

The October Gallery Development

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

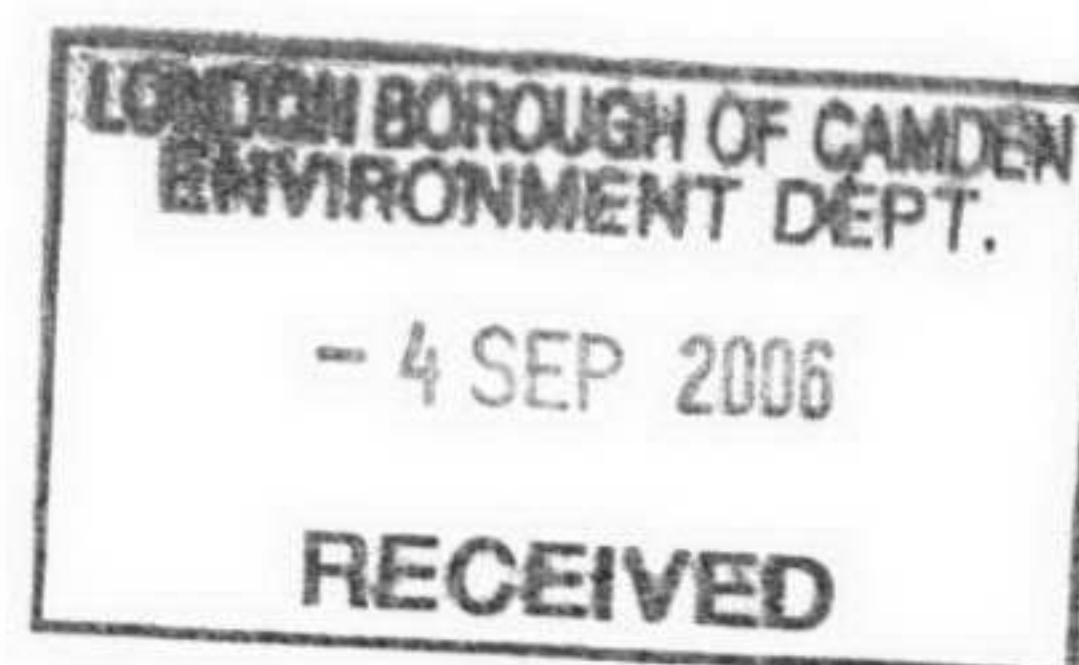
Narrative accompanying planning and listed building applications

Location & Use

The October Gallery is located within a three storey Victorian Brick Building within a vibrant area of Bloomsbury, south of Queens Square and to the east of Southampton Row. Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children is situated off the eastern side of Queens Square and the British Museum is located in the immediate area to the west.

The October Gallery is a nationally and internationally recognised centre for the provision of contemporary international visual art exhibitions, with thriving Schools and Outreach education programme and a reputation for hosting a diverse range of performing arts, music, poetry and seminar events. The Gallery's central location has allowed for creative links to be sustained with both the local community and neighbouring institutions such as the British Museum, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Tate Gallery, the Hayward Gallery and the Great Ormond Street Hospital amongst others. It is supported on a project by project basis by Camden Borough Council and a number of other funding organizations.

The Gallery opened in 1979, with the aim of exhibiting the foremost exponents of contemporary art from all cultures around the world. At the time, this was a radical departure from the Euro-centric norms of gallery practice in the UK, and as such, October Gallery was the first UK gallery actively and consistently to promote awareness of modernism, change and the avant-garde in the cultures of other countries. In the intervening years, the Gallery has showcased contemporary art from over 80 different countries, gaining a reputation as a vibrant educational resource, which both reflects and caters to the healthy diversity of London's population.



The Gallery celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2004 with a landmark exhibition and a series of events funded by the Arts Council England. Moving beyond this milestone allowed for a reassessment of the Gallery's current systems and objectives, resulting in a re-branding process, a re-design and expansion of the website, www.octobergallery.co.uk, and a revised exhibitions strategy that would continue to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the sectors in which the Gallery operates.

The Gallery is run by the October Gallery Trust which is a registered charity (227032). The Gallery has recently renewed its lease for a further 25 years. The accommodation comprises the gallery, a restaurant and courtyard on the ground floor; offices and studios for artists on the first floor; a theatre and library on the second floor and plant and studio space in the basement.

Access

The Gallery is readily accessible from the London Underground network with both Russell Square and Holborn Stations on the Piccadilly line within walking distance. Numerous Busses; 19,38 and 168 run close to the intersection of Theobalds road and Southampton Row.

Vehicular access is from Old Gloucester Street, which is one way. Old Gloucester Street is situated within the Congestion Charge Zone and parking in the immediate area of the Gallery is on a 'Pay and Display' basis.

The main entrance to the building is located on Old Gloucester Street and is well sign posted with a vertical banner.

