

client **Mishcon de Reya**

project *Africa House, Kingsway, London, WC2B 6AH*

document *Design, Access & Heritage Statement*



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Design Statement

Rationale

The only access currently into Africa House for visitors, clients and essentially also for employees is the main entrance on Kingsway. The applicant wishes to introduce a second pedestrian entrance at the rear in Gate Street for disabled members of staff and visitors.

Design Approach

The design approach has been to locate a new entrance in the least sensitive location in terms of heritage significance of the building in a manner sympathetic in design to the original architectural detailing of the building in balance with more recent alterations to provide a coherent overall composition (see right).

The rear of the building on the Gate St (east) façade provides a suitable and logical location to provide the desired access as the only other entrances fronting Kingsway faces onto this very busy thoroughfare and designated Red Route. Gate St (east) provides a quiet environment away from traffic and congestion for DDA and visitor ingress/ egress. The following access statement provides further information. Due to the comprehensive remodelling of this part of the building under the 2007 consent, no original historic fabric of the listed building is removed or altered by the proposal. The scope of the works is illustrated on the opposite page.

New Entrance

A set of double doors made from external grade timber with ppc decorative steelwork and glass vision panels are proposed that will be finished to match the existing main entrance door. The non-original stone plinth at the base of the existing window opening will be removed and the entrance taken down to street level.

Canopy roof

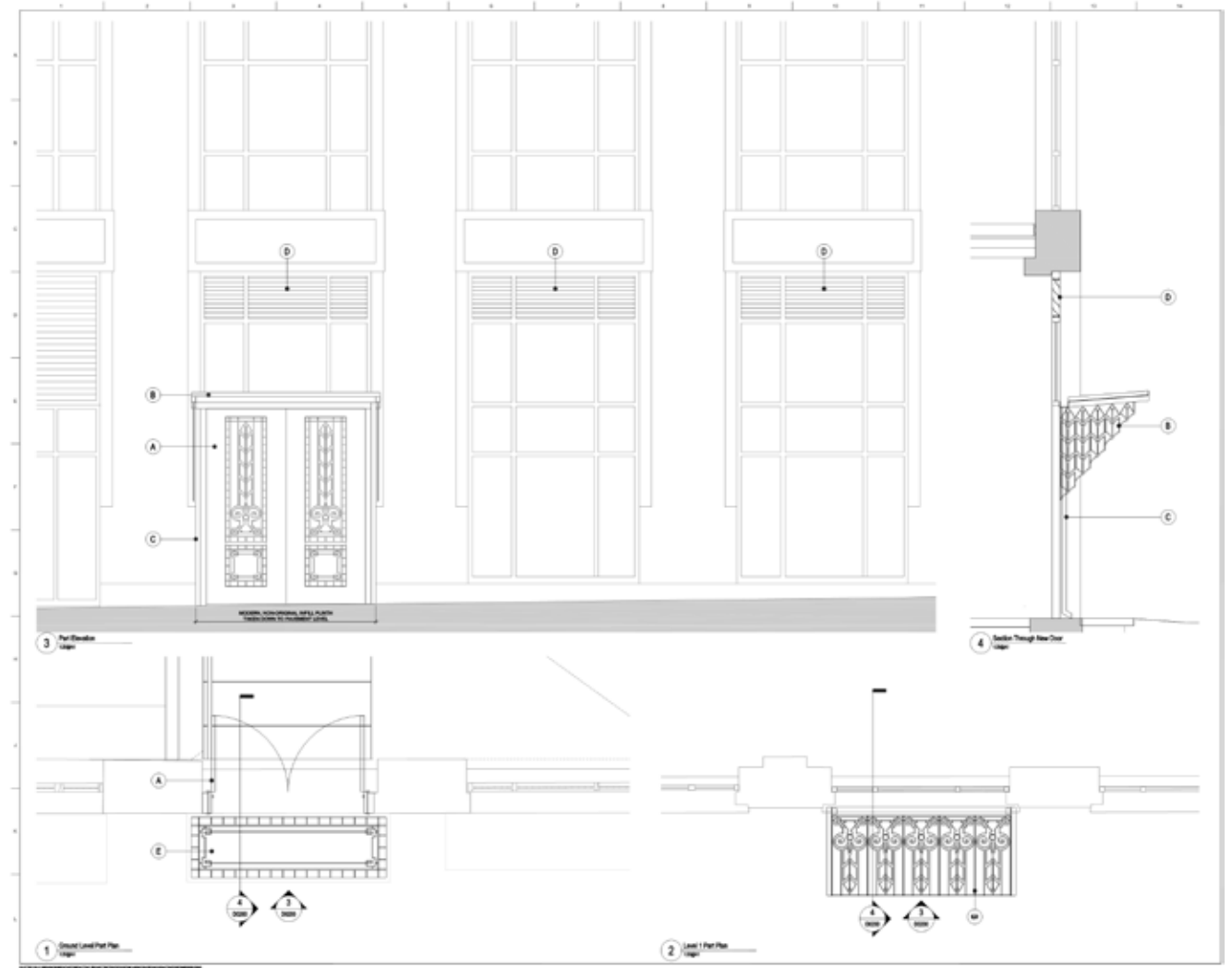
A small canopy is proposed above the new entrance to provide shelter for the building's users. It has been designed to match the doors in appearance, constructed in ppc steel decorative metalwork and clear glass to match the main entrance door decorative metalwork. Matching downpipes are integral to the design to carry rainwater from the canopy roof which drains back towards the building.

