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for
West London Circuit of the Methodist Church

**King's Cross
Methodist Church**
Birkenhead Street
Facade Retention
Feasibility Study
London Borough of Camden
31st March 2016

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This document has been prepared by Dexter Moren Associates, with input from Bidwells Heritage Consultants and Planning Consultancy Pegasus Group on behalf of West London Circuit of the Methodist Church (WLM) as an addendum to the planning application submitted to LBCamden in December 2015.

The intention is to show how the proposals have been developed to address the demolition and design proposal of Birkenhead St elevation.

One of the key points raised by the planning and conservation officers was the possibility of retaining part of the existing facade of Birkenhead St. This document presents a feasibility study carried out to demonstrate this design approach and its impact on the layout and street scene and the proposed development as a whole.

This document also details the improvements incorporated in the design in order to create an elevation which improves the inclusion of the redevelopment option within the street scene.

01

intro & contents



Development options

A full description of the existing building and the quality of the accommodation is provided in the accompanying Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement previously submitted, and is therefore, not repeated here. However the quality of the existing accommodation and the desire of the West London Mission circuit of the Methodist Church to continue to serve the communities at King's Cross has led to the submission of the planning application, upon recognition that the facilities at KXMC are old, run down and increasingly unsuitable for modern requirements, WLM set up the Kings Cross Redevelopment Working Group (KXRWG) to look at and review development options.

Three options have been carefully considered:

A. Do nothing

KXRWG commissioned a specialist building management and survey company to assess the cost of repairs, replacements and maintenance over the next 20 years. Their report found that £1,600,000 would be required as a conservative maintenance budget over the next 20 years, at the end of which time the basic fabric of the building will still be unfit for purpose.

In short, if improvements are not initiated at KXMC, there would be a high probability that WLM would have to relinquish and shut down the premises, and move the congregations out of King's Cross.

The end result of 'doing nothing' could lead to the loss of significant community benefits from KXMC. The building would be left empty and WLM may decide to sell it and third parties may not be sympathetic to the requirements of the community.

B. Repair & maintain option

This would mean a new 'fit-out' project within the existing shell as well as potential extensions for the ancillary accommodation. It would bring the facilities up to modern standards, renew services and undertake a major refurbishment of the Church and charity spaces both externally and internally.

The layout of the existing building offers the congregation and other uses of the Church a highly compromised and inefficient facility that does not fully meet its needs.

This option is not being costed at present as a structural engineer discounted the potential for extension due to 'progressive collapse', the lack of income stream at KXMC and MCH also limits the amount of refurbishment and improvement works such as a lift and new interiors.

Similarly to the "do nothing" option the eventual decline of the KXMC and community work in the local area will be at risk.

C. Demolition & redevelopment

Given the costs associated with Option A and Option B, a further option has been considered by the Working Group. This option is now the subject of a planning application which is being considered by the Local Planning Authority.

KXRWG commissioned Dexter Moren Associates to prepare a new build proposal and this scheme has been costed by quantity surveyors. The proposal includes demolition of the present buildings and the erection of a new purpose built church and ancillary accommodation. The intention would be to maximise the developable area/volume, and construct leasehold apartments above the church. The sale of the apartments would contribute to the cost of redevelopment.

We emphasise that it is not the intention of WLM to make a profit from the venture. The proceeds from the sale of the apartments would pay for the development and improvement of its charitable work in King's Cross.

As stated in the National Planning Policy Framework, the potential harm arising from the loss of the existing buildings (on grounds of heritage value) should be weighed up against the obvious social benefits from improved community facilities in King's Cross as well as townscape benefits from a replacement building.

A Heritage Statement which has been submitted as part of the planning application concludes the moderate/ low heritage value of the existing buildings. Therefore, the harm to the character of the Conservation Area(s) would be outweighed by the public benefits that a new carefully designed building would bring.

A new purpose built facility for the Church community will enhance its ability to serve in the local area and ensure that the building is socially and economically sustainable for the future.

02 alternatives considered

Commentary by Chris Surfleet, Heritage Specialist at Bidwells as an addendum to the Heritage Statement submitted as part of the planning application submitted in December 2015.

03 facade retention heritage & townscape analysis

introduction

The Heritage Statement (WYG, October 2015) includes an assessment of the existing building's significance and also a review of its townscape contribution. If it is intended to retain the façade, then it is important to have assessed its merits and dis-merits and whether or not a scheme of retention will either preserve or enhance its positive characteristics, without accentuating its negative features.

guidance to be considered

LBCamden's Kings Cross & St Pancras Conservation Area Character Audit has identified the existing frontage to Birkenhead Street as making a 'positive contribution' to the character and appearance of the designated area. The definition of this term is explained in the Audit document as follows:

"5.4 Buildings and groups of buildings that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area"

"5.4.1 In addition to the buildings that are on the statutory list, there are a large number of individual buildings and groups of buildings that contribute to the character of their immediate surroundings and the Conservation Area as a whole. A number of buildings are notable because of their value as local landmarks, or as particularly good examples of the local building traditions. The assessment of whether a building makes a positive contribution to the special architectural and historic interest of a Conservation Area is based on guidance provided in English Heritage's publication 'Conservation Area Appraisals'".

5.4.2 Identification of a building as a positive contributor confers a general presumption in favour of the retention of that building (unless it is proved to meet certain tests: see 'Demolition' in section 7 of this document). Buildings that have been poorly maintained or have had reversible alterations (such as inappropriate painting, roof coverings or additions such as shutters where they are not part of the original part of the property) have been judged to be positive where they otherwise form part of the architectural and historic interest of the area."

