

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London The Philips Building Planning Statement

February 2025

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1 Introduction and Proposals

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in support of Listed Building Consent. This application supports proposals for internal works to the Philips Building, SOAS (Grade II* Listed), specifically, Listed Building Consent for:
- 1.2 *“Formation of new librarian hubs on Levels A, B, C, D & E comprising the installation of timber partition and associated fixtures and fixed furniture; formation of new meeting room on Level D comprising removal of existing partition and erection of new glazed partition and new stud partition; refurbishment of the desk; conversion of existing office on Level E into event space comprising the formation of two new door and erection of new partition walls and associated refurbishment; formation of Audio Visual Room with new partially glazed partition and door; reorganisation of Special Collection Reading Room comprising formation of three no. new doors and closure of existing door and associated refurbishment on Level F; refurbishment of ceiling”*
- 1.3 This document outlines the design rationale, planning policies, and the approach to accessibility for the proposed development.
- 1.4 This document should be read in conjunction with the submitted drawings and the following documents: Heritage Assessment, Design and Access Statement submitted drawings:

2 Site Context

- 2.1 Our overarching plan is to preserve the historic fabric of the building, while simultaneously enhancing the Library into a facility that is suitable for world-class modern research and teaching enabling a fundamentally better space which is more conducive to study and collaboration.

SOAS Context

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.

Library Context

- 2.6 The SOAS Library is at the heart of the institution's reputation as the world's University with prodigious expertise in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The objective for the SOAS Library is for it to be available to scholars from around the world. The Library's unique holdings, its world-famous archives, and the Brunei Gallery with its exhibitions and collections make it one of the UK's National Research Libraries, just one of five making it an international treasure.
- 2.7 The Library is also unique in the fact is a meeting place for knowledge from different, often marginalised parts of the world. The Library as a space is vital venue for teaching and learning that helps to shape new approaches to internationalisation that are responsive for the grand challenges facing humanity.

Site & Surroundings

- 2.8 The Library, located in the Philips building, Thornhaugh Street, is located within Bloomsbury part of the London Borough of Camden. The building is contained between Torrington Square to the southwest, Charles Holden's original SOAS building, the College Building (Grade II) (to which it is linked) immediately to the southeast, the Institute of Education (Grade II*) to the northeast and Woburn Square to the north west.
- 2.9 The building is Grade II*-listed and located in Sub-Area 3 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The building dates back to 1960 when it was commissioned by leading post war British post-war architect Sir Denys Lasdun in Brutalist style. In 2003 John McAslan and Partners completed a contemporary extension on the south side of the Lasdun building.
- 2.10 The SOAS campus 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*). The building comprises two main elements, the central triple height reading room and the study library spaces, with academic offices around the perimeter of the library.

3 Planning Policy Framework

3.1 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 (2012)

- 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 2024

Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy - Adopted 18 April 2011

4 Planning History

- 4.1 A summary of the relevant planning history for the site, including:
- 4.2 **024/3528/L** - Retrospective consent for the replacement of original painted and laminate faced office/teaching room flush panel doors and associated ironmongery, within the 2nd 3rd & 4th floor corridor areas of the Philips Building.
- 4.3 **2024/2223/L** - Internal works to the ground floor of the Junior Common Room (JCR) comprising: the removal of non-original partition walls and erection of replacement partition walls on ground floor.
- 4.4 **2024/2089/L** - Essential roof waterproofing works to areas of both the Grade II* Philips Building and Grade II College Building.
- 4.5 **2024/1096/L** - The interior repurposing and refurbishment of approximately 194SQM of ancillary accommodation which occupies part of the original building demise and later 1980s west courtyard infill on the lower ground floor level.
- 4.6 **2024/0128/L** - Refurbishment works to the 5th floor corridor areas of the Philips Building which include the replacement of existing suspended ceilings, upgrading of doors, floor finishes, decorations and the upgrading of localised service infrastructure and associated fire stopping.
- 4.7 **2023/3409/L** - The creation of functional and accessible student focused hubs on each of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors of the Philips Building. Replacement of floor finishes, redecoration of walls, doors, architraves, and skirtings. Upgrading existing lighting, fire & security infrastructure.
- 4.8 **2023/2473/L** - The proposals relate to reinstating the floor separation between the lower ground and ground floor levels of the Student Union areas within the College Building, through the removal of the 2009 steel staircase insertion (2009 Planning Ref: 2009/5923/P).
- 4.9 **2023/1422/L** - The proposals relate to the interior refurbishment of existing toilet facilities located adjacent to the main stair, on the Ground to 4th floor levels of the College Building.
- 4.10 **2022/5402/L** - The proposed interior refurbishment works are related to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floor corridor areas of the SOAS Philips Building, including the Link Bridge corridors to these floors, which link the Philips Building to the College Building (Holden Building). The proposed works include replacement of existing suspended ceilings, floor finishes, decoration to walls and doors, refinishing of joinery (skirtings, architraves, door frames) and upgrading of localised service infrastructure and associated fire stopping.

