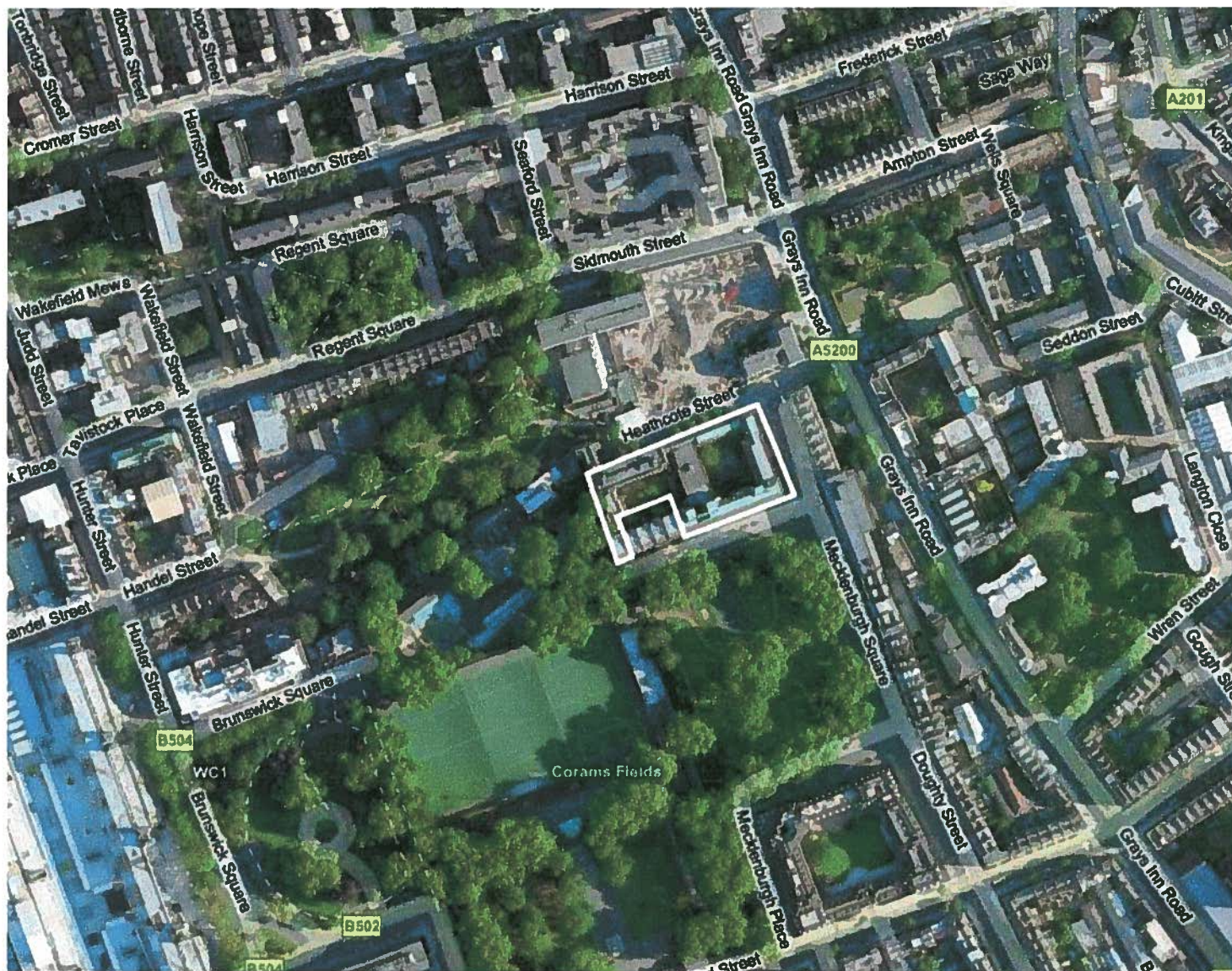


# William Goodenough House

## Mecklenburgh Square



*Listed Building Conservation Area & Historic Gardens Appraisal  
on behalf of Goodenough College*

*By Sir Andrew Derbyshire*

*February 2010*

# **WILLIAM GOODENOUGH HOUSE, Mecklenburgh Square**

## **Listed Building, Conservation Area & Historic Gardens Appraisal**

**By Sir Andrew Derbyshire**

**22 ii 10**

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Ref:Projects/Goodenough/22ii10

## **1, Background**

1.1, I was formerly Chairman and later President of RMJM Architects, Engineers and Planners and in 1986 was knighted for services to Architecture. In advising on listing issues and development in Conservation Areas my clients include the University of York in the early 60's, (Heslington Hall and King's Manor), the London Docklands Development Corporation, the Royal Mint and, more recently, Sheffield City Council, the Borough Councils of Darlington and Reading and the Scottish Widows Investment Partnership.

1.2, In November 2009 I was invited by Colliers CRE to advise on the acceptability of proposed developments at William Goodenough House bearing in mind the requirements of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and the sensitivity of adjacent listed buildings. William Goodenough House is at the northern end of Mecklenburgh Square and combines with London House at the southern end to form Goodenough College.

1.3, The college was founded in 1930, initially as a residential college for students from the Dominions, and now consists of a community of 650 postgraduate students from over ninety countries. Goodenough House is predominantly devoted to student residence while London House provides communal facilities as well as residence. The two buildings are linked by the Mecklenburgh Square Gardens which are owned by the College and provide a green lung for the whole institution as well as local residents.

## **2, The Proposed Development**

2.1, Fig 2.1 shows the site with the building edged in red and blue bounded on the north by Heathcote Street, on the east by Mecklenburgh Street and on the south by Mecklenburgh Square. On the west the site overlooks St George's and Coram's Gardens. The north side of Heathcote Street includes the entrance to St George's Gardens, some pseudo-Georgian housing known as Grayland Court and Westminster Kingsway College. This is the largest of the six centres of the further education college and is housed in a new building completed in early 2009.

2.2, The aerial view of the William Goodenough House in Fig 2.2 shows that the west wing is 5 storeys high plus a basement, as is the north wing facing Heathcote Street as far as the entrance archway to the inner courtyard, beyond which it loses two storeys, Fig 2.3. The east wing is mainly 4 storeys plus a basement facing Mecklenburgh Street, Fig 2.4, and the south wing facing Mecklenburgh Square is five storeys high plus a basement, Fig 2.5. There is a block linking the north and south wings internally and dividing the interior space into two courtyards. This internal block is called the Elysium and is predominantly three storeys high except for a two storey section containing a double height Common Room on the ground floor.

2.3, The proposed development is designed to increase the residential accommodation by adding floors to different parts of the building. The additions are confined to the three blocks of the building edged in red in Fig 2.1. It is proposed to raise the height of the north block by one floor and a mansard storey with dormers to match the existing building at the corner of Heathcote Street

and Mecklenburgh Street. The junction is made at the archway which gives access to the interior courtyard. Fig 2.6 shows the proposed and existing elevations to Heathcote Street with a view looking west down the street. The roof of the east block facing Mecklenburgh Street is raised to match as shown in Fig 2.7 which illustrates the proposed and existing elevations with a view looking south down the street towards Mecklenburgh Square. This brings it into greater conformity with the façade facing the Square. The internal elevations to the courtyard are dealt with in a similar way. The west block, (Elysium), is increased in height by two storeys to suit. Fig 2.8 shows the east elevation to the courtyard and its relationship to the additional two storeys on the north wing facing Heathcote Street. The west elevation is substantially the same.