(Kings Cross & St Pancras Conservation Area Character Audit paras 5.4.1-5.4.2)

It is also relevant to note that the Character Audit is also careful and correct to identify that the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is formed to a large extent by *"physical and visual characteristics (i.e. materials, heights of buildings, types and relationship of built form)"*, but it also include other *"less tangible effects relating to the*

experience of an area", such as levels and type of activity and patterns of land use, which may alter according to the season, day of the week or time of day. In this regard, the existing facilities at the KXMC are a contributor to this range of experience, land use and activity. The ability to retain these facilities on site is also therefore an important factor when considering how the site and re-development can contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area for the future, and is not solely a consideration of physical and visual effects.

The reference to the English Heritage publication 'Conservation Area Appraisal' is now superseded by advice presented in Historic England's [Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management](#). In relation to buildings making a positive contribution, it states as follows:

"Positive contributors

61 Most of the buildings in a Conservation Area will help to shape its character. The extent to which their contribution is considered as positive depends not just on their street elevations but also on their integrity as historic structures [my underlining] and the impact they have in three dimensions, perhaps in an interesting roofscape or skyline. Back elevations can be important, as can side views from alleys and yards. It will be helpful to identify those key unlisted buildings that make an important contribution to the character of the conservation area, as well as those which clearly detract from it and could be replaced." (Historic England's Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, paragraph 61)

The Historic England advice note provides a checklist of potential items of positive contribution, but acceptance of values still depends on whether or not *"the historic form and value* [of the building]" have not been eroded.

Between these two pieces of guidance, one provided by the Council and one by Historic England, there is a very clear recognition that the extent of value resides in the integrity of fabric and evidence remaining. Paragraph 5.4.2 of the Character Audit refers to buildings which have had "reversible" alterations made to them (ie alterations having a minor impact and capable of reinstatement). The implication is that these minor adaptations have not masked the significance or contribution of the whole. The Historic England advice refers specifically to "integrity" and that the level of contribution will depend upon the extent of erosion to historic form and value. The finding of the Significance Assessment for KXMC is that the existing building does not survive with high levels of integrity and that the extent of adaptation has gone far beyond that which would be readily reversible or could be justified.

significance assessment summary

To summarise the findings of the Heritage Statement, the three assessments of significance have related to aspects of: i) historic ii) architectural and iii) townscape significance.

Within the assessment of historic significance, the summary that the existing building holds a **low** level of significance is principally the result of its partial remains as a result of numerous and extensive adaptations.

In relation to architectural significance, the conclusion is also that the existing Birkenhead Street frontage retains a **low** level of significance – again due to the nature and extent of adaptation (see section 04a of this document).

In the assessment of townscape significance, the summary is that the building holds **low/medium** value, a symptom of the building's compromised adaptation to part-residential use which has removed or altered the essential elements of its original architecture.

The consistent theme of this significance-assessment is the degraded evidence of the building's fabric and appearance – to the extent that its integrity is not readily perceived. Integrity of evidence is one of the defining aspects of quality- and significance-assessment (see section 04a of this document).

03a introduction, guidance & significance assessment

retention option analysis

In seeking to explore the potential for the existing Birkenhead Street façade to be retained within the context of a proposal for re-development, with issues of viability aside, it is necessary to consider whether the elevation should be:

- A- retained in its current form or whether a re-use could be sufficiently flexible to give rise to
- B- a restoration of the elevation to its original form as part of the wider re-development of the site.

The former approach (A-façade retention as existing) would entail adaptation of the retained façade as an element within the re-development of the remainder of the site. The implications of this are illustrated by the façade-retention design proposal produced by Dexter Moren Associates (see section 04 of this document). This scheme effectively retains the existing frontage, which has been identified as making a 'positive contribution' to the Conservation Area in its current form. In principle, this is presumably acceptable to the Planning Authority as it retains those built elements considered to make the contribution positive. In order to increase viability and to secure the benefits and facilities associated with the re-development, the proposal would need to allow for a re-design of the existing fourth floor. This would be designed to read as a mansard roof with dormers, to accord with the adjoining terraces.

The result of this approach is one of confusion rather than legibility. The existing building is already troubled in expressing its original ecclesiastical character as a result of previous adaptations which make an attempt to convey its residential use in a manner consistent with the adjoining terraces. This attempt fails, as the rhythm and proportions of the bays essentially differ – leading to the fenestration appearing mean and squat alongside the elegance of the Georgian elevations. The missing architectural features (pediment and porch in particular) leave the façade without two of its key elements which define its typology.

The design approach to create a consistency of roofline by running the mansard roof across the principal frontage and the side wings - essential for delivering a viable re-development - leads to further compromise of the architecture and townscape when the existing façade is retained. The proposal reads as a further attempt to 'disguise' the former chapel or otherwise render it more contiguous with this context – but the existing differences between architecture designed to serve a residential purpose and an ecclesiastical building poorly converted to that use are too distinct for this to be achieved. The only alternative would be to omit the fourth floor accommodation over the side wings to denote the break in the roofline and therefore to express the former chapel as a distinct element in the streetscene. This would not, however, resolve the intrinsic contradictions in the appearance of the retained elevation below.