Louvres

Three new louvres are proposed within two adjacent window openings and above the new entrance to allow improved ventilation to the internal office space. The specification of the louvres will be chosen to match the existing louvres along this façade, currently situated above the central entrance and fire escape doors to the south of the proposed alterations. These are finished in PPC steel.

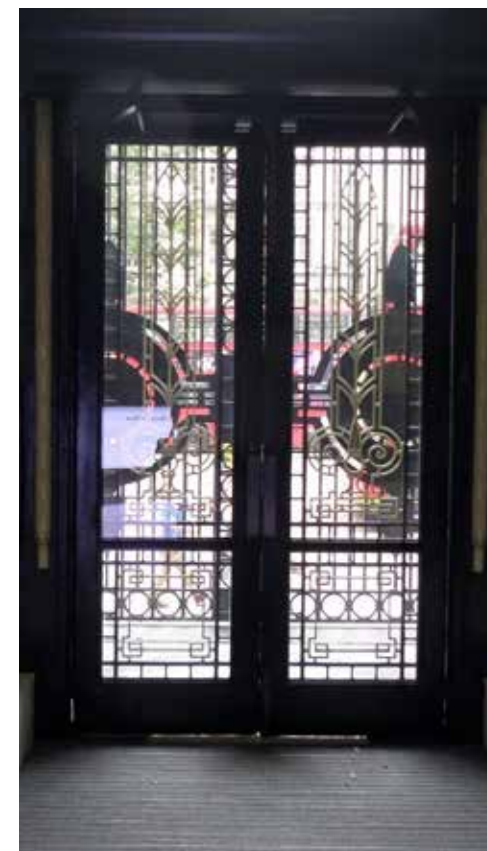
Smoke Vent

A decorative smoke vent will be set within the pavement immediately outside the proposed new entrance to provide an attractive threshold and replace the existing vent which comprises an utilitarian steel with concrete surround design.





Above and right: The extent of the proposals shown in red shading superimposed on the Gate Street façade of the building.



Above and left: Inspiration for the detailing of the new entrance and canopy has been taken from the existing main entrance to the building.

Access Statement

Inclusive Access

The proposal aims to introduce DDA-compliant wheelchair access into the building that provides full, unfettered and non-discriminatory ingress; the front doorway being stepped access only, and the DDA access adjacent on the front façade not being in reality accessible to disabled people arriving by private vehicles. Kingsway is a bus lane, allowing only taxis to stop. Furthermore, the bus stop immediately outside the entrance is frequently occupied by 2 or more buses; the reality therefore of taxi drop-off being that taxis and buses and general traffic flow tend to be mutually interfering. Access through the front of the building with private vehicle set-down at the rear, in Gate Street, is not reasonable or feasible as the fruit stall at the Kingsway end of Twyford Place does not leave sufficient space for wheelchairs to squeeze through, and is part of the long overall route which feels particularly discriminatory (see right).

