Donald Insall Associates

Senate House - North Block DIA-SOAS-A-REP-XXX-XX-003

Report on Historical Floor Finishes Revision D 11 September 2014



1.0 Summary of Floor Finishes in the North Block of Senate House

This report has been produced by Donald Insall Associates to describe the existing historic floor finishes in the North Block of Senate House, discuss the impacts of, and provide justification for the proposed building works as per Application References 2013/4415/P, 2013/4478/L and 2013/4411/L.

1.1 Travertine Paving

The principal ground floor lobby areas, at the entrance to the North Block and the secondary lobby adjacent to the tower's lobby, are finished with large travertine paving slabs. As two of the most prominent and traversed spaces in the building, they have the most prestigious floor finishes. (Figure 1).

1.2 York Stone Paving

The flooring in the ground floor 'cloister' is finished with 700mm square York stone paving slabs, likely selected by Holden to provide continuity in floor finishes between the interior and exterior spaces of the cloister. The paving slabs are presently concealed below contemporary linoleum sheeting. (Figure 2)

1.3 Terrazzo Flooring

Terrazzo is one of the principal floor finishes used throughout the North Block, and is found principally in circulation spaces, such as the staircases, lift lobbies on the first and third floors, and corridors on the ground, first and third floors, It is also found in the lavatories. The terrazzo is a beige tone with tan and cream aggregate and matches that in the South Block. It typically has a 480mm high coved skirting to the adjacent wall, which in some locations extends to cover the window cills and forms decorative surrounds for radiator panels. The terrazzo in the staircases wraps around the stringer course and has two rows of 20mm square mosaic tiles inlaid to the edge of the tread (see figures 3 & 4). In the corridors on the ground, first and third floors the terrazzo floor finish is limited to a coved skirting and 275mm border of terrazzo with a brass divider strip. The area between the borders presently comprises only of the concrete plank sub-flooring; however, it was likely originally finished with linoleum or carpeting. The terrazzo floor in the third floor bathrooms is presently covered with linoleum sheeting, which in areas was laid over a thin Portland cement levelling screed that has permanently adhered to the terrazzo (Figure 17).

The terrazzo flooring is **generally** in fair condition, with hairline cracks throughout. **In some locations, there are larger movement cracks**. In some areas, principally to the east corridor on the first floor, the terrazzo is in poor condition having significant areas of spalling and/or a large number of poorly executed patch repairs. The skirting to the west wall of the ground floor west corridor is in equally poor condition, with significant discolouration from water damage and large areas of patch repairs that do not match the original colour or profile.

1.4 Timber Board Flooring

Oak tongue and groove boarding is also found throughout the North Block. It is present in all rooms on the first and second floors, the western rooms to the ground floor (save for one), and in a number of the rooms on the third floor, and in the second floor corridor. Generally, it is in poor condition, with the majority of rooms having multiple layers of mastic carpet adhesive applied to the surface. In several, where under-floor access was previously required, large sections of flooring were cut out, lifted and replaced with plywood boards. Some rooms have access panels in the floor in the form of hinged boards with brass pulls. (Figures 5, 6 & 7)

1.5 Oak Parquet Flooring

Oak wood block flooring is found in the basement lift lobby and courtyard perimeter corridor. It is also present in the second floor lift lobby and the southeast corner of the corridor—an area previously part of the southeast corner lobby, but now divided by later 20th Century timber and glass partitions. The parquet flooring is in good condition considering its age, with only small areas of loose or damaged blocks.

