

5. SITE CONTEXT

CONSERVATION AREA CONTEXT

The site is a largely vacant plot on Gordon Street, between 26 Gordon Square and the Bloomsbury Theatre. The site is defined by Gordon Street to the east, the Bloomsbury Theatre to the north, the Japanese Garden and Bernard Katz Building to the west, and Grade II listed terraced houses from the 1800s to the south. The Grade I listed Wilkins Building sits to the west, flanking two sides of the Japanese Garden. All of the buildings directly adjacent to the site are owned by UCL.

The urban landscape of this part of Gordon Street varies. The 1960's Bloomsbury Theatre dominates with the imposing bulk of its attic story, partnered by the robustness of UCL's concrete Chemistry building on the other side of the road, built around the same time. Further north, the screened façade to the London Centre for Nanotechnology offers a similar scale.

Further south, the listed terraces on Gordon Square offer something more refined in scale, establishing a sense of engagement through their articulation. The site for the New Student Centre currently provides the punctuation between these contrasting styles and scales, giving an opportunity to create something unique, distinctive, rich and rewarding, a building that engages with the street and the public, reflecting its point of interplay between UCL and the world.



THE SITE

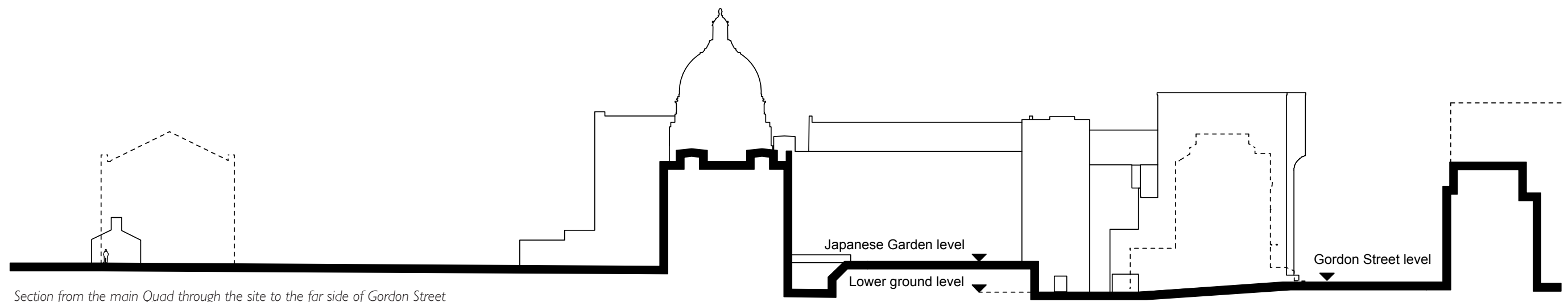
The site is a portal to UCL's Bloomsbury campus. It provides an essential and busy access point for pedestrians, emergency services, and deliveries. The new building must be fully accessible and continue to meet these circulation demands: these include primary routes into and through the new building at the Gordon Street entrance, and by the Bernard Katz Building, and essential connections through to the refectory and the lower ground floor of the Wilkins Building. In addition, the new building will establish a direct route to the Japanese Garden and the Wilkins Building ground floor.

The Gordon Street entrance sits at approximately 1.5m above the level of the Bernard Katz Building entrance and Wilkins Building lower ground floor, and approximately 2.5m below the level of the Japanese Garden.

The 'Node' (the Bloomsbury Theatre stair tower) currently stands behind the Bloomsbury Theatre, abutting the Japanese Garden. It contains stairs, WCs and servicing plant for the theatre. However this structure presents significant functional and aesthetic challenges for the development of the campus as a whole, and the design for the New Student Centre in particular. This being the case, it is proposed that it should be demolished.

The project scope includes re-inventing the landscape of the Japanese Garden. The eastern section of this courtyard space is currently occupied by the ACBE plant room, a pitched-roofed single-storey building containing air-conditioning plant to serve the laboratory spaces beneath. Any new link between Gordon Street and the Japanese Garden would be greatly impeded by this structure, and thus it is proposed that it is also demolished with the plant it contains relocated to the basement of the New Student Centre.

The proposed demolition of these two buildings is described in further detail in section 8.



6. INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE SITE

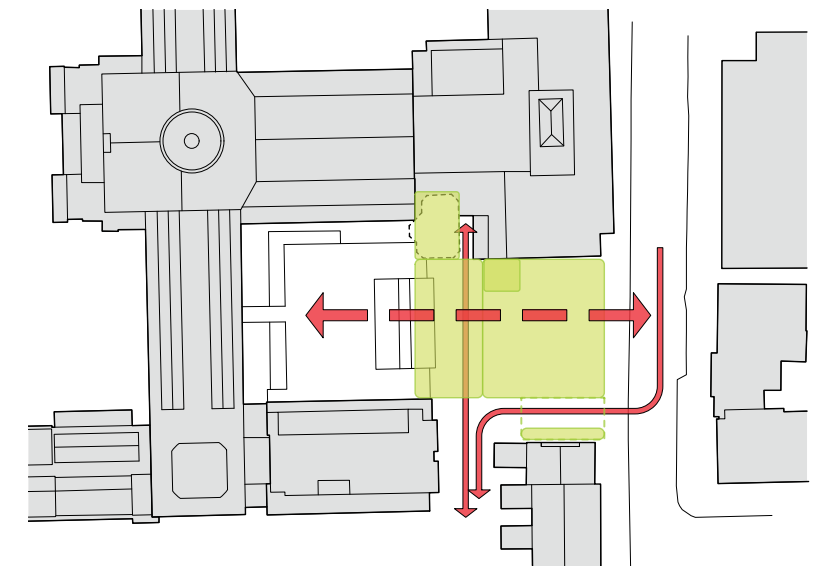
The building is intended to be inviting, legible and publicly accessible at its ground floor levels, encouraging people to enter without feeling constrained. Transparency and openness aid navigation and orientation, and generous space at the street and garden entrances will maximise the sense of welcome and accessibility.