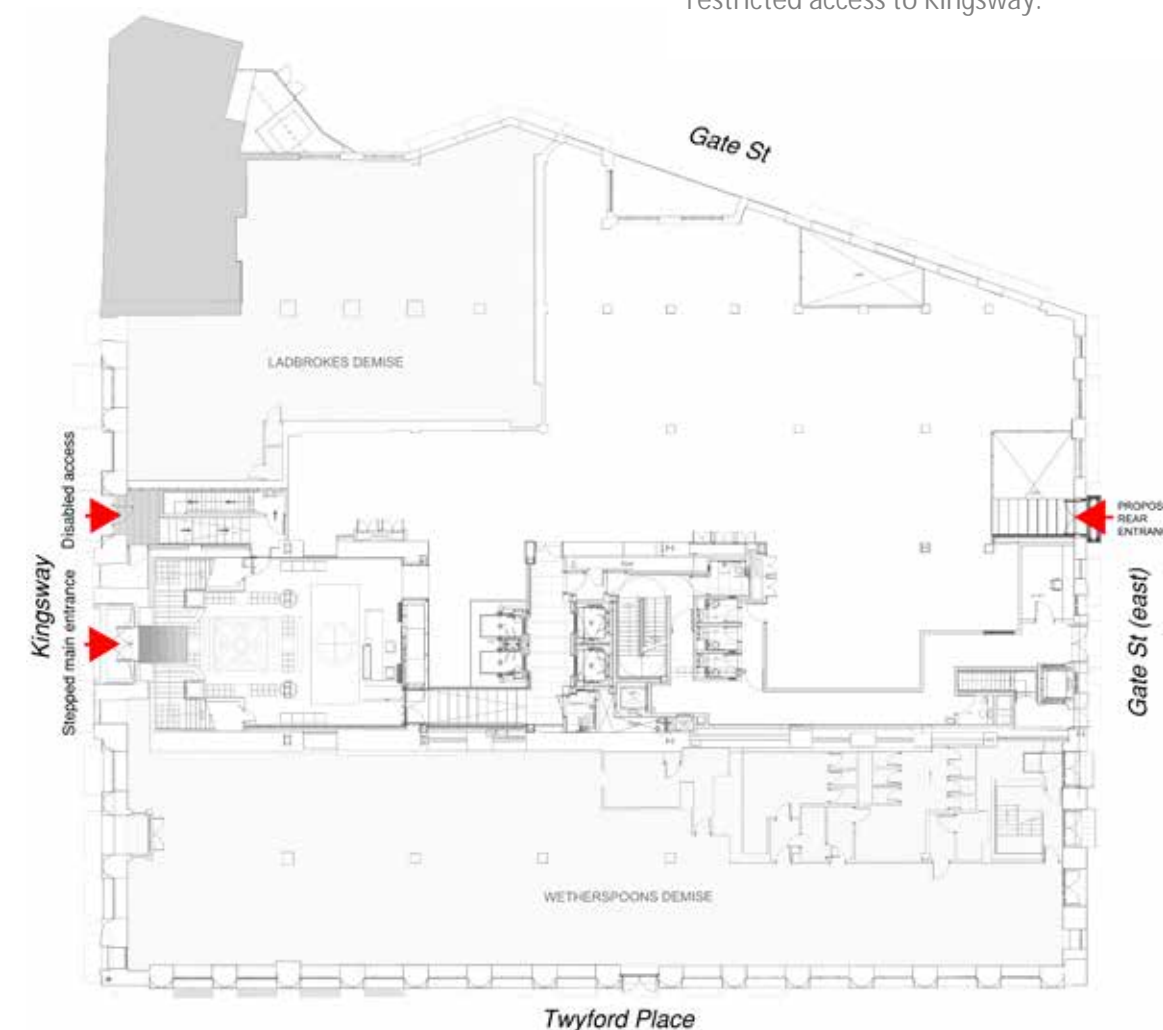
The new rear, level, access would be achieved directly into the office demise to allow access for all – particularly the wheelchair-bound person that the client currently employs, who would need to be considered for most likely parking in Lincoln's Inn Fields – Africa House having no on-site parking facilities. There are further ambulant disabled members of staff. Currently the only level access associated with all possible and reasonable expectations of disabled approach to the building is via the goods corridor/ fire brigade access door along an extremely convoluted, tight and otherwise non-DDA compliant back-of-house service corridor and fire escape route. The new access, being available to all, would remove this discriminatory circumstance, and form a route which would be fully compliant in both approach to, and internal circulation within Africa House, to both visitor areas and the employees' place of work.

Visitor Access

As an extremely busy thoroughfare with bus lane and bus stops, and adjacent traffic lights, Kingsway is an environment not suitable for clients being dropped off by taxi with respect to the presence of, and the detrimental impact such dropping-off would have on, traffic flow. The provision of the rear pedestrian access would allow this aspect to be provided and well managed without being to the detriment of traffic flow along this primary artery.



Above: Twyford Place showing the restricted access to Kingsway.



Heritage Statement

Africa House, Includes: 64-78 Kingsway, 1-17 Gate Street, Camden, London

Introduction

This statement describes the heritage significance of the building and the anticipated impacts of the current proposals. This document supports applications for planning permission and listed building consent for the proposed alterations.