2.4, Fig 2.9 shows the detail of the additional two floors on the north block with masonry string courses at first floor and parapet level and party walls protruding above the mansard roof. The materials used for the additions to the north and east blocks are the same as those of the existing buildings, (yellow stock brick, dark blue slate and timber sash windows). The fenestration follows the same pattern with gauged brick flat arches to the sashes. The elevations to the west block, Elysium, are different for structural reasons but use the same vocabulary with the addition of masonry beams and columns to support the additional floors over the Common Room, and attached brick piers elsewhere, Fig 2.8.

### **3, The Architectural and Environmental Context**

3.1, Mecklenburgh Street is a terrace of eight houses and is listed Grade II, (Fig 3.1). It was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century of yellow stock brick with four storeys and a basement, gauged brick flat arches to recessed sashes and continuous cast iron balconies to the first floor. The doorways have round arches with attached quarter columns, jambs and cornices in plaster.

3.2, Mecklenburgh Square, a much larger and more flamboyant affair, is a terrace of 24 houses, (four storeys and basements), by Joseph Kay forming the east side of the Square. It is listed Grade II\* and was built between 1810 and 1820, (Fig 3.2). A central and two end pavilions are enriched in stucco with attached ionic columns, cornice mouldings and entablature. The houses in between are more subdued in multi-coloured stock brick although the rusticated ground floor and cornice continue in plaster. All the houses have cast iron balconies at the first floor.

3.3, Numbers 43 to 47 on the north side of Mecklenburgh Square form a terrace of 5 houses, (Fig 3.3). They are listed Grade II and were built in 1824-5 by Joseph Kay in a similar style to the middle houses in the east side of the Square with a rusticated ground floor and cornice in stucco and continuous balconies to the first floor.

3.4, St George's Gardens were formed from the Victorian amalgamation of two adjoining 18th century burial grounds. They are listed Grade II\* in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, and are laid out as lawns with mature trees and interesting relics from the graveyards of the past, (Figs 3.4 & 5). Coram's Gardens to the south are reminders of the Foundling Hospital and include sports pitches and children's play areas. Both areas of open space are preserved as much valued facilities for rest and recreation. Various listed artifacts such as railings, gates, walls, graves and lodges are scattered about to form a kind of open air museum.

3.5, Figs 3.6 – 7 show a succession of views looking west along Heathcote Street from its junction with Gray's Inn Road. Prominent are Grayland Court and, facing Goodenough House on the opposite side of the road, the new building of Westminster Kingsway College. This is in yellow stock brick four storeys high with a recessed top floor.

#### **4, The Planning Context – Constraints and Criteria**

4.1, The site lies towards the east of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, (Fig 4.1). This stipulates a number of constraints to development and describes design principles which are supported and amplified in Planning Policy Guidance statements (including PPG15), the London Plan, UDP policies and the Bloomsbury Conservation Character Area Appraisal. Some of these are statutory and some advisory and the key policies have been summarised in Section 6.0 of the Planning Statement which accompanied the planning application.

4.2, The main emphasis of these policies is that developments should respect the site and its setting, seek to improve the attractiveness of the area and do no harm to its appearance and amenity and, in particular, in respect of that part of the area we are considering, should recognise the original Georgian design principles to which it owes much of its character. This is a tall order considering that Mecklenburgh Square and its environs are widely regarded as one of the gems of the Georgian town house tradition.

4.3, As far as listed buildings are concerned – and this must include St George's Gardens – the rule is that, even though they themselves are not being touched, the development should do no harm to their setting. What "setting" means in this context is a matter of judgement but is generally taken to mean that views to and from the listed structures should not be materially altered.

#### **5, Appraisal**

5.1, How far does the William Goodenough House respond to the exhortations of the design guidance and conservation principles described above? – especially when considered in the context of Mecklenburgh Square. It has to be admitted to begin with that Goodenough House as a whole departs from the Georgian town house tradition in that it is five storeys high not four and the proportions of its fenestration are not the same as the Georgian window proportions which are characterised by a tall *piano nobile* sash on the first floor. It is also without balconies and the elevations lack the customary stucco of rusticated ground floor and doorways, attached columns, cornices and entablature celebrated in the bravura centre and end pavilions of the Mecklenburgh Terrace.

5.2, However, times change. The economics of twentieth century student residence are very different from the ambitions of the rich economic migrants of the earlier century and generate a different architectural language. Thus it is that the existing building stock of Goodenough College is already five storeys high and the "before and after" drawings show that a rounding off of the profile of the block benefits the street scene. Furthermore the continuation of masonry string courses and the addition of party wall extensions above roof level on the new Heathcote Street frontage are a further reference to the Georgian tradition. The proposals for the Elysium wing also demonstrate a marked improvement on what is there at the moment, (Fig 2.8).

5.3, The first positive thing to be said about the impact of the development on listed structures is to point out that St George's and Coram's Gardens, which are already overlooked by five storeys and a basement of Goodenough House, are too far away to be affected by the additional floors. Secondly the addition of dormer windows to the sloping roof of the frontage to Mecklenburgh Street is such a slight increase in height as to make an insignificant difference to the listed terrace opposite. The third listed structures to be considered are the five houses on the north side of Mecklenburgh Square, (Nos 43-7). The only change which could affect them is the two storey addition to Elysium and this is invisible from their frontage. The ambience of their backs on the other hand can only be improved by the additions to Elysium. This leaves for consideration the two storey addition to the major frontage to Heathcote Street which will not be visible from any of the listed locations.

## **6, Conclusion**

6.1, The William Goodenough development makes a positive contribution to the existing street scene by filling in the gaps in the existing irregular roof profiles – particularly on Heathcote Street. The changes to the Elysium block are also very welcome. Yellow stock bricks, slate roofs and gauged flat arches to sash windows also use the correct vocabulary. It cannot possibly be argued that it does any more harm to the appearance and amenity of the area than the existing college buildings and the recently completed Westminster Kingsway College; on the contrary it can be said that it will conserve it. It is also a compelling fact that they add up to a convincing precedent. Neither is any harm done to the historic or architectural setting of the listed structures. I conclude therefore that the proposed extensions broadly satisfy the criteria set out in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 above and that there is therefore no case for rejecting them.