The latter approach (B-restoration and adaptation) would be likely to involve reinstatement of the pediment, probable removal of a floor of accommodation at first and second floor levels, and reinstatement of the taller arched openings and windows at the original first floor, reconstruction of the original narrow entrance door and porch, and reinstatement of the ground floor openings and windows. To be consistent with the original appearance, it is also likely that the two side extensions would also require to be removed. Whilst these adaptations would restore a more refined and attractive elevation to Birkenhead Street, they have considerable implications for the delivery of the scheme, in addition to their own individual cost. They also imply an extent of alteration and addition of new material to a retained elevation which is not justified by the relative significance of the extant fabric. The absence of historic fabric behind the retained and restored façade renders this an approach which would not result in significance with integrity. To this end, we find it an approach which is not consistent with conservation philosophy and which, through its effect on viability, would preclude the delivery of other public benefits which themselves contribute to the viability and vitality of the wider community and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The above approaches are to be considered in the context of a re-development option which has researched and acknowledged the relative value of the extant fabric but also identifies the potential to provide a higher level of physical and visual enhancement of the Conservation Area, in addition to improvement of the community facilities which contribute to its character and appearance.

proposed replacement option analysis

The current version of the proposal for Birkenhead Street seeks to replace the partial and adapted evidence of the former chapel building and its resultant, inelegant appearance with a scheme which reinforces the prevailing character of the street – an aspiration of many re-developments of this nature. Although there is loss of fabric of low level significance, the re-development has the opportunity to address a number of the weaker aspects of the existing building and its residual townscape role, including the formation of a more active frontage to the street, a more attractive public realm, and a building line, parapet, material choice, pattern and rhythm of bays, expression of piano nobile and roofscape which are all complementary to the adjoining listed buildings and expressive of the internal functions (section 06 of this document).

The final assessment of townscape merit is one which considers individual architectural merit and the success of a re-development scheme in its streetscene context. The driver for the design of the replacement of the Birkenhead Street frontage is the re-organisation of the internal plan to congregate community uses within Crestfield Street, enabling reinforcement of Birkenhead Street as a residential area. As a result, in place of the existing, confused architecture within Birkenhead Street, the re-development provides an ordered response to the prevailing neo-classical context.

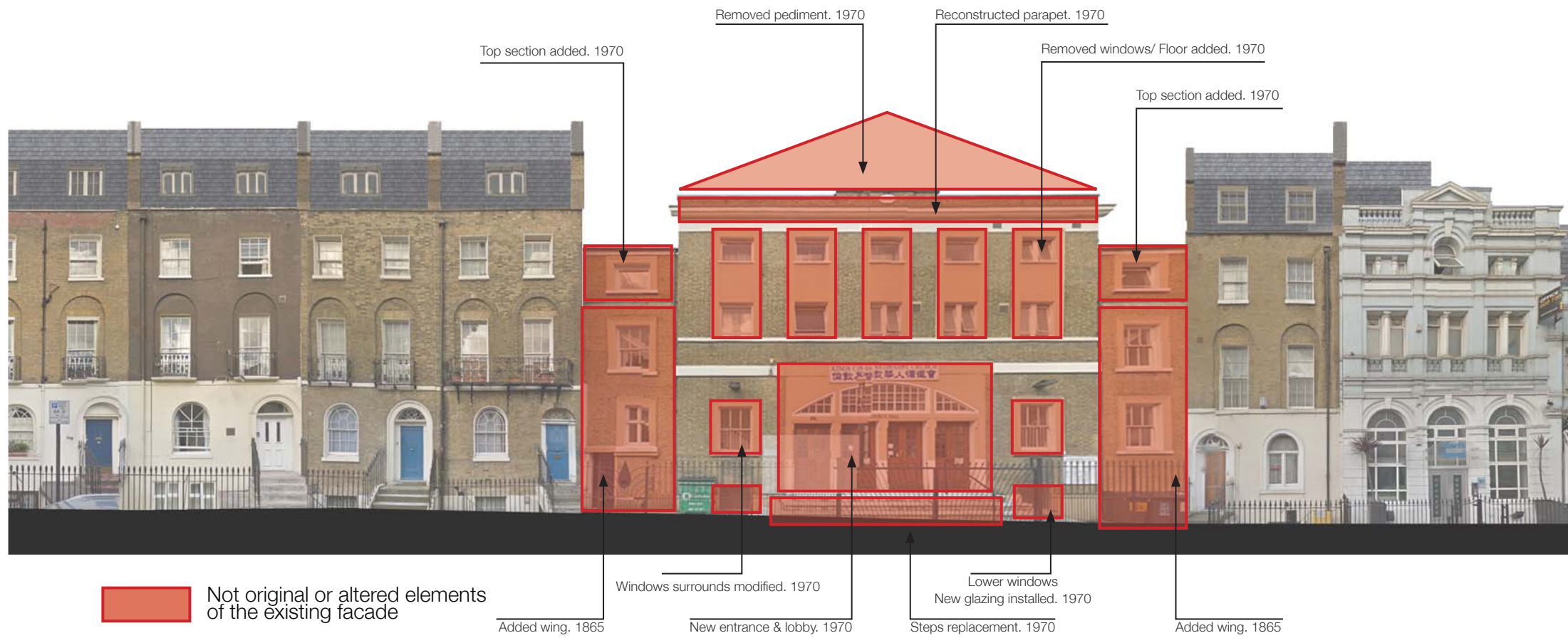
Architecturally, the role of the design is not to create an arresting individual composition but to take the opportunities to reinforce existing street character consistent with the building's uses at ground floor and above. This has been achieved with a clarity which is responsive to the historic context but also expressive as a contemporary addition to the street. The architectural merit therefore lies in what the building delivers to streetscene quality. To this end, the 'positive contribution' of the existing building would be replaced by a development which makes an equally valid positive contribution, but expressed more cleanly and with greater architectural integrity.

03b retention & proposed options analysis

04 facade retention feasibility study

King's Cross Methodist Church
 Birkenhead St Existing Elevation
 Heritage Assessment Diagram

For more information please refer to the
 Heritage Statement



Existing Streetview



Drawing of the "Old Chapel" appearance 1830-1840

As discussed in the opening chapter to the addendum , the existing building has been altered over time. This diagram clarifies the extent of the original remainings of the original church façade and the alterations over time. The remainings provide the baseline for this feasibility study for a design which would retain the notable part of the Birkenhead Street façade.



04a
 existing facade analysis

Flank facades would not align with the adjacent buildings, also creating blind areas not suitable as per secured by design requirements

Due to the setback of the existing building, the proposed 4th floor would be visible from the street level.