National and local planning policy requires applicants to have special regard to the desirability of preserving buildings of historic or architectural merit or their settings or any features of architectural or historic interest which they possess. It also requires a level of information to be provided in support of a proposal that is proportionate to the significance of the asset and the potential impact upon that significance.

The site under consideration is Africa House, 64-78 Kingsway, 1-17 Gate Street, Camden, London. For the purposes of this statement, the area of study been concerned principally with Africa House, as the alterations to the listed building are minor in scale and nature, the impact upon the wider setting of Kingsway Conservation Area is also assessed.

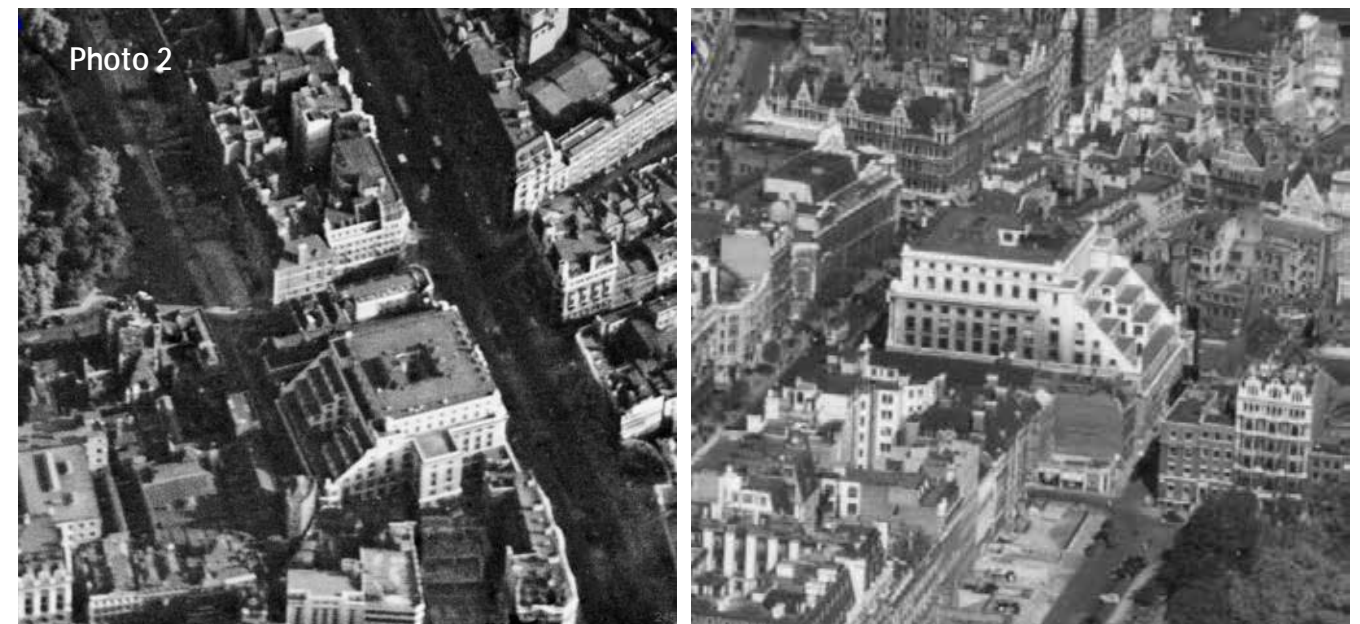
This statement is produced in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (Chapter 12) as supported by the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (2010) and as required by planning policies contained in the Core Strategy (2010) and Development Policies Document (2010).

The Proposals in Brief

It is proposed to create a new ground floor entrance at the rear of the building on Gate Street (east) to enable a DDA compliant secondary pedestrian access as an alternative to the substandard arrangements at the front of the building. The proposal involves:

- The construction of a new ground floor entrance on Gate Street using an existing opening
- A canopy roof above the entrance
- Replacement louvres in existing upper window panes
- Replacement smoke vent
- All materials to match existing finishes

The new entrance concerns only the Gate Street (east) façade (the back of the building) at ground level and the proposed new entrance is in an existing window location which on inspection may have been used as an entrance in the past.



Top: View of Kingsway shortly after completion with Africa House on the left.

Bottom: Aerial photographs from 1932 and 1948 showing the distinctive massing of Africa House. The terraced upper floors and light well are clearly shown.

