

Planning Design & Access Statement

53 Gordon Square - Fourth Floor

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of
London

March 2025

1. Introduction

This Planning, Design, and Access Statement (PDAS) has been prepared on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in support of Listed Building Consent.

This application supports proposals for essential internal works of 53 Gordon Square (Grade II Listed) used by SOAS.

Specifically, this PDAS requests Listed Building Consent for the reconfiguration of internal spaces comprising:

Installation of air-conditioning for fourth floor only comprising installation of condensing unit on roof and associated internal alteration including new services within roof space and ceiling grilles. Re-organisation of fourth floor comprising: removal of internal partitions and doors; removing current kitchen and bathroom fittings and installing replacements; renewal of finishes throughout; reinstatement of a chimneypiece; new lighting and sockets and associated works.

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

This document includes the following sections:

- Introduction
- Context
- Planning Policy Framework
- Planning History
- Proposed Scheme
- Design
- Access
- Planning Assessment
- Conclusion

2. Site Context

2.1 Background

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

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

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

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

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

SOAS has a very diverse student base, from over a hundred different countries, and has a number of unique courses. SOAS cater for approximately 5,400 students on campus with a further 1,500 distant learning students - Supported by 1,180 academic and professional services staff.

2.2 Site & Surroundings

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

53 Gordon Square is part of the SOAS campus which is associated with the University of London and includes: the Philips Building (Grade II*); the Brunei Gallery; the Paul Webley Wing of the Senate House (Grade II*). The building sits within the Sub Area 3 of the

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

Please refer to the accompanying Heritage Statement for further details.

53, Gordon Square, London, Camden, WC1H 0PD



Figure 1: Location of 53 Gordon Square

3. Planning Policy Framework

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

- London Plan (2021)
 - Policy D5 Inclusive Design
 - Policy HC1 Heritage
- Adopted Camden Local Plan (2017)
 - Policy D2 Heritage conservation and growth
- Camden Core Strategy 2010-2025
 - Policy CS14 - Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy - Adopted 18 April 2011
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)
- National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) (2024)
- English Heritage 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' 2008

4. Planning History

In February 2024 Listed Building Consent (planning reference: **2024/4483/L**) was granted for the reconfiguration of internal spaces comprising: Removal of partition walls; construction of new partition walls; installation of platform lift and refurbishment of toilets. All discharge of the conditions has been submitted.

Application Number	Site Address	Development Description	Status	Date Registered	Decision
2025/1156/L	53 Gordon Square London Camden WC1H 0PD	Discharge of condition 4b of listed consent application 2024/4482/L regarding doors architraces and mouldings.	REGISTERED	17-03-2025	
2025/1138/L	53 Gordon Square London Camden WC1H 0PD	Discharge of condition 4 of listed buildings consent application 2024/4483/L regarding fireplaces.	REGISTERED	17-03-2025	
2025/0721/L	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Discharge of condition 4 of listed building consent application 2024/4483/L regarding details of a platform lift.	FINAL DECISION	25-02-2025	Granted
2024/4483/L	53 Gordon Square London Camden WC1H 0PD	<div>Development Description</div> The reconfiguration of internal spaces comprising: Removal of partition walls; construction of new partition walls; installation of platform lift and refurbishment of toilets.	FINAL DECISION	21-10-2024	Granted
2012/3582/P	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Details pertaining to condition 4 (external elevation fittings) of planning permission ref. 2009/5727/P for the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1), decided 12/03/2010.	FINAL DECISION	17-07-2012	Granted
2012/2152/L	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Installation of an external ramp and steps with balustrade to provide an accessible entrance to building in education use (Class D1).	WITHDRAWN	26-04-2012	Withdrawn Decision
2012/2151/P	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Installation of an external ramp and steps with balustrade to provide an accessible entrance to building in education use (Class D1).	WITHDRAWN	26-04-2012	Withdrawn Decision
2012/2033/P	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Removal of condition 5 (details of proposed external cleaning of brickwork) of listed building consent granted 12/03/10 (Ref: 2009/5734/L) for internal works and work associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	16-04-2012	Granted
2012/1347/L	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Details pursuant to condition 4 (written specification/method statement of damp proofing and tanking works) of Listed Building Consent dated 12/03/10 (Ref 2009/5734/L) for internal works associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	16-04-2012	Granted
2009/5734/L	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Internal works and work associated with the installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	21-01-2010	Granted

