



# New Student Centre

Design and Access Statement

June 2015

Nicholas Hare **Architects**



## UCL - New Student Centre

### Design and Access Statement June 2015

#### Contributors:

Client Team	UCL Estates
Architect	Nicholas Hare Architects
Project Manager	Mace
Energy and Sustainability	Expedition
Services Engineer	BDP
Structural and Civil Engineer	Curtins
Landscape Architect	Colour UDL
Cost Manager	Aecom
CDM Coordinator	Faithful & Gould
Planning Consultant	Deloitte
Lighting	BDP
Acoustics	BDP
Fire Engineering	Arup

Note: this report has been formatted as a double-sided A3 document.

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Aerial view from the north with the site highlighted in red



# I. INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

*"The vision is to make UCL the most exciting university in the world at which to study and work. UCL aims to be the UK's leading outward-looking university, making a major contribution to the society in which we function and enhancing the lives of our students. The New Student Centre must support and reflect this scale of ambition and will be the benchmark for excellence for all future UCL construction projects and it should have the highest design, quality, sustainability and procurement approach. It should enhance the student experience and create a new and exciting student experience at UCL. The design must be sensitive to the surrounding built environment, in particular the adjacent listed buildings and Bloomsbury Conservation Area, while staying true to the ambition of UCL to create a 'landmark' building and be London's Global University."*