Strategically, the levels of Gordon Street and the Japanese Garden extend into the central part of the building, the levels brought together with wide central steps that correspond to the Wilkins Building steps in the Main Quad. A direct and covered connection to the Lower Refectory becomes possible beneath the higher Japanese Garden level slab. The existing vehicle route to South Quad needs to be maintained for both daily deliveries and emergency vehicle access; this is most sensibly located to the south of the site.

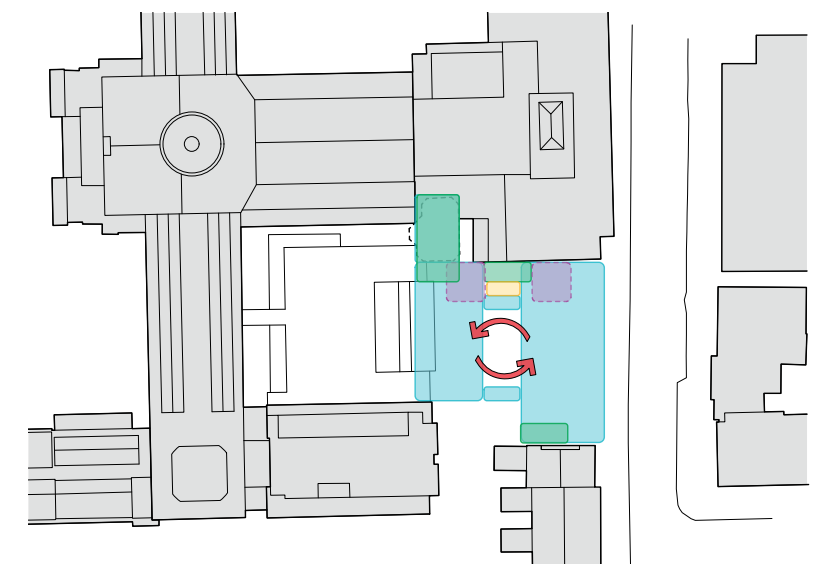
Analysis of the listed terrace elevations to Gordon Square acknowledges a vertical rhythm of grids at approximately 7m centres corresponding to building widths. By coincidence perhaps this pattern continues and aligns with the building grid of the Wilkins Terrace façade to the Japanese Garden behind. This suggests a composition for the New Student Centre elevation that recognises and continues the rhythm, and leads to a structural grid with four large bays of around 7m and a smaller bay of around half the width.

Internally, the building comprises two floor plates separated by a day-lit atrium rising for the height of the building, with bridges and stairs spiralling around the atrium and animating the space. The main core (including three passenger lifts) stacks vertically on the north side against the Bloomsbury Theatre.

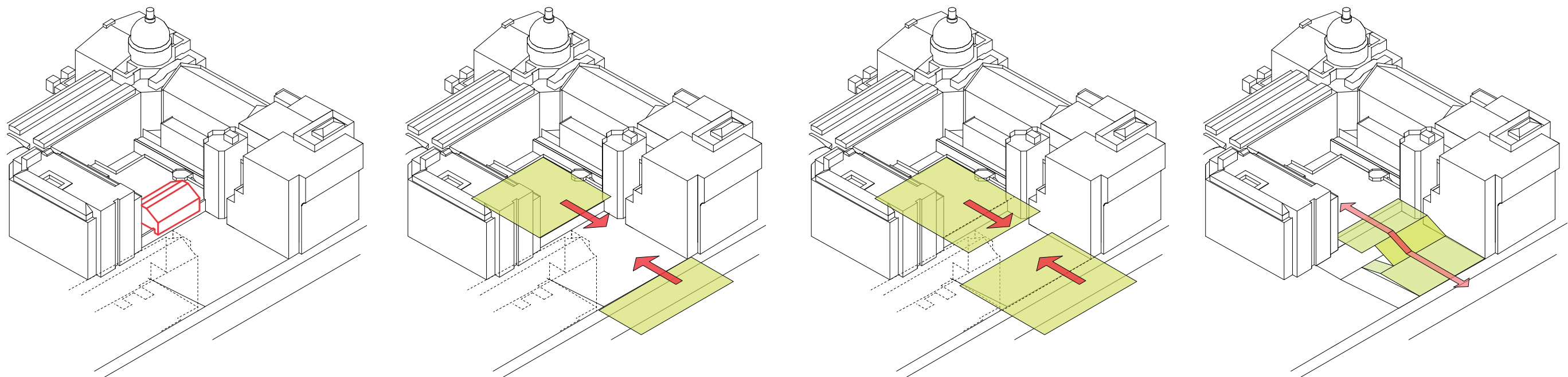
Working with the scale of neighbouring buildings, the New Student Centre has four floors of accommodation above ground level. It provides a refined 'book-end' for the adjacent listed terraced houses on Gordon Street, but remains visually lower than the Bloomsbury Theatre to the north. The building's height is set by generous floor-to-floor heights of 3.9m, providing the basis for creating pleasant studying environments and allowing good daylight penetration, as well as giving good adaptability for future changes in use.