Application Number	Site Address	Development Description	Status	Date Registered	Decision
<u>2009/5727/P</u>	53 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0DP	The installation of a new door within a wall to the gallery of the building in education use (Class D1).	FINAL DECISION	21-01-2010	Granted
<u>2004/4869/L</u>	Percival David Foundation 53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Installation of lighting and fire alarm system throughout building	FINAL DECISION	24-05-2005	Granted
<u>2005/0501/L</u>	53 Gordon Square London WC1H 0PD	Internal alterations involving the removal of a stud partition and 2 doors and insertion of 2 new stud partitions and doors to form disabled persons wc and store room at rear ground floor level.	FINAL DECISION	17-02-2005	Granted
<u>L9601929</u>	53 Gordon Square, WC1	Internal alterations comprising damp-proof works and various external alterations, as shown on drawing numbers 4471/1 to /4, and 4702/1 to /3.	FINAL DECISION	26-06-1996	Grant L B Consent with Conditions
<u>8770258</u>	53 Gordon Square WC1	Internal alterations to create a seminar/meeting room on 3rd floor.As shown on drawing numbered SVE 46.6.	FINAL DECISION	29-05-1987	Grant List.Build. or Cons.Area Consent
<u>8570258</u>	53 Gordon Square WC1	The erection of a metal framed poster display case 4' 8" x 3' 4" to be fixed to the railings to the left of the entrance. ^As shown on drawing nos:CW/PDF/1 & 1A.	FINAL DECISION	15-08-1985	Grant List.Build. or Cons.Area Consent
<u>8580194</u>	53 Gordon Square WC1	The erection of a metal framed poster display case 4' 8" x 3' 4" to be fixed to the railings to the left of the entrance. ^As shown on drawing nos:CW/PDF/1 & 1A. ^Period of consent:1st November 1985 - 31st October 1990	FINAL DECISION	02-08-1985	Grant Approval for Advertisement
<u>HB2596/R1</u>	53 Gordon Square & 45 Tavistock Square, WC1	The ereation of a second storey in the gallery involving alterations to the entrance hall at 53 Gordon Square and raising the wall of the gallery between the properties.	FINAL DECISION	14-01-1981	Conditional
<u>31734/R1</u>	53 Gordon Square & 45 Tavistook Square, WC1	The erection of a second storey in the gallery, involving alterations to the entrance hall at 53 Gordon Square, and raising the wall of the gallery between these properties.	FINAL DECISION	14-01-1981	Conditional
<u>M13/16/E/737</u>	No. 53 Gordon Square, Camden,	The use of the third floor of No. 53 Gordon Square, Camden, for University purposes.	FINAL DECISION	29-07-1965	Permission

5. Proposed Scheme

5.1 Vision

SOAS is home to leading research and expertise on the global issues of today. Students engage with academics on these issues throughout their study. It is uniquely placed to inform and shape current thinking about the economic, political, cultural, security and religious challenges of our world. Its 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.

Given its international reputation, SOAS often hosts visiting international academics, researchers, and VIPs with an interest in the wide and varied research that is undertaken at School. Despite this, SOAS does not have a suitable space for hosting these important guests and visitors. This is very much in contrast to the Colleges of Oxford or Cambridge, which are renowned for their historic dining halls and senior common rooms. This is a missed opportunity for SOAS, limiting the scope for the school to build on its international reputation and develop these relationships with visitors and attract the highest calibre staff and researchers.

As part of the Estates Strategy the school has sought to identify an opportunity to create a high-quality meeting/dining space, where important visitors and academic staff can meet comfortably. This space will also provide the setting for the all-important work of attracting philanthropic supporters.



Figure 2: Dining Room Visual

5.2 Existing Layout

53 Gordon Square has undergone some external and internal alterations to facilitate its change of use. Although original plans have not been obtained for 53 Gordon Square, drainage plans were uncovered dating from the 1900s and 1950s. Part of the brief for the 1950 works at 53 Gordon Square was to accommodate SOAS's Percival David Collection of Chinese Ceramics. The 1950s works were undertaken pre-listing. There were several phases of alterations including the 1950s, late-20th century (including 1987 and 1996 works and 21st century interventions – these works often related to improving the accessibility of the university building. Planning applications were submitted in 1987 (Planning Ref: 8770258), 1996 (Planning Ref: L9601929), 2005, 2009 (Planning Ref: 2009/5727/P and 2009/5734/L) and 2012.