Extract from UCL's New Student Centre project description

This report sets out the basis of the design strategy for the New Student Centre, developed following the selection of Nicholas Hare Architects (NHA) to lead the design of the project. NHA's work commenced in early September 2014. The development by others of a previous scheme for a building on the site has led to a good understanding of the objectives and opportunities. Better strategic definition for the project has now developed; the design team and UCL have established a clear brief and a design approach that aims to create an outstanding New Student Centre on the site.

The purpose of a Design and Access Statement is to set out the thinking that has resulted in the design submitted in the planning application. It explains how the building's massing, layout and appearance has developed in response to the demands of its particular context and brief, and how the resulting building will be easy to use and navigate by everyone.

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in accordance with CABE guidance, both in terms of its structure and in reflecting CABE's feedback in the development of the design.

## 2. SITE CONTEXT - THE BLOOMSBURY MASTERPLAN

### THE UCL MASTERPLAN

In 2011 UCL commissioned a masterplan for its Bloomsbury Campus that aims to shape the development of the university's academic, social and urban environment.

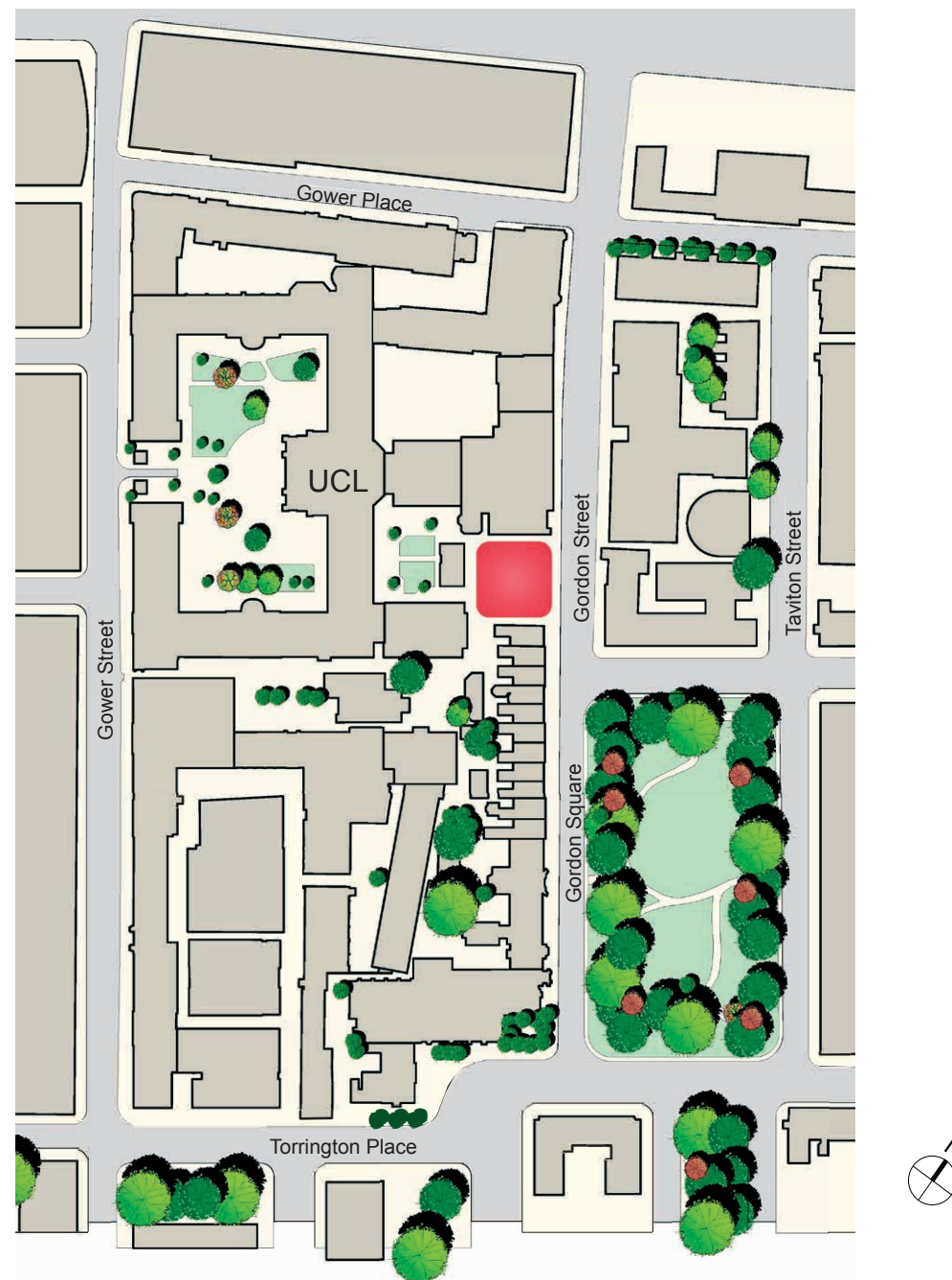
The development of the Student Centre design has been informed by the key objectives of this masterplan:

- To improve the quality, range and flexibility of the facilities and learning spaces on offer;
- To reflect the outstanding academic record of UCL through the quality of its built environment.
- To raise the public visibility of the University by means of buildings that more obviously communicate the activities undertaken within.
- To enhance the day-to-day experience of the University's public realm, increasing the permeability of the campus.

The UCL masterplan identifies a number of particular challenges for Gordon Street. These are summarised below:

- Lack of UCL identity;
- Little physical or visual interaction between buildings and street, with blank facades and limited street entrances;
- Lack of connection with other parts of the campus;
- Low-rise and empty sites forming a break to the street façade and undermining the high-density development of the rest of the street; and
- Low-quality appearance by comparison to the rest of the Bloomsbury campus.

The Bloomsbury Masterplan identifies the site between 26 Gordon Square and 15 Gordon Street for a New Student Centre. The delivery of this project is central to delivering the Masterplan vision.



*Illustration from the Bloomsbury Masterplan - site to be developed extends across the Japanese Garden and includes the ACBE plantroom and Bloomsbury 'Node'*



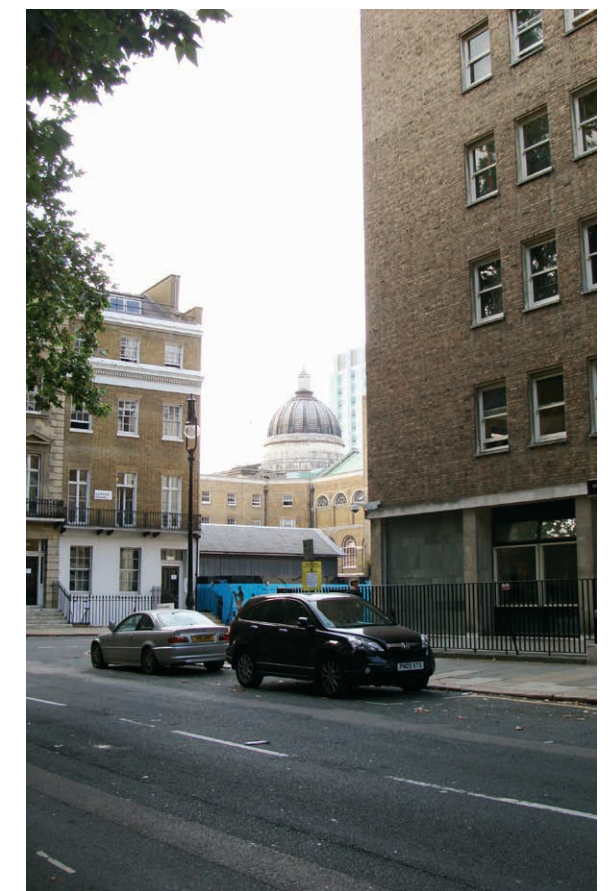
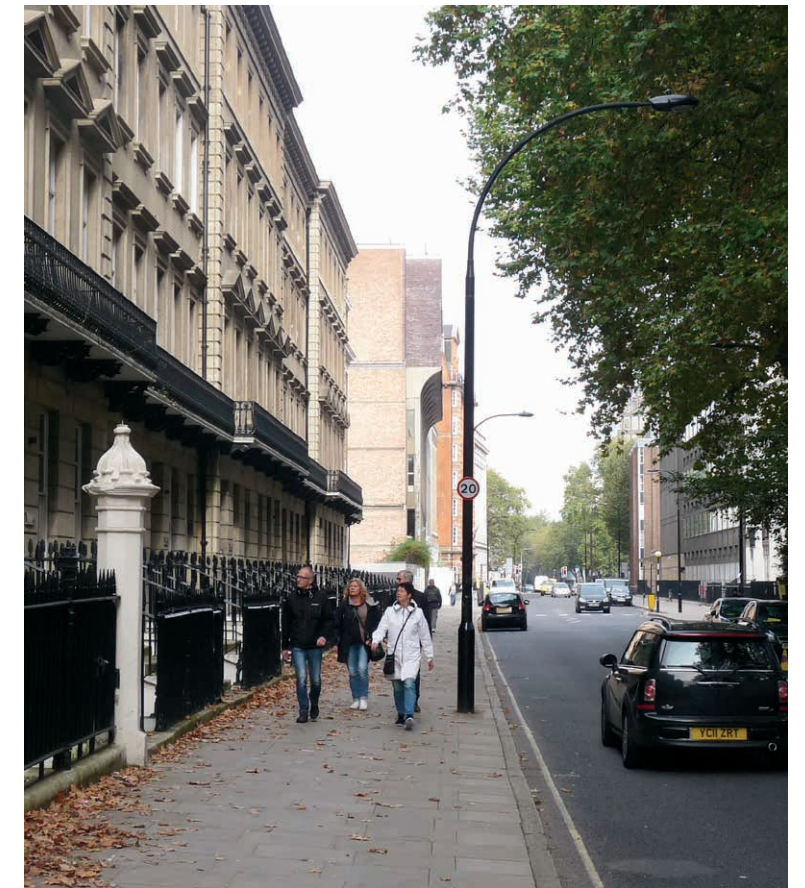
## PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is located at the heart of the UCL Bloomsbury Campus, adjacent to the Bloomsbury Theatre and the Wilkins Building. The site is vacant, having been cleared following bomb damage during the Second World War. An east-west access route from Gordon Street to Gower Street runs through the site, along with a north-south route connecting a number of UCL departments.

The site has been allocated for development for university, education, cultural and/or community related ancillary uses in the adopted version of the Site Allocations DPD (SADPD). The full site allocation (Site 22) states that development will be expected to:

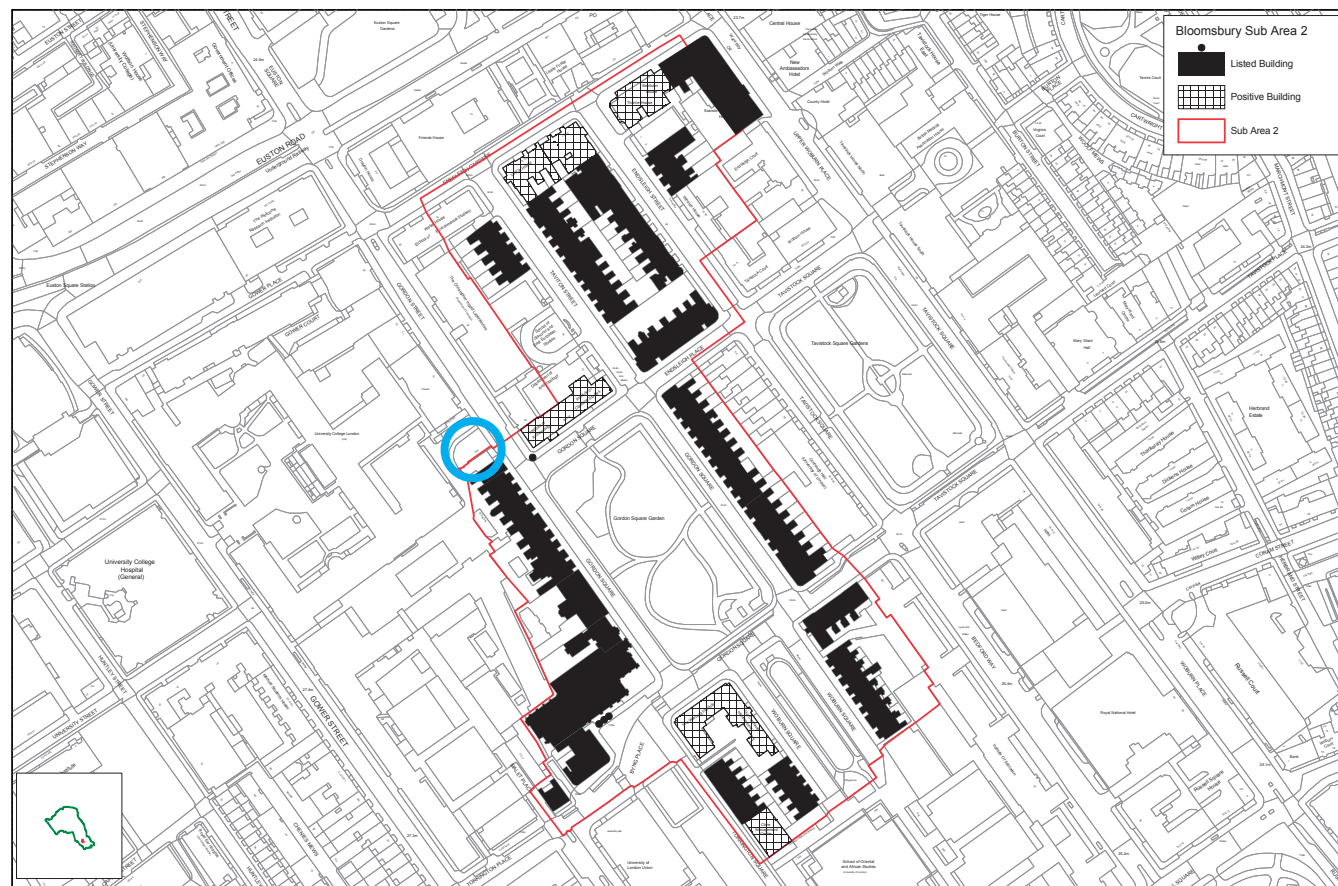
- Integrate development with associated development and improvements within and adjoining the UCL campus and assist providing a more legible entrance to UCL;
- Create an improved pedestrian entrance into the university campus;
- Support opportunities for activities and spaces encouraging public access;
- Safeguard the setting of nearby listed buildings;
- Provide infrastructure for supporting local energy generation on site and/or connections to existing or future networks where feasible; and
- Safeguard the future construction of the Chelsea-Hackney line.

There are two recent planning permissions for the site. In 2004, permission was granted (2004/4090/P) for the erection of a six-storey infill building with three basement levels to provide a museum gallery, lecture theatres and associated facilities for UCL. In 2006, a revised planning application (2006/2435/P) was granted permission, which approved design changes to the external envelope, additional bulk at roof level and the inclusion of a chimney. Both permissions have been implemented through minor works and demolition on site. Another scheme for the site was developed in 2012-2013 but was not progressed to a planning application.