Lack of amenity spaces for apartments located within the central body of the facade due to size and location of existing openings.

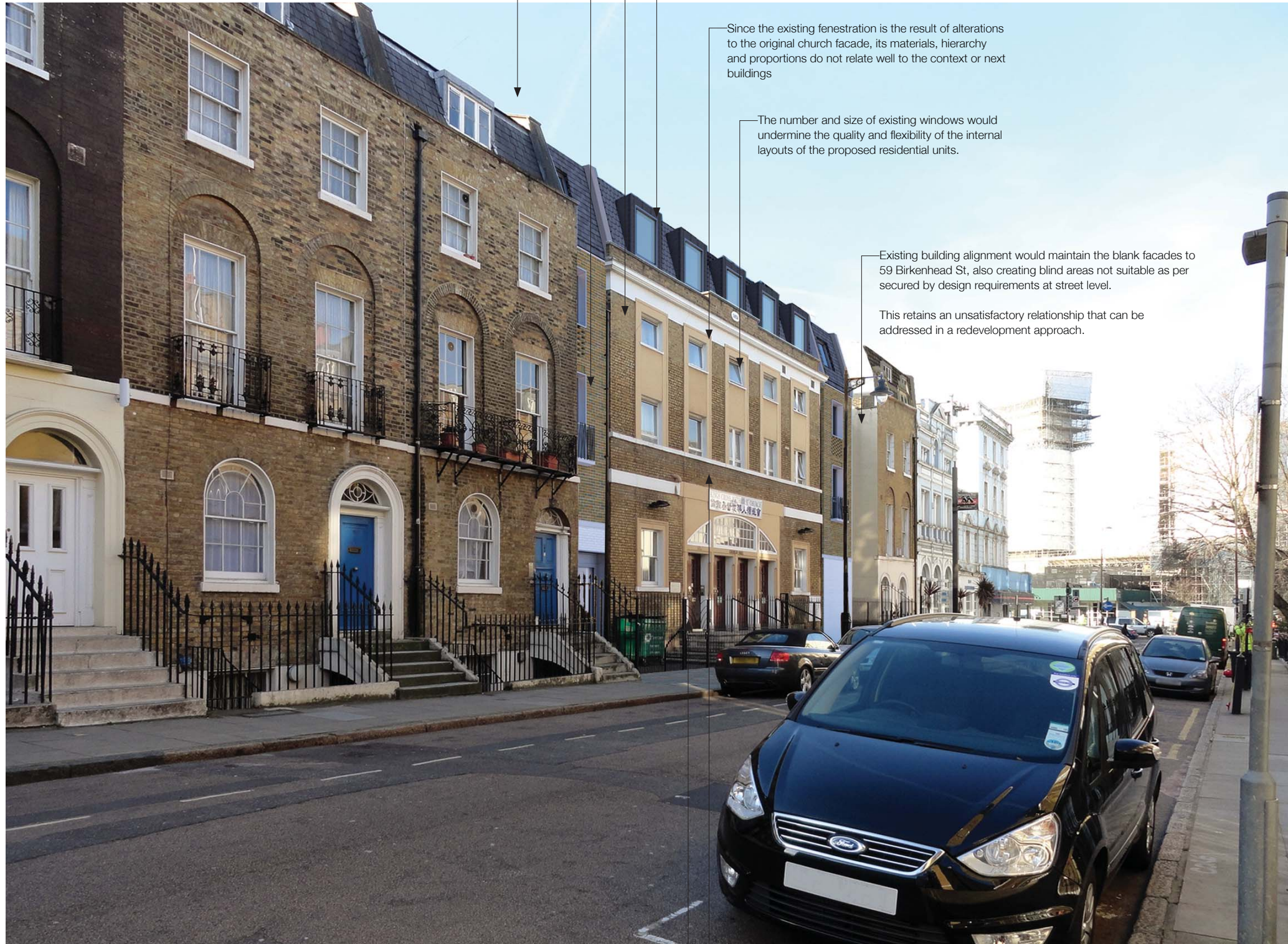
A proposed 3rd floor slate mansard level would not fit the existing central part of the facade

Since the existing fenestration is the result of alterations to the original church facade, its materials, hierarchy and proportions do not relate well to the context or next buildings

The number and size of existing windows would undermine the quality and flexibility of the internal layouts of the proposed residential units.

Existing building alignment would maintain the blank facades to 59 Birkenhead St, also creating blind areas not suitable as per secured by design requirements at street level.

This retains an unsatisfactory relationship that can be addressed in a redevelopment approach.



Maintaining the existing facade would have implications with accessibility and fire egress due to the ground floor raised level and steps location. Compliant ramps cannot be considered for the lack of external space

Scale and proportion of retained facade would not be related to the more slender Georgian terraces.



Existing Birkenhead St facade

This option endeavours to rehabilitate the church facade to a residential use whilst exploring a sympathetic extension to improve its relationship in the terrace.

The result shows clearly the impossibility of creating a viable new building fit for purpose fitting suitably within its context due to the different character, proportion and scale of the existing building when compared to the surrounding Georgian terraces.

Therefore, it would fail to comply with Policy DP24: 'Securing High Quality Design', would not enhance the character of the King's Cross Conservation Area and contradicts the aims of policy DP25: 'Conserving Camden's Heritage'.