Description of the Site

The site is located on the east side of Kingsway, near to the junction with High Holborn and is within the London Borough of Camden (see Location Plan). The site is within the Kingsway Conservation Area, with Lincoln's Inn Fields to the south-east (see proposals map extract).

Africa House is a 9 storey mixed use building with public house (A5) retail (A3) and office (B1a) uses at ground floor level and offices on the upper floors. It was constructed in 1921-2 and has a significant history being one of the last major builds of the prestigious Kingsway development (see historic maps right), which was the most significant highway improvement in London after the completion of Regent Street in 1820. The building is Grade II listed.

Currently, The main entrance to Africa House is from Kingsway (see Photo 3), a series of rear entrances are provided on Gate Street (photos 4-6).



Site location plan



Proposals map extract



Pre Kingsway and Africa House construction



Post Kingsway and Africa House construction



Assessment of Significance

The site in its original form comprised 8 floors of office space, a mansard roof has since been added along with a rear extension fronting Gate Street. Today the site comprises 11,800sq m office related net internal area. The ground floor accommodates a mix of uses including public house, retail, and office floorspace (see ground floor plan right).

The original building layout featured open plan offices to the front either side of the grand entrance hall with rear entrances, central lifts and a light well in the centre.

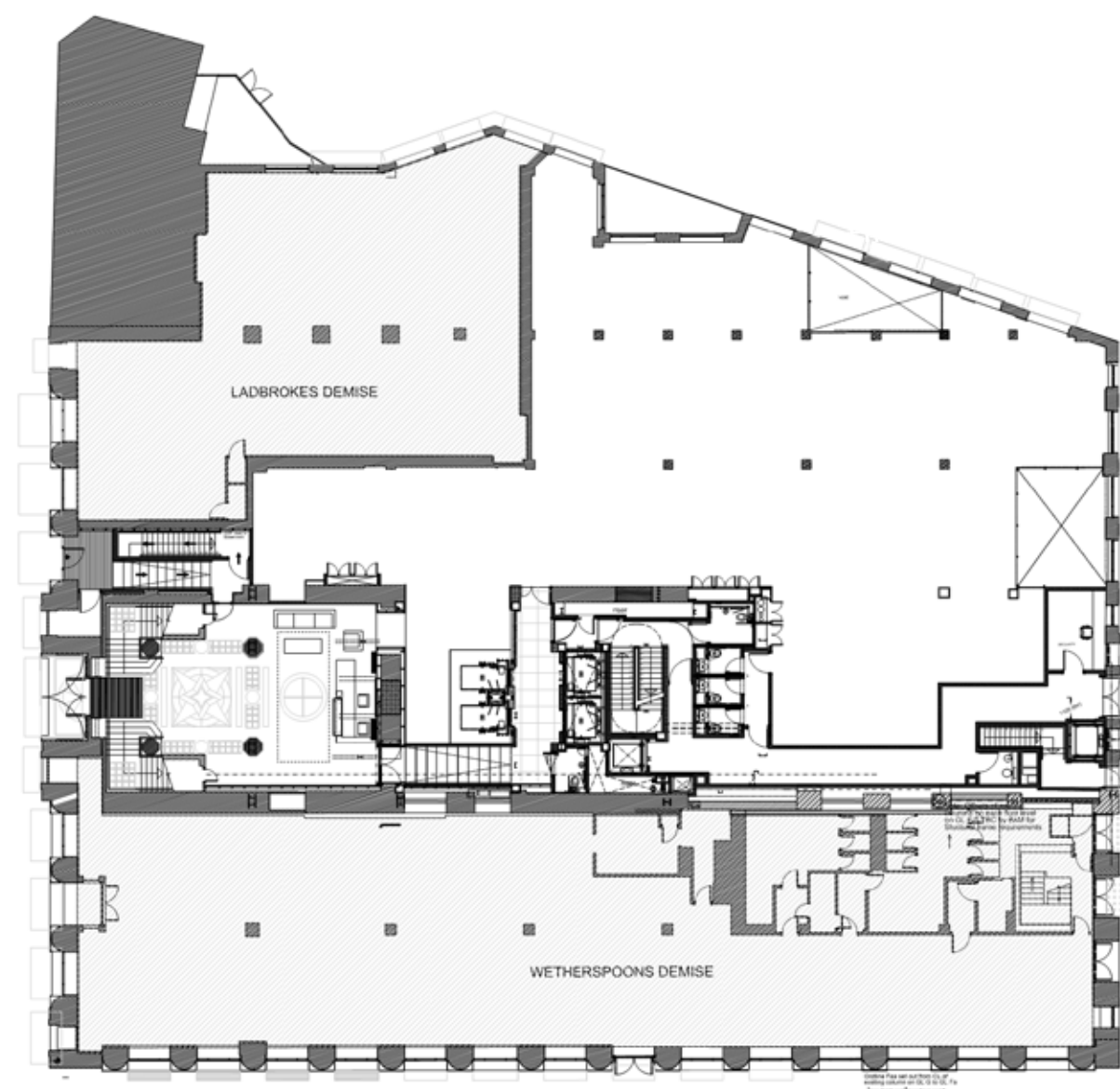
Through the main entrance is a double height entrance hall with a domed and vaulted ceiling. Two marble staircases run up either side of the hall to the central landing. The floor of the hall is finished as a Roman mosaic with marble slabs and a central star design; a motif which is repeated in the columns and dado borders (photo 13).