*Photos looking towards the site*

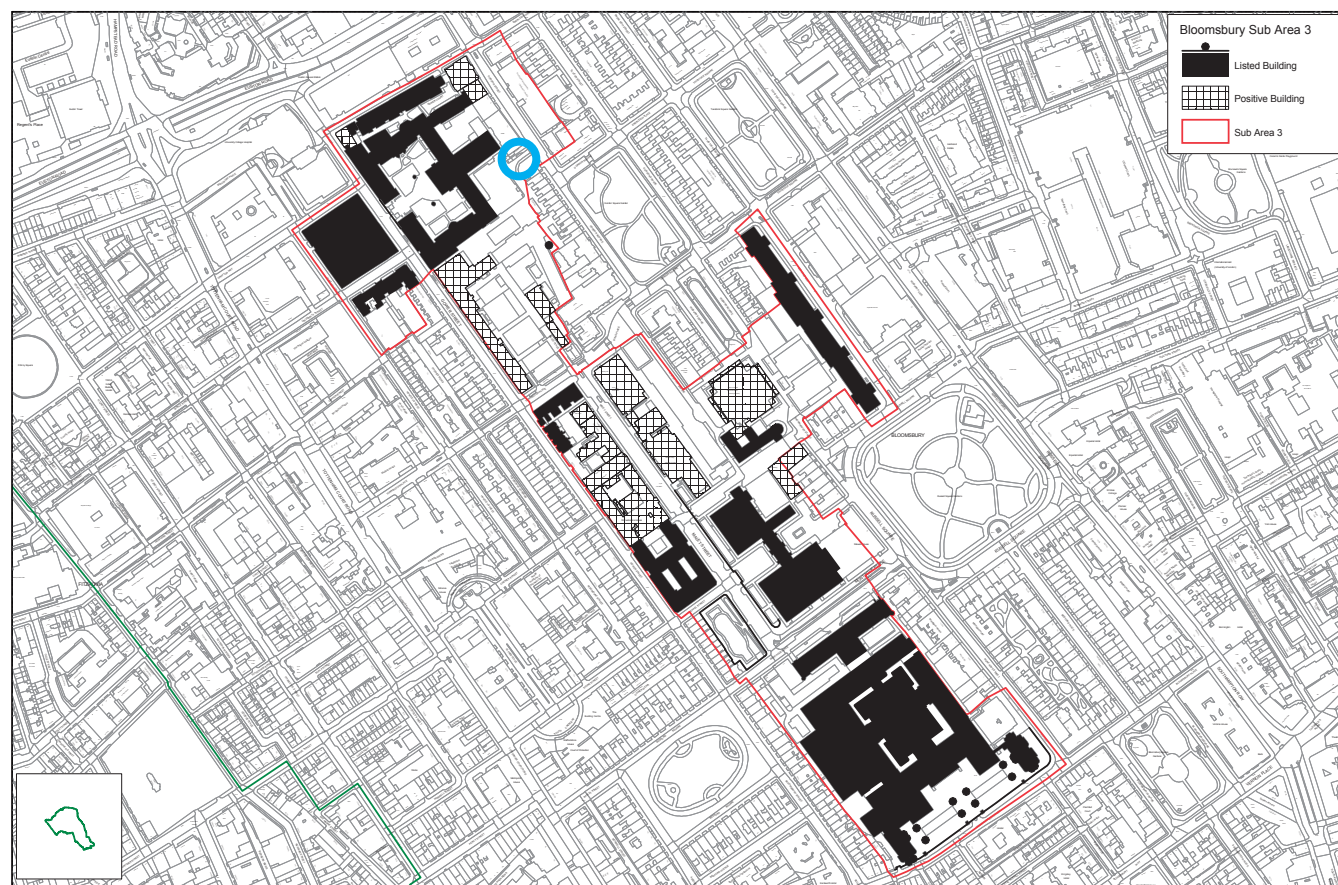




The site is in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and is in the Background Assessment Area of the Greenwich Park Wolfe statue to St Paul's Cathedral Strategic Viewing Corridor. However, any development on site will be below the height threshold of the strategic view due to townscape and heritage issues.

The site is located in Sub Area 3 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and borders Sub Area 2. To the south, the terraces at Nos 1-26 Gordon Square are Grade II listed, while to the west, the Wilkins Building dates from shortly after the founding of UCL and is Grade I listed. The adjacent Institute of Archaeology Building on Gordon Street is identified as making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

At the north-west corner of the site there is a 1960s brutalist tower known as the 'Node', containing stairs, toilets and plant for the Bloomsbury Theatre. Planning permission has recently been granted for the construction of a new plant enclosure on the roof of the Theatre (application reference 2015/1262/P). This will enable the 'Node' tower to be demolished and the plant it contains to be relocated, thus freeing up this portion of the site.



Conservation area plans with site identified in blue





*View of the New Student Centre across Gordon Square*



# 3. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATIONS

## Public displays

There have been two public exhibitions held in the Wilkins Terrace Cloisters, in March 2015 in the South Cloister; and in May 2015 in the North Cloister. The team displayed plans and images of the proposals and received useful and encouraging feedback from staff and students at both sessions.

## UCL users

The design has been developed through a regular and constructive series of workshop, review and reporting sessions with representatives of Learning Environments and Student Services. A series of precedent visits has also been undertaken to help establish shared aspirations for the building.

## UCL stakeholders

Consultations have continued with representatives of neighbouring buildings, including the Bernard Katz Building, ACBE, Bloomsbury Theatre and the gym, together with teams dealing with other UCL campus projects which may affect or be affected by the project objectives.