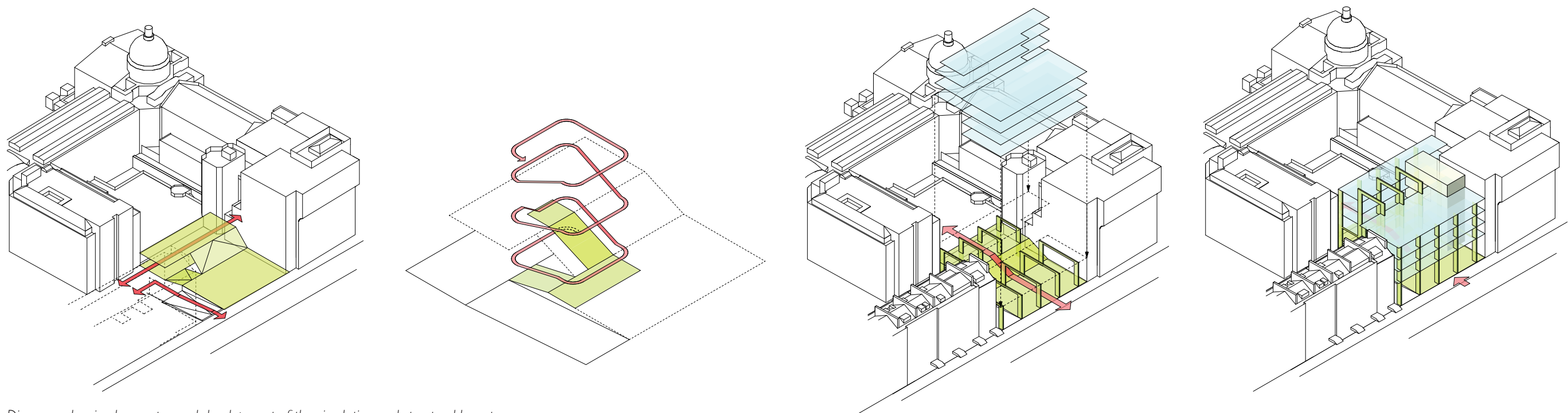
Ground level diagram showing routes through the building



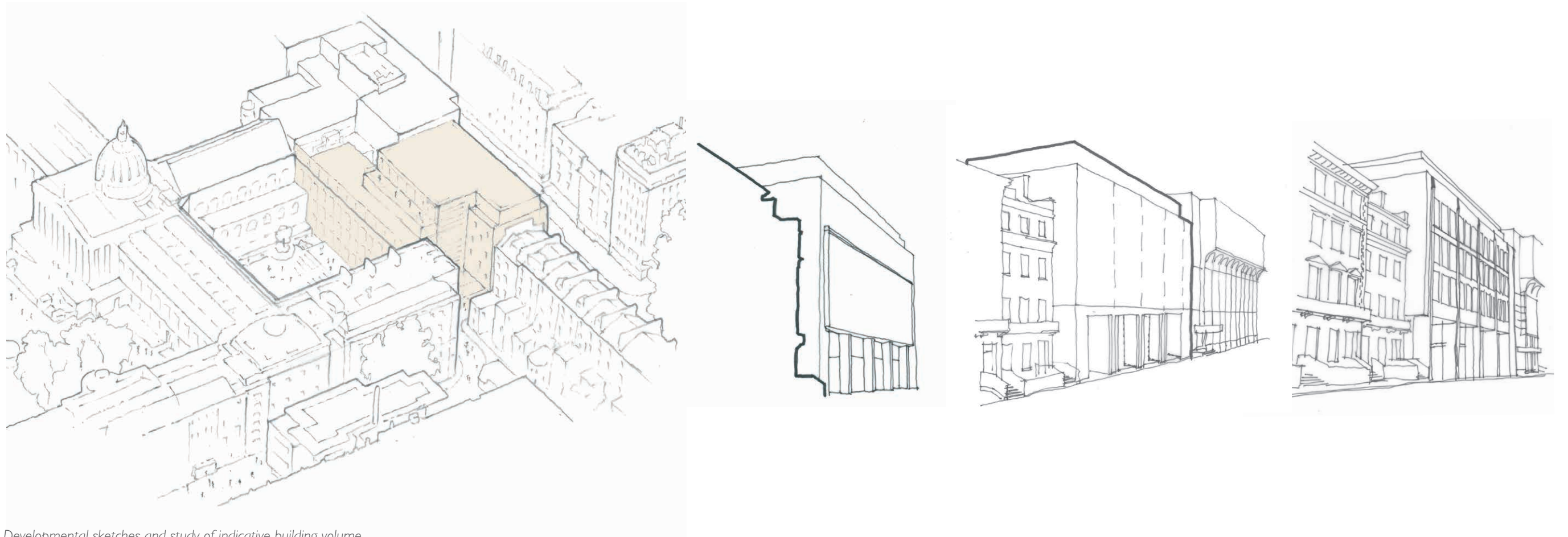
Circulation at upper floor levels



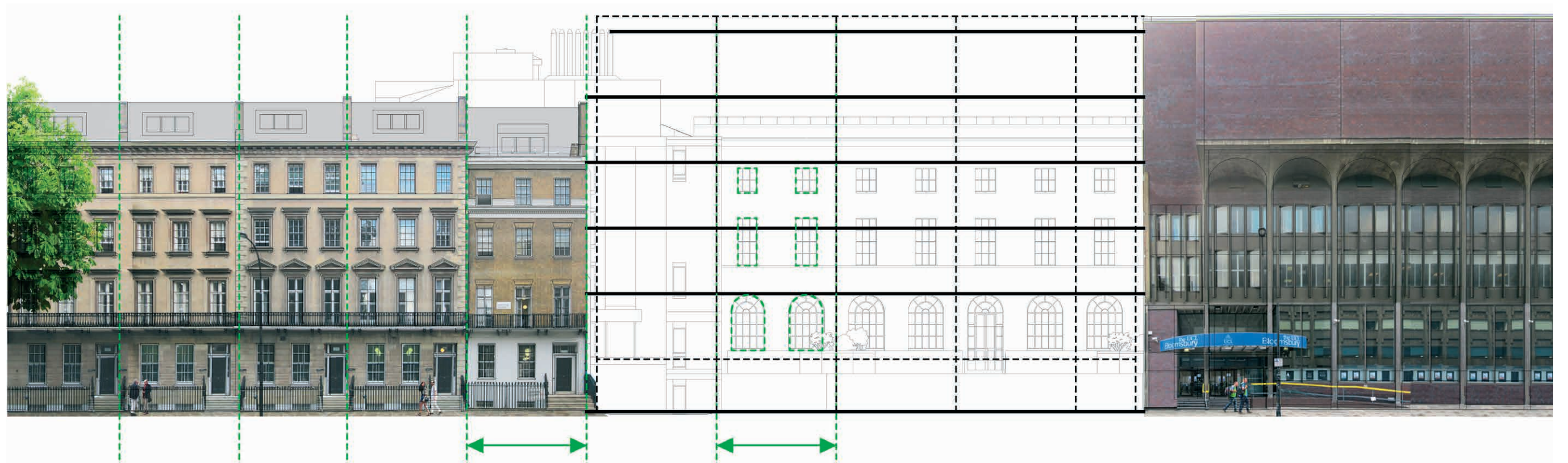
Diagrams showing the forming of the ground floor by extending the Gordon Street and Japanese Garden levels into the site



