the square in the late 17th century.
- Nash’s Reconstruction, 18th Century (c.1770): John Nash acquired the subject site in addition to several other properties on Great Russell Street in 1777. The remodelling of 17 Bloomsbury Square in the late 18th century included subdividing it into two properties. In creating a second dwelling, Nash introduced a second entrance off of Great Russell Street. He also integrated two similar, but not identical, cantilevered Portland stone staircases into the houses which are situated back-to-back in planned form. To this property, he added a rear octagonal room which was repeated on the first and second floors and also re-designed the exterior to include rusticated ground floors and giant Corinthian pilaster on the Bloomsbury Square façade, covering the walls of both properties in stucco.
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 19th Century (c.1830–60): 17 Bloomsbury Square was acquired by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. The establishment expanded into 72–73 Great Russell Street in 1857 and undertook several alterations to rejoin the two properties, including making various openings to the rear of the properties and to the north of the principal staircases. In c.1845, the Society added a chemistry laboratory to the rear of 17 Bloomsbury Square (within the rear garden), at lower ground floor and ground floor levels. An additional (third) floor was added to the entire building in 1859 and the projecting classical porch to the principal entrance was also added by the society in 1860.
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Early/Mid 20th Century: During this time, many internal alterations occurred such as new large glazed openings between the stairwell and principle rooms at ground and first floor level and installation of a lift in a small back stairwell.
- The German Historical Institute, Late 20th Century (c.1990): During this time, many internal alterations occurred, including new toilet facilities at ground floor and installation of a staircase to the LGF along with infilling of many of the openings made in the early 20th century.

2.5 Ground Floor rear room, showing the large, glazed opening between this room and the stairwell. This opening dates from the mid-20th century and was infilled during the 1990s.
2.6 Rear room at first floor with the 18th century painted ceiling. Note the large glazed opening on the side wall in this room, mirroring the opening at ground floor. This opening was also closed (replaced with a large joinery) during the c.1990 works.