5 Pre-Application Engagement

- 5.1 We have engaged in ongoing collaboration with Camden Council's Conservation Case Officer since 29 July 2024, ensuring alignment throughout the planning process.
- 5.2 Key milestones in this consultation include:
- 28 August 2024:** Initial on-site pre-application meeting.
 - 21 October 2024:** Follow-up on-site meeting.
 - 2 December 2024:** Receipt of written feedback from the Conservation Case Officer.
 - 13 January 2025:** Final on-site meeting to address comments and refine the proposal.
- 5.3 These discussions have focused on ensuring that the proposed design aligns with the officer's expectations, particularly with respect to heritage considerations.
- 5.4 Please see Table 1 in the Appendix which provides a summary of the feedback provided by the Conservation Officer, our response with an explanation of how the scheme has evolved.

6 Vision

- 6.1 The proposal is part of a wider masterplan centred around optimising the SOAS Library. This initiative seeks to preserve and enhance the Library's historical significance while ensuring that Library functions and remains relevant and addresses the needs for future generations.

Context and Need for the Masterplan

- 6.2 The SOAS Library is central to the institution's reputation as the world's University with prodigious expertise in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The objective for the SOAS Library is for it to be available to scholars from around the world. The Library's unique holdings, its world-famous archives, and the Brunei Gallery with its exhibitions and collections make it one of the UK's National Research Libraries, just one of five making it an international treasure.
- 6.3 The Library is also unique in the fact is a meeting place for knowledge from different, often marginalised parts of the world. The Library as a space is vital venue for teaching and learning that helps to shape new approaches to internationalisation that are responsive for the grand challenges facing humanity. However, the Library faces significant operational challenges that threaten its ability to meet the demands of a modern 21st-century institution.

Space Constraints

- 6.4 The SOAS Library faces significant space shortages for students, collections, and events. Originally designed for far fewer resources, the Library's collection has grown exponentially, from 500,000 volumes to over 1.3 million in just 50 years.
- 6.5 When the Library was completed in 1973, SOAS had fewer than 1,000 students. Today, enrolment has risen to approximately 5,500, and the Library now sees an estimated peak of over 1,000 physical visits daily during term time. However, it provides only 800 study spaces—many of which are inadequate due to poor lighting and limited space—leaving students underserved

Events Space Deficiency

- 6.6 The Library lacks a dedicated space to host its diverse and rich events program. As a result, events are often accommodated elsewhere on campus in ad hoc locations, undermining their potential impact.
- 6.7 Further, the SOAS Library fails to sufficiently accommodate for modern study styles which are typically more collaborative, interdisciplinary enabled activities.
- 6.8 A 2022 study using the Campus Experience Index (CEI) highlighted key deficiencies in SOAS's facilities compared to similar urban campuses.
- Formal learning spaces at SOAS scored 14% worse than the CEI average.
 - Informal learning spaces scored at just 46%, 8% below the average.
- 6.9 The study incorporated over 2,000 individual comments, underlining widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of the Library's facilities.
- 6.10 It is clear the Library is not functioning at its best. It is outdated, operationally challenging, and failing to meet the demands of a modern 21st-century institution. Addressing these issues is critical to restoring the Library's ability to serve its core purpose effectively.
- 6.11 Addressing these challenges are critical for three reasons:

1. Preserving SOAS' international reputation

As a cornerstone of academic and cultural experience, the SOAS Library must retain a globally respected

institution. Maintaining its reputation requires continuous investment in facilities and resources to support world-class research and teaching.

2. Strengthening Competitiveness in Higher Education

In an ever-increasing competitive global education landscape, SOAS must differentiate itself by offering exceptional facilities. The Library plays a pivotal role in attracting leading international students, faculty, and researchers, serving as a critical asset in promoting SOAS' academic standing. The library must be both functional and inspiring, providing a conducive environment for cutting-edge research and innovative study.

3. Securing Investment and funding

A future-focused Library strengthens SOAS' ability to attract diverse funding sources, including alumni, donors and grants. Demonstrating a clear commitment to enhancing the Library reinforces its role as a critical academic cultural resource, ensuring continued financial support.