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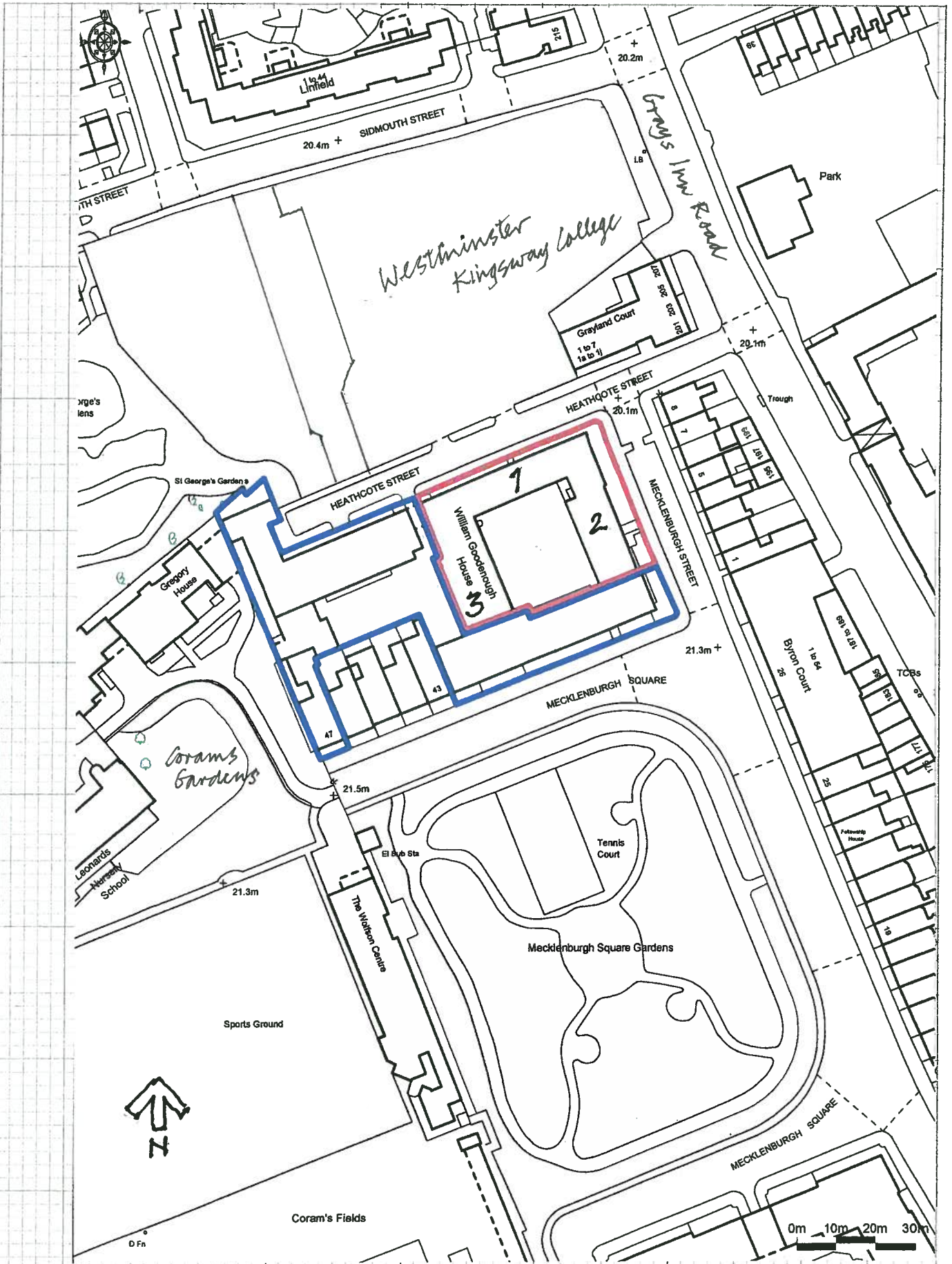