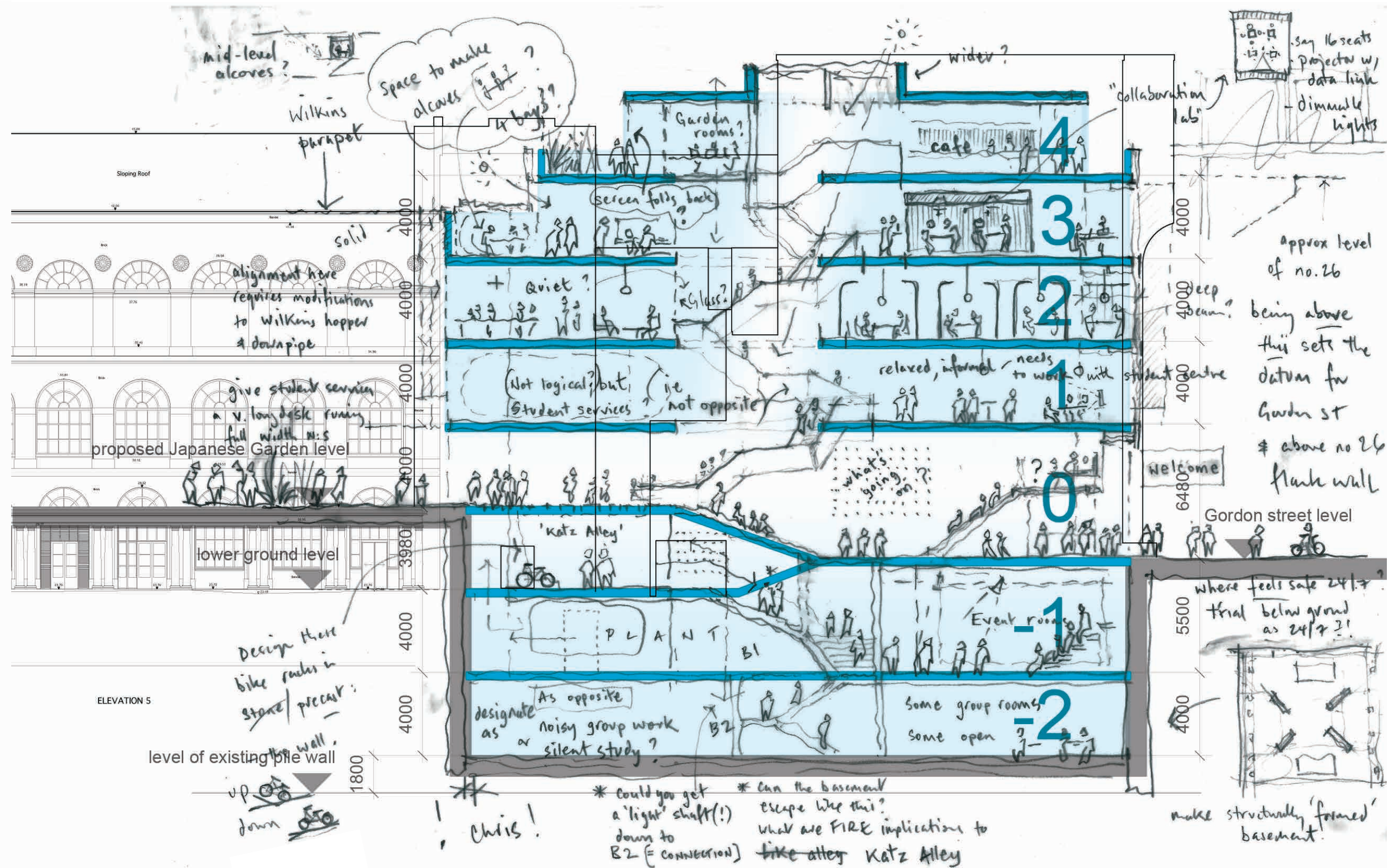
Diagrams showing key routes and development of the circulation and structural layout



Developmental sketches and study of indicative building volume



Gordon Street elevation study



Early sketch section showing potential disposition of functions within the building

7. PROPOSALS

USE AND AMOUNT

Site area: 0.26 hectares
Existing floorspace: ACBE plantroom = 171m²
Node stairs, circulation, toilets & plant = 315m²
Substation adjacent to Theatre = 13m²
Total = 499m²
Total proposed GEA: 6,794m²
Total proposed GIA: 5,838m²

The table below sets out the proposed net internal floorspace at each level.

	Study space & main circulation areas (m²)	Core areas, plant, WCs, lifts & escape stairs (m²)	Staff areas (m²)	Other (m²)	Total (m²)
Basement 2	68	409		134 (QCR)	611
Basement 1	290	317	26		633
Street level	326	185	10		521
Garden level	217	177			394
1st floor	210	195	17	294 (Student Enquiries Centre)	716
2nd floor	557	150			707
3rd floor	402	177		71 (Cafe)	650
4th floor	316	156			472
Total net area	2,386	1,766	53	499	4,704m²

54no. cycle parking spaces are proposed at Street level.

