

Design, Access & Heritage Statement

Senate House North Block Careers Space

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1. Introduction and Aims

This Design, Access and Heritage Statement has been submitted on behalf of the applicant, in support of an application for planning permission and Listed Building Consent for internal alterations at Lower Ground floor of Senate House North Block.

Site Description

The North Block of Senate House designed by Charles Holden in 1932 is Listed at Grade II* and stands in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Senate House was the headquarters of the University of London and the North Block was the home of the Institute of Education and the School of Slavonic Studies, two of its constituent colleges.

Extensive refurbishment works were completed in 2016 including the removal of temporary buildings from the courtyard, excavation of the basement and the insertion of a glazed roof over the courtyard.

2. Proposed Works

All proposed works are within the north wing on the lower ground floor of Senate House West Block.

The following works are included;

- 2.1 Install of 8m of Baya single glazed partitioning and CFT Glass Clarit Doors.
Refer to dwgs RT16080_1000, RT16080_1001, RT16080_1002, RT16080_1003, RT16080_1004, RT16080_1005, RT16080_1006, RT16080_1011.
- 2.2 Install of 9m of Movawall 80 partitioning.
Refer to dwgs RT16080_1000, RT16080_1001, RT16080_1002, RT16080_1003, RT16080_1004, RT16080_1005, RT16080_1006, RT16080_1010.

No external works are proposed.

3. Listing Description

The application was first Listed on 28th March 1969. The list entry number 1113107 by Camden by Historic England states:

GV II*

INTERIOR: imposing Egyptianate entrance hall at base of tower with travertine floor and walls with broad fluted pilasters a semi-open space giving through access, with doors to south leading to Senate House and to north to Institute of Historical Research and School of Slavonic Studies. Senate House. Principal spaces all with travertine cladding to walls and floors, ceilings of moulded plaster with flat panel patterns and embellishments based on a London plane tree motif. Staircases floored in travertine, with bronzed balustrades treated as stylised Ionic columns. Principal entrance hall on two levels with first floor balcony having elaborate bronzed balustrade: Holden's original model exhibited here. On ground floor there is to east the MacMillan Hall, named after Lord MacMillan first Chairman of the University Court, with square panelled ceiling, travertine walls decorated as fluted pilasters at end and to sides set with acoustic panels to Holden's design and coloured glass, teak floor, and original light fittings. Memorials to HRH Queen Mother, Chancellor 1955-80, and to Princess Royal, Chancellor 1981-. William Beveridge Hall, named after the University's Vice Chancellor 1926-8, retains dado panelling set with brass filets in Greek key pattern under acoustic quilting, with semi-permanent seating and stage. On first floor processional stair leads to Chancellor's Hall, with square panelled timber to window recesses, travertine cladding, and square panelled plaster ceilings. Inlay pattern floors, original doors and fittings. To east a suite of rooms set round courtyard includes Court Room and Senate Room. Senate Room and ante rooms fully panelled in English walnut, the former of double height with trabeated ceilings, original fixed seating in stepped rows arranged like a council chamber with dias. Bronze uplighters. Ante rooms with heraldic glass by E Bossanyi dated 1937. On north side committee room and processional suite of corridors with dado panelling and moulded cornices, original furnishings and fittings. On south side the Vice Chancellor's offices not inspected. Second floor staff common rooms and third floor common rooms and refectories originally with painted mural ceilings. Those in refectory not seen under later acoustic tiles; war memorial tablet in corridor. Fourth floor libraries of double height. Two general reading rooms, the Middlesex Libraries, finished in oak with original bookshelves and fittings of English walnut. Goldsmith's Library to south with glazed bookcases, and ceiling of cypress wood and stained glass by E Bossanyi. Above these the bookstacks supported by steel frame on concrete raft. The offices retain original doors, lettering and fittings. The whole is a remarkably unaltered ensemble of 1930s design, with a high proportion of highly decorated ceremonial spaces over functional offices. The Institute of Historical Research and School of Slavonic Studies with ground-floor entrance hall of single-storey height, travertine floors and finishings similar in style but simpler than those found in Senate House.

HISTORICAL NOTE: built as a landmark, in 1937 this was the tallest building in London apart from St Paul's Cathedral. (University of London: The Senate House and Library: London: -1938).

4. Heritage Statement

The Senate House as a whole is a manifestly significant building, but (as Charles Holden would be the first to concede) it is not flawless. Holden's full vision for the site was never realised, and the design, conceived in 1932, was out of fashion by the time the building opened in 1937. Important elements of his idea, such as sculpture on the tower, were never executed and the building's sheer scale makes it something of an imposition in the otherwise largely Georgian, domestic streets of Bloomsbury; as such it has acquired (entirely unfairly, and thanks to George Orwell) an unhappy association with the architecture of totalitarianism.

Senate House is however an undeniably important building. It is remarkable 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 the great Charles Holden and with the University of London in its interwar heyday. Listing at Grade II*, which places Senate House in the top ten per cent of buildings nationally, is fully warranted for this London landmark.

This special interest is not evenly distributed across the entire building, however. 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. All these aspects of the building are of the utmost significance.

The north block is of lesser interest, but is still important. Its significance may be summarised thus:

Of **high significance** are:

The external elevations, for the part they play in the composition of the ‘balanced’ scheme which Holden devised when his plan to build a much larger structure came to nought; and for their carefully-proportioned design and high quality materials and detailing, including dated lead hoppers.

The ground floor foyer, for its travertine-clad walls and original fittings, which are broadly as Holden designed.

Of **moderate** significance are:

The interior fittings, apart from the ground floor foyer. 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. Some of the fittings (parquet floors, lighting, fragments of signage) are similar to those in the south block and library, but on the whole the interiors are nothing out of the ordinary.

Plan form, which has some interest as it survives largely as built, but was designed to be flexible and has no exceptional value.

Various factors **detract** from the building’s significance and prevent enjoyment of the north block’s principal elevations and interiors. These are:

The unfinished sections of the L-shaped elevation to the east, where a further courtyard was proposed.

Suspended ceilings and runs of modern cables obscure the building’s original form and details.

If the north block were a standalone building (as for the purposes of this application it essentially is), it would likely be listed at Grade II rather than Grade II*, albeit with a strong emphasis on its group value with the south block and tower.

5. Access Strategy

The proposed glazed partitions and door is intended to comply with all current legislation with regards to access, access into the space is unchanged. The proposal does not have any impact on escape distances during an emergency. The proposal also retains access to the adjacent plant room and there is no changes in levels.

6. Conclusion

The application property is in need of the proposed alterations in order to make the most efficient use of the space and internal arrangements to suit the current occupiers.

The proposal follows on from the light-touch approach adopted on the previous phase of refurbishment. Glazing details specifications are identical to those used for the refurbishment works completed in 2016. The movable wall partition is top-hung so that no floor mounted fixings are required.

The proposed works are considered sympathetic to the internal configuration and historic significance of this Grade II* listed heritage asset.

As such the scheme is considered acceptable and complies with the Council's relevant policies and guidance. It is therefore respectfully requested that the Council grant both listed building consent and planning permission.