Fig 2.1 Site Plan



Building to be modified

- 1 - North block
- 2 - East block
- 3 - West block

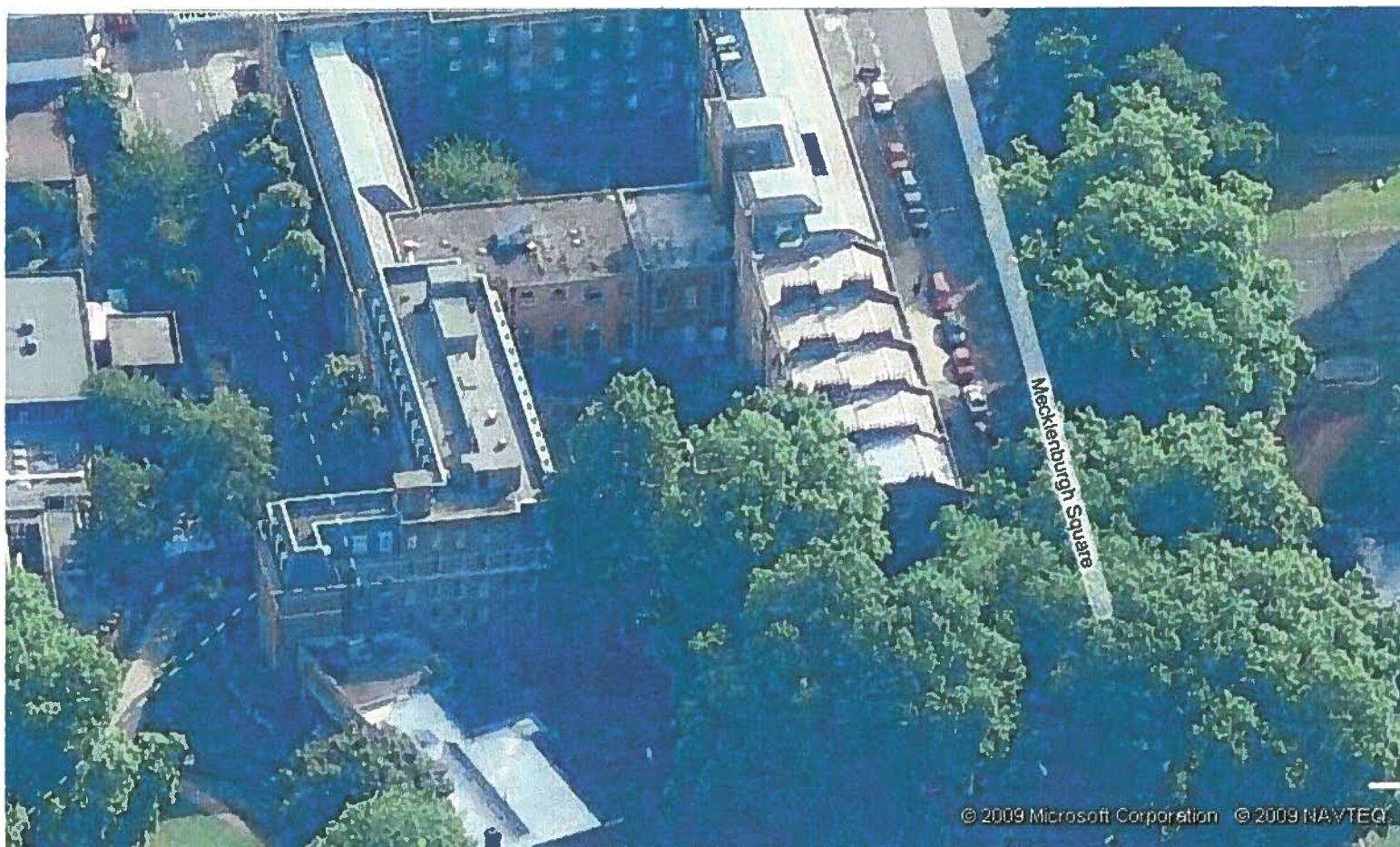


Fig 2.2 View from the west showing the west wing overlooking St George's Gardens

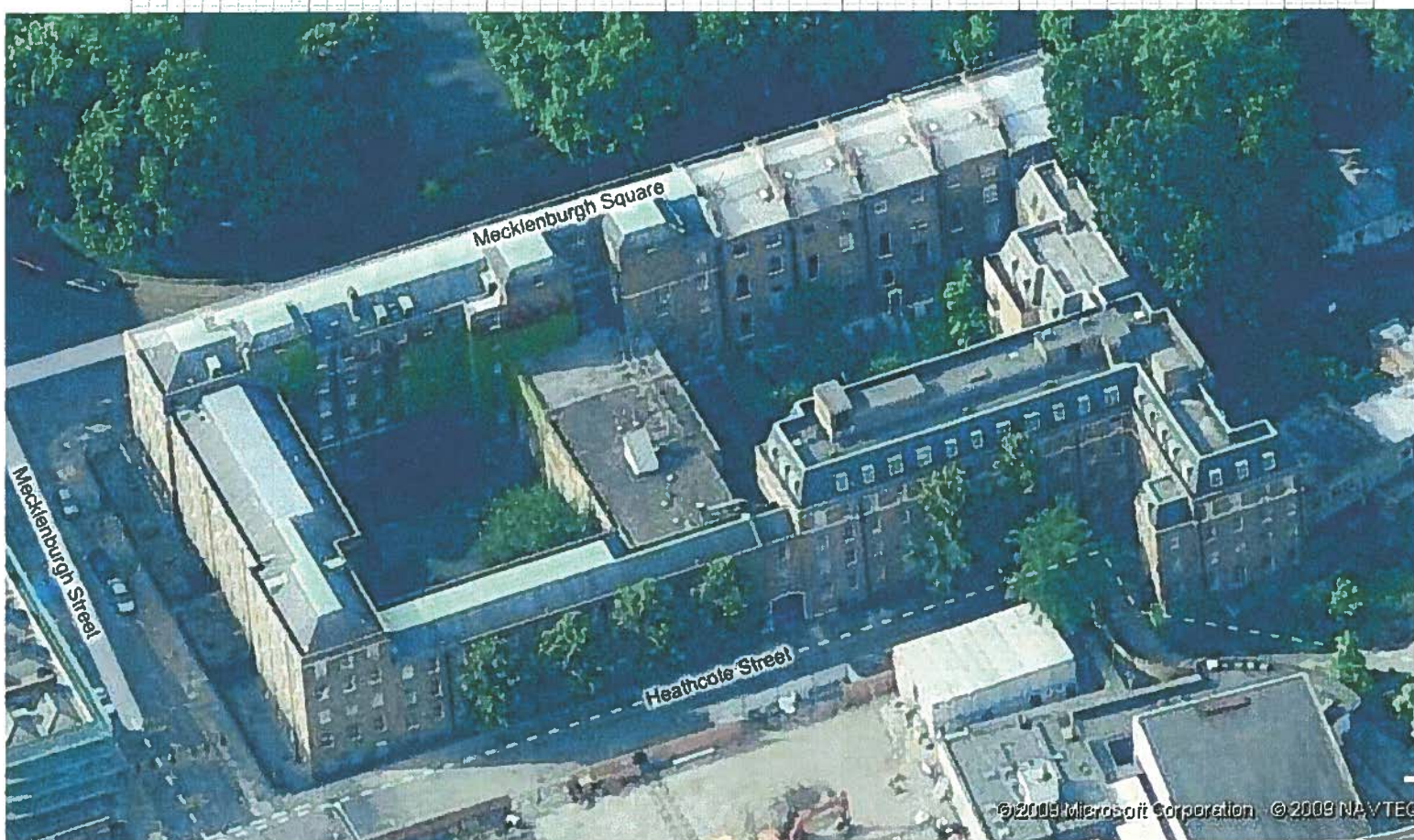


Fig 2.3 View from the north showing the north wing facing Heathcote Street

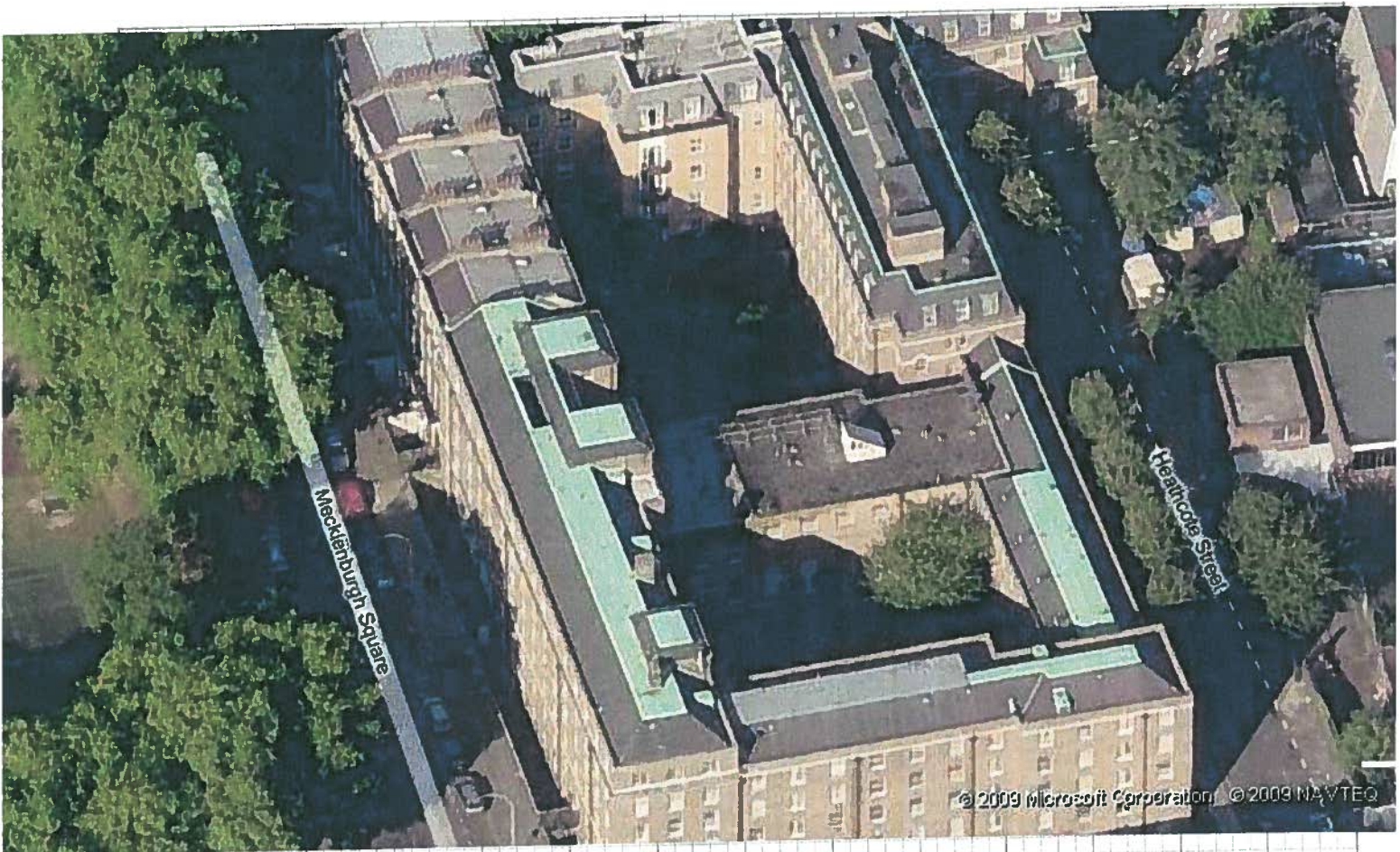