1.6 Plywood Boarding

Plywood boarding sub-flooring is found in the ground floor north lecture rooms and in many of the rooms on the third floor. It is known that the ground floor originally had tongue and groove boarding to match other rooms; however, this was removed in the later 20th Century and replaced with the existing plywood sub-floor and carpet tile finish. The plywood sub-floor to the third floor rooms appears to be original and likely had a linoleum finish historically. (Figures 8 & 9)

2.0 Proposed Treatment to Floor Finishes

2.1 Travertine Paving

The existing travertine paving to the lobby areas will be left in situ and cleaned. Any cracks to the travertine will be repaired and areas where paving has been previously removed will be reinstated using travertine to match the original as closely as possible, in colour, texture and size of flags. The method for cleaning the travertine will be determined following trials. Cleaning agents will be selected that are not deleterious to the travertine. The specification for this work is included in Appendix C.

2.2 York Stone Paving

The existing York stone paving to the Cloister area will be left in situ and the existing linoleum sheeting and associated adhesive removed. The paving will be cleaned and any open joints repointed in a lime-based mortar to match the colour of the existing. The method for cleaning this paving will also be determined following trials. Cleaning agents will be selected that are not deleterious to the flags. The specification for this work is included in Appendix C.

2.3 Terrazzo Flooring

Cleaning and repair trials were undertaken to the terrazzo flooring in October 2013. The purpose of these trials was to determine the standard of finish that could be achieved, taking into account the amount of historical damage and years of soiling from multiple applications of carpet and linoleum adhesives. The trials were undertaken in the first and third floor lobbies and included a 2m² area on both floors and an area of skirting on the first floor. These areas were selected as they were the most heavily soiled and in the poorest condition. The trials were successful in restoring the terrazzo and it is proposed that the majority of the existing historic terrazzo can remain in situ in the buildings corridors and stair landings. The specification for this work is included in Appendix D. See also Figures 10, 11 & 12.

The North block was designed with the majority of the existing services concealed behind joinery and within floor voids. This configuration is generally flexible with regards to the insertion of new services, as the joinery can be temporarily dismantled and floorboards can be temporarily lifted; however, no access has been provided for in the lift lobbies. Following the meeting with English Heritage and the Conservation Officer on 20th May 2014, it is proposed to reuse as many of these existing voids as possible.

The existing floor coverings will remain and be cleaned and restored in the second

and third floor lift lobbies, thus requiring the addition of new risers and surface mounted services. As there is presently no access to the floor void to the lift lobbies and the ceiling finishes to the bottom of the floor below are applied directly to the bottom of the floor slab, the services cannot be routed through the service void or on the ceiling below. Without access to the floor voids in the lift lobbies new risers are proposed within the western corner and surface mounted conduits added to the 1st and 2nd floor soffits to the lobby ceilings to provide for the pendant lighting and fire alarm cabling. In this way, it will possible to retain the original floors above these areas. A mock up for the new exposed service and lighting is provided on site on the 3rd floor for inspection and approval by the local planning authority.

For the detailed specification for the restoration, cleaning and new terrazzo, refer to Donald Insall specification DIA-SOAS-A-SPC-0001, section M41.

It is proposed that terrazzo be renewed in the following areas:

Balcony threshold to first floor northweast stairs - DELETED.