Masterplan

- 6.12 To address these challenges and ensure the SOAS Library remains fit for purpose, SOAS is implementing a phased capital project spanning five years from 2024.
- 6.13 The masterplan focuses on optimising the SOAS Library to preserve its reputation and ensure it remains a relevant and inspiring resource for future generations. It has been divided into four works packages:
- Package 1** Works to the Lift Cores (already complete)
Package 2 Internal reconfiguring, and upgrades to the Library's facilities
Package 3 Overhaul of Roof Coverings, Access, Lighting and Insulation
Package 4 Creation of a new Dedicated Entrance, and Overhaul of Windows
- 6.14 The phased implementation ensures minimal disruption to the University students and staff while transforming the Library into a modern, efficient, and inspiring space.
- 6.15 The overarching vision is to meet a new set of student and faculty needs; to preserve the historic fabric of the building, while simultaneously transforming the Library into a facility that is suitable for world-class modern research and teaching enabling a fundamentally better space which is more conducive to the study and collaboration it serves.
- 6.16 This will allow the Library to connect and develop access for its three key communities; the local community in London and beyond, their global research community, and the student community, both on site and online and around the world.
- 6.17 Specific comments on the Library related to a lack of suitable workspaces; poor levels of lighting making some areas unworkable; and the concentration of bookshelves and lack of communal space being claustrophobic. It is clear the Library is not functioning at its best. It is outdated, operationally challenging, and failing to meet the demands of a modern 21st-century institution. Addressing these issues is critical to restoring the library's ability to serve its core purpose effectively.

7 Proposed Schemes

- 7.1 The main aim of the proposal is to better reorganise the Library space for improved quality of research through modern study and learning styles, whilst preserving the architectural heritage. The proposals include alterations to the interior of the building to enhance the user experience for all of the library's students and staff, as well as providing new facilities to broaden its ability to serve the existing and future requirements of this listed building.
- 7.2 *The material changes to the building are summarised below (not including those relating to loose furniture and finishes):*
- 7.3 The proposals have been carefully developed to limit impact on the significant elements of the listed building and many proposals are light touch. The proposals are outlined in full in the Stage 3 Report by Story Design. Only those which have the potential to affect original fabric / areas of significance are discussed below:

Level	Space	Description of works	Drawing No.
F	Reorganisation of the Special Collections Reading Room	Existing double doors replaced with glass doors. Installation of folding partition wall.	<i>Level F Proposed Special Collections Reading J1163/LF-P-161/D</i>
	Reorganisation of the Office	Opening created for walkway to meeting room and new entry point into Office LF03. Existing door removed to create secure storage rooms for lockers/ coats. New opening with reused door (from removed doors within SCRR) to create locker/ coat room.	
	New Meeting Room	New Meeting Room created with glass partition.	
E	Librarian Hub	Removal of existing full-height glazed partition, to be replaced with new timber desk structure and door.	<i>Level E - Proposed Librarian Hub J1163/ LE-P-151/B</i>
	Event Space	Formation of new openings for two doors and hatch for catering. New stud partition constructed to form cupboards	<i>Level E – Proposed Events Space J1163- LE-P-156/B</i>
	Accessible Room	Proposed new partition with glazed sections to create quiet room.	<i>Level E – Proposed Accessible Room J1163/LE-P-157/B</i>
	Proposed Book Check Station	Existing bench surface removed to provide space for book check machines New timber panel to rear of unit to cover space where bench surface removed and provide contrast in materiality	<i>Level E - Proposed Book Check Station J1163/ LE-P-155</i>
	AV room	New glazed partition and doors to create audio/visual room	<i>Level E - Proposed A_V Room J1163/ LE-P-159</i>
D	Librarian Hub	Insertion of half height timber partition with glazed panels above (to enclose back of hub). Removal of	<i>Level D – Proposed Librarian</i>