ROUTES AND LEVELS

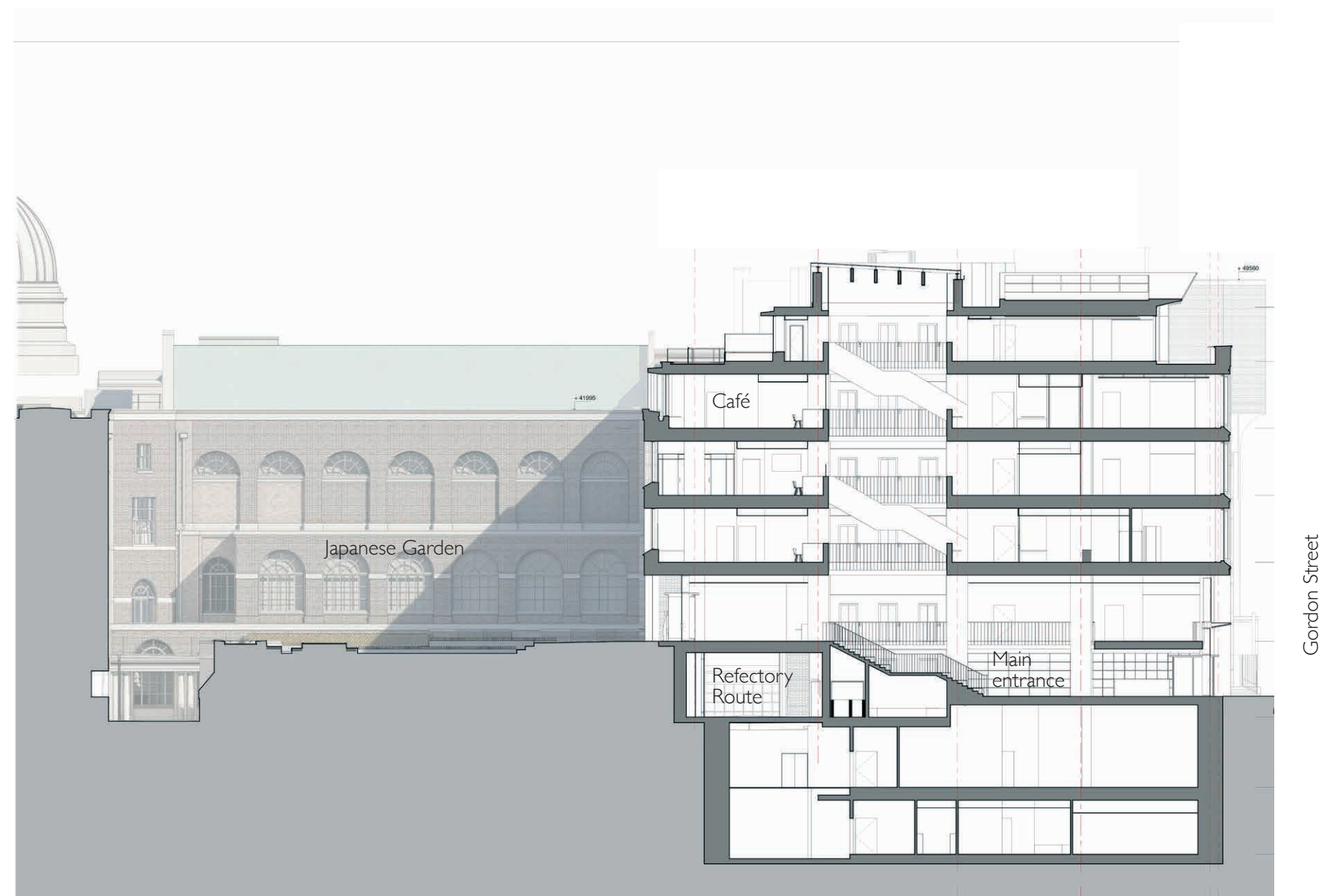
The routes and changes in level through the ground floors are made easier to navigate by creating lofty day-lit space, the transparency and views through the building offering an extension to the public realm, and giving a sense of engagement with the street. A linear column structure, drawing the eye from Gordon Street to the Japanese Garden, allows the ground floor to feel open and publicly welcoming, the structure supporting the more private UCL learning spaces above.

From the higher Japanese Garden level the steps continue rising to upper floors, establishing a circulation route that spirals up around the day-lit atrium at the heart of the building. The route towards the Bernard Katz Building and the Lower Refectory flows naturally down from the central steps. A platform lift ensures that the three ground floor levels are accessible by all visitors.

Across the Japanese Garden the public route continues over the bridge, into the South Cloister and beyond to the Main Quad.



View from mezzanine level above Gordon Street entrance



Proposed section looking north

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

The route for vehicles to gain access to the South Quad is located close to the listed terraces and designed as a pedestrian route bridged over by the upper floors of the new building. Maintaining transparency between this route and the internal ground floor space helps the inclusive sense of pedestrians being part of the building.