2.5

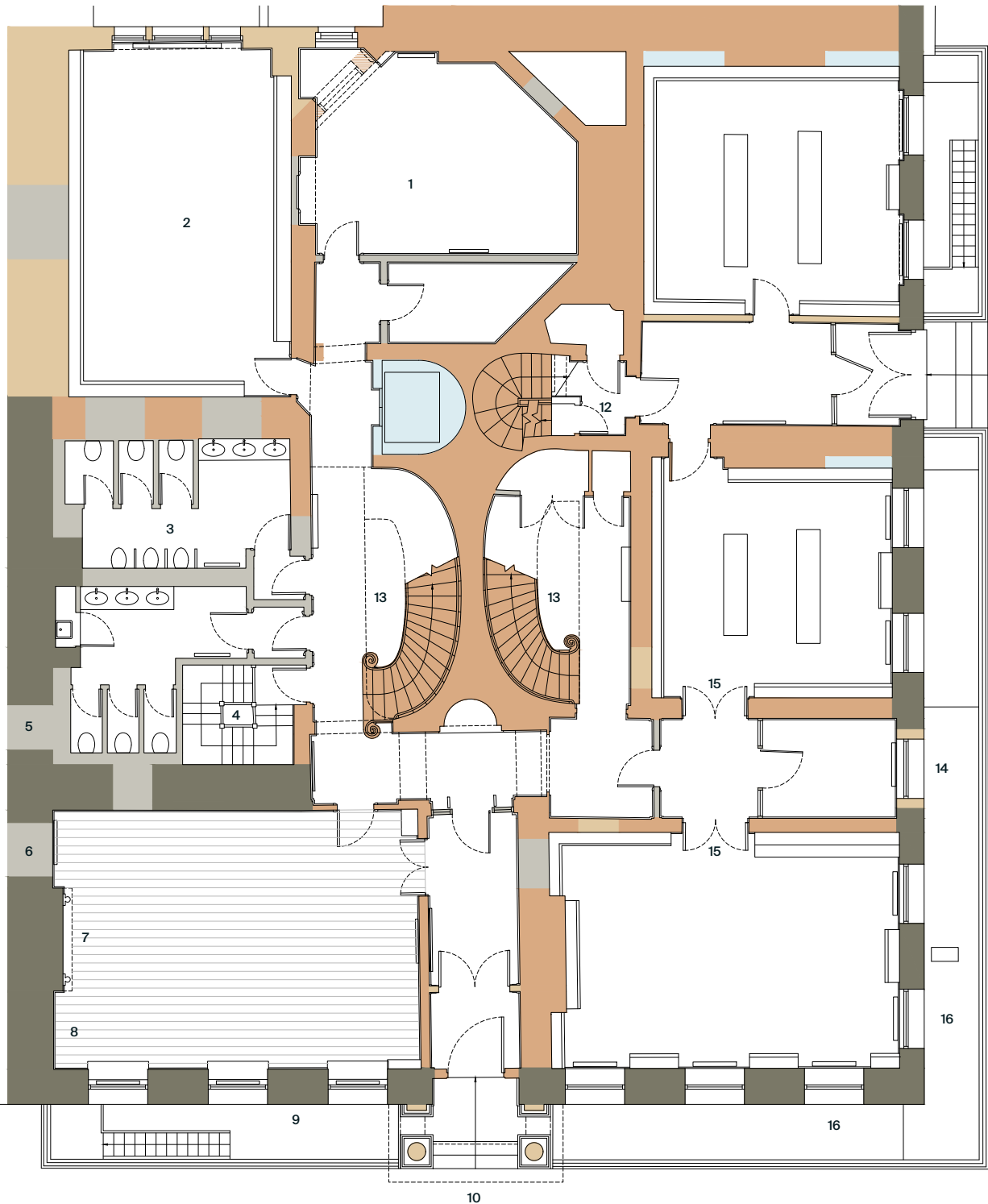


2.6



1. Octagonal Room created by Nash in the former gardens of 17 Bloomsbury Square.
2. C. 1830s extension of chemistry laboratory (now GHI library). The roof was originally a timber trussed roof but was replaced in the early 20th century by a concrete slab.
3. Internal partition walls, finishes and joinery of the WC areas date from 1990s works.
4. Staircase to LGF from the 1990s works.
5. Lateral opening with No. 16 blocked during the c.1990 works.
6. Lateral opening with No. 16 blocked during the c.1990 works.
7. Possibly 18th century chimneypiece.
8. Early to mid 19th century dado, dado rail and skirting preserved in this space.
9. Presumed 17th century fabric reused by Nash during the c.1770s remodelling. Stuccoed in c.1778 and this was renewed in the mid-19th century.
10. Original 17th century entrance, used as entrance to 17 Bloomsbury Square in Nash's remodelling. Porch added in 19th century by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.
11. 19th century entrance created during alterations by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. A former window opening was enlarged and converted into a door.
12. Back or service staircase. This staircase appears to be the original 18th century (Nash reconstruction) from lower ground to second floor. It was extended on a similar footprint/design as part of the mid-19th century third floor extension.
13. Dual elliptical staircases dating from the 18th century, each serving one house as part of Nash's reconstruction. The staircase to the north (Great Russell Street side) is largely original and unaltered; whereas that to the south (Bloomsbury Square property) has been altered in the 19th century.
14. 18th century entrance to the Great Russell Square property as part of Nash's remodelling, converted into a window in the 19th century during alterations by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.
15. Openings created in the 19th century, when the layout of the spaces was changed.
16. All windows on Bloomsbury Square and Great Russel Street elevations replaced in the 19th century and renewed in the 20th century.

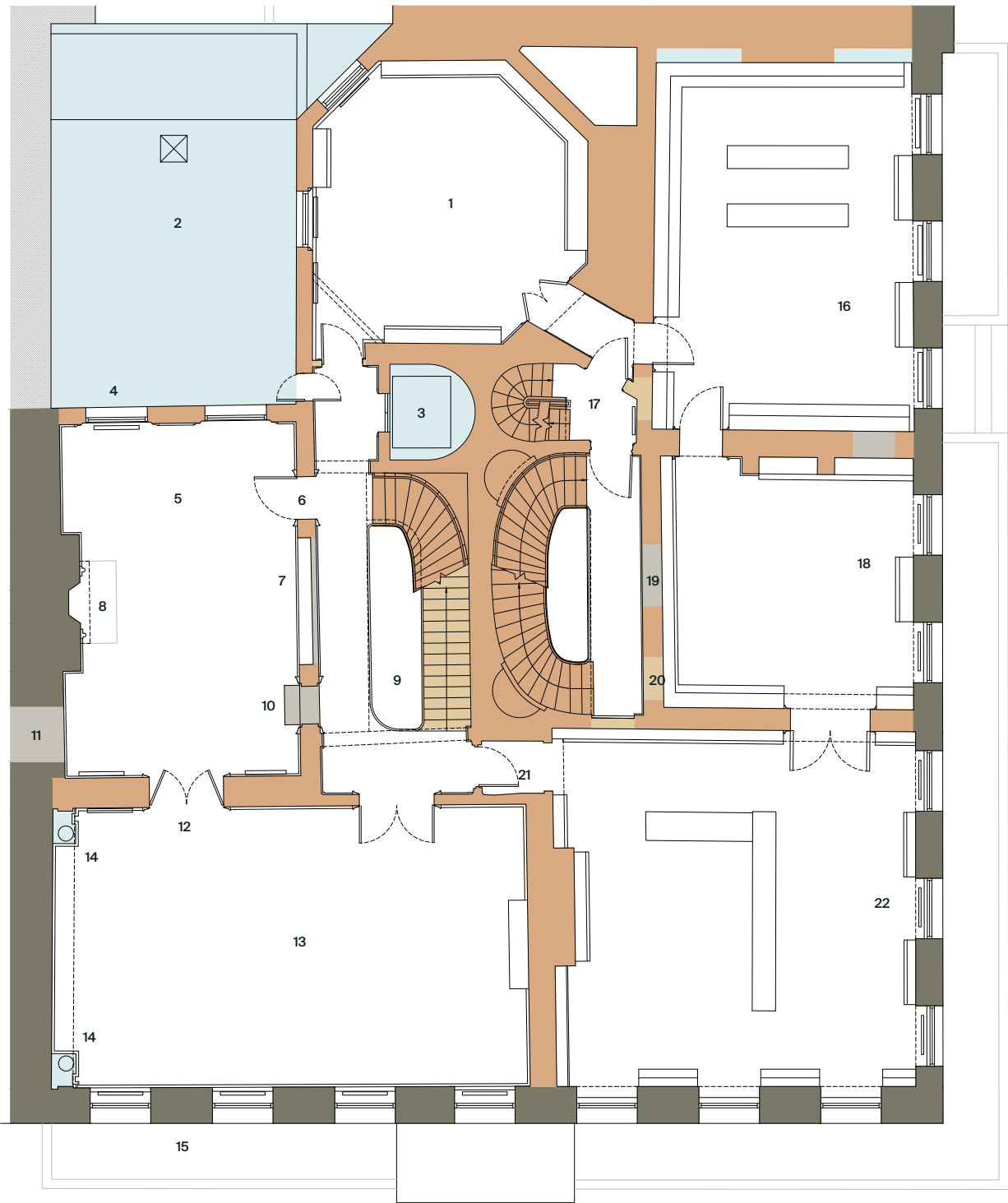
- Original Phase, 17th Century (c.1670)
- Nash's Reconstruction, 18th Century (c.1770)
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 19th Century (c.1830–60)
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Early/Mid 20th Century
- The German Historical Institute, Late 20th Century (c.1990)