		existing fitted desks and replacement with new furniture. New Timber desk and door.	Hub J1163/ LD-P-141/B
	Commons area	<p>New stud partitions formed to create-Comms cupboard for existing IT rack.</p> <p>Existing partition partially removed to create glazed partition to form new meeting room.</p> <p>Proposed minor refurbishment to existing desk. Existing concrete-based desk retained. Minor refurbishment to include sanding and re-varnishing, with damaged and splintering end timbers carefully repaired with new timber.</p>	Level D – Proposed Commons Plan J1163/ LD-P-143/B
C	Librarian Hub	New frameless Glazed screen to be installed on existing low wall to prevent access to hub from adjoining bay. Removal of existing fitted desks and replacement with new furniture. New Timber desk and door.	Level C– Proposed Librarian Hub J1163/LC-P-131/B
B	Librarian Hub	-Installation of new timber desk and door 2.1m timber screen and librarian station.	Level B– Proposed Librarian Hub J1163/LB-P-121/B
A	Librarian Hub	Insertion of half height timber partition with glazed panels above. Installation of new timber desk and door 2.1m timber screen and librarian station.	Level A – Proposed Librarian Hub J1163/LA-P-110i/C
Ceiling	Ceiling Strategy	<p>Existing modern ceiling tiles removed to expose existing concrete soffit</p> <p>Existing mineral ceiling tiles removed (Level D only) and reclaimed for repairs elsewhere. New MF plasterboard surface with Sil Acospray DC3 sprayed acoustic textured coating or similar</p> <p>Existing life-expired metal ceilings and bulkheads to be replaced with new perforated metal plank ceiling with bulkheads and other trims @ 2400 and 2200 AFL - SAS System 330 to match replacement ceilings elsewhere in the building.</p>	<i>Level D Proposed Ceiling Plan J1163/ LD-A-113/A</i>
Wayfinding Strategy		As part of the works, appropriately designed new and replacement signage will be put in place	<i>Details to be secured by conditions</i>

8 Planning Assessment

Policy Context

- 8.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:
- 8.2 Statute regarding the heritage environment is relevant to this application.
- 8.3 Section 66(1) states that:

"In considering whether to grant planning permission [F1or permission in principle] for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of

State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses."

8.4 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out that local planning authorities should pay special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of historic or architectural interest which it possesses when considering applications.

8.5 Section 72 states that:

"General duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions.

(1)In the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, of any [F1]functions under or by virtue of] any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2), special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

(2)The provisions referred to in subsection (1) are the planning Acts and Part I of the M1Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 [F2 and sections 70 and 73 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993].

8.6 Section 72 of the same Act states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

8.7 Both the site's historic fabric and the surrounding environment have been carefully considered in the development of the proposals having regard for the statutory legislation set out below.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024:

8.8 Under paragraph 202 of the NPPF, it notes the importance of heritage assets as an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

8.9 Paragraph 203 sets out the positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. This includes heritage assets most at risk through, neglect decay or other threats. Local Authorities should take into account:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

8.10 Paragraph 207 requires applicants to provide a proportionate and detailed assessment of heritage assets, including their significance and setting. This should be based on relevant historic environment record and appropriate expertise.

8.11 Paragraph 210 sets out that Local Planning Authorities must consider the importance of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets, their role in supporting sustainable communities, and ensuring new developments positively contribute to local character and distinctiveness.

8.12 Paragraph 212 emphasises that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets when assessing development proposals, with more significant assets warranting even greater consideration, regardless of the level of harm.

- 8.13 Paragraph 215 states that where development results in less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, this harm must be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal, including securing the asset's optimal viable use.

Development Plan

- 8.14 The proposed works have been assessed in accordance with the development plan which includes the London Borough of Camden's Core Strategy, the London Plan (2021) and the Camden Local Plan (2017), and the adopted planning Guidance documents all of which are material considerations. The National Planning Policy Framework (2024) has also been taken into account. This assessment ensures compliance with statutory duties and the preservation of heritage assets

London Plan (2021)

Policy D5 Inclusive Design

Seeks to ensure developments are accessible and inclusive for all.

Policy HC1 Heritage Conservation and Growth:

Encourages the identification, protection, and enhancement of London's heritage assets while accommodating appropriate growth that respects their significance.

Camden Local Plan (2017)

Policy C6 Access for All:

Requires development proposals to address inclusivity and accessibility for all users.

Policy D2 Heritage Conservation and Growth:

Emphasises the importance of conserving heritage assets within Camden, ensuring that new development respects the historical and architectural significance of such assets.

Camden Core Strategy 2010-2025

Policy CS14 Promoting High-Quality Places and Conserving Our Heritage:

Sets out the Council's commitment to conserving heritage assets while ensuring high-quality development that enhances local character and identity.

Assessment Context

- 8.15 The assessment of the proposed works has been undertaken with a structured approach, ensuring compliance with statutory and policy requirements, as follows:

1. Determining the Significance
2. Assessing the Impact
3. Weighing the Impact Against Public Benefit

1. Determining the Significance

- 8.16 Lasdun's design integrated elements of Brutalist architecture with a sensitivity to the verticality of surrounding Georgian architecture. Notable features include a reinforced concrete frame to support the overall structure, providing open-plan spaces with precast panels and distinct materials such as timber board concrete walls.