Beyond the entrance hall, very little of the original office layout remains. Originally the offices of the directors and boardroom were lavishly finished in African mahogany and parquet floors however these finishes have since been removed. The building floorplans are currently laid out as open plan office areas north and south of a central core with open plan staircases which run the full depth of the building. The alterations have increased the flexibility and usability of the commercial floorspace, which are well lit and can be subdivided by partitions if required.

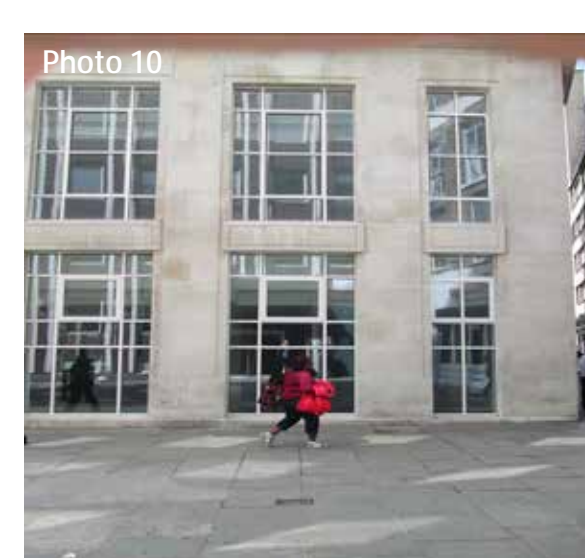
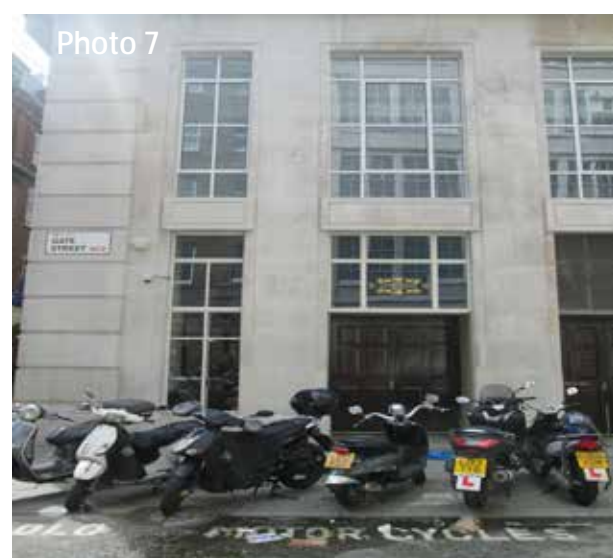
The building has undergone considerable alteration and historic fabric has been removed in past alterations. Externally the Gate Street façade has seen significant alteration through a comprehensive extension approved in 2007 (2007/4111/L). The secondary entrances along Gate Street East (which concern this proposal) have also been altered over time. The original doors and windows have been replaced, most recently with doors replacing windows in 2008 (2008/5547/P) and additional louvres replacing existing windows in 2011 (2011/4863/P). However, the key elements of historic structure on all facades have largely been preserved with the original openings, Portland stone and the distinctive Doric columns fronting Kingsway retained.

The applicant's tenancy covers the commercial (B1a) floor space comprising part ground floor and the upper 8 floors of B1a floorspace in their entirety and is part of a commitment to a long term business presence in this part of Holborn.

Existing Ground Floor



Below: Gate Street Façade – The various rear entrances – visible louvres and replacement window frames



The building was originally built in 1921-2, designed by architects Trehearne and Norman and was one of the last European Palazzo style buildings of the Kingsway development. Africa House was a landmark design constructed on a large plot surrounded by lower buildings. This led to the incorporation of a set back of the top two stories, and a distinctive terracing of upper floors on the Gate Street elevation, reducing the impact of the building's massing on its neighbours.