1. Octagonal room is best preserved at first floor level with early cornicing.
2. Flat roof over the 1830 extension provided in the early 20th century, replacing the original timber truss roof.
3. Lift installed in the early/mid 20th century.
4. Only original 18th century sash window in the property.
5. 18th century plaster ceiling in an Adams Style (possibly by the Adams practice or by Nash). Current paint scheme from the 1980s.
6. 18th century door and architrave to the reading room.
7. 20th century large opening closed during c.1990 works with joinery.
8. Late 19th or 20th century chimneypiece in an 18th century style.
9. Elliptical staircase altered in the mid-19th century when original party wall between the 18th century properties was breached. Staircase has metal bracket supports on the underside.
10. Door altered in 20th century and blocked in mid-late 20th century. Original architrave in position.
11. Blocked lateral opening with No. 16.
12. Late 18th or mid-19th century door openings to the front room. Dado rail, dado and skirting in this room matches that of the ground floor (reception and library areas).
13. 18th century plaster ceiling in an Adams Style (possibly by the Adams practice or by Nash). Current paint scheme from the 1980s.
14. Mid 20th century works. New structural works were undertaken to this wall, the chimney breast was removed and ionic pilasters were added to conceal the structural works.
15. Presumed 17th century fabric reused by Nash during the c.1770s remodelling. Stuccoed in c.1778 and this was renewed in the mid-19th century.
16. 19th century cornice and ceiling?
17. Secondary (service) staircase. This staircase appears to be the original 18th century (Nash reconstruction) from lower ground to second floor. It was extended on a similar footprint/ design as part of the mid-19th century third floor extension.
18. 19th century cornice and ceiling?
19. Large central opening created in the 19th century and blocked during the 1990 works.
20. 18th century opening blocked as part of the mid-19th century works.
21. 18th century partition wall between the two properties breached in mid-19th century.
22. 19th century cornice and ceiling?

- Original Phase, 17th Century (c.1670)
- Nash's Reconstruction, 18th Century (c.1770)
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 19th Century (c.1830–60)
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Early/Mid 20th Century
- The German Historical Institute, Late 20th Century (c.1990)



2.2 The Site Existing Details

The Site forms the north-western corner of Bloomsbury Square and Great Russell Street and has entrances on both roads related to the time the property was subdivided into two houses by John Nash. The building is on four storeys plus basement, the third floor having been added in 1859. The exterior is close to John Nash's 1777 remodelling, although the fenestration has been replaced in the mid-nineteenth century and later. The Doric porch, (with triglyph frieze and mutule cornice) which frames the main entrance at ground floor level, was added in 1860. The principal Bloomsbury Square front is symmetrical, across seven window bays with central door, and with an eight-window bay return to Great Russell Street. Giant order Corinthian pilasters run above the ground floor rustication to the entablature above the second floor.⁵



2.7

2.7 No. 17 Bloomsbury Square. The porch and attic were added in 1869.

2.2 The Site Existing Details

Internally there is substantial plan-form evidence of the two terraced houses John Nash created from the subdivision of the original seventeenth century building. The two principal cantilever staircases of equal size, are top lit. There is an evident hierarchy of spaces, with the first floor housing the principal rooms, two of which retain their complete plaster ceilings in the Adam style, or possibly by the Adam Brothers. Some other of the ceilings retain elements of their previous decorative style or were originally more simply decorated. The ground floor has a greater variety of ceiling decoration, although this is mostly very simple in style. The building is very well maintained and sympathetically decorated. Large areas of the building, especially on the basement, ground and first floors, provide space for the German Historical Institute's extensive library.⁶



2.8

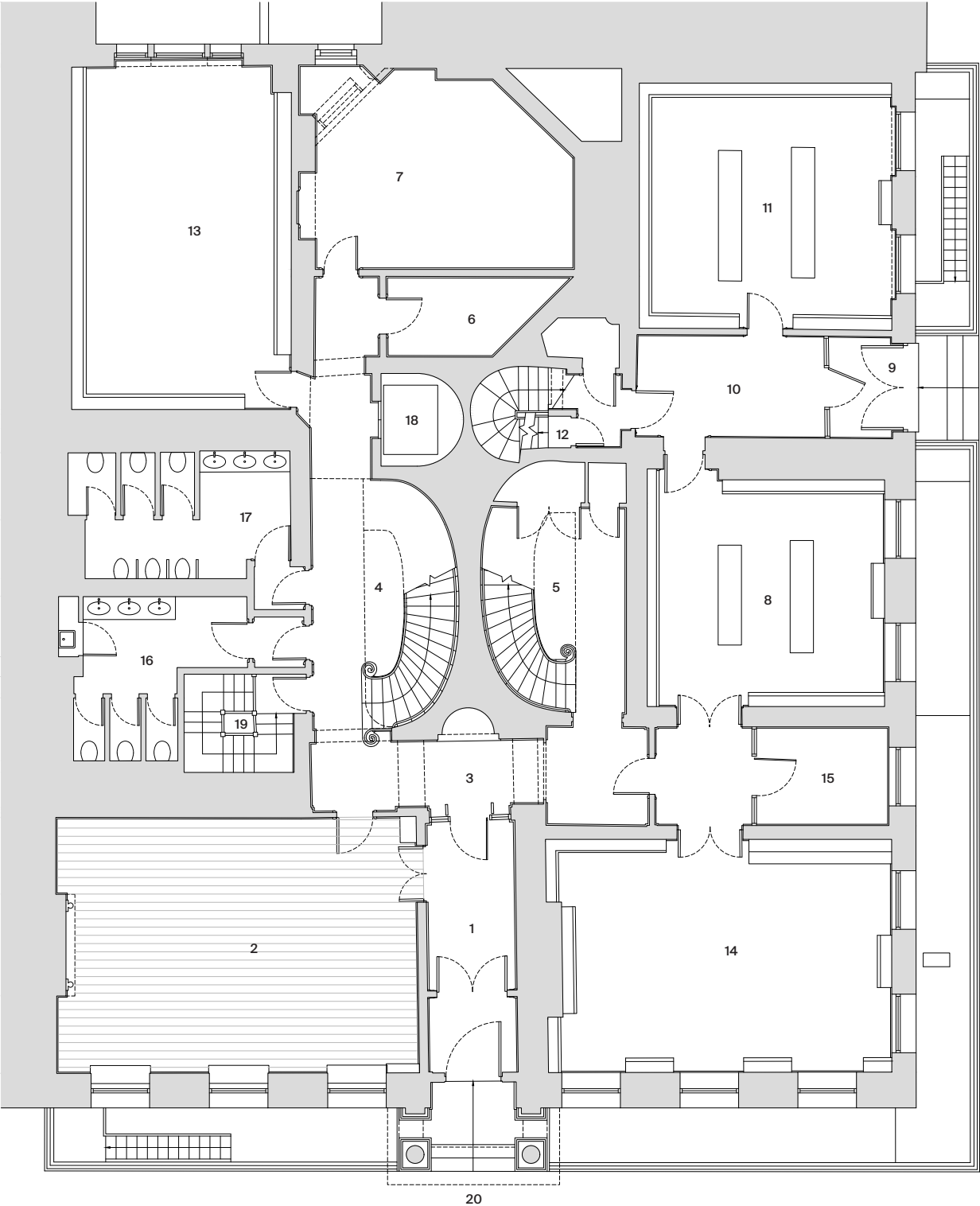
2.8 Nos 68–71 Russell Street. The attic was added in 1869.