- 8.17 The Library's triple-height reading room is illuminated by a diagrid roof and surrounded by balconies on the upper levels, creating a cascading visual effect. This central space exemplifies Lasdun's innovative approach

to Library design. It is important to note that the Library design prioritised flexibility and capacity, with modular planning that could adapt to changes in shelving and reading areas.

- 8.18 The original plan accommodated 800,000 books and 312 reading places. The building also features structural precast concrete panels, finely detailed frameless corner windows and slit windows in the lower levels. These elements exemplify the modernist aesthetic and functional design principles of that era.
- 8.19 In 2003, John McAslan & Partners added a contemporary extension on the building's south side. This addition contrasted with the original Brutalist design and maintained the building's legibility. Further enhancements in 2012 included glazed extensions to the north and east terraces, expanding study areas and improving ventilation. Simultaneously, refurbishment of the diagrid ceiling exposed its structural elements, increasing light and spatial quality.
- 8.20 Over time, several smaller-scale alterations have impacted the building, including Partition changes in the perimeter teaching rooms during the 1970s and later refurbishments; Conversion of the principal reading room into a computer room during the 1990s; Refurbishment of lecture theatres and the addition of new partitions, suspended ceilings, and services such as lighting and ventilation systems. Please refer to the accompanying Heritage Statement for further details.

Architectural and aesthetic interest

- 8.21 The Philips Building is an architectural set piece - a "pavilion" to the principal "spine" Institute building fronting Bedford Way; these buildings successfully fulfilled their brief despite being a truncated part of the more comprehensive "Martin Plan" of 1959. The Philips Building is highly characteristic of Lasdun's buildings of the 1960s and 1970s - when he was arguably at the zenith of his career - indeed Lasdun is recognised as one of the most distinctive and distinguished of post-war British architects.
- 8.22 The building is a fine example of his work in the "Brutalist" style, imbued with a richness and quality derived from its striking massing akin to a moated island fortress with towers and no celebrated main entrance. The quality of the detailing and the treatment of its principal material - concrete, the expression of services as part of the design, and the concept of "strata" or layers are highly representative of Lasdun's work and can be found both externally and internally.
- 8.23 The external form and appearance of the building remains largely intact but for the addition of the two visually lightweight glazed extensions to the north and east terraces by JMP (2012). These additions are not considered to have compromised an appreciation of the quality of the architecture externally or internally. Externally, the extensions lightly touch the 1970s structure and are legible additions, whilst internally the key architectural elements were left intact, and a number of previous functional issues were resolved - particularly regarding light, ventilation and reader accommodation.

Historic Interest

- 8.24 The Philips Building embodies the revitalisation of the Bloomsbury precinct of the University of London in the post-war period, and particularly of SOAS which was founded in 1916 had played a crucial role during the Second World War in the Far East. The association with SOAS, which is home to leading research and expertise on the global issues of today, is considered to enhance historic interest.
- 8.25 The Philips Building provides an essential facility for the School as a world-leading centre for teaching and research focused on Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It houses one of the world's largest and most important academic libraries (over 1.3 million volumes with collections of archives, manuscripts and rare books). The Philips building represents a pivotal moment in post-war British architectural history.
- 8.26 The SOAS extension formed one of the two new developments of the "Martin Plan" which intended to modernise the Bloomsbury area while maintaining its historic fabric. The brief for the SOAS extension included the provision of a substantial Library together with tutorial rooms and a lecture theatre, as well as squash courts and residential accommodation for a caretaker and visiting scholars. The building

was commissioned in 1960, although full planning permission was not granted until 1968, with construction beginning in 1970.

8.27 Please refer to the accompanying Heritage Statement for further detail.

2. Assessing the Impact

8.28 The historical significance of the building primarily lies in its spatial organisation, which reflects the architected and functional priorities of its time. The layout emphasises flexibility and capacity, which are fundamental characteristics of its design. Given this context a detailed assessment of the proposed interventions demonstrates that they have minimal impact on the historic fabric while aligning with the building's inherent adaptability.

Librarian hubs – Levels A, B, C, D & E

8.29 There is strong evidence of the modular building design and this was intended for flexible use, particularly in the peripheral spaces. For examples the historic plans indicate that Level A originally had partitioned spaces,

which have seen be repurposed with shelving. This reinforces the notion that the peripheral areas around the atrium were always meant to be adaptable.