There have also been a number of consultations with key UCL stakeholders with an interest in either the operation and / or maintenance of the building. These include sustainability, security, catering, EM&I, fire safety, Central Campus, accessibility, maintenance and window cleaning.

## Public organisations

The following meetings have taken place with the Local Planning Authority and associated public organisations:

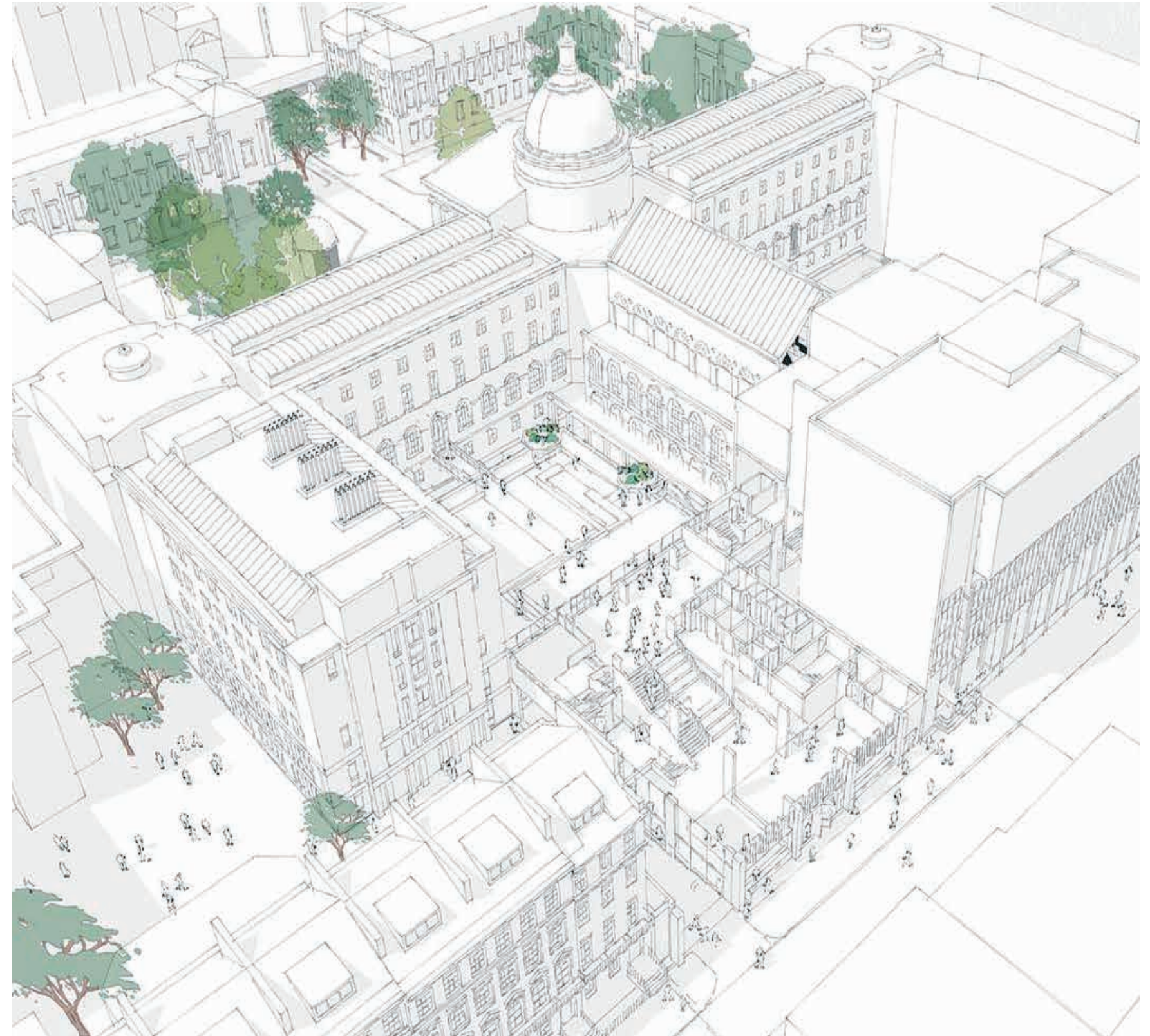
- London Borough of Camden Planning (LBC)  
(Pre-application meetings held in December 2014, March 2015 and April 2015)
- LBC Highways (January and February 2015)
- LBC Access (April and May 2015)
- LBC Sustainability (April 2015)
- Historic England (January and April 2015)
- Bloomsbury CAAC (February and May 2015)
- CABE (March 2015)
- Metropolitan Police (May 2015)