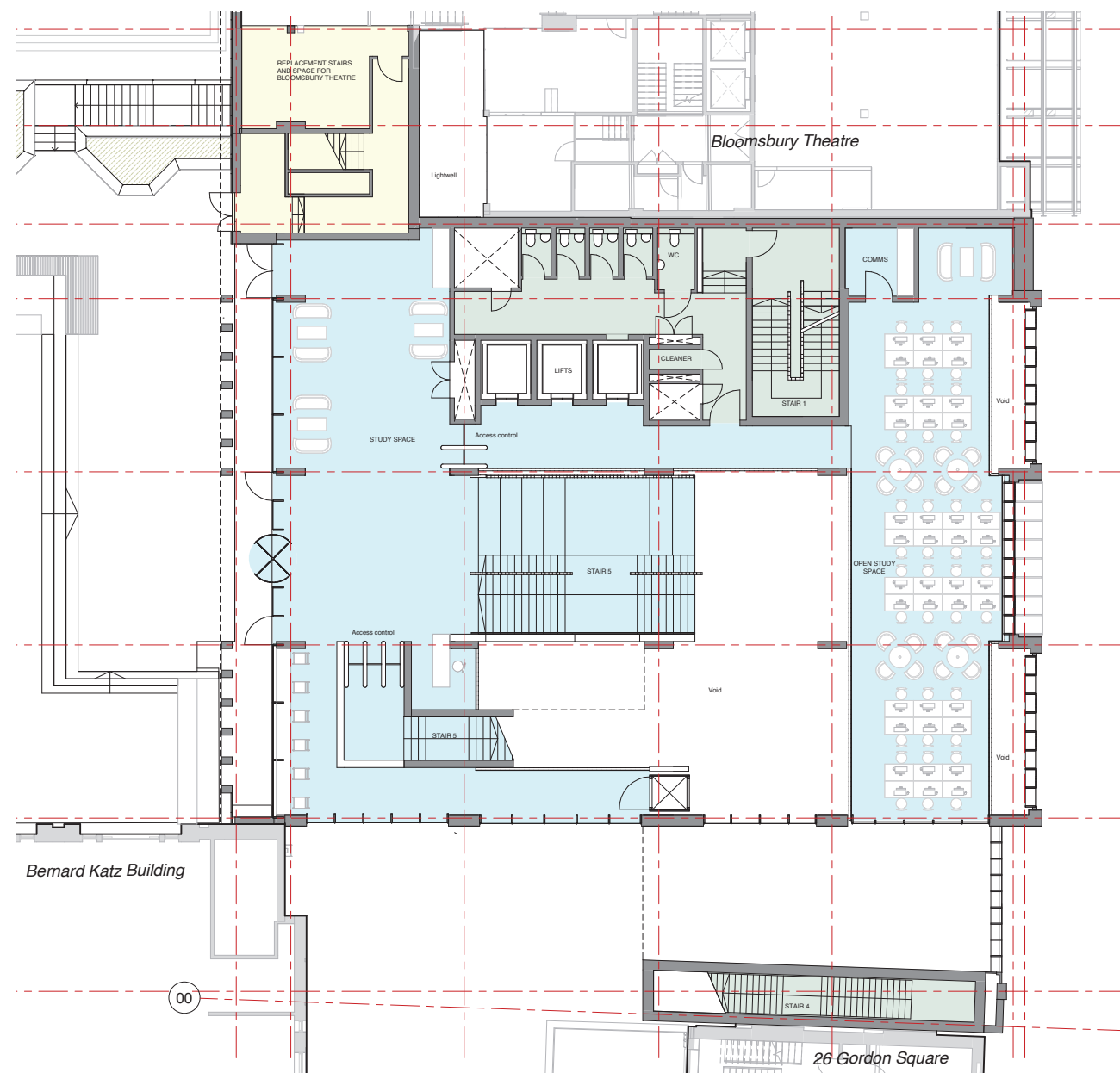
Vehicles will use the route only at controlled times, or in emergencies. Sliding security gates on the Gordon Street façade maintain a secure line out-of-hours, and are controlled from a manned security point in the space below the escape stairway alongside the listed terrace party wall. Retractable bollards will also be controlled from the same security point.

The route between the Bernard Katz Building and the Lower Refectory runs beneath the new building's Japanese Garden entrance level. This undercover route includes a series of lightboxes along its western wall to animate the space and ensure it does not appear as a dark corridor. It is lined with high quality, robust materials, as it will accommodate significant flows of people and deliveries. It is also seen as a practical space for accommodating cycle storage.