8.30 The hubs will be formed as joinery items with limited mechanical fixings, ensuring that the intervention remains reversible and does not compromise the integrity of the historic structure. This intervention is minor and will have minimal impact upon the significance of the building .

8.31 The formation and location of librarian hubs will have limited impact on the historic character of the building.

Commons area – Level D

8.32 The Commons area is an important part of the significance of the building. However, the proposed interventions in this area are minor,. these include:

- The installation of a new stud partition to create a comms cupboard for an existing IT rack
- the partial removal of existing partition to introduce a glazed partition for a meeting room.
- The refurbishment of an existing desk which focuses on repairing damaged areas with carefully selected new timber, ensuring the desk remains functional and visually appropriate within the setting.

8.33 These interventions would have negligible impact on the historic fabric or significance of the listed building, notably would not impact upon the main Commons area, which will remain entirely unaffected.

Special Collections Reading Room – Level F

8.34 The Special Collections Reading Room interventions include replacing existing double doors with glass doors and installation of folding partition. This would have very limited impact on the historic fabric of the listed building by the fact that this section of the Library has undergone multiple changes over time.

Reorganisation of the office, including a new meeting room – Level F

8.35 The planned reorganisation involves:

- Creating a new walkway to the meeting room.
- Introducing a new entry point into Office LF03.
- Removing an existing door to facilitate secure storage for lockers and coats.
- Repurposing a historic door from the Special Collections Reading Room to create a new locker/coat room entrance.
- Constructing a new meeting room with a glass partition.

8.36 This part of the Library is not as sensitive and has been subject to change over time. These interventions would also have a limited impact on the fabric or significance of the listed building. Further, the re use of the historic door should be noted here highlighted the historic fabric is retained.

AV Room – Level E

8.37 The interventions include a new glazed partition and doors to create an audio/visual room. As above, this would also have a limited impact on the fabric of the listed building. This part of the Library is not as sensitive and has been subject to change over time.

Accessible Room – Level E

- 8.38 A new partition with glazed sections will create a quiet room. Since this space has seen previous modifications, the proposed changes are consistent with the building's history of adaption. The limited impact on the modern fabric is outweighed by the benefits of improved accessibility.

Events Space – Level E

- 8.39 The interventions include the formation of new openings for two doors and hatch for catering and a new stud partition constructed to form cupboards. Again, this will have a limited impact on the historic fabric of the

building as this part of the Library is not as sensitive and has been subject to change over time. Thus, it would have a minor impact to the modern fabric.

Ceiling strategy – Level E

- 8.40 The proposed ceiling alterations will replace outdated elements with modern equivalents while preserving the overall character of the space. Specific changes include:
- Removing modern mineral ceiling tiles to expose the original concrete soffit.
 - Reclaiming removed ceiling tiles for repairs elsewhere.
 - Installing a new MF plasterboard surface with an acoustic textured coating.
 - Replacing life-expired metal ceilings and bulkheads with a perforated metal plank ceiling (SAS System 330), matching the replacement ceilings elsewhere in the building.
- 8.41 These interventions will enhance the longevity and aesthetic coherence of the interior spaces while respecting the building’s original design principles
- 8.42 The interventions include:
- the Existing modern ceiling tiles removed to expose existing concrete soffit
 - Existing mineral ceiling tiles removed (Level D only) and reclaimed for repairs elsewhere.
 - New MF plasterboard surface with Sil Acospray DC3 sprayed acoustic textured coating or similar.
 - Existing life-expired metal ceilings and bulkheads to be replaced with new perforated metal plank ceiling with bulkheads and other trims @ 2400 and 2200 AFL - SAS System 330 to match replacement ceilings elsewhere in the building.
- 8.43 This sensitive intervention being proposed will enhance the longevity and character of the space while respecting the buildings original design principles by improving the condition of the ceiling, which are currently in very poor condition.
- 8.44 **The proposed development results in less than substantial harm, at the lower end of the scale. They align with prioritising reversibility, sensitivity to historical context, and enhancement of the building’s functional use.**

3. Weighing the Impact Against Public Benefit

- 8.45 As highlighted in Paragraph 215 in the NPPF, developments that results in less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, this harm then must be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal, including securing the asset’s optimal viable use.
- 8.46 Overall, this proposal provides a wider public benefit to the students, staff, wider Bloomsbury community and international benefit. In particular, it will deliver the following:

Librarian Hubs (Levels A – E)

- 8.47 The formation of the librarian hubs on Levels A-E significantly enhances the public benefits. The design allows subject librarians to be co-located with their stock areas. This enhances user accessibility by fostering a more

user-friendly and efficient research environment. Given the very limited impact on heritage significance, the public benefits clearly outweigh the impact.