Several key points emerged as a result of these consultations, which have informed the development of the design from its earliest stages:

- The location of this building within the unique townscape of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area demands architecture of the highest quality.
- It is critical to provide clear links through the building from Gordon Street to the courtyard, with a strong sense of permeability through the site.
- The design of the east elevation and the planning of the internal spaces beyond should work to enhance the animation of Gordon Street.
- It is important that the main building entrance and the adjacent vehicle portal are welcoming and appropriate in scale.
- The resolution of the junction with 26 Gordon Square should be carefully considered to enhance the views from the south and across the Square
- The landscaping of the Japanese Garden should aim to create a green, unique and contemplative oasis in the heart of the campus.
- Well thought out junctions with existing buildings are required to form a strong and coherent whole to the elevation facing the Japanese Garden, and the use of a colonnade or cloister should be explored in this area.
- Plant at roof level should be minimised, though adding interest to the roovescape through the massing at roof level is welcomed.
- There is an opportunity to add attractive and useful open space at roof level.
- A strong focus on sustainability should be maintained, though the detailed design of shading devices should ensure bright, airy spaces are not compromised by overheating.
- It is desirable to demolish the 'Node' if the plant it contains can be relocated unobtrusively.



*Cut-away view of the New Student Centre in context*



# 4. THE BRIEF

## THE ASPIRATIONAL BRIEF

*"This is a unique opportunity for UCL to demonstrate its core values. The building should be truly student focused, responsive to change, inspirational and enabling, capable of reinventing itself as trends in education develop, accessible and inclusive to all, and reflecting the diversity of its users. It is not a building that people should be in awe of but want to be part of – the architecture should be easy to read and use, memorable by the experience that it provides. It should be an exemplar for other universities worldwide."*

*"The building must be of the highest quality finish, focusing on longevity (both durable, timeless and with careful management with regard to acoustics) and ease of maintenance. It is to be an intensively used environment that will have a lot of scene changes. The infrastructure must be planned to provide technology, AV and power / data with ease and reliability and high standards of acoustic performance are essential. The Environmental Strategy should reflect the range of capacities that the building will accommodate through an academic year / day and demonstrate latest thinking in resource efficiency and promotion of sustainable behaviours through the design."*

Extracts from UCL's New Student Centre project description

The New Student Centre project demonstrates UCL's commitment to students, providing outstanding facilities that enhance the student experience. The brief has developed out of the work previously undertaken by UCL for a building on the site, and calls for a highly sustainable new building that is distinctive, with exceptional design quality, reflecting UCL's global significance whilst not appearing elitist. It should be a building that is accessible, inclusive, and welcoming.

## BUILDING FUNCTION

In essence, the purpose of the building is to provide two core functions: student learning environments, and a Student Enquiries Centre, both of which will enhance the student experience at UCL.



## Learning environments

UCL has a pressing need for new student study spaces, and this is supported by data collated by UCL Library Services, UCL Information Services Department (ISD), and from the National Student Survey. Students describe UCL's learning spaces as inadequate, along with identifying dissatisfaction at IT provision, and a lack of access to computers.

The New Student Centre will help rebalance these perceived issues, through providing a variety of learning spaces: 1000 new 'seats' for studying is the stated aim. The spaces vary in character and size, creating different settings for individual study and group collaboration, as well as more social learning environments. Dedicated to the needs of the students, these are spaces and furniture

solutions that are flexible, adaptable, and IT resourced, with effective power provision. The learning environments occupy the largest portion of the new building's area.

## Student Enquiries Centre

Operated by a team of UCL Student and Registry Services (SRS) staff, the Student Enquiries Centre has a 'customer-facing' service desk providing a comprehensive enquiry point for students. The team of up to 20 staff operate between the front desk and a 'back-office' area dealing with phone / email enquiries. Co-located with the enquiries centre are a number of small consultation rooms for more private discussions, as well as an area dedicated to self-service and information points.