Fig 2.4 View from the east showing the east wing facing Mecklenburgh Street

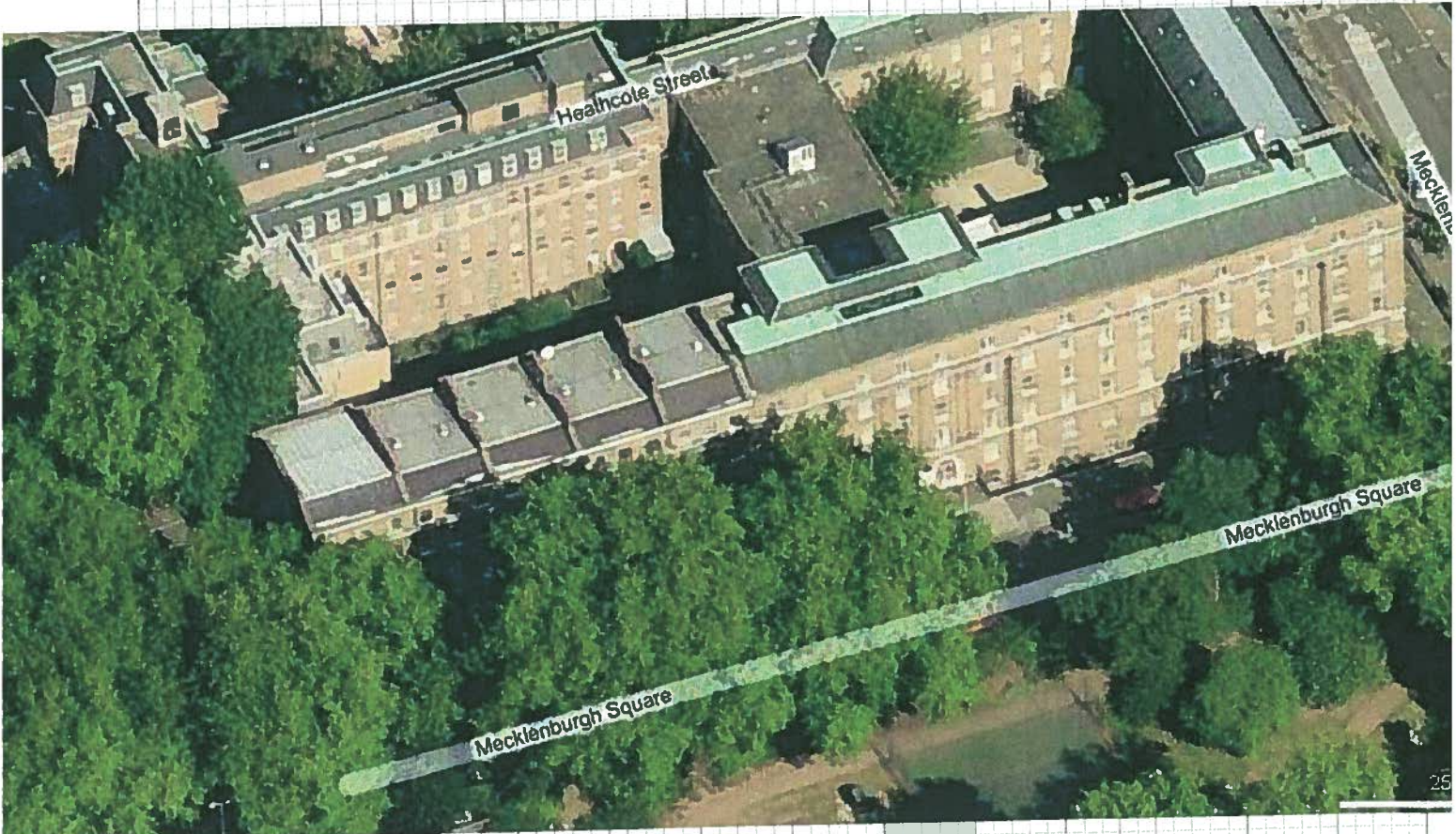


Fig 2.5 View from the south overlooking Mecklenburgh Square  
The five houses on the left are listed Grade II.

Alter pitch of existing mansard and provide new dormers all to match existing

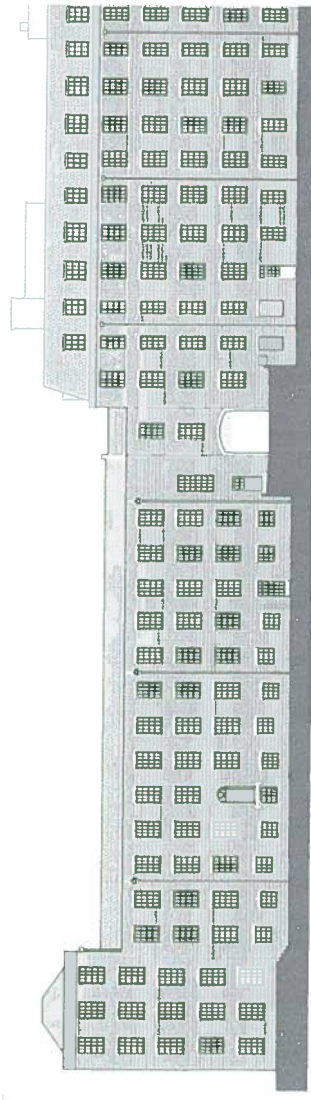
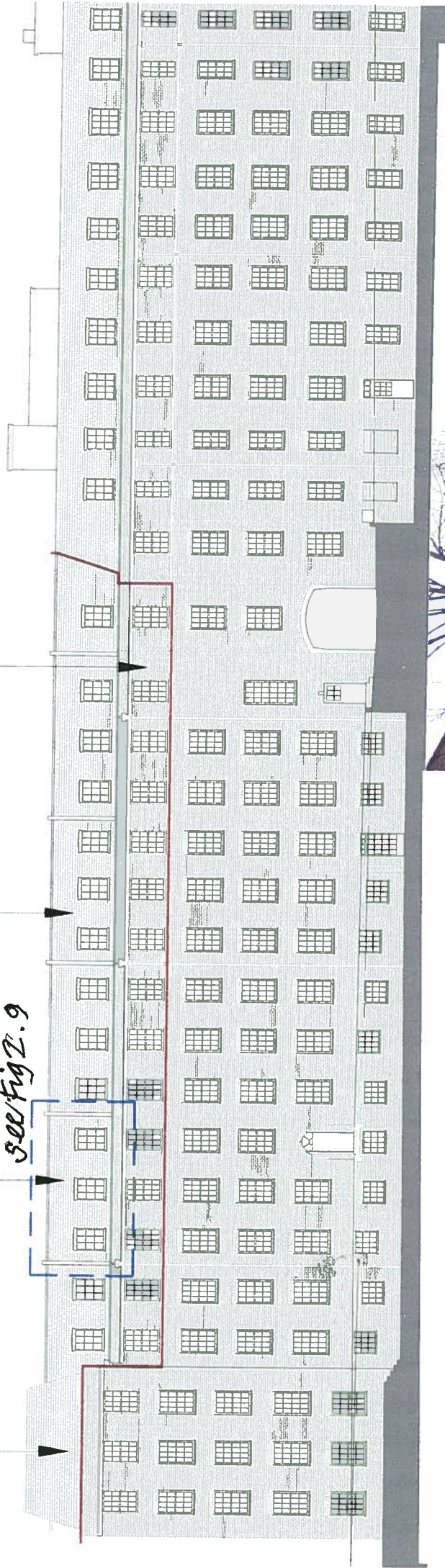
Please refer to existing drawing SK-202/01 for more information