Commons area – Level D

- 8.48 The reorganisation of the commons area directly addresses the shortage of study and teaching spaces within the Library. The transformation of an underutilised space into an efficient and functional areas supports the evolving demands of academic users while safeguarding the historic environment.

Ceiling Strategy

- 8.49 The sensitive intervention on the ceilings is a significant benefit to the building itself. It enhances, preserves the building in the long term and thus should be classified as a heritage benefit as well as public benefit.
- 8.50 The ceiling intervention not only preserves but also enhances the heritage value of the building by restoring a cohesive visual identity. This represents both a heritage and public benefits improving the condition and functionality.

Events Space – Level E

- 8.51 It is clear the lack of events space in this building. The fact there is no events space currently in the Library is of a concern especially given the status and role as public research Library. It essential the building has a space for events that not only benefit the SOAS cohort but also for the wider public as the public is able to access and use this building. Given the very limited impact on the significance above, this is clearly outweighed by these benefits
- 8.52 The Library currently lacks a dedicated events space, limiting its potential as a public research facility. The creation of such space will facilitate academic and community engagement, benefiting both SOAS and the wider public. Given the very limited impact on the significance above, this is clearly outweighed by these benefits.

AV Room – Level E

- 8.53 The AV room is a public benefit here that relates to the type of research and learning spaces the Library needs to meet the needs of its users. This room provides a significant public benefit by supporting the Library's need for inclusive research and learning spaces. It is particularly important in ensuring equitable access for all users, including those with disabilities or additional needs and adheres to Policy D5 and C6. It transforms a poorly utilised areas and allows efficient use of space. Given the demands of the building, it is important to use the spaces efficiently whilst also protecting the historic environment. Given the very limited impact on the significance above, this is clearly outweighed by these benefits

Accessible Room – Level E

- 8.54 This room provides a significant public benefit by supporting the Library's need for inclusive research and learning spaces. It is particularly important in ensuring equitable access for all users, including those with disabilities or additional needs and adheres to Policy D5 and C6. Recognising the demands of the building, it is essential to use spaces efficiently while also preserving the historic environment. Given the minimal impact on the building's significance, the substantial public benefits of accessibility and inclusivity clearly outweigh the limited impact on the significance.

Special Collections Reading Room – Level F

- 8.55 The room provides a significant public benefit and the reorganisation allows better access for users to engage with the room and special collections. Recognising the demands of the building, it is essential to use spaces efficiently while also preserving the historic environment. Given the minimal impact on the building's

significance, the substantial public benefits of accessibility and inclusivity clearly outweigh the limited impact on the significance.

Reorganisation of the Office, including a new meeting room – Level F

- 8.56 The reorganisation of the commons area directly addresses the shortage of study and teaching spaces within the library. The transformation of an underutilised space into an efficient and functional areas supports the evolving demands of academic users while safeguarding the historic environment.
- 8.57 **In accordance with the Paragraph 215 of the NPPF, where less than substantial harm occurs, it must be weighed against public benefit. In this case, the enhancements to accessibility, functionality and long-term preservation far outweigh any less than substantial harm on heritage significance. The proposed interventions support the building's continued optimal viable use while maintaining historical integrity.**

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The proposed scheme for the SOAS Library presents a critical opportunity to enhance and revitalise a landmark academic building in Bloomsbury while preserving its historic character. It is part of a wider masterplan designed to ensure the Library remains a world-class research and learning facility, responsive to the evolving needs not only of students, staff and scholars from around the world but also the general public given its status as a public library.
- 9.2 The proposals have been carefully developed and consulted with Camden Council right from the start to provide a sensitive yet transformative solution to address the longstanding space constraints, to improve functionality and introduce much needed facilities while safeguarding the buildings historic integrity. By enhancing accessibility, the scheme directly supports SOAS' mission to be an inclusive and internationally leading institution.
- 9.3 The development aligns with national, regional, and local planning policies by balancing heritage conservation with the imperative to future of the Library's long-term viability. The sensitive design approach ensures that any impact on the listed building is minimal, while the public benefits – ranging from improved research infrastructure to enhance student experience are significant and far reaching.