The fourth floor was used for accommodation. On this floor, the landing was privatised - a partition and door were added at the top of the stairs. The front room (west) was divided into two with a store (north) and a sitting room (south). The kitchen was centrally located and in 1950, the proportions of this room were reduced with the removal of a partition and new partition and door added to align to the bedroom's north partition – rear room. The bathroom was also no longer accessed off the half landing and instead a door was added to the eastern end of the hall. This layout remained the same in the 1996 application and was only altered in 2009 with the removal of the doorway/ lobby at the top of the stairs and the reinstatement of the landing area.

5.3 Proposed works

The proposals seek to convert the fourth floor of the building, which is current a flat, for entertainment use. In summary, the proposals include:

- Layout changes including enlarging existing openings and removing partitions (all later partitions);
- Removing current kitchen and bathroom fittings and installing replacements;
- Renewal of finishes throughout;
- Reinstatement of a chimneypiece;
- New lighting and sockets;
- Revisions to services, including the introduction of A/C;
- Installation of a condensing unit on the chimneystack, concealed within the roof valley.

6. Design

The existing flat on the 4th floor of SOAS's Gordon Square Building is notably devoid of genuine period details, with flush veneered doors and modern torus skirting & architraves. In designing the conversion, we were keen to avoid creating a pastiche of a historical interior that never existed in this part of the building, but to specify the interior in a way that was more sympathetic to the detailing of the rest of the building, including the Holden conversion of the mid-twentieth century.

We were given a clear steer by the Client that the space should convey a quality that lived up to the interiors found in some of the University's other buildings such as the Senate House.

The design aims to create a flow, from the repositioned entrance door into the ante-room through a new set of double doors into the dining space. In order to create a space sufficiently large for 16-18 people to dine, we have proposed that the two front rooms are opened into one. The kitchen and WC are formed from existing spaces.

Our scheme is intended to also be appropriate to the scale of the spaces, which are relatively small and have low ceilings. We have used joinery pieces to create additional storage rather than creating separate rooms.

To accommodate the increased occupancy, air conditioning has become necessary, together with mechanical ventilation and heat recovery. These units have been concealed as far as possible, with the air handling unit in the loft space, and the air conditioner concealed under a bespoke cover, with matching covers being proposed for radiators to provide a consistent appearance. Vents on the roof will be of lead, and designed to suit a slate roof, and the condenser is hidden in the valley of the roof making it invisible from street level.

6.1 Use

The fourth floor of 53 Gordon Square would provide a high-quality meeting and entertaining space for senior staff and visiting guests and dignitaries. This space currently contains ancillary residential accommodation with a very low occupation, which with space at a premium within the University and is not a viable use of their property.

The works to No.53 form part of a programme of improvements to Gordon Square (and the wider University Estates Strategy). As a direct consequence of making better use of the space, the proposed use will result in increased occupancy of the space and given that this is at the top of the building, with limited natural ventilation, increased occupation will result in overheating. To successfully accommodate increased occupancy in this space needs to have some limited air conditioning.

6.2 Appearance

The overall appearance is contemporary but with classical detailing, creating a premium environment that will be suitable for the activities that the University hope to undertake in the space, helping them to achieve the full-potential of SOAS.

6.3 Landscape

Not relevant to this application.

7. Access

Currently, access to the building is through the main stepped entrance. There is also side entrance that allows disabled access for the ground floor only. A new platform lift and ramp has been consented to allow access to the lower and ground floor as well, which provides accessible toilets and showers.

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

However, there is no disabled access to the proposed fourth floor due the historic constraints of the building.

8. Planning Assessment

8.1 Heritage

Policy Context

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: Statute regarding the heritage environment is relevant to this application.

Section 66(1) states that:

"In considering whether to grant planning permission [F1 or 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."

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.

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 M1 Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 [F2 and sections 70 and 73 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993]."

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.

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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

53 Gordon Square - Significance

Architectural and Aesthetic Interest

The principal front (west) and side (south) elevations are generally little altered and feature decorative embellishments including deep overhanging cornices, rusticated stucco quoins, Doric style portico and alternating rusticated and plain ground floors – overall they are of high architectural interest. However, two of its windows on the south elevation were adapted in c.1950, which has reduced its symmetry slightly.