2.3 Existing Ground Floor



The ground floor rooms are also largely plain in decoration; however, most maintain their cornice mouldings and the two entrance halls from Nash’s redevelopment of the building still have their vaulted and banded ceilings. Most rooms and are painted in historically unsympathetic colours. The contribution of the ceilings to the significance of their respective rooms is largely through the maintenance of the original ceiling heights and re-tained details. The walls are also largely plain or with floor to ceiling book-cases in the libraries. There are several different lighting styles utilised.⁴

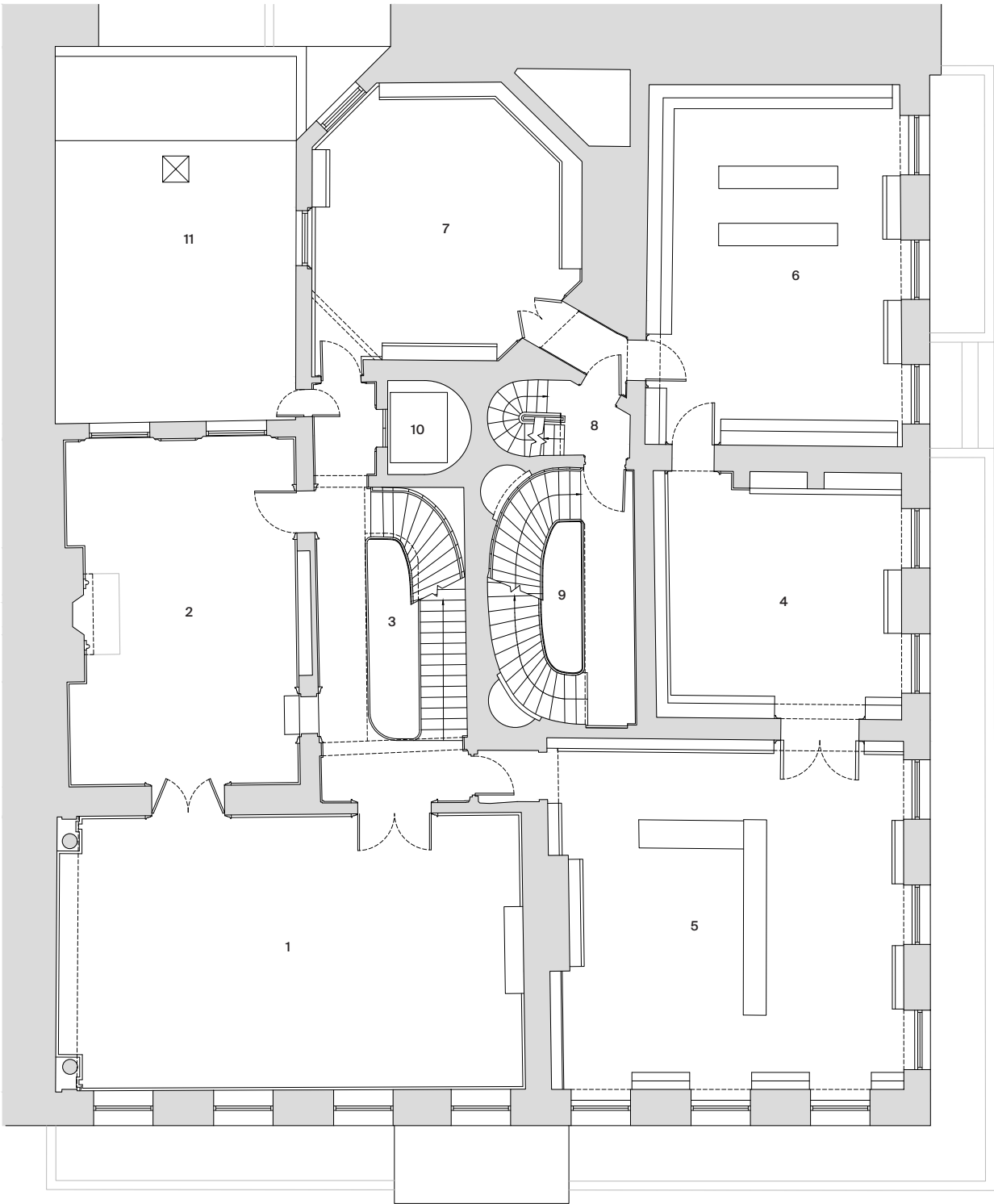
- 1. Entrance Lobby R.0001
- 2. Reception R.0002
- 3. Entrance Corridor R.0003
- 4. Main Stairs R.0004
- 5. Second Stairs R.0005
- 6. Storage Room R.0006
- 7. Resting Room R.0007
- 8. Library R.0008
- 9. Secondary Entrance R.0009
- 10. Secondary Entrance Lobby R.0010
- 11. Library R.0011
- 12. Back Stairs R.0012
- 13. Library R.0013
- 14. Library R.0014
- 15. Office R.0015
- 16. Toilets R.0016
- 17. Toilets R.0017
- 18. Lift
- 19. Stairs to Basement
- 20. Main Entrance