04b retention option street view

04c
retention option
elevation design



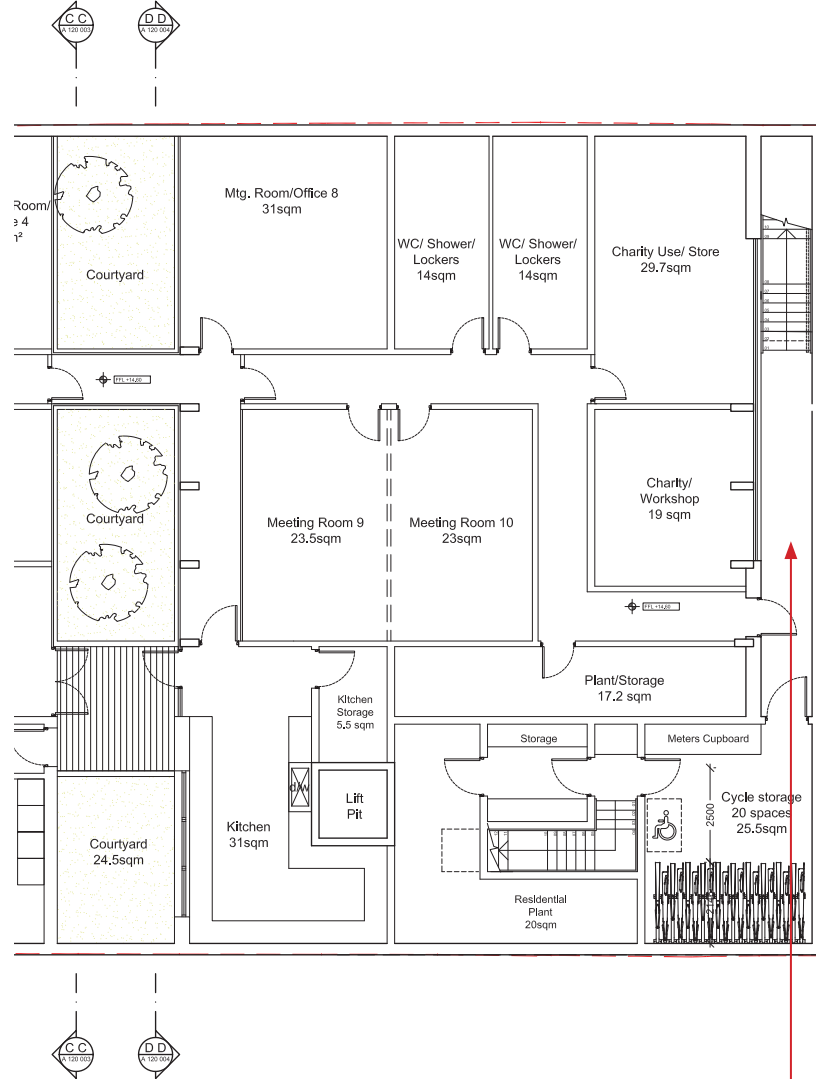
Existing elevation



Retention option design, May 2015

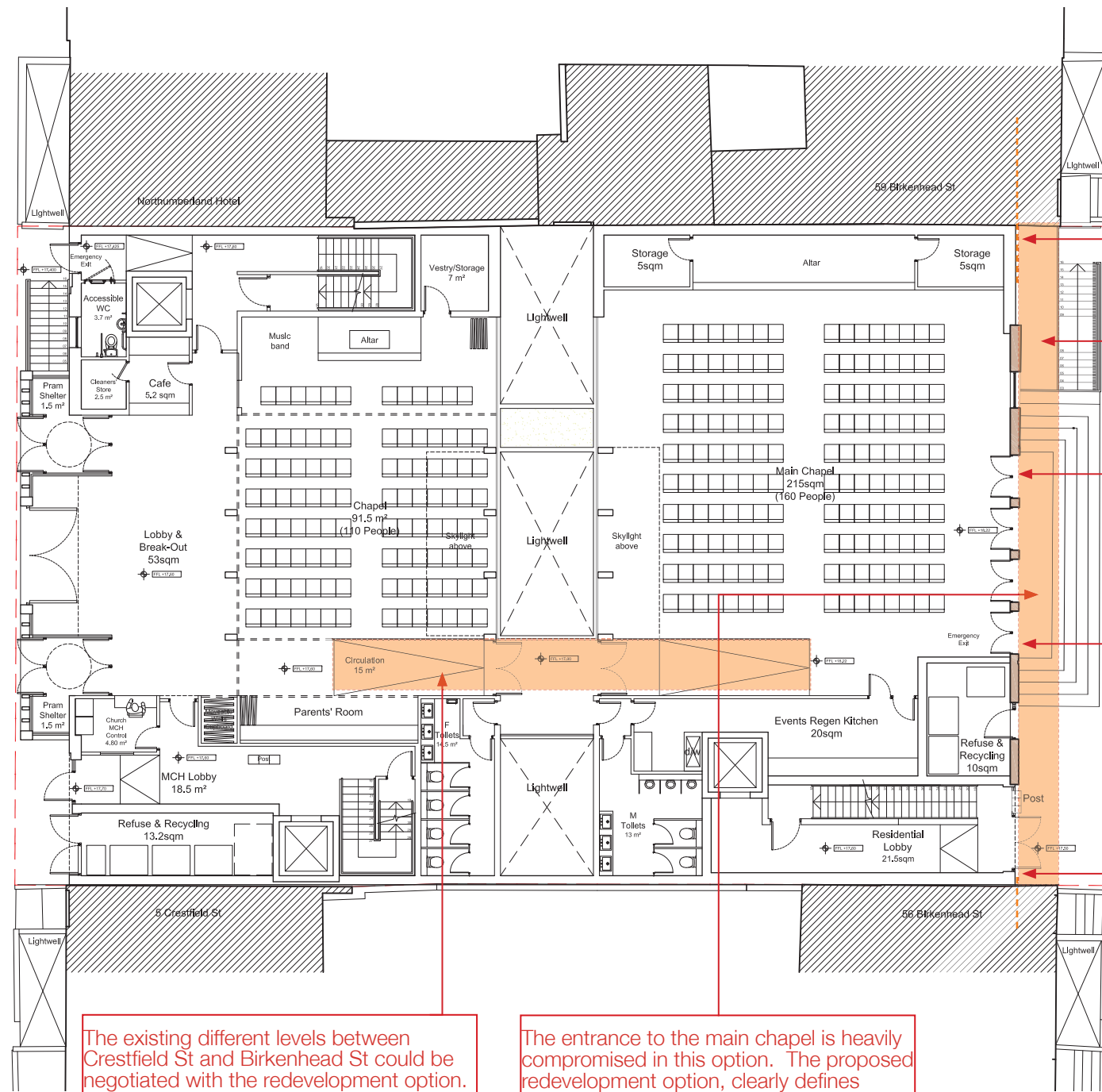
The preceding section demonstrates that the retained façade would have a confused appearance in expressing a residential form through the adopted ecclesiastical façade. The retention option also requires adaptation of the internal layout of the building. This section of the feasibility study identifies those implications.