10 Appendix 1: Table 1 Conservation Officer Feedback

Item	Comment	Response
Formation of 'librarian hubs'	<p><i>...the creation of 'hubs' required more than just the addition of furniture, for example fixings, there would be some opposition. The plan form of the library with its top light and concrete fronted open plan balconies is an important component of Lasdun's architecture and as a result, the Council would seek to conserve this element of the building.</i></p> <p><i>It should be noted that the open plan form in the McAslan extension is also an important component of the interior of the building, and that fixed partitions would also be resisted here.'</i></p> <p><i>'At level E it is proposed to remove a modern partition to create a librarian hub, this alteration is considered to be acceptable'</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We noted the strong operational need for librarians to be located near the collections, hence the formation of hubs to allow the library to operate more efficiently. The hubs are central to reorganisation as the library itself is benefits from having librarians who are specialists in respect of certain collections. However, currently all of librarians are located on the Ground Floor in a single location. hubs are required so that these specialist librarians are located on the same floor as the relevant specialist collections. This will ensure greater accessibility and greater interaction with researchers and students. This will result in a significantly enhanced service for students and researchers, supporting its performance as a national research library. 2. There is strong evidence of the modular building design and its deliberate and inherent flexibility. The original plans reveal that the spaces at Level A were partitioned originally and these areas have been filled with shelving since. This indicates that the peripheral areas around the atrium were intended to be used flexibly. See Heritage Assessment for further information. 3. We are implementing a design with limited mechanical fixings into the existing structure to restrain the floor-standing joinery. The hubs need to be secure so that volumes can be safely stored.
Location of 'librarian hubs'	<p><i>The Conservation Officer pointed out the relocation of Hubs C & D to a less impactful area.</i></p>	<p>We agreed at the site meeting on 13th January to relocate the Hubs C & D (see the accompanying drawings) so that they do not affect the views of the building and the natural lighting. The Conservation Officer agreed this was the correct approach.</p>
Additional Plug sockets and power points	<p><i>'The creation of additional plug sockets and power points is generally considered to be acceptable.'</i></p>	<p>Agree with Conservation Officer's comments.</p>
Level D desk	<p><i>Concerns raised about impact of historic fabric and need.</i></p>	<p>Agreed noted the proposal of light refurbishment instead. The minor</p>

		refurbishment of the existing desk is a sensitive intervention, aimed at enhancing its longevity. The refurbishment focuses on repairing damaged areas with carefully selected new timber, ensuring the desk remains functional and visually appropriate within the setting.
Level E – creation of Events Space	<i>'The creation of an event space in the existing librarians office would also be supported as the associated changes appear only to impact modern fabric.'</i>	Agree with Conservation Officer's comments.
Level E – creation of Debating Chamber	<i>'The addition of the debating chamber is generally not supported as its location means the plan form, which at present includes an open plan central section with partitioned spaces on the periphery, is compromised. A debating chamber should be created in one of the spaces already partitioned.'</i>	Agree with Conservation Officer's comments and will apply at a later date.
Ceiling strategy	<p><i>'The existing ceiling is mostly original to the building but in some parts is damaged or deteriorating. The proposals are to remove the damaged tiles in one of the part of the building and replace them with non-damaged tiles from another part of the building, essentially creating one area of ceiling of entirely historic tiles. The area that the good tiles have been taken from will then be refitted with new tiles. This allows for homogenous ceilings in all areas.</i></p> <p><i>This alteration is supported in principle, however I understand that so far, a suitable replacement tile has been difficult to source. The texture of the historic tiles is an important component of the internal decoration of the building, creating an interesting contrast with the texture of the adjacent concrete. I suggest extensive research is undertaken to find a material that closely replicates the historic.'</i></p> <p><i>'The removal of the modern tiles and the installation of an acoustic raft to levels C and D is acceptable.'</i></p>	<p>Spoke with the Conservation Officer at the site meeting on 13th January and it was agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Removal, cleaning (or potentially painting), storage and/or relocation of existing tiles in good condition – noted that removal of the tiles is difficult and not clear how feasible it will be to remove and re-use. · Using special textured spray paint to create new ceiling finishes · Exposed concrete soffit in perimeter areas, with rafts installed · The idea would be to review samples of the spray finish in situ and endorsed the trial approach. · The Conservation Officer said they would be happy for the applicant to propose draft conditions.
Historic doors strategy	<i>'The replacement of historic doors is generally not supported unless there is very clear and convincing justification for the replacement.'</i>	No historic doors removed, if needed to shall be relocated.

Paintings of railings	'The painting of the railings within the library is acceptable'.	Agree with Conservation Officer's comments.
Special Collection Reading Room	'Alterations as level F are generally considered to be acceptable.'	Agree with Conservation Officer's comments.