Additional Fourth floor constructed as a mansard with dormer windows all to match existing

Additional Third floor constructed in masonry with fenestration all to match existing

*PROPOSED*

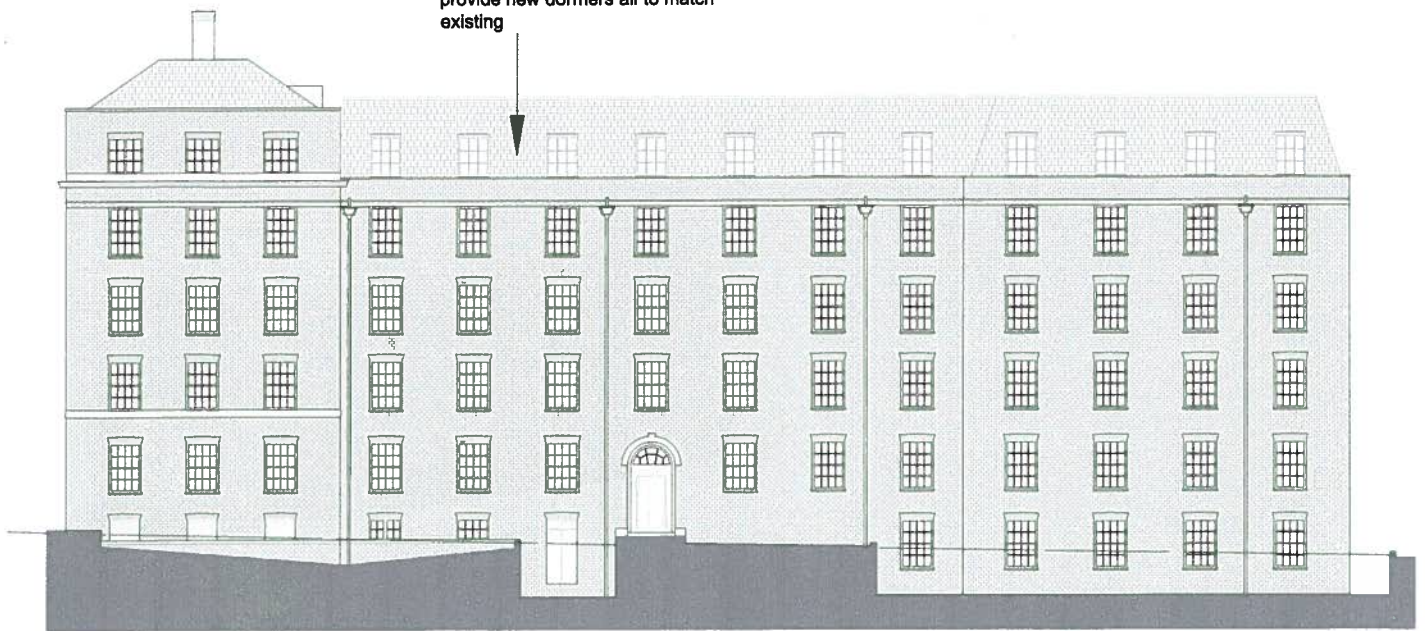
*see Fig 2.9*



*EXISTING*

*Fig 2.6 Heatnote Street frontage*

Alter pitch of existing mansard and provide new dormers all to match existing



PROPOSED

EXISTING

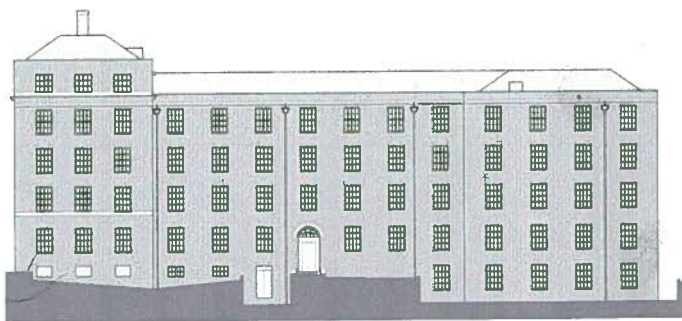
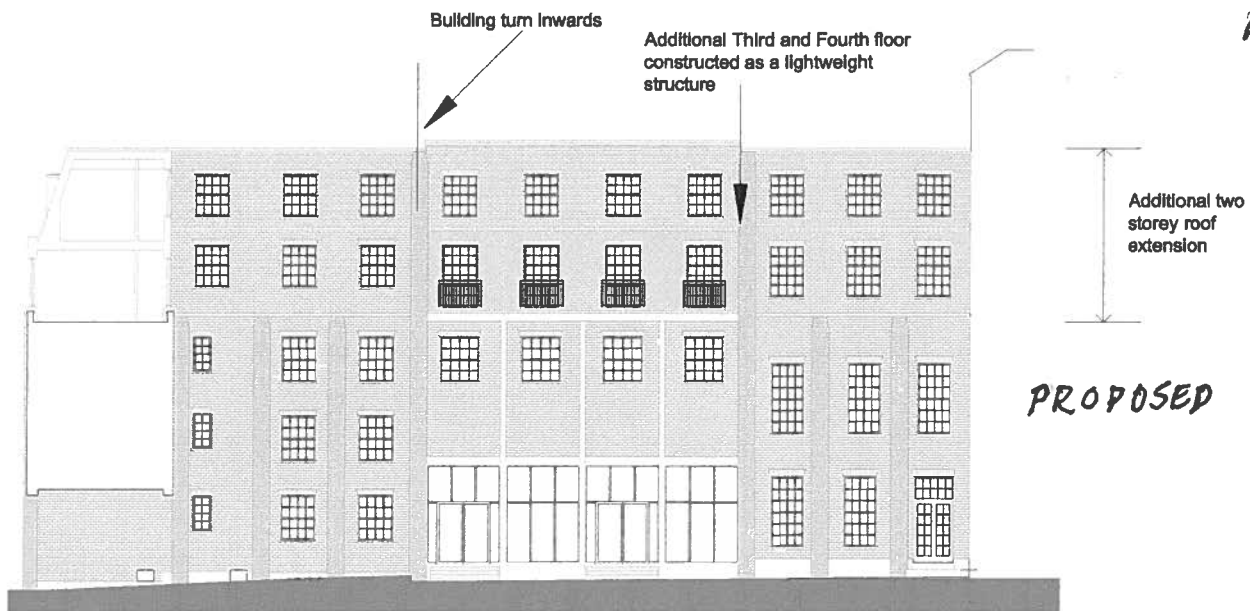
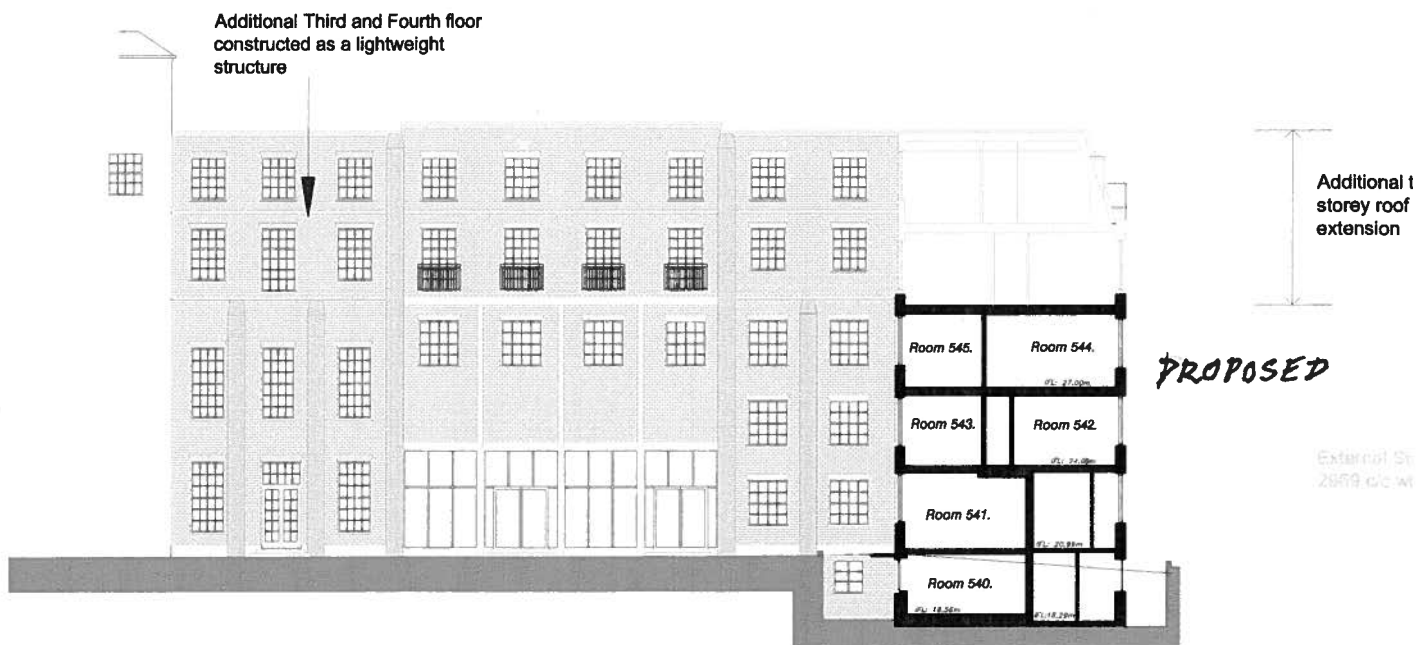
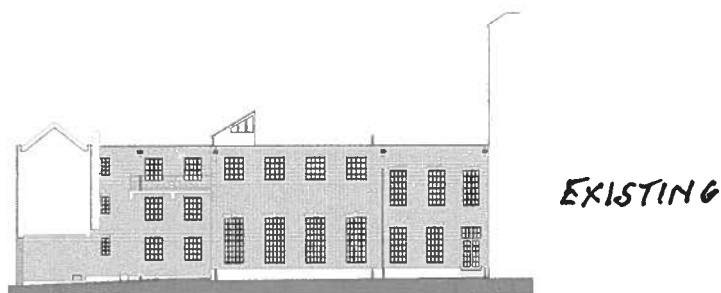