The Doric columns and the round triumphal arch style entrance inscribed "Africa House" surmounted by sculptured lions (photo 11 & 12) are the most notable features at ground floor level on the main Kingsway frontage. The architecture, with an Italian palazzo theme, incorporates a modern massing akin to contemporary American commercial buildings of the time. This was a common pattern of development adopted for the Kingsway development with many other similarly conceived buildings. However, unlike many of its contemporaries in Kingsway, the external walls are built entirely of Portland Stone without a steel frame. Commercial activity at ground floor was a design feature from the outset, requiring more light ingress and a load bearing open colonnade treatment was adopted that wraps around the building on the southern return (photo 12).

Recent Alterations to the Building

The area affected by the proposals is the Gate Street (east) façade at ground floor level (see right) which has been altered significantly in the recent past:

- Comprehensive rear extension inc 8 storeys + mansard roof (2007/4111/L)
- Doors replaced windows either side of the central entrance (2008/5547/P)
- Windows replaced with louvres (2011/4863/P)

The (east) facade at ground floor level accommodates the central secondary entrance, south of this are the fire escape doors of the public house demise. Windows run along the whole facade. Historically the fire escape doorways provided separate rear entrances/exits for the office and bank on the ground floor.

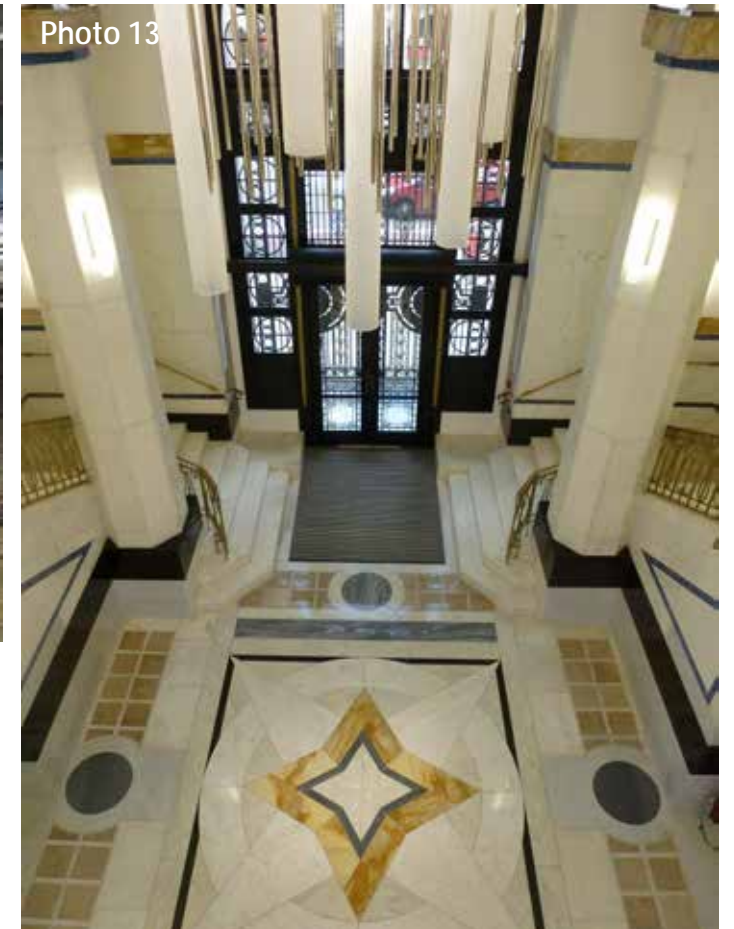
The (east) façade has always been conceived as the 'back' of the building and as such was deliberately utilitarian in its design. The fenestration pattern has been altered at ground floor level though the structure and the size of the openings remain. The impact of the comprehensive rear extension in 2007 (2007/4111/L) has significantly altered the appearance of this façade.

Summary of Heritage Significance

Our understanding of the heritage significance of the building can be summarised as follows:

- An important commercial building forming part of the Kingsway development;
- An example of innovation in commercial building design in terms of layout, massing, style, structure, materials and decoration;
- Innovative use of materials - use of colonnade and load bearing stone and brick;
- Quality of interior finishes - distinctive arch entrance, double height entrance hall with a domed vaulted ceiling and marble mosaic floor.

Of these elements, the Kingsway façade, arched main entrance and the entrance hall interior carry the greatest significance, being a prominent presence within the conservation area and largely intact historic record of interior design of the time.