The rear elevation is typically much plainer and was altered and extended principally at basement and ground level in the early 1950s to create a basement reading/library space and ground floor gallery. This extension is situated behind the screen wall and connects to the basement at 45 Tavistock Square. It is of moderate-low architectural interest.

Internally, the property has been substantially altered and lost many of its architectural features of aesthetic and architectural interest. The key element which survives almost intact is the principal staircase, which makes a high contribution to the building's architectural interest. The principal floors – ground and first – are the most significant, however they have been significantly altered. The basement, second and third floors with their plainer finishes and more altered states are of proportionately lower significance. The c.1950 works generally removed historic planform and features and their architectural interest is low, however they add a certain layer of interest through their association with Charles Holden and with the addition of 'Deco' cornices and the quirky lift.

The fourth floor was similarly converted in the 1950s. Several historic partitions were removed, such as the landing partition, and a series of modern partitions added altering the planform and volume of spaces on this floor. The landing partition was inserted in the 21st century.

The finishes at this level are all modern and are of no architectural interest. In summary, the architectural and artistic interest of the exterior of 53 Gordon Square is considered to be **medium-high** and for the interior it is **low-medium**.

Historic and Cultural Interest

53 Gordon Square derives its historic interest from its association with the Bedford Estate and renowned Victorian builders Thomas and Lewis Cubitt. The building is also of historic interest as a terrace house built in the later stages of Bloomsbury's development and stalled by the Napoleonic War. Later it was used as a convent (in the early-20th century), which affords it some historic interest. It holds historic, and more so cultural interest, for its association with SOAS (from 1951-present day) – a major higher education institution which was established in 1916. Further interest can be attributed to its connection with Charles Holden (1875-1960), who worked on the alterations to the building in the 1950s

as well as the wider masterplan for the Bloomsbury university precinct. The building is also significant for its exhibitions and the collections it has held, including the Percival David Collection of Chinese Ceramics. The fabric of the building is also of evidential value given its age and materials including stock brick, stucco and cast iron - which reflects the skills and craftsmanship in the 19th century.

The historical interest of the building is therefore considered to be **medium-high**.

Overall, the significance of 53 Gordon Square is considered to be **medium** owing to its architectural and historic interest – as a fine external example of stucco Italianate terrace situated on a formal garden square. This layout and arrangement are very particular to this part of London. The property is significant for its association with Thomas and Lewis Cubitt, SOAS and Charles Holden. The impact of the individual elements of the scheme are set out below:

The proposals and their impact on the Significance of the Heritage Assets

Internal Alterations

It is proposed to form a new opening from the landing into the hallway and to block the existing one; remove the partitions from the front of the building to form one single room; form a double width opening between the front and central room; enlarge the opening from the hallway into the central room to create a double width opening; and remove a partition and door within the hallway. This would create a dining room at the front, a lounge at the centre, a kitchen to the rear and a WC tucked behind the stair (current location of the bathroom).

As demonstrated in the morphology drawing below, these proposals would affect non-original partitions and planform which are of no particular significance – therefore they would have a neutral impact on the significance of the listed building. The removal of the lobby from the front room would clarify the planform and would be beneficial.