05 façade retention implications on layouts



The proposed internal space at basement level would be significantly compromised and will be of a reduced quality. The retention of the existing steps and pavement prevent the installation of lightwells, thus the basement would continue to have a dark, enclosed and oppressive feel, which is not conducive to the redevelopment option or the 'quality' of space that the Applicant is trying to achieve.

Basement



Ground Floor

The existing different levels between Crestfield St and Birkenhead St could be negotiated with the redevelopment option. Retaining the existing facade, levels and steps would imply the need of internal ramps to avoid accessibility barriers. This results in the loss of usable internal area, spatial clarity and flexibility of the new church ground floor as well as buildability and construction implications.

The entrance to the main chapel is heavily compromised in this option. The proposed redevelopment option, clearly defines and separates the church and residential entrances. The retention option would retain the entrance doors on Birkenhead Street, however due to the internal layout and the stepped access this entrance/egress would not be promoted by the King's Cross Methodist Church and would only be utilised in the case of an emergency. Thus the facade at street level would be 'blank' with no activity or serving function.

Existing building not aligned to street facade producing blind spaces at corners: secured by design implications

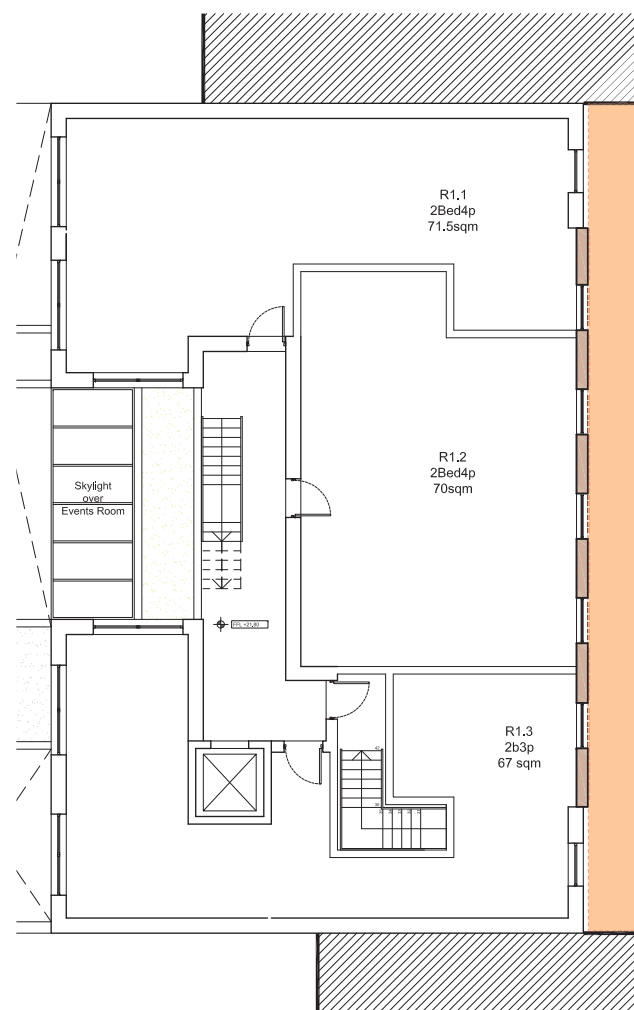
A loss of internal area for the main chapel compromises the desired church capacity and operational flexibility

Existing doors and fenestration not suitable for a new church space, intended to be as open, transparent and inviting as possible in its relation to the public realm.

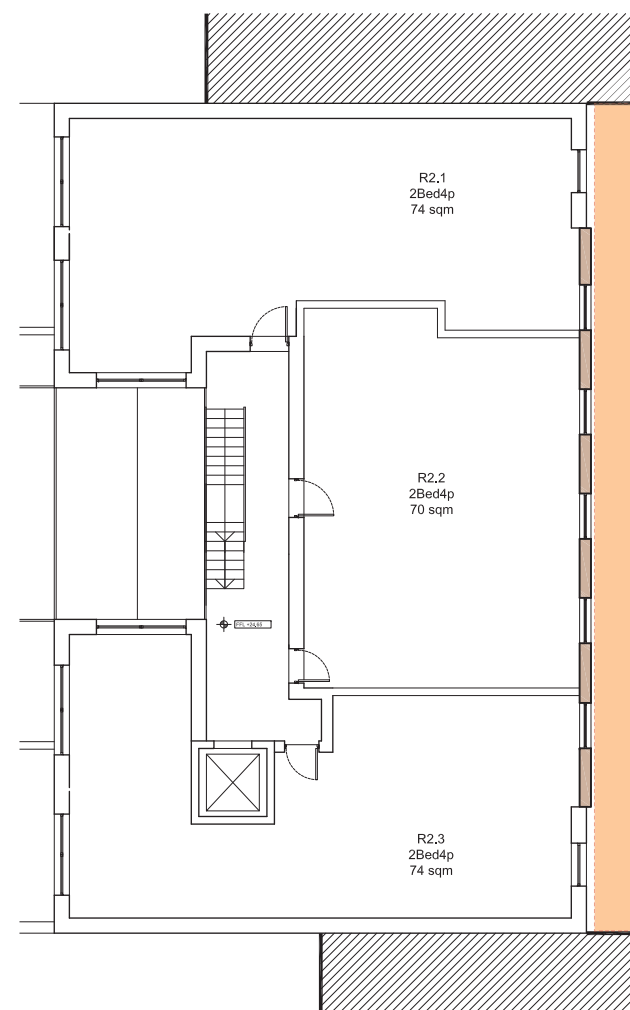
Fire egress implications due to existing raised ground floor and steps. Lack of external space to include ramps. This would fail to comply with policy DP29: 'Improving Access'