- Lower Ground Lavatories
 - The terrazzo flooring to the two lower ground floor lavatories is in poor condition, with large areas severely cracked and poor previous repairs where redundant partitions have been removed. Moreover, the existing stall partitions are to be removed and reconfigured, which will require significant patch repairs to the floors. Therefore, it is proposed that these areas are renewed with new terrazzo to match the appearance of the existing.
- Area of skirting/ border to the ground floor west corridor
 The skirting and border to the northern half of the west side of the corridor has water damage, which has resulted in significant discolouration and cracking. Adjacent to this area, new terrazzo skirting and borders have been installed; however, they are a poor match to the original in both colour and profile. It is proposed that both the area of water damaged terrazzo and the later terrazzo finish be renewed to match the original. (Figure 13)
- Skirting/ border to first floor eastern corridor
 There have been several significant modifications to the first floor layout
 in this area which has resulted in the loss and/or damage of the terrazzo
 border and skirting, particularly to the eastern side of the corridor. To the
 west side of the corridor there is a significant amount of cracking to the
 terrazzo, as well as a number of poorly executed patch repairs. Therefore, in
 conjunction with restoring the corridor's original layout, it is proposed that the
 missing areas of terrazzo border and skirting be reinstated and the existing
 terrazzo in poor repair be renewed in facsimile. (Figures 14 & 15)
- Lavatories to the first and third floors
 A large portion of the terrazzo to one of the original first floor bathrooms was previously removed and the other areas have been overlaid with linoleum using a cementitious levelling screed. This screed has adhered to the original terrazzo finish and cannot be removed without causing significant damage. In bathrooms where the terrazzo is not covered in screed, the existing stall partitions are to be removed and reconfigured, which will require significant patch repairs to floors that have already been heavily repaired in the past using inappropriate materials. Therefore, it is proposed that these areas are renewed with new terrazzo finishes to match the appearance of the existing. (Figures 16 & 17)
- First floor lift lobby
 As part of the building works, it is proposed that new ceiling mounted light fixtures be installed in the 1st and 2nd floor lift lobbies; however, the existing floor construction precludes accessing the purpose-built service void in the

floor from the ceiling below (refer to Mace drawing 28731-SOAS-A-DET-GEN-XX-761 submitted as part of planning approval). Therefore, to avoid surface mounting a series of conduits to the ground floor lift lobby's original cornices and ceilings, it is proposed that the original first floor terrazzo floor finish be lifted to allow access below and renewed to match the existing. The proposals include the installation of new discreet access panels to allow for future access to the service void without disturbing the terrazzo.

In addition to the above, new designed access panels will be installed in original terrazzo finishes. These panels will emulate the design of the original brass framed panels with terrazzo infill. The proposed locations of the new panels are indicated on Mace floor finishes GA's.

2.4 Timber Board Flooring

It is proposed that the existing oak tongue and groove board flooring be restored throughout the building. This will include removing existing carpet adhesive, refinishing and repairing areas of damaged flooring with new boards to match the existing historic, where the original boards have been lost. Where new bathrooms are proposed in the rooms adjacent to the second floor lift lobby, the existing timber flooring in this area is to be carefully salvaged and reinstated in the new third floor lift lobby. Salvaged boards will be used to undertake repairs as necessary throughout the building.

As part of the building's refurbishment works, new access panels will be added in the timber floors in locations as shown on the drawing in Appendix A. It is also proposed that the lecture rooms and offices with timber floor boards have a carpeted finish to meet sound-deadening requirements. To avoid adversely impacting the historic fabric, plywood is to be laid over the newly restored oak boarding and the carpet finish adhered to the plywood. A minimal number of fixings will be made into the boarding using stainless steel nails or staples to secure the plywood.

2.5 Oak Parquet Flooring

The oak parquet/ block flooring in the lower ground floor lift lobby and corridor will be retained in situ and restored. As second floor construction is identical to that on the first and third, to allow for the installation of ceiling-mounted light fixtures it is proposed that the parquet flooring in the second floor lift lobby is carefully recorded and temporarily lifted. Following installation of the necessary services, the flooring will be reinstated in its original configuration and restored.

3.0 Impact of the Proposals to Historic Floor Finishes

The vast majority of the floor finishes in the building are part of the original fit out, so the description of the proposals above essentially sets out the impact of the proposed works on the historic fabric. The impact on historic fabric has been minimised to areas where the floor finishes are in a very poor state of repair (as is the case with the two sections of skirting, the single stair landing, the two lift lobbies, and in the bathrooms on the first and second floors), where original plan form is being restored and therefore new terrazzo is required which should be seamless with surviving original terrazzo (skirting on first floor eastern corridor), or where there is a clear need to disrupt the original fabric in order to channel services that would otherwise be surface- or ceiling-mounted and hence more damaging to the character and significant spaces of the building (the ground floor lift lobby). In instances where the floors are proposed for replacement, the new finish will be like-for-like and undertaken by specialist contractors to the specification of Donald Insall Associates, with samples of the proposed new finish submitted to Camden Council for review and approval. New access panels of brass-framed terrazzo will be included in the new floor so that future maintenance does not harm the floors and the design of

the lobbies is not undermined by ad-hoc alterations over the years. For the same reason, access panels will be inserted where necessary into the timber boards.