1. Fourth Floor: Layout

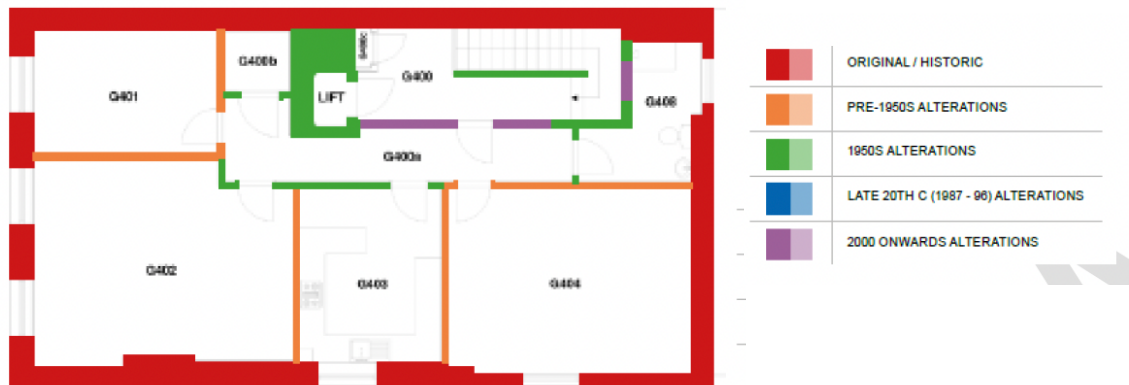


Figure 52 Morphology drawing of the fourth floor



Figure 53 Proposed fabric removal (Story Design), red denoted fabric removal

Given that this floor will be used for entertainment and will host larger numbers of people, the spaces require comfort cooling. Within the spaces, this would be accommodated beneath two windows – one in the front and another in the central room, set behind a panelled timber casing, to match the radiator covers (also proposed). There would also be a supply and return grille within each of the three main spaces, these would be colour-matched to the ceiling to ensure it is a subtle addition. The pipework would run above the ceiling (within the loft) and would drop down to the unit (chased into the walls, dia 6mm).

The units beneath windows would appear as a typical radiator cover and would have no adverse impact on the character of the spaces and therefore significance of the listed building. The installation of grilles has been carefully designed to be unobtrusive, with minimal loss of historic fabric. The installation of pipework would affect historic wall fabric, causing a minor degree of harm.

New directional spotlights for artwork are proposed within the front room, and recessed spotlights within the central room, the hallway and the WC (there are currently spotlights

within all aforementioned spaces). Wall lights are proposed within the front room and central room. A shallow oval in plan glass chandelier is proposed in the front room.

Ventilation is not required within the Kitchen as its specification/use is for reheating only. Within the existing bathroom some limited additional ventilation is proposed comprising a small ceiling vent, which would expel at roof level within the valley (see roof proposals).

Fourth Floor: Joinery, Finishes and Fittings

New features and fittings are proposed including new full-height timber-framed glazed cupboards within the front room (dining room) tucked against the lift wall; low cupboards within the central room, set against the hall wall; and full-height timber-framed cupboards at the end of the hallway.

New floor finishes include parquet in the hallway, front and central rooms; tile within the WC and within the kitchen a suitably hardwearing finish.

The modern doors would be replaced with timber three-panel doors, some with vision panels or more fully glazed timber framed doors with an Art Deco type glazing pattern. The modern architraves and skirtings would be replaced with ogee and torus mouldings akin to those found on the floors below.

Within the front room (dining room) a chimneypiece is Renaissance London, Bolection in Breche Violet marble surround, the insert tiles are TBC. The spaces would all be redecorated, with new paintwork. The WC would feature marble up to dado-height, scribed around the window architrave. The modern cavetto cornice in the 'front of house' spaces would be replaced in lieu of a moulded cornice, 'Birkdale', which would be more appropriate to the character and age of the property.

The fabric and character of these spaces have been considerably altered previously and so these proposals would have a **neutral impact**. The reinstatement of more appropriate architraves and cornices, and an opening and chimneypiece in the front room would improve the character of this spaces and would be beneficial.

External Alterations

Roof

To serve the air conditioning at fourth floor, it is proposed to fit a small condensing unit within the valley of the hipped roof. It would be fixed to the chimneybreast, fixing into

mortar joints rather than brickwork. This location has been carefully selected and the unit would be carefully located below the ridgeline to ensure that it is not visible in public views. Given that the roof is not hipped to the north, there is the potential for it to be visible in very limited views from 45 Tavistock Square, at attic level only.

The fixing of this unit would cause no harm to significant fabric given that they would be in localised areas of mortar, which is easily repairable.

The unit would be concealed from public views and so the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area would be neutral.

The unit may be visible in only very limited – not key - views from the attic level of 45 Tavistock Square; however, given that this may only be possible in glimpsed views, the setting of 45 Tavistock Square would overall be preserved. The contribution which 53 Gordon Square makes to its setting would not be affected.

The impact on the significance of 53 Gordon Square itself would be neutral given that the unit would, if anything, read alongside the pop-up roof access in this glimpsed view from 45 Tavistock Square.