Existing building not aligned to street facade producing blind spaces at corners: secured by design implications

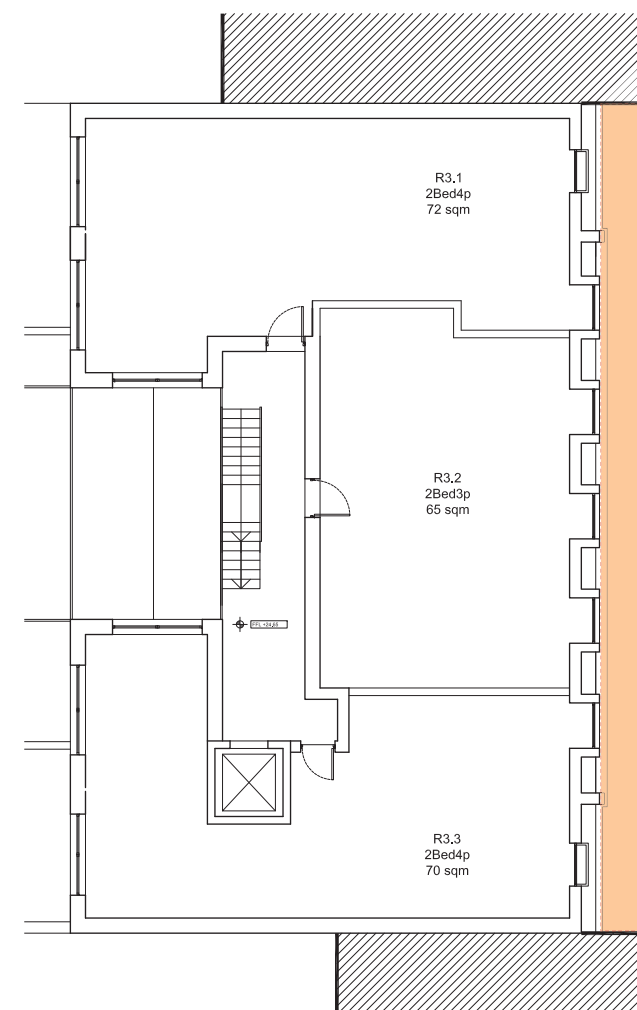
05a retention option layout implications ground & basement church levels



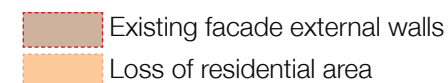
First Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor

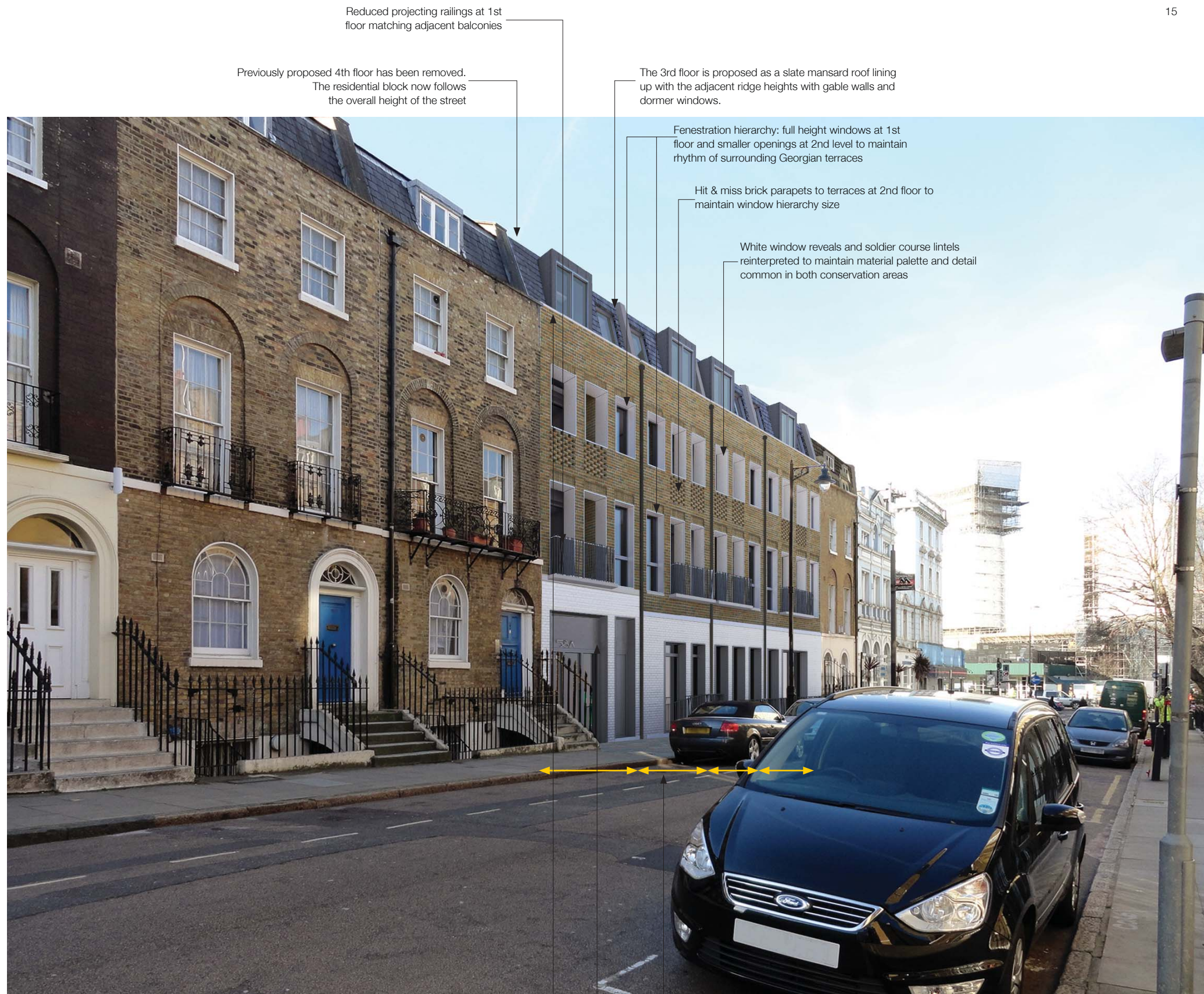


The retention option would represent numerous implications on the residential proposals in the following terms:

- In designing a retention option, nine two bedroom units would be provided
- Difficulty of introducing residential units meeting minimum standards of size and rooms. Therefore the proposal would fail to meet National Space Standards and Camden's Housing space standards.
- With reduced areas, the provision of 2bed units would be compromised. The proposal would not meet the requirement for 2bed units, which is the priority target for the area.
- Whilst the technical space standard could be achieved, there would be no access to outdoor space and the quality of the layout of the residential apartments would be compromised.
- Impossibility of providing amenity spaces for most of the dwellings, which would fail to comply with Camden's Housing Supplementary Planning Document.
- Existing fenestration type and size are not suitable for new apartments modern quality expectations and would also compromise the internal layouts flexibility.
- Since the internal existing levels and headroom heights are inconsistent and out of scale and proportion due to the different alterations from the original church building, any viable proposal would have to be adapted to them resulting in a higher and bulkier building, which would compromise the character of the Conservation Area.
- Maintaining the remains of existing external walls would have buildability and cost implications to achieve a compliant building envelope in terms of sustainability, energy consumption and acoustic requirements.

05b retention option layout implications residential levels

06 proposed design



Reduced projecting railings at 1st floor matching adjacent balconies

Previously proposed 4th floor has been removed. The residential block now follows the overall height of the street

The 3rd floor is proposed as a slate mansard roof lining up with the adjacent ridge heights with gable walls and dormer windows.

Fenestration hierarchy: full height windows at 1st floor and smaller openings at 2nd level to maintain rhythm of surrounding Georgian terraces

Hit & miss brick parapets to terraces at 2nd floor to maintain window hierarchy size

White window reveals and soldier course lintels reinterpreted to maintain material palette and detail common in both conservation areas

Parapets, lintels and heights matching adjacent properties is reinforced by 3rd floor mansard level.

Ground floor facade treatment has been rationalised to give a more regular and organised response to the public realm whilst maintaining an active frontage open in character

The initial concept of splitting the facade into four vertical 'townhouses' is maintained and further expressed with the rainwater pipes and roof gable



Existing Birkenhead St facade

This view reflects the considerations taken into account in order to propose an elevation design capable of maintaining and enhancing the quality of the Birkenhead St frontage compared to the existing facade.

We believe that this redevelopment option would improve its context as it would sit more comfortably within the adjacent buildings both in terms of size, proportion, rhythm and material quality.

This design repairs and maintains the appearance of the Georgian terrace that was disrupted by the set back of the existing facade. The facade treatment is also more in keeping to its context compared to the existing elevation which has been the result of numerous alterations through the years.

06a proposed design street view



Proposed design submitted December 2015

06b proposed design elevation



As detailed within this study a façade retention scheme would create a confused piece of townscape, which in turn would compromise the character of the King's Cross Conservation Area.

Whilst the retention option has been fully explored at the request of the Local Planning Authority, the reality is that such an option could not be delivered by the Applicant. As indicated within this study, the façade retention option compromises the quality of the internal accommodation for the KXMC, resulting in an illegible layout, which is enclosed and poorly lit. Such a compromised set of spaces would result in accommodation that is largely the same as what currently exists at the KXMC.

It is important that the Applicant is able to provide spaces which are modern, functional, accessible and adaptable to enable the church to continue with their on-going charitable work. The current building is substandard, the retention option would also result in the provision of substandard spaces. Therefore compromised space would restrict the continuation and enhancement of the community programmes at the KXMC.

Further to the above, the financial costs associated with the retention option and the delivery of only nine residential units would be unlikely to provide the financial receipt necessary to upgrade the KXMC accommodation.

For the reasons given in Section 02 the 'do-nothing' and 'repair & maintain' options have been previously discounted by the Applicant. Given the current state of the building, it is likely that in due course the West London Mission circuit of the Methodist Church would seriously have to consider leaving the site. Thus the building would become vacant and would most likely be sold to a developer. Such an outcome would not contribute to the character or appearance of the King's Cross Conservation Area and it would not result in the efficient use of land or contribute to achieving sustainable development.

As proposed, the removal of the Birkenhead Street façade will enable the continued use of the site as a place of worship and as a place to undertake the various community outreach programmes. The proposed development replaces fabric of low-level significance to provide a high quality design response which reinforces and positively responds to the character of Birkenhead Street and the King's Cross Conservation Area as a whole. The townscape and public benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the retention of the Birkenhead Street elevation.

07 conclusion

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