2.3 Existing First Floor

The rooms on the first floor hold the highest aesthetic value across the entire building, this is to a varying degree, with the highest contribution to the building’s special interest contained within the two highly decorated ceilings, with designs in Adam’s Brothers Style. Other ceilings are much more simple in character, usually with decorative cornices. Many of the rooms are given over to libraries with floor to ceiling bookcases, where walls are exposed, they are plain in decoration. The two grand staircases are also of high significance, related to their aesthetic quality and historical connection to the Nash remodelling.⁴

- 1. Conference Room R.1001
- 2. Common Room R.1002
- 3. Main Stairwell and Landing R. 1003
- 4. Library R.1004
- 5. Library R.1005
- 6. Library R.1006
- 7. Library Octagonal Room R.1007
- 8. Back Stairs R.1008
- 9. Second Stairwell R. 1009
- 10. Lift
- 11. Flat Roof

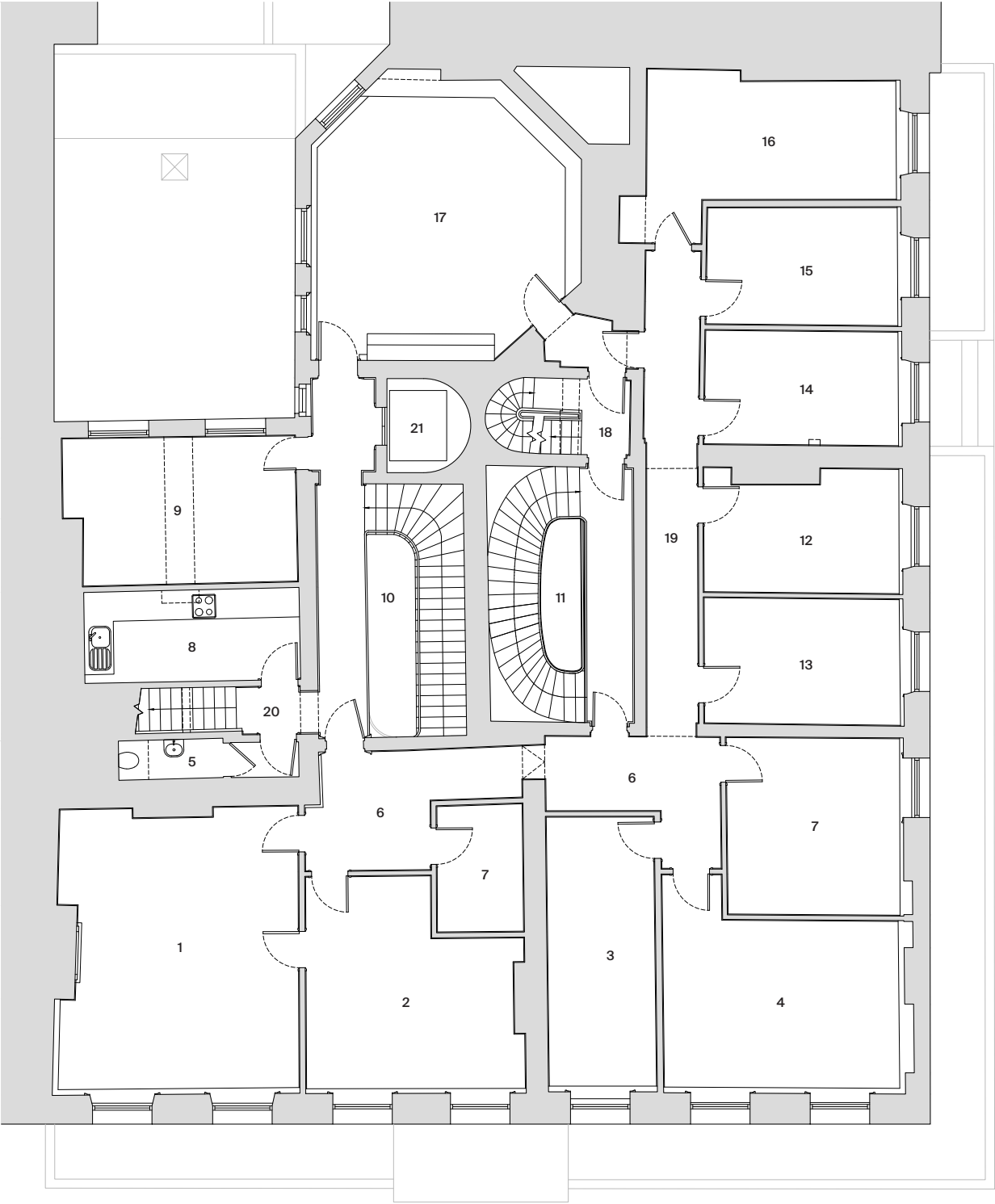


2.3 Existing Second Floor



Like the basement, on the whole the second floor is largely absent of decorative detail. Where covings do exist, these are of a modern date. No evidence appears to exist of fittings related to the period in which the building was the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, and this space is unlikely to have been fitted up to any great degree as part of Nash's speculative scheme.

The spaces on this floor have largely been given over to offices with some of the original spaces subdivided. Therefore, the areas of special interest and significance relate to the culmination of the two grand staircases, with their original glass lanterns and decorative plaster; the back stair; and the retained shape (but not any surface detail) of the octagon room. These are of high contribution to the special interest of the building as a whole. Otherwise, the second floor has a low contribution to the overall significance of 17 Bloomsbury Square, the limited contribution found only in parts of the retained plan-form.⁴



- 1. Office R.2001
- 2. Office R.2002
- 3. Office R.2003
- 4. Office R.2004
- 5. Toilet R.2005
- 6. Hallway R.2006
- 7. Office R.2007
- 8. Kitchen R.2008
- 9. Office R.2009
- 10. Main Stairwell R.2010
- 11. Second Stairwell R.2011
- 12. Office R.2011
- 13. Office R.2013
- 14. Office R.2014
- 15. Office R.2015
- 16. Office R.2016
- 17. Office Octagonal Room R.2017
- 18. Back Stairs R.2018
- 19. Hallway R.2019
- 20. Stairs to Third Floor
- 21. Lift

3.0 Approach and Proposals

Studio Charlotte Harris architects have adopted an approach that is sympathetic to the historic fabric in the number and scope of the proposed alterations. The intent is to intervene in a sensitive way. Most interventions are relatively small in scale and make use of existing rooms, openings, and circulation routes unlocking the dormant potential of the existing building. They use materials, colours and textures that respond to the existing fabric and mend existing damage, whilst sharing a common language.