Fig 2.7  
Mecklenburgh Street  
frontage





View from the West



View from the East

EXISTING

Fig2.8 the ELYSIUM Block

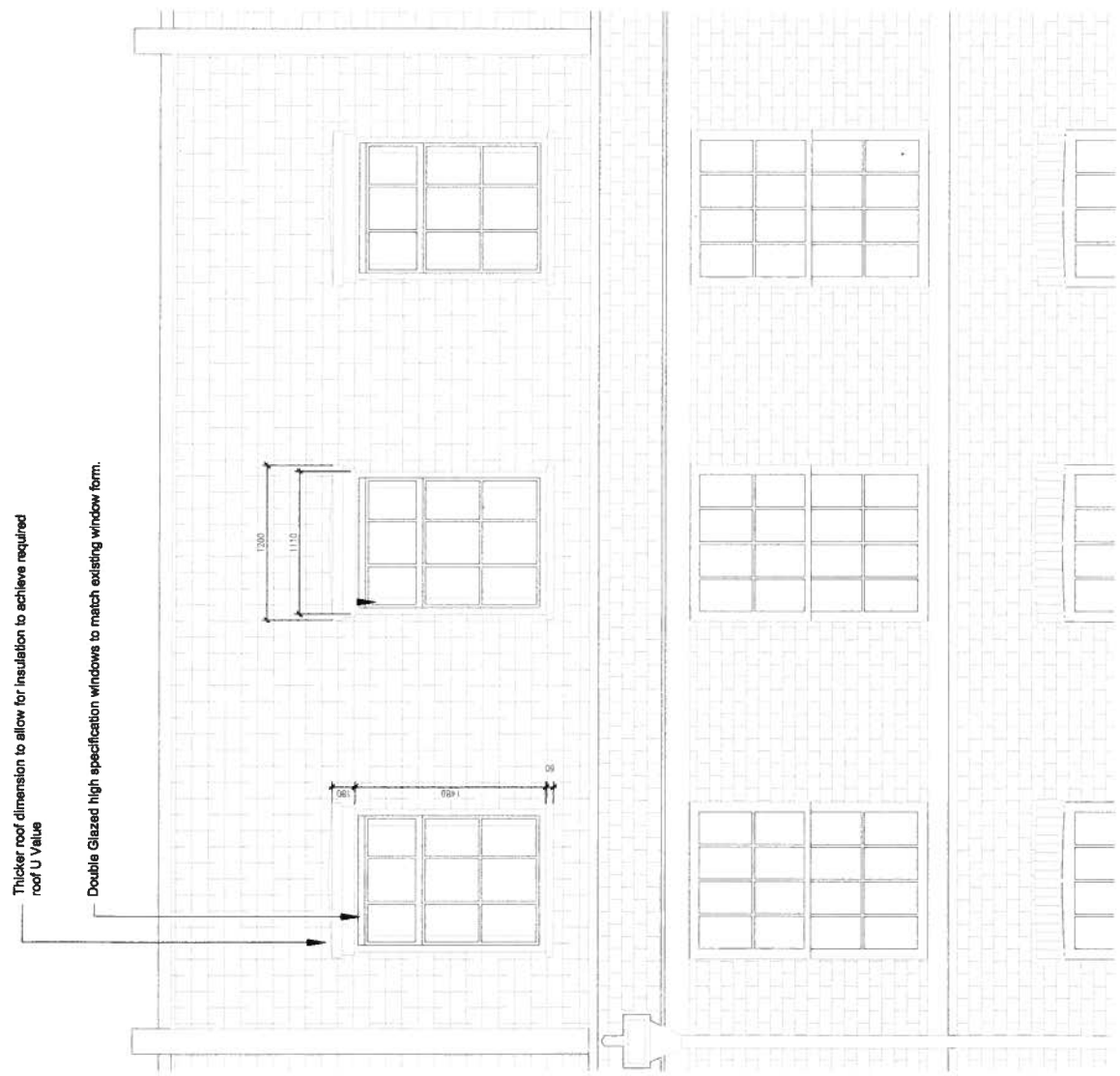
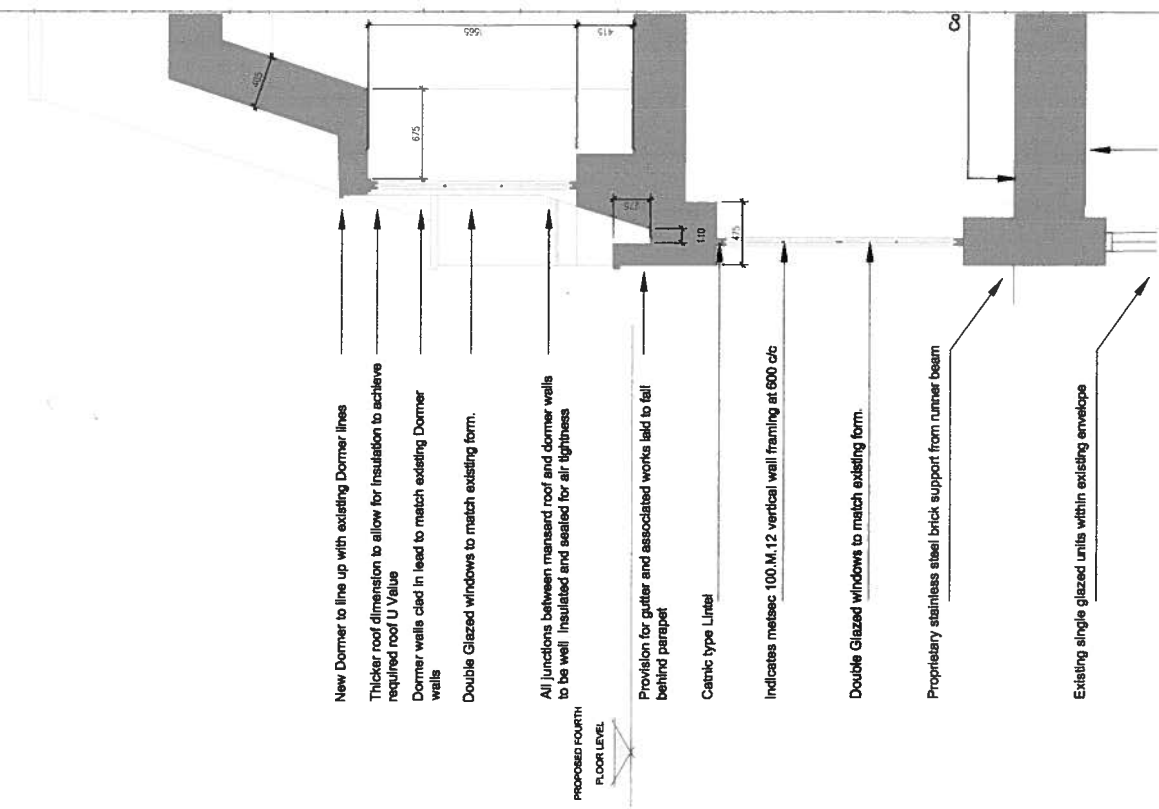