The two steps up to the ground floor level has impaired disabled access into the gallery in the past and achieving inclusive access to the October Gallery forms the basis of this planning and listed building application. The proposed access route via the pedestrianised Gage Street utilizes both the four meter width for wheelchair maneuverability and will provide direct access to the gallery from the street.

Extent of Works

The proposals are for the formation of a disabled access into the gallery through the widening of an existing, non original door opening on Gage Street with a lowered lobby area and platform lift located within the Gallery. A total of four design options for the disabled access route into the building have been investigated and discussed with the Camden Planning and Highways Department. These are described in greater detail later in this document.

The Historic Building Fabric

The October Gallery occupies premises in Old Gloucester Street built in 1863 as a girls' infants school. It is listed Grade II. The listing describes the building thus:

TQ3081NW

798-1/100/1750

GV II

Formerly known as: St George the Martyr Girls and Infants School Old Gloucester Street.

Girls' infants school, now private residence. 1863-4. By S S Teulon. Stock brick with yellow brick and stone dressings, slate roof. Early Gothic style.

3 storeys, front to Old Gloucester Street, return to Gage Street. Irregular composition adhering to street line. Ground storey with door at north end and lancet openings with forceful continuous stone mullions to windows. First floor windows with pointed brick relieving arches. Top storey with tall arched windows, some with geometrical tracery. Gables and external chimney breasts and chimneys, now slightly simplified. Entrance at north end with fanlight under pointed arch. Interior altered, but with teaching spaces essentially surviving. On angle with biblical quotation and date 1863. Characteristic school building by Teulon, which forms a strong group with No. 25 the boys school (qv) and St George the Martyr church, Queen Square (qv), the latter altered by Teulon.

The building has been altered on many occasions, most notably by the extension of the second floor into the courtyard. However the street facades remain substantially unaltered except for the addition of a door off Gage Street.

Development proposal

Earlier this year the Gallery was successful in securing funds from the Arts Council specifically for carrying out improvements to the gallery space, raising its presence on the Street and providing access for the disabled.

Inclusive Access

Providing access for the disabled has proved to be the most intractable aspect of the proposed improvements. The ground floor of the building is approximately 350mm above pavement level. A means of providing wheel chair access is therefore required.

Layout

Providing a 5m ramp with its landings and balustrades would take up a large part of the gallery space which already falls short of the space needs of many exhibitions and workshops and which the Gallery is looking to extend. There are also restrictions as to where it can be located due to the presence of the basement accommodation located beneath the gallery.

Options for providing disabled access have, therefore, been explored. Four schemes were investigated:

1. A external ramp associated with the existing main entrance off Old Gloucester Street similar to that of the neighbouring Mary Ward Centre. This had to be discounted for lack of space, cost of relocating underground services and an existing escape route from the basement, and the Highways Engineering Department considering the proposal caused an unwanted precedent in respect to other applicants for further external ramps on public walkways.
2. A ramp and steps in Gage Street associated with the existing, but not original, door into the Gallery. This also had to be discounted due to the Highways Engineering Department considering the proposal caused an unwanted precedent for further external ramps on public walkways.

3. A re-profiling of the pavement levels in Gage Street to raise the surface in such a way as to provide a new access into the gallery at a position of the existing chimney breast. This was developed with the collaboration of the Highways Engineering Department and is acceptable from their point of view. The Gallery also considers it the best option since it provides a direct access to the gallery in a central position without taking up valuable exhibition and workshop space and allows for a range of internal layouts in respect to the reception / sales area, the exhibition space and the restaurant. However this option proved to be unacceptable to Camden's conservation officer on the grounds that the fire place is an original feature and its removal from the Grade 2 listed building would be an unacceptable loss.
4. Internal steps and a platform lift in association with a lowered section of the floor immediately inside the enlarged existing Gage Street entrance. This reduces the usable floor area of the gallery space, but requires minimal change to the building's exterior and no external ramps or reprofiling of the ground. This is the proposal that is now submitted on the basis that it is the best compromise satisfying all interests.

Scale

The proposed works involve the widening of an existing external door and lowering of the existing door threshold. The dimensions of the new opening have been governed by both the existing site constraints and dimensional requirements under access legislation. The design elements have sought to be in keeping with the existing building fabric.

Appearance

The widening of the existing non original door opening to Gage Street will require the reforming one side of the door opening to enable adequate maneuvering space requirements for wheelchair uses within the new gallery lobby. Where possible, the existing facing bricks will be salvaged for reuse in the formation of the new door reveal. The widening of the existing door opening will also provide an opportunity to replace the existing facing concrete lintel with a facing stone lintel in keeping to the adjacent feature stonework to the existing window openings.

The new external timber door has been designed in sympathy with the existing timber main entrance door to Old Gloucester Street and requires glazed panels at high and low level under current Building legislation.

Landscaping

No landscaping works are involved with this planning and listed building application.

Signage

A separate application will be made for such items as a canopy over the new entrance, the location of banners, the location of a notice board announcing forthcoming events.