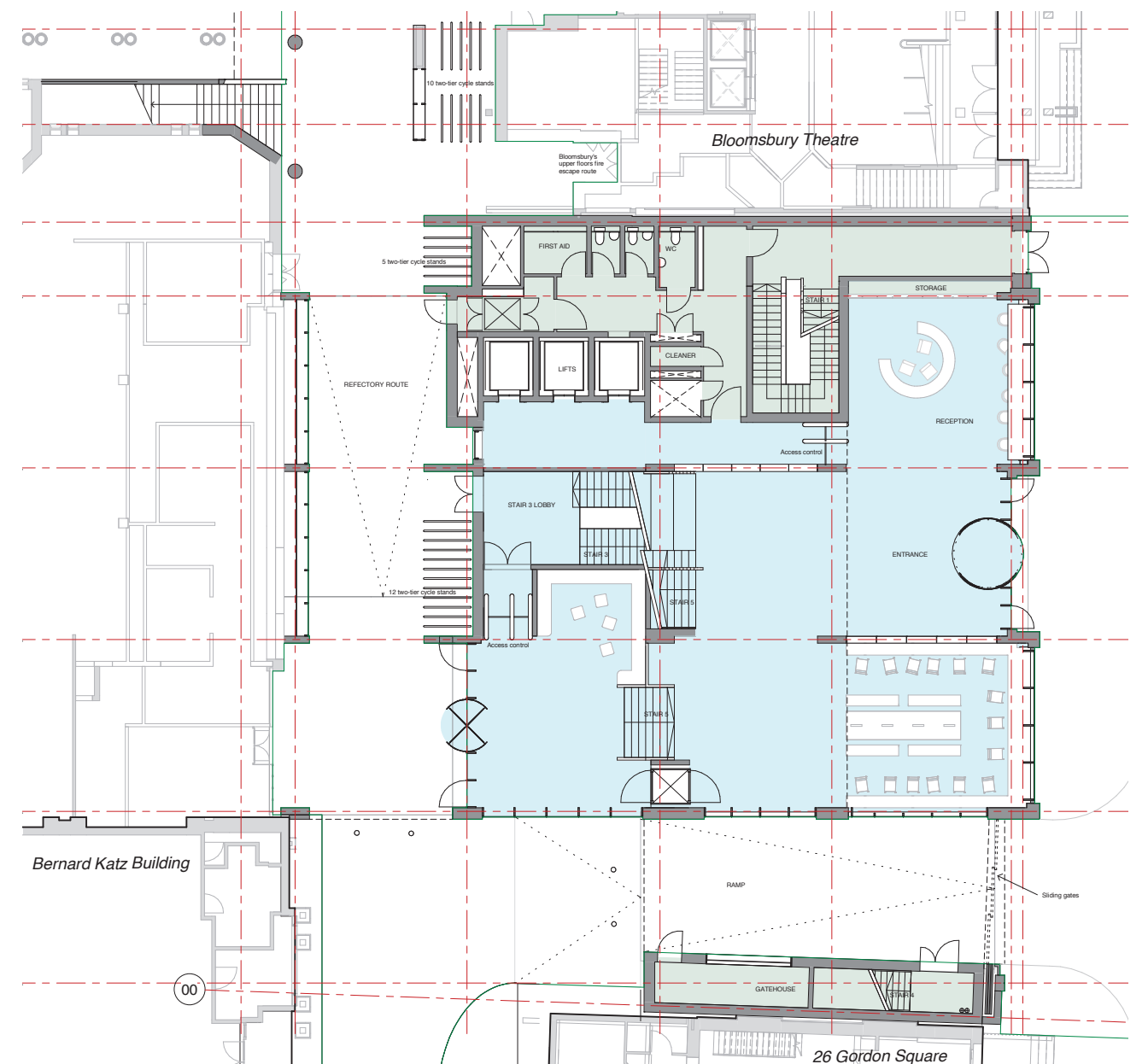


View along Refectory Route from future Lower Refectory

Views of sliding security gates: open and closed



Plan at Japanese Garden level



Plan at Gordon Street level

SCALE AND FORM

On Gordon Street, a notional building line is established from the corner of the Bloomsbury Theatre at the north to the corner of 26 Gordon Square to the south, with the elevation to the New Student Centre aligning with the theatre building.

Numerous different arrangements of this fourth bay have been tested as part of the design process: continuing the line of the adjacent three bays; splaying the line of the façade at this point; adding a projecting bay window to the corner. Some of these elevational studies are shown here. It is felt that setting the fourth bay back in line with 26 Gordon Square gives the most successful overall composition and provides a more sensitive junction with the terrace.