The proposals will impact on the **significance of the listed** building. Overwhelmingly, this is a positive impact, because historic floor finishes will be repaired (travertine, parquet, the majority of the terrazzo) and revealed for the first time in decades (York stone in the cloister). The only negative impact of the proposals is the covering of the timber board flooring with carpet tiles, but this is proposed in such a way that the boards are unharmed and it is a reversible alteration.

The impact on fabric, character and appearance is a slightly different question to that of the impact on the building's overall significance. The building is listed at Grade II* and is significant for the grace of its overall composition, the refined massing of the tower, the fine detailing and craftsmanship, the quality of materials, and its associations with Charles Holden and with the University of London in its interwar expansion. The architectural strength of the Senate House is very much concentrated in the tower, with its elegant form and monumental presence. The courtyard blocks flanking the tower are less sophisticated in their massing, but are nonetheless very important for their carefully-composed elevations and high quality materials and detailing. The interiors to the southern block and to the Senate House Library are also very special: these are rare and complete ensembles of interwar interior design. The foyer of the north block forms part of this sequence of interior spaces too. The rest of the north block interior is of more modest interest. The fixtures and fittings in the north block are good quality 1940s work, and have some interest as surviving features of this period, but they are not of the same order of significance as those in the south block. Lavish interiors were never intended for this block, which did not form part of the ceremonial or intellectual heart of the University, as the south block and tower did. Only the bare skeleton of Holden's interior was built and the building was fitted out after the Second World War. The proposals described above affect only this fabric of more modest interest and the overall significance of the Grade II* listed Senate House is not harmed or undermined in any respect.

The overall impact of the proposals on the significance of the listed building amounts to very much 'less than substantial harm', to use the terms of the *National Planning Policy Framework*.

4.0 Justification of the Proposals

The works described above are part of a wider proposal to refurbish and extend the north block of the Senate House so that it can continue in use as a higher education building, occupied by SOAS. Taken by themselves, the proposed works to the floors offer an appropriate balance of harm and benefit in terms of the impact on the listed building. Taken as part of the wider scheme, the proposals remain firmly advantageous for the listed building.

The *National Planning Policy Framework* states that the 'public benefits of a proposal' – which includes securing its optimum viable use – should outweigh any 'less than substantial harm'. The 'less than substantial harm' is the replacement of the terrazzo in isolated areas only, which has been kept to a minimum and involves like-for-like replacement. The benefits the works to the floor finishes bring to the listed building are: the repair and reconditioning of the timber boards; the repair and revealing of the York stone in the cloister; the repair of the parquet flooring; and the introduction of a discreet series of access panels (carefully designed in the same idiom as the original floor finishes) which will reduce the likelihood of future, insensitive, ad-hoc alterations. All these works will allow the original design of the building and its historic fabric to be more fully appreciated.

These works to the floor finishes must also be considered alongside the wider

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benefits of the main proposal. These are, to quote directly from the historic building report which accompanies that application:

The first and major benefit is the improvement of the internal courtyard ... the [new atrium] reveals and celebrates the original building, which is visible through the largely glazed roof. The subtle design and high quality materials and craftsmanship of the courtyard elevations are in no way undermined by the new atrium, instead they are emphasised. Nor does the new structure compete with the old, but rather it connects with a light-touch to the existing fabric and creates a dramatic contemporary space from which the historic building can be enjoyed.

... Added to this major benefit is the removal of modern partitions in two of the original spaces on the ground floor, in particular the open cloister in the centre of the two lobbies. This space will be transformed by the removal of modern infill from the arcades to each external wall and of the modern breeze block walls, creating the open cloister Holden intended in his original design but which was abandoned at the outset of the Second World War.