Beyond the aims and objectives, the project has the following benefits:

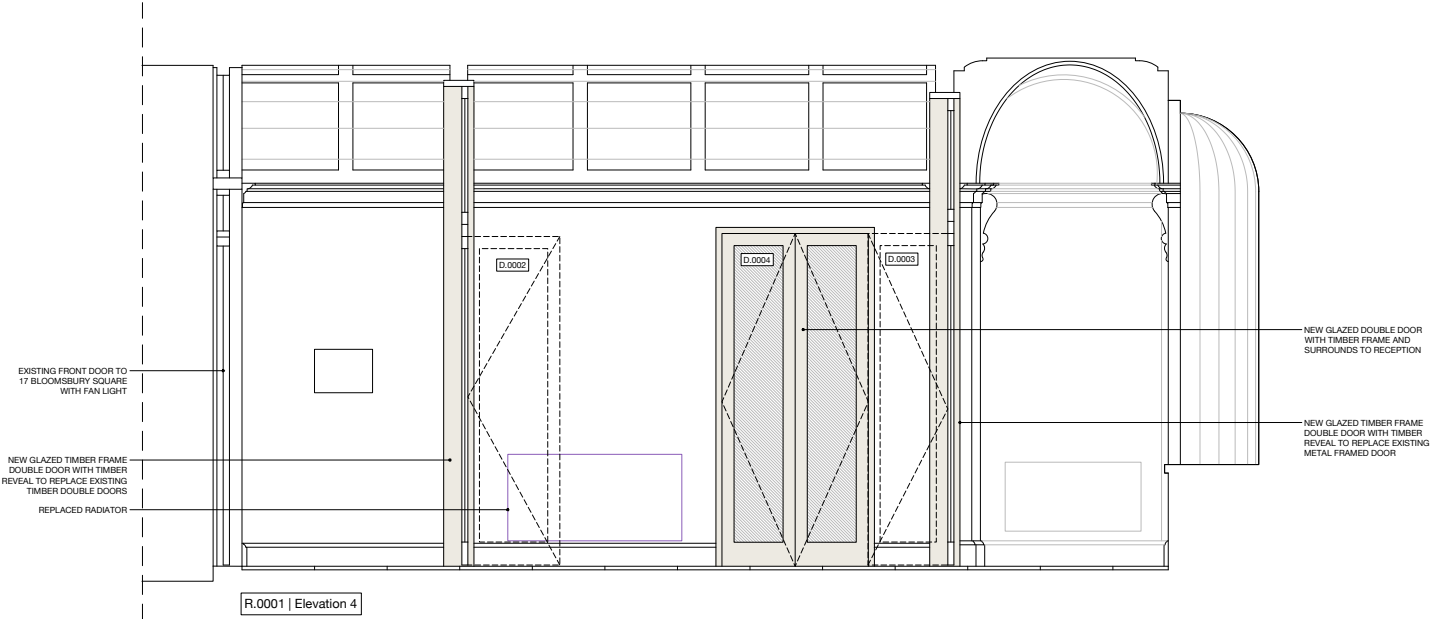
- enhancing the character of the entrance hall, stairwells and principal rooms by redecoration in historically appropriate paint schemes following the outcome of the paint history investigation.
- reinstatement of the original plan form of the ground floor
- improved legibility of the episodic nature in which the building has evolved.
- improved visitor access and orientation.

We wish to breathe new life into the building by establishing a condition in which the old and new participate in a coherent and respectful conversation with one another.

3.1 Entrance Lobby R.0001

Proposals to the Entrance Lobby R.0001 include:

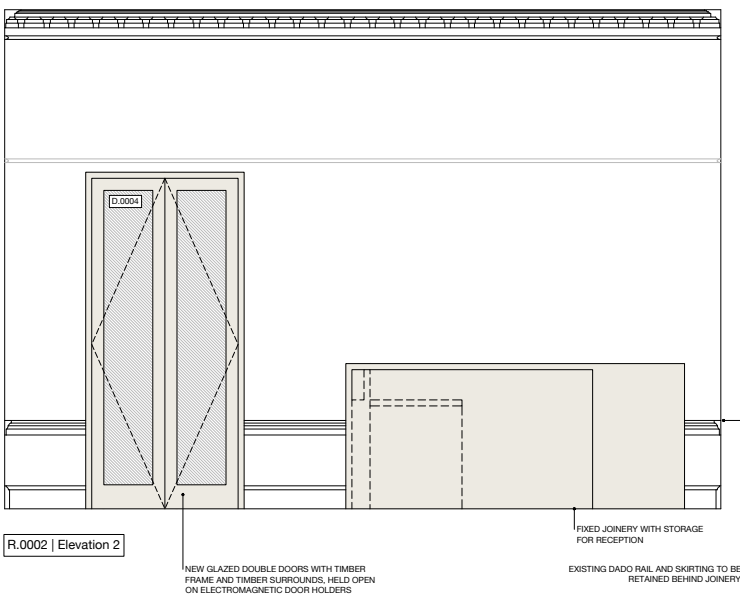
- The proposal alters the design of the consented, frameless glazed double door at the western end of the principal entrance lobby (ref: 2023/1044/L) to a contemporary timber frame design to match the language of the proposed reception joinery.
- It is also proposed to replace the non-original double doors on entry to the building with automated doors linked to the reception area.