Summary

In summary, the proposals have been developed to ensure the required entertainment facilities can be accommodated within 53 Gordon Square in a sensitive manner – by locating them at fourth floor, which is of low significance. There are instances where the proposals have the potential to cause some very minor harm including minor penetrations / new service runs and the installation ventilation grilles. Where there are opportunities for enhancement, they have been taken and the proposals also include the amelioration of planform, improvements to the decorative scheme and the reinstatement of a historically-appropriate chimneypiece in the front room – overall enhancing the character of the building. 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

8.2 Noise

A Plant Noise assessment has been carried out in accordance with BS4142 and the requirements of the Camden London Borough Council. The results of the measurements have been used to determine the required criteria for atmospheric noise emissions from the proposed plant installation. Noise calculations based on the plant have been undertaken to the nearest noise sensitive receptor. The results of the assessment indicate that atmospheric noise emissions from the plant are predicted to comfortably achieve the criteria required by the Council without the need for mitigation. Please refer to the Plant Noise assessment report for more information.

8.3 Public Benefit

The proposed scheme of the fourth floor of 53 Gordon Square represents a significant opportunity for SOAS to enhance the effective use of its estate. Currently, this space is used as ancillary residential accommodation, which has an extremely low occupancy rate. Therefore, repurposing this space ensures more efficient use of the SOAS estate. Given that space within the University is at a premium, maintaining such a low-utilisation use is neither viable nor efficient. By repurposing this space for directly related university activities, SOAS will ensure that it is used to support its mission of research, academic engagement, and international collaboration.

Given its international reputation, SOAS often hosts visiting international academics, researchers, and VIPs with an interest in the wide and varied research that is undertaken at School. Despite this, SOAS does not have a suitable space for hosting these important guests and visitors. This is very much in contrast to the Colleges of Oxford or Cambridge, which are renowned for their historic dining halls and senior common rooms. Thus, the proposed scheme will address this shortcoming by creating a high-quality meeting and dining space, enabling SOAS to fully capitalise on the opportunities these visits present.

Further, a dedicated meeting and entertaining space is essential for engaging with potential donors, alumni and external partners. Philanthropy is a critical component of SOAS's financial sustainability. By providing a setting where this relationship can be cultivated, the proposal directly contributes to the long term success and growth of SOAS.

This proposed scheme is part of a wider programme of improvements under the University Estates Strategy, aimed at optimising SOAS's property portfolio and ensuring that all spaces serve meaningful function. The proposed changes will help increase the overall occupancy of the building making better use of the valuable real estate in central London that aligns with SOAS' strategic objectives.

In summary, the public benefit of this scheme allows SOAS to improve the functionality of the estate whilst it will also contribute to the University's continued growth, international reputation, and financial sustainability.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this PDAS has outlined the rationale and necessity for the internal reconfiguration of the SOAS 53 Gordon Square Building (Grade II Listed). The proposal includes:

Installation of air-conditioning for fourth floor only comprising installation of condensing unit on roof and associated internal alteration including new services within roof space and ceiling grilles. Re-organisation of fourth floor comprising: removal of internal partitions and doors; removing current kitchen and bathroom fittings and installing replacements; renewal of finishes throughout; reinstatement of a chimneypiece; new lighting and sockets and associated works.

This scheme is grounded in a design approach that balances heritage conservation with the practical needs of the University.

In regard to heritage, please refer to the accompanying Heritage Impact Assessment. It identifies the historic significance of the building. In summary, the proposals have been developed to ensure the required entertainment facilities can be accommodated within 53 Gordon Square in a sensitive manner – by locating them at fourth floor, which is of low significance. There are instances where the proposals have the potential to cause some very minor harm including minor penetrations / new service runs and the installation ventilation grilles. Where there are opportunities for enhancement, they have been taken and the proposals also include the amelioration of planform, improvements to the decorative scheme and the reinstatement of a historically-appropriate chimneypiece in the front room – overall enhancing the character of the building.

The public benefit of the proposed scheme is substantial. It enables SOAS to effectively use its estate, in a cost efficient and effective way. As highlighted in Section 8, the fourth floor space is at a premium within the University and is not viable for this low occupation use to continue. the public benefit of this scheme allows SOAS to improve the functionality of the estate whilst it will also contribute to the University's continued growth, international reputation, and financial sustainability.

The proposed scheme provides SOAS an effective space that secures long-term viability of 53 Gordon Square as key facility for SOAS, while respecting and enhancing its historical character.