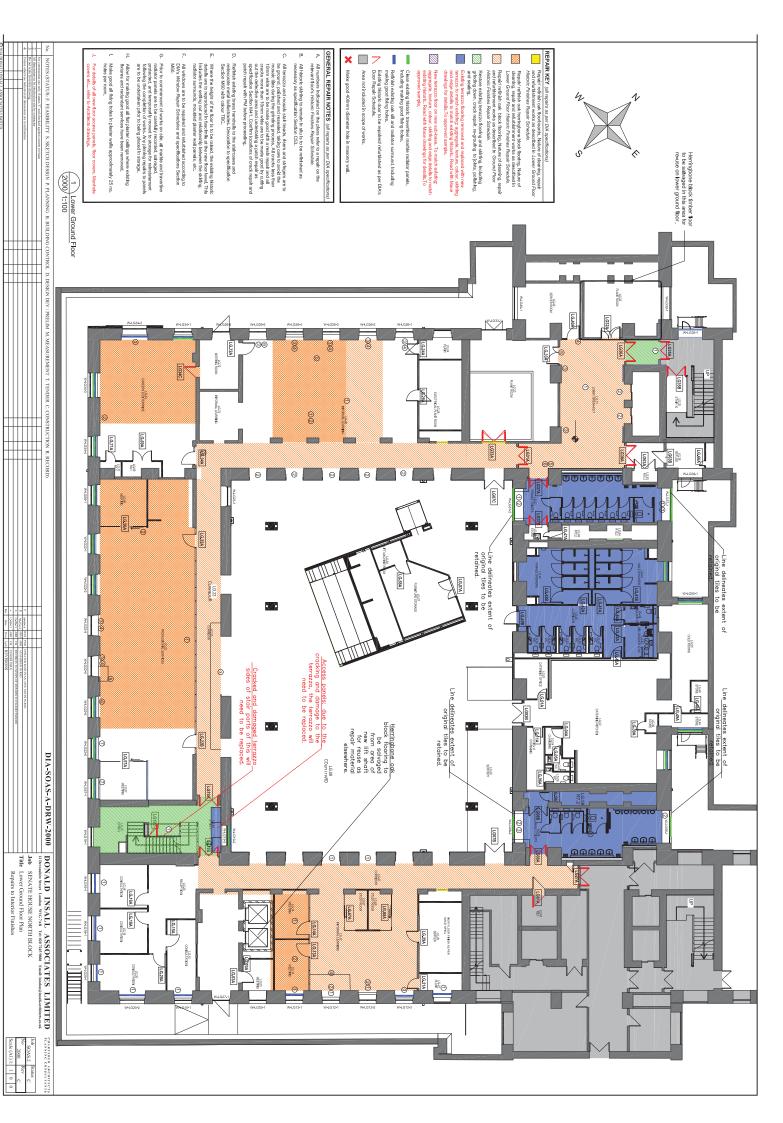
Other benefits of the proposal are that the façades will be cleaned and repaired and the external doors and windows restored. The interior of the existing building will be refurbished and its original character will be restored. The original qualities of the interior have been obscured by myriad piecemeal alterations and an accumulation of clutter which began even before the building was finished, as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War. The partitions, suspended ceilings, wiring, signage and services of over 70 years of institutional use will be stripped back and discreet