3.1 Reception Room R.0002

Proposals to the Reception Room R.0002 include:

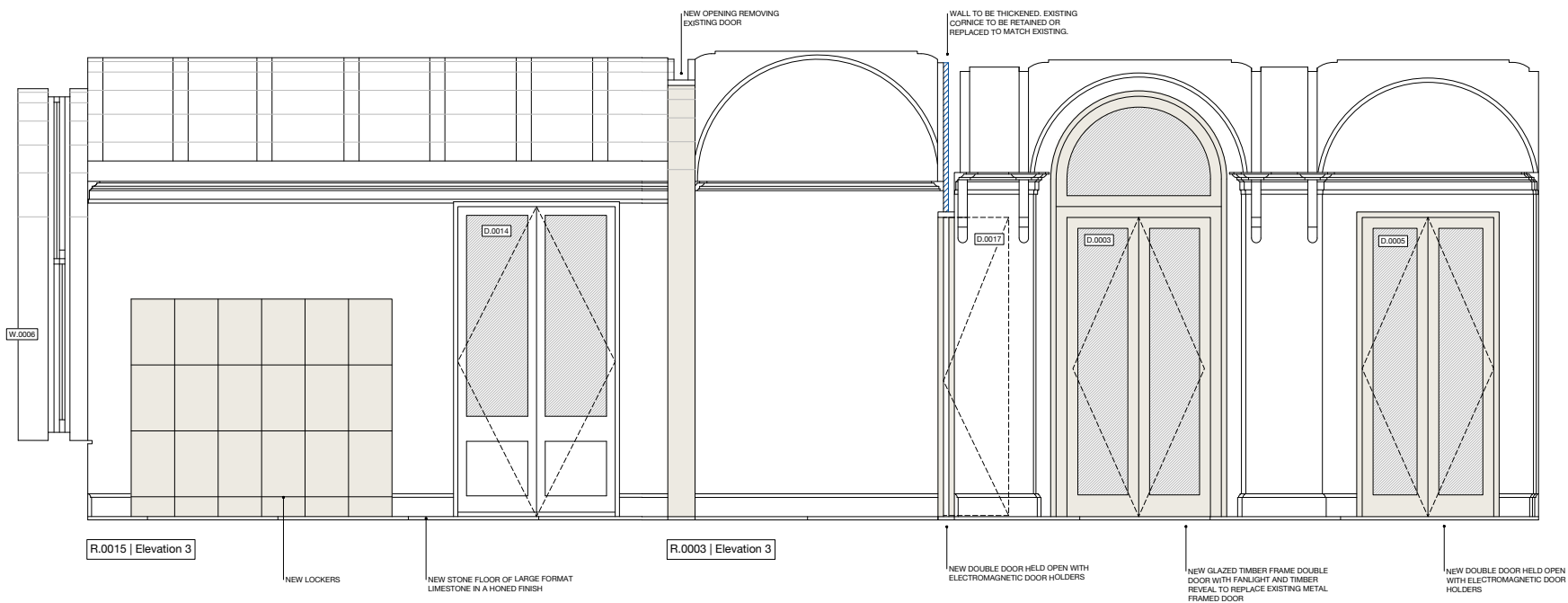
- Introduction of new fixed low level joinery along the northern wall of the reception area. The the wall mounted joinery would have multiple elements that stack below the single fixed element to the design. The fixings would be the minimum necessary to secure the table.
- The replacement and contemporary design of both doors in the ground floor reception room has been consented (ref: 2023/1044/L) and the principle of replacing the doors established. The proposals alter the design of this consent from a part glazed contemporary door to a fully glazed timber frame contemporary door. This door would be introduced to both openings in this room. It would be are reversible intervention that does not impact the historic fabric.



3.1 Corridor R.0003 and R.0015

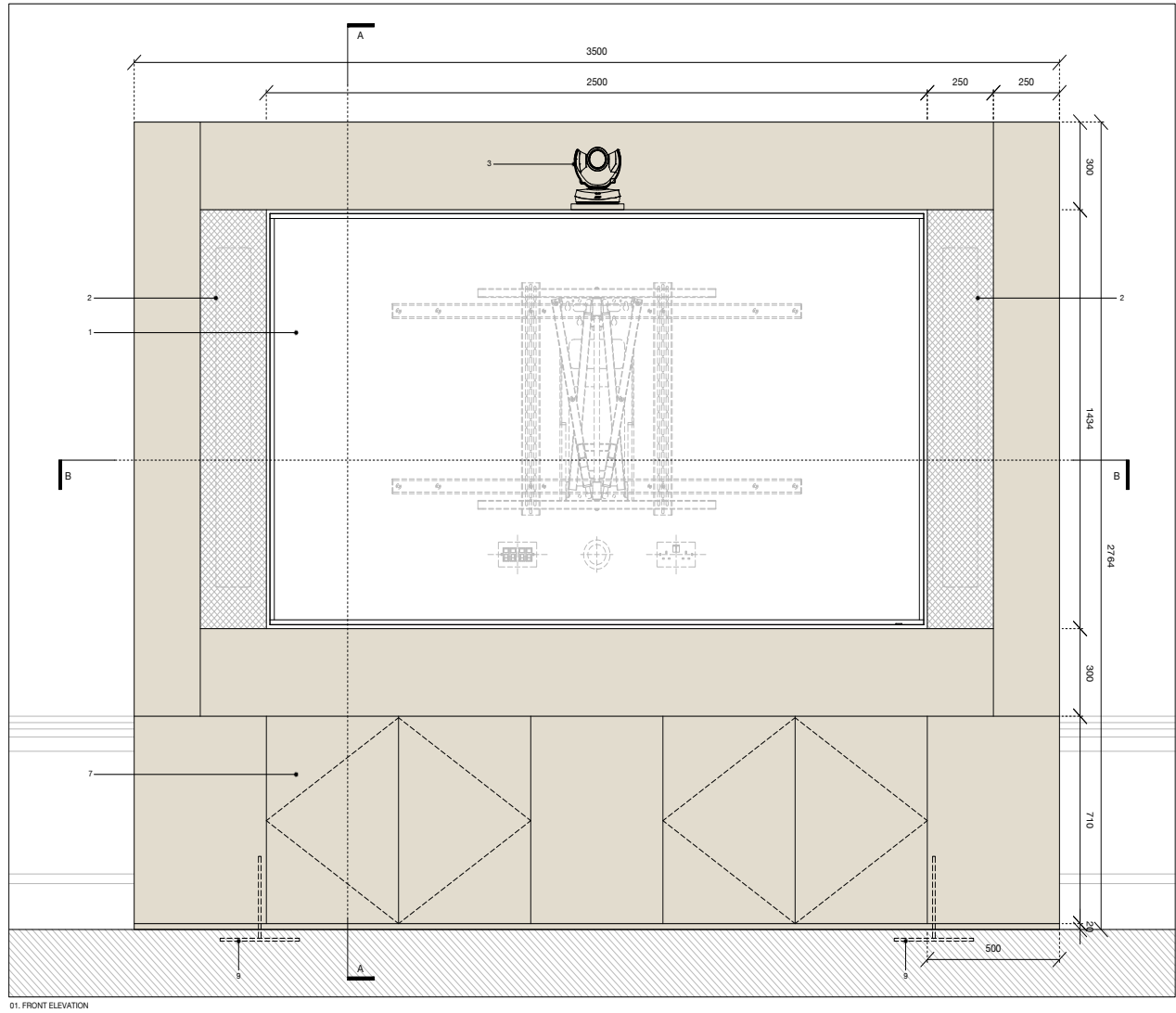
Proposals to the Corridor R.0003 and R.0015 include:

- Removal of a modern glazed door/partition in the corridor to the north of the elliptical staircase.
- An enlarged opening in the non-original partition in this corridor was consented as part of the 2023 application (ref: 2023/1044/L). The current proposals look to amend this approved design by omitting the proposed door and fanlight to this opening.
- Fixed lockers are proposed to be added at the northern end of this circulation space.
- Solid double doors, of the same architectural language as the proposed reception doors, in between the elliptical staircases in the former location of the party wall of the two terrace houses (which can still be read in layout). This addition would reinstate plan form of Nash's former terrace houses and improve the legibility of the 18th century phase of the building. It would also help improve the fire strategy.



3.1 First Floor Conference Room R.1001

Two structural plates are required to support the weight of the consented AV unit (ref: 2023/1044/L) in the first floor conference room. These plates would be screwed into structural timber members, beam and across several joists, and is a reversible measure. The assumed modern floorboards (see opening up works from 2023 in Appendix 5 within SLHA's Heritage impact Assessment Report) would be notched in the location of the steel plates to retain a level floor.



3.1 Second Floor Kitchen R.2008

The proposal is to remove a non-original partition between the existing kitchenette and central office on the second floor to create a larger kitchenette area. The existing vent is proposed to be extended and existing MEP reused in the kitchen. The replacement kitchen is proposed along the eastern wall of the room.

4.0 Access Statement

A key driver for the proposals is the need to improve visitor circulation and way finding, and to mitigate the cramped sense of orientation around the entrance, reception and central staircases. The design proposals were produced in line with an access brief prepared by the GHI, addressing the needs of visitors, academics, and staff:

Access & Circulation

- Clear and welcoming view to reception as one enters the building.
- The reception area will be used as a public-facing ‘front-of-house’ space to hold exhibitions and events and therefore circulation routes through and into the space need to be larger and clearer to allow for ease of movement and increase in use.
- All internal routes (to lift, stairs, cloakroom, lockers and other areas in the building) should be clearly defined, unobstructed, and logical to follow.
- Reception desk should be located close to the principal entrance while still providing a view to the main circulation space.
- Book security system moved to reception and integrated within joinery, in order to provide more logical circulation routes for those using the library.
- Relocation of lockable storage space for visitors’ coats and belongings to a more suitable space.

Signage

- Location of signage should be part of the process of the overall design so they do not become an obstruction and so they can be properly illuminated and identifiable.
- Positioned at eye level with easy access for up close viewing.
- Sign boards must contrast with the background against which it is seen, and the lettering should contrast with the sign board.

Visitor and reception facilities

- Increased lockable storage space for visitors’ coats and belongings.
- Joinery in reception to provide space for storage for receptionist, visitors, audiovisual unit and existing fire alarm system.
- Reception desk should be at two heights, for standing visitors and for receptionist at a seated position.
- All lighting including natural light should be controllable and adjustable to suit the needs of the individual.

The GHI proposals seek to gently reconfigure the main circulation areas to improve accessibility, reduce congestion and enhance clarity of wayfinding. The proposed alterations include:

- increased door widths to provide more generous openings.
- improved visibility and wayfinding signage.
- relocation of visitor services (lockers, cloakroom) to a larger, more suitable space.
- relocation of book security system to allow for a simpler, more logical exit route out of the building.
- revival of the second elliptical stairwell, which is currently only used as a storage space for tables and chairs.

5.0 Conclusion

Collectively the proposed alterations offer a significant enhancement to the Listed Building which is currently compromised by the unsympathetic mid to late 20th century alterations, fit-out, and modern room partitions, and redundant services. The scheme seeks to reinstate the historic floor plan and historic features in the principal areas of the building at ground and first floor. The philosophy to retain and represent historic architectural features is demonstrated in the refurbishment of the historic timber shutters and architraves, internal cornicework, decorative ceilings, and the re-introduction of targeted replica doors and skirting where appropriate.

The scheme will accent the historic interiors by contrast with new introduced elements, particularly within the reception room. While some harm is acknowledged, principally in the loss of some historic fabric through the enlargement of the modern door openings, this 'less than substantial harm' is asserted to be more than balanced by the return to the historic floor plan finishes and details in high significance areas, the historic benefit of significant improvements to the interior aesthetic through repair and refurbishment. The existing historic fabric will be manicured and represented in a clearly knowledgeable manner to reveal its virtues and character to advantage.

The style of the new architectural interventions grows out of the existing complex sequence of alteration, from the 17th century original, the Nash reconstruction in the 18th century and 19th century interventions. It will respond in a dignified and contextual way to build on the episodic language of elements within the building. Each intervention has been individually reviewed to ensure a congruity of architectural language and a thoughtfully considered series of interventions has been developed.

These proposals ensure the building is kept in a sustainable use, which its historic character celebrated in the revived building. This revitalised used and presence in the townscape represents a significant communal, historic, aesthetic, and public benefit.

6.0 References

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3. 17 Bloomsbury Square Heritage Statement (July 2019) prepared by Iceni Projects.
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