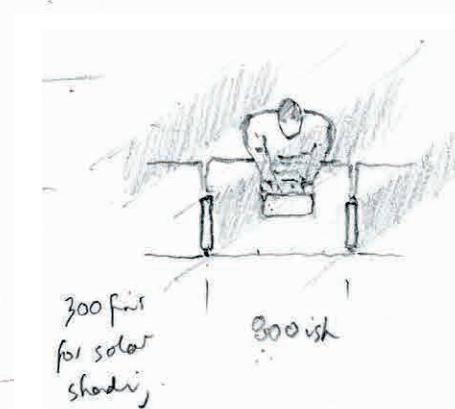
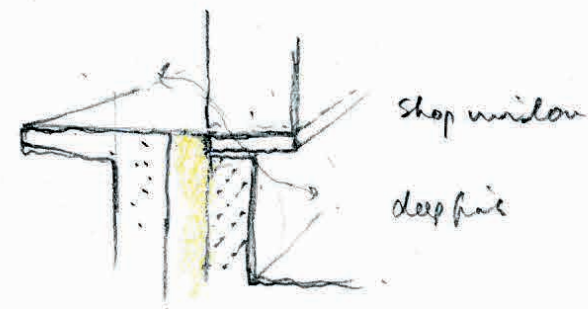
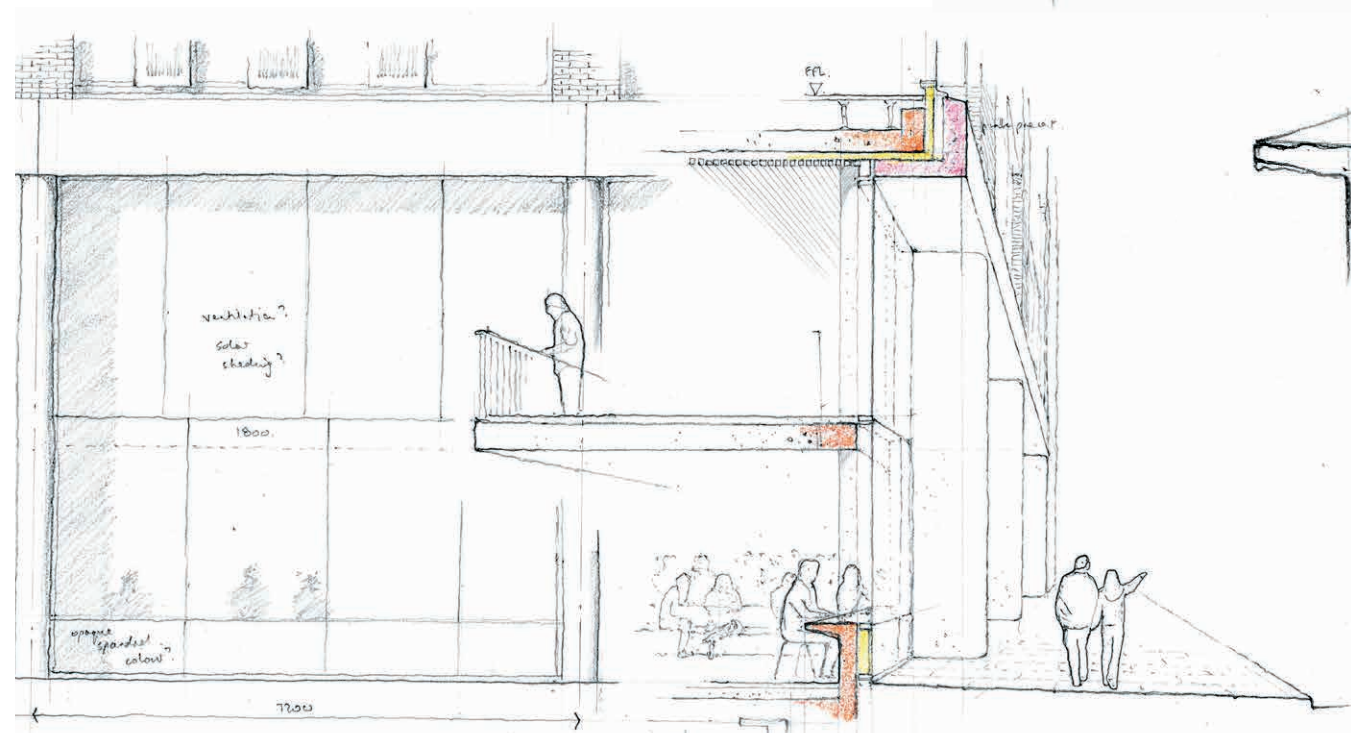
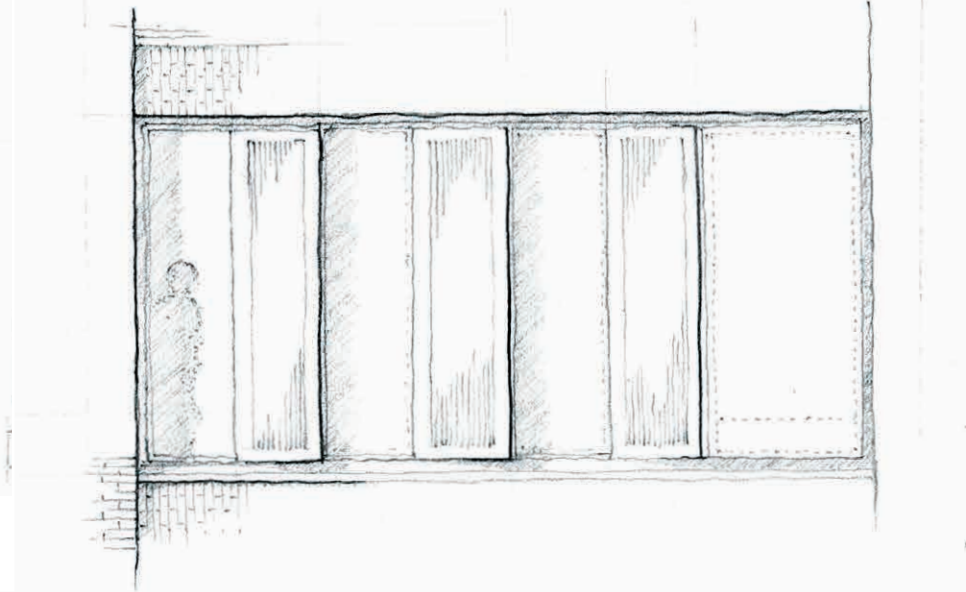
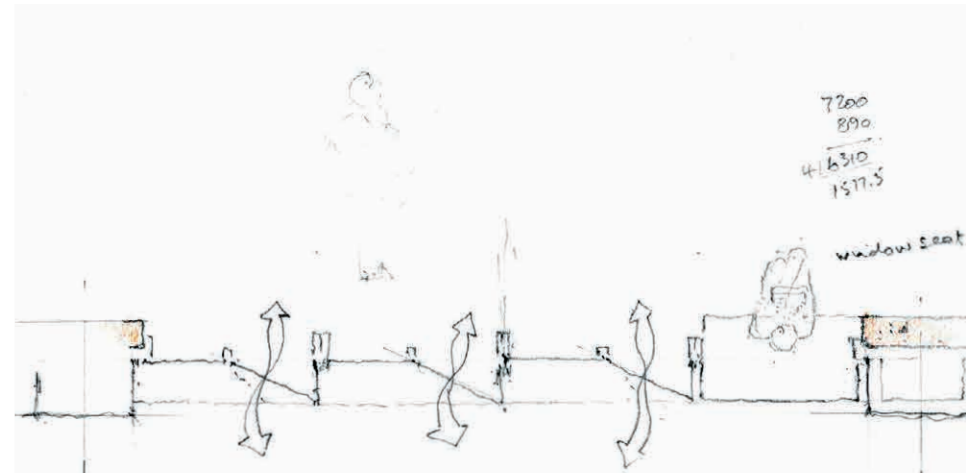
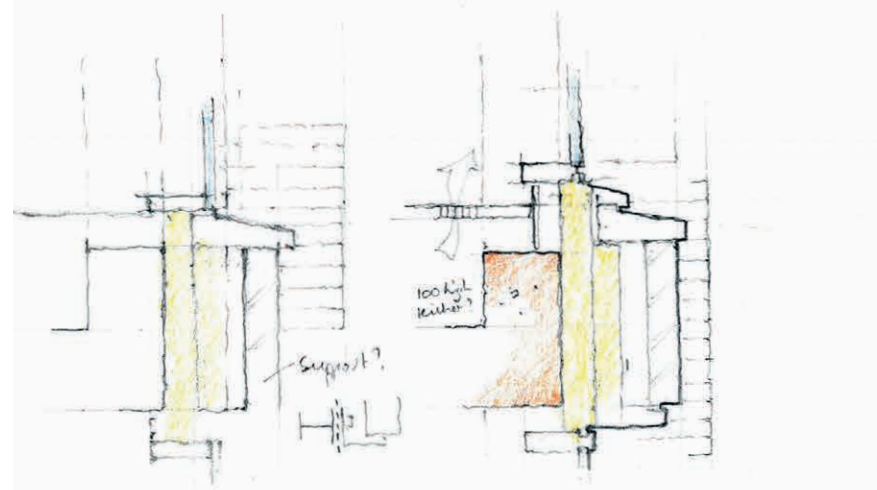
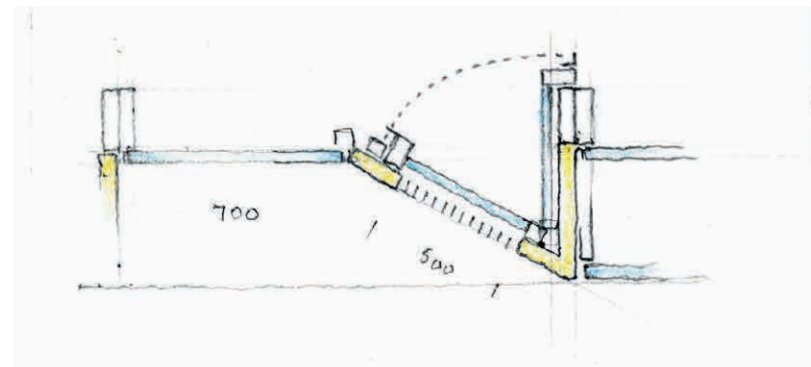


Early study model



Options for expressing the bay adjacent to 26 Gordon Square





Developmental studies of the building facades