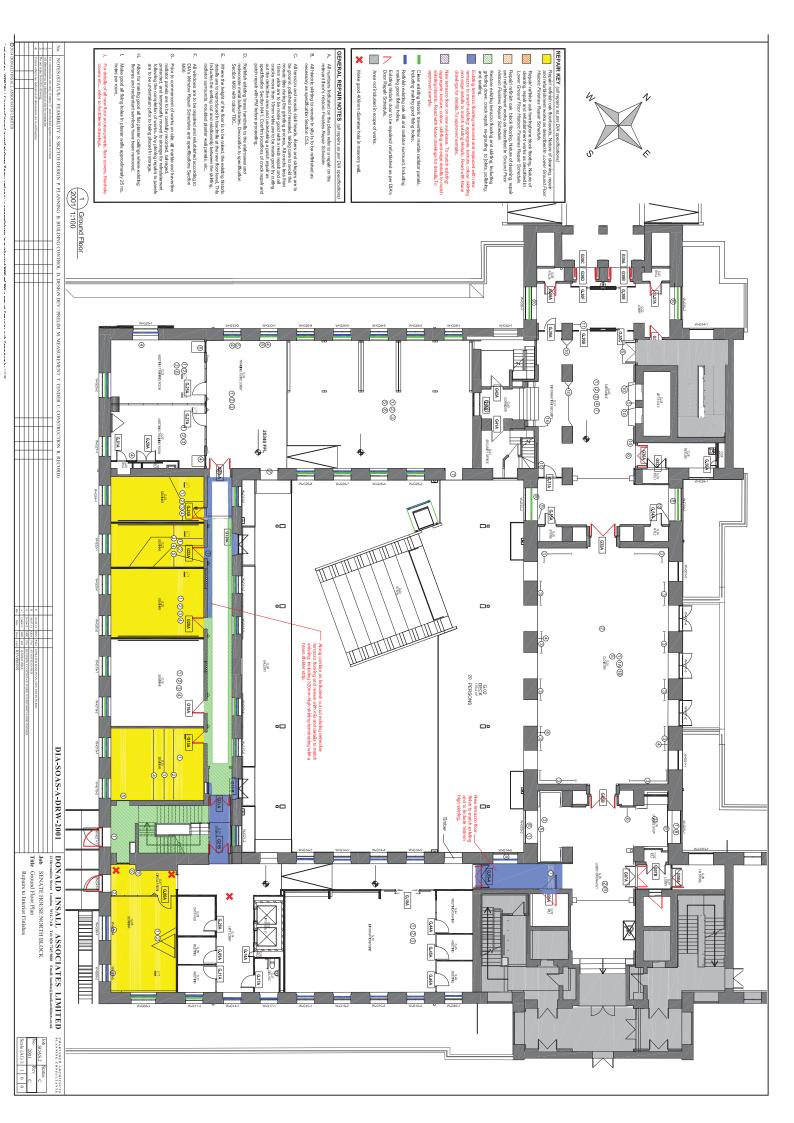
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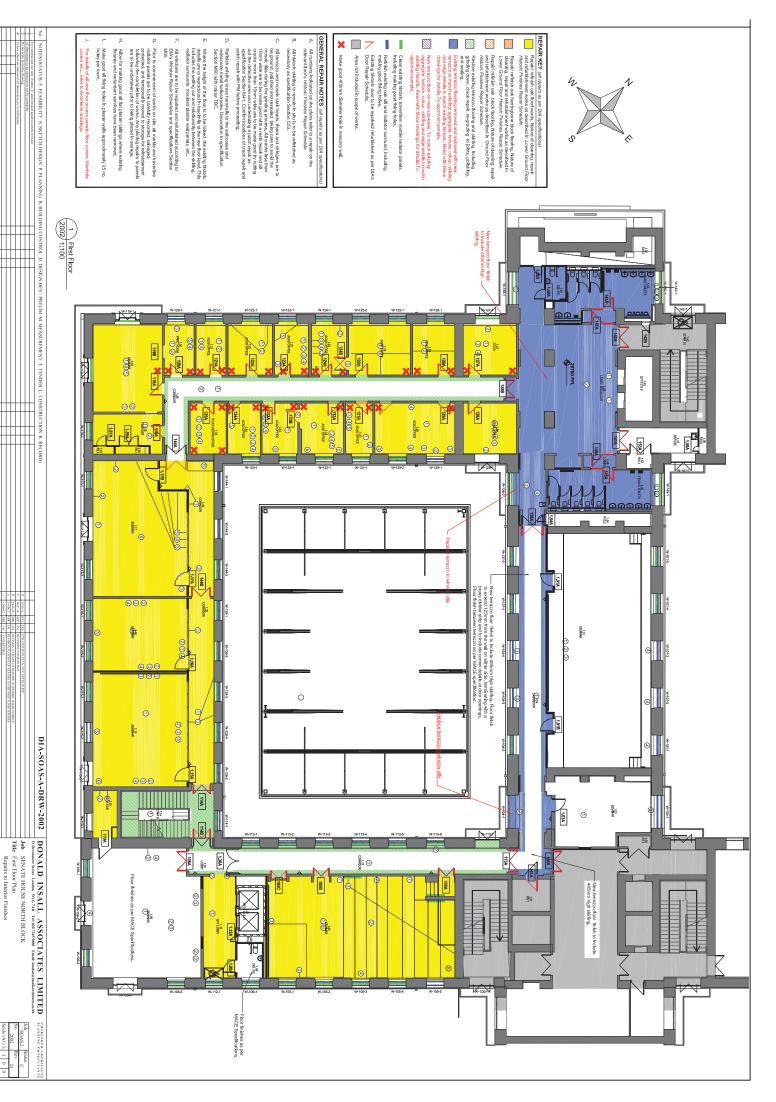
APPENDIX A DRAWINGS