Fig 2.9 Detail of the additional floor & Mansard to the North Block



Fig 3.1 Mecklenburgh Street

## LISTED BUILDINGS

Fig 3.2 Mecklenburgh Square



Fig 3.3 43-7 Mecklenburgh Square

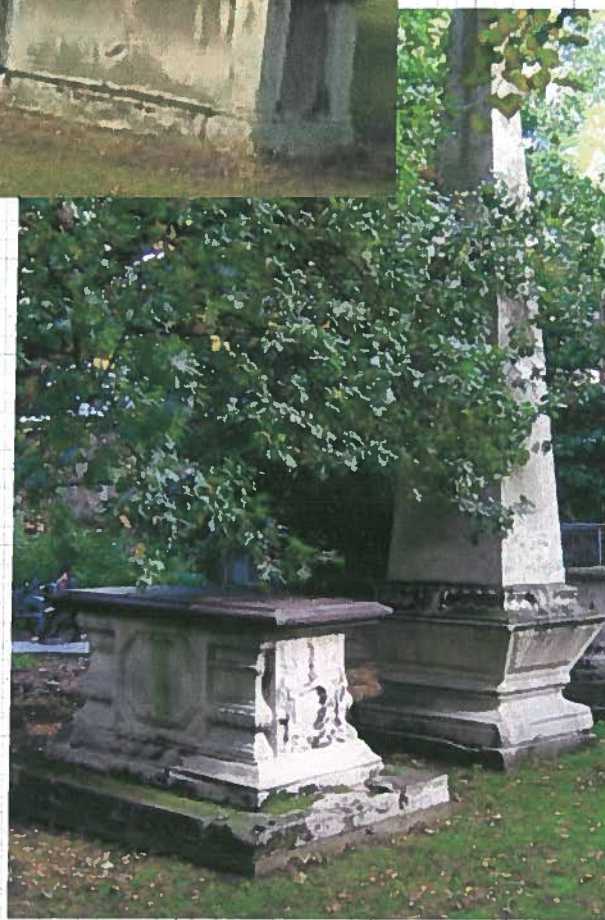


Fig 3.4 In the snow, February 2009



Robert Nelson 1715  
The first burial

Fig 3.5  
Graves



Thomas Falconer 1729  
St GEORGE'S GARDENS



*Fig 3.6 Grayland Court*



*Fig 3.7 Westminster Kingsway College*

LOOKING WEST ALONG HEATHCOTE STREET

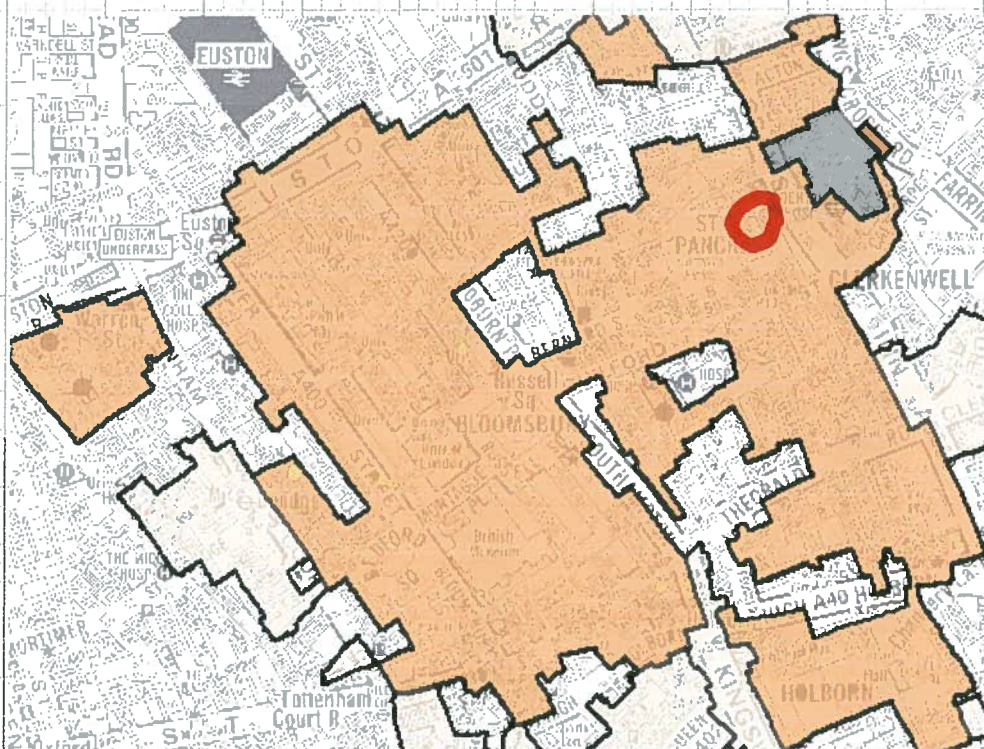


Fig 4.1 The Bloomsbury Conservation Area

Goodenough site location