### Other brief requirements

In addition to and supporting these two core functions, the following spaces and requirements also form part of the brief for the building:

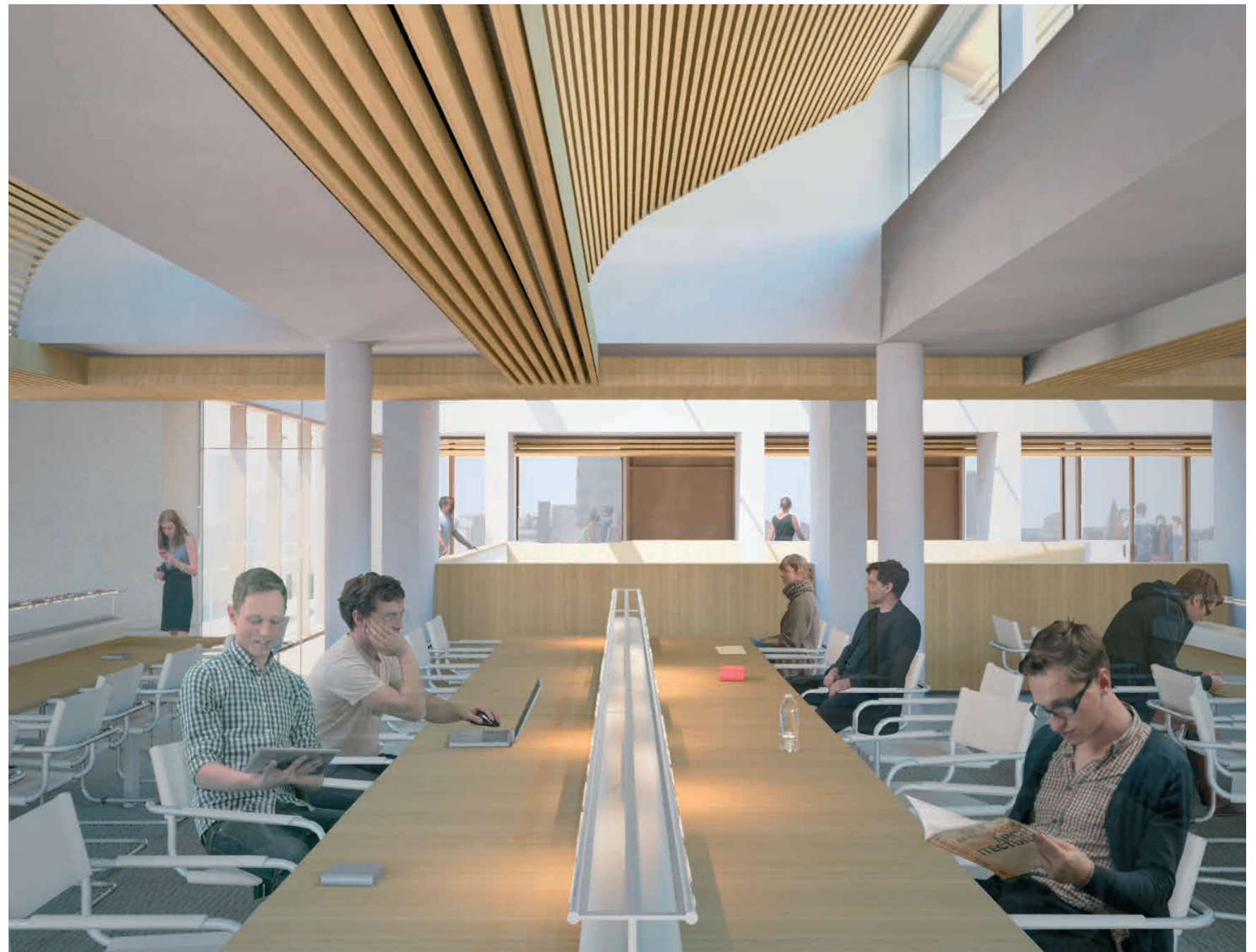
- A welcoming reception point for students, the public and visitors, combined with a security presence.
- A lightly serviced café, essentially providing coffee and sandwiches.
- A Quiet Contemplation Room/Multi-faith Centre - a flexible space for prayer and meditation, including chaplaincy and pastoral support.
- Space for displays and pop-up exhibitions, ideally forming part of the publically accessible spaces at ground level.
- Cycle storage and associated facilities.
- Staff support facilities.
- Storage for laptops and personal belongings at each level.
- Waste and recycling facilities.

### ACCESS

As stated in the UCL masterplan, a key objective for this scheme is to improve and encourage access through the site to the wider campus beyond. The ground floor levels are completely open to the general public as well as students, with security barriers only restricting access to upper and basement levels. Good levels of daylight and transparency throughout will help those unfamiliar with the building to find their way around, and all appropriate measures have been taken to ensure those with disabilities can make full use of the facilities.

Consideration has been given to access for deliveries and emergency services, as well as accommodating pedestrian and vehicular traffic flows.

The means by which the design aims to accommodate these requirements are described in more detail within the Access Statement on p43.



View of fourth floor study space looking west