Donald Insall Associates Author: ARR Checker: MJS

Revision D









Existing timber board flooring and travertime radiator panel to the north wall to be carrefully salvaged. New sub-floor construction to room as per MACE detail

REPAIR KEY (all repairs as per DIA specifications)

Repairl refinish oak floorboards, Nature of telaning, repair
and refurtishment works as described in Lower Ground Floor
Historic Trianshes Repair Schedule. Repair/ refinish oak herringbone block flooring. Nature of cleaning, repair and refurbishment works as described in Lower Ground Floor Historic Finishes Repair Schedule.

tore existing terrazzo flooring and skirting, including ding down, crack repair, re-grouting to joints, polishing

Repair refinish oak block flooring. Nature of cleaning, repair and refurbishment works as described in Ground Floor Historic Finishes Repair Schedule.

Refinish existing oak sill and radiator surround, including making good fixing holes. Clean existing historic travertine/ marble radiator panels including making good fixing holes:

Existing historic door to be repaired/ refurblished as per DIA's Door Repair Schedule.

X Make good 400mm diameter hole in masonry wall

Area not included in scope of works.

All numbers indicated on the plans refer to a repair on the relevant floor's Historic Finishes Repair Schedule. All historic skirting to remain in situ is to be refinished as necessary as specification Section C53.

Where the helpful of the floor is to be raised, the existing historic details are to reproduced in faschnile at the new floor level. This includes the setting out and relationship between the skirting, radiator surrounds, moulded plaster wall panets, etc.

Prior to commencent of works on site, all marble and traverline radiator; panels are to be carefully recorded, safugard, protected, and temporally moved to stronge for reinstatement following the competition of works. Any planting replants to panels are to be undertaken prior to being placed in strongs.

Make good all fixing holes in plaster walls approximately 25 no holes per room.

Refinish existing brass handralis to the staircases and redecorate metal ballustrades. Decoration to specification Section M60 with colour TBC.

All windows are to be repaired and refurbished according to DIA's Window Repair Schedules and specifications Section M60.

ES (STATUS: F. FEASIBILITY S. SKETCH DESIGN P. PLANNING B. BUILDING CONTROL D. DESIGN DEV / PRELIM M. MEASUREMENT T. TENDER C. CONSTRUCTION R. RECORD) 1 Second Floor 2003 1:100

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Title Second Floor Plan
Repairs to Interior Finishes