Left: Gate Street (east) elevation as existing.

Assessment of Heritage Impacts

We have researched the history of the building through the Heritage Environmental Record, property record planning history and other document sources. The full listing is reproduced here (see right).

An assessment of the impacts of the proposals is required concerning:

Direct impacts

- 1)
- Alterations to the original listed fabric – on a building of acknowledged national importance (Grade II listed) within a townscape of national importance (conservation area);

Indirect impacts

- 2)
- Impact upon a building that makes a positive contribution to the Kingsway Conservation area

The assessment of the magnitude of impact (or change) requires some professional judgement in order to establish whether that impact is beneficial or detrimental. This statement has been guided by the relevant planning policy tests contained within national, regional and local planning policy, which require that proposals protect and enhance the character or appearance of the identified heritage asset.

Impacts have been assessed according to the table below:

	Magnitude of Impact			
Significance	Negligible	Low	Medium	High
Exceptional	Slight/Moderate	Moderate/Slight	Substantial/Moderate	Substantial
Very High	Slight	Slight/Moderate	Moderate	Substantial / Moderate
High	Effectively no change	Slight	Slight/Moderate	Moderate/Slight

The alterations have been assessed as being of slight magnitude to a building of high significance (highlighted).

The proposed alterations are concerned with the exterior of the building. The main component of the proposal is the replacement of an existing window with a pedestrian entrance (doorway), general decoration and finishes to all elements of the proposal are detailed in the design statement. The proposals concern the removal of later alterations to the building using modern materials and their replacement with matching framing, louvres and the addition of a door and canopy in a treatment more sympathetic to the original design intent of the building.

The summary assessment of impacts is shown in the table on the right. In conclusion, the alterations and additions have been assessed as having an overall beneficial impact on the building and its setting (the conservation area).

Address/ Building	Significance	Assessment of Impacts
Africa House	High National Elements mentioned in the listing description of the building and underpinning its designation	Slight - A minor alteration to replace modern windows with doorway and canopy roof, insertion of louvres, no loss of historic fabric; - A sympathetic treatment is proposed to the entrance and canopy; - The opportunity has been taken to rationalise the fenestration and louvre treatment at ground level producing a more cohesive overall composition; - The alterations and additions will not be intervisible with the elements assessed as being of highest significance, being at the back of the building; Direct – slight beneficial Indirect – slight beneficial

Listing Description

Large office block with shops at ground floor. 1921-2. By Trehearne and Norman. Portland stone faced steel frame. 6 storeys and 2 storey set back attic. 9 windows. Double height fluted Doric screen, with inset shops and bank, flanks a round-arched triumphal arch style entrance inscribed "Africa House" and surmounted by lions couchant. Upper storeys set back with central distyle-in-antis screen rising from 3rd to 5th floor; metal-framed windows, 5th floor with Greek scroll aprons and enrichment to heads of bays suggesting pilasters. Entablature with deep mutule cornice surmounted by a pediment of carved figures and animals. Plain attic storeys with cornice and blocking course having a central antefixa. Return to Twyford Place continues the design with a long screen.

Conclusions

Planning permission and Listed building consent is required for the proposed alterations. Applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise (section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the TCPA 1990).

Our research of the planning history indicates that the authorised use of the building is for offices (B1a), retail (A1) and public house (A5). No material change of use will occur as a result of these proposals.

The proposals must be considered in light of the development plan applicable to the site, in this case the London Plan and the LB Camden Local Development Framework (Core Strategy, Camden Development Policies and CPG 1 (Design). Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy and policy DP25 of the Camden Development Policies apply. The National Planning Policy Framework and other supplementary and emerging policy may also be material to the making of planning decisions. The Planning Statement accompanying this application gives further detail.

The principal planning issue is ensuring that the proposals “would not cause harm to the special interest of the building” (Policy DP25 of the Camden Development Policies). The proposals also involve improvements to arrangements for pedestrian and in particular disabled access to the building (Policy DP24 of the Camden Development Policies and Core Strategy Policy CS14).

The proposals seek to protect and enhance the architectural and historic character of the listed building by avoiding direct impacts on the original historic fabric remaining and maintaining access to and visibility of key features of the building with the highest heritage significance. The proposals have been derived in a sensitive manner in sympathy with the original design and to complement the alterations that have already occurred on the Gate Street (East) facade. The proposal has been assessed as having a slight beneficial impact on the character and appearance of the building and its conservation area setting.

The proposals involve significant improvements to the building’s accessibility for the disabled without compromising the building’s heritage significance.

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