

FRIENDS HOUSE

COURTYARD DESIGN PROPOSALS

INTRODUCTION

This summary report has been prepared by John McAslan + Partners (Architects) on behalf of the Applicant; Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM / Applicant / Client).

Friends House is located on Euston Road opposite Euston Railway Station in the London Borough of Camden. The site comprises an important Grade II listed building comprising of the following key spaces:

- The Quaker Meeting House Headquarters
- The Light (events and Quaker Meeting space) - excluded from this application
- Drayton House - excluded from this application

The 4-storey building was originally designed by the Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter, since it was constructed in . At ground floor the Site provides a number of public facilities including a large meeting and events space, a cafe and a small landscaped courtyard to the rear.

Britain Yearly Meeting, the owner of the property, proposes to adapt Friends House to provide fit for purpose facilities to serve its members, the people of Camden, the surrounding learning community and the wider public. When Friends House was built it was intended to be both a home for Quakers, and a gift to London. Quakers today want to continue to make a major contribution towards the facilities and public buildings in Camden.

To this aim, the Client has appointed world-renowned architects John McAslan + Partners to develop the vision to regenerate this important landmark building.

The design proposals, as detailed in this summary report, have undergone design development and client consultation, and are consistent with Camden's ambitions and policies for greater sustainability in the built environment.

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1. STATEMENT OF NEED

OVERVIEW

Friends House is the home of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. It is owned by Britain Yearly Meeting (the umbrella charity for Quakers in Britain) and managed by its wholly-owned subsidiary Quiet Company (formerly known as Friends House Hospitality (London) Limited). Friends House, in the London Borough of Camden, has long been an established gathering place in London, known well beyond the Quaker community.

Friends House sits especially well in the London Borough of Camden which is home to a large community of church and charity headquarters, many with a long and radical history. Friends House takes its rightful place among that community, providing the facilities, which religious, educational, third sector and charitable organisations, as well as trade unions and radical reform groups, use to meet and conduct their affairs. Camden has a thriving and vibrant university sector in Bloomsbury; Friends House and the adjoining Drayton House are a vital part of this learning quarter hosting lectures, classes, research and events for both University College London and Birkbeck College.

Camden is a major transport hub. The building is in an ideal location, easy to reach by train (including Eurostar), tube and bus; this is one of the major attractions of the location of Friends House as a venue, and a persuasive factor in Friends' deciding to maintain their headquarters in the borough over the many years since it was built in 1926. The transport plans for HS2 and Crossrail, along with Camden's Vision for Euston, mean that Friends House is at the centre of exciting new developments that will further increase connections to the wider Camden community.

These developments underpin the need for Friends House to enhance its facilities to serve its members, the people of Camden, the surrounding learning community and the wider public. When Friends House was built it was intended to be both a home for Quakers, and a gift to London. Quakers today want to continue to make a major contribution towards the facilities and public buildings in Camden, as Camden takes its place as the 'third city' in Central London.

THE BUILDING

Friends House was designed by the Quaker architect Hubert Lidbetter and won the RIBA Bronze Medal for the best designed building in London in 1927. It was listed Grade II in May 1996.

Friends House was designed to be a meeting place for all those engaged in church, charitable and social reform activities, as well as a national and international home for Quakers. The building's purposes remain unchanged since 1926, although the use of various rooms, and the way in which it functions, have evolved to suit the different ways in which its purposes are delivered. Over the years, various alterations have been made to modernise individual elements of the building eg the sanitary provision has been relocated, the kitchen has been moved, and renewed; lifts have been renewed, and additional lifts (including for wheelchair users) installed.

The original brief for the building required that it be 'simple and dignified', without stating any particular style. (2009 Conservation Plan p.160) The Conservation Plan Overview (2009) sets out the essential characteristics of Lidbetter's design: "This building dates from a time when architects were using new technology to produce structures, which pushed the boundaries of traditional design. While Friends House is not regarded as particularly innovative in this regard, long steels helped the architect to exercise a Quaker vision of pared-back simplicity and large, unadorned spaces. In adhering to his religious ethos, Lidbetter (perhaps unwittingly) provided a building in tune with the emerging, minimalist ideals of Modernism – a building which was seen as advanced and ground-breaking. The minimalist ethos is particularly striking inside the building, where the clean lines of polished stone floors and wall panels, copper-glazed doors, steel-framed (courtyard) windows and unadorned spaces provide a building which is absolutely of its time." (CP p. 42) The Conservation Plan considers the courtyard, courtyard corridors, library, east lobby, main staircase and first floor landing and the ground floor corridors and staircases around the Large Meeting House (The Light) to be of national significance.

The largest room in Friends House, the Large Meeting House (The Light), is one of the very few venues in central London that will seat over 1000 people. In 2014 it was completely renovated and reconfigured. This reconfiguration, including a pyramidal ceiling with a glazed apex, won a regional RIBA prize that year. Its purpose was to improve access, visibility, acoustics, ventilation, and above all, the lightness of the space for Quaker and non-Quakers users alike. It also radically improved its flexibility for use in different configurations, while retaining many of the original listed elements, including the 1926 panelling in the newly-formed lobbies. The 2014 renovation and reconfiguration have proved a singular success, both for Quakers and the wider community; The Light now operates at near full capacity, with all available space utilised throughout the year.

NEED

The need for the current proposal results from and follows the success of the 2014 reconfiguration of The Light (Large Meeting House). This scheme will complete, complement and enhance the success of The Light. It has become a versatile, accessible and multi-functional auditorium space that now accommodates over 1,000 people, responding to the growing needs of the outreach and social programmes at Friends House. The redesign of The Light created a coherent and dynamic space with moveable raked seating that allows a range of configurations and a dramatic roof-light that fills the space with daylight. Now providing disabled access, the reconfigured congregation space is inclusive, calm and luminous. McAslans also designed the award-winning landscaped garden, providing an elegant setting for Friends House.

The greater use of The Light has highlighted the lack of a large spill-out space adjacent to it; the passages around the courtyard are too constrained to cope with the movement of large numbers of people to 'breakout' after a lecture or business session; it is difficult to serve food in these corridors and leaves little space for permanent displays, and temporary exhibitions; and there are insufficient toilet facilities. The proposed creation of an event space and related renovations will make it possible for Friends House to offer facilities to greater numbers in the learning quarter and wider community, as well as improving the way the building works during large Quaker assemblies.

The proposed event space and adapted adjacent spaces will facilitate holding events for these large numbers, both of Quakers and of likeminded organisations. It will also provide space for the enhanced display of the extensive collection of historical artefacts as well as of displays relating to current Quaker activities in such fields as peace-building and economic justice. It is also intended to refurbish the much-loved Quaker Library, home to extensive historical Quaker records, to open that space to wider use and to provide access for other activities.

Currently, both The Light, and most other rooms in Friends House are fully booked; the proposed expanded and enhanced areas on both the ground and first floors will increase the scope for more lettings for large or simultaneous events adjacent to the existing provision in The Light.

THE DESIGN

Following the success of the renovation of the Large Meeting House as The Light, John McAslan + Partners have been invited back to design this next stage of Friends House' development by creating a new internal event space within the existing courtyard, by renovating the ground floor to improve Friends House for the public, and the creation of a new 'garden' courtyard at first floor level, accessed directly from the existing corridors on the first floor. A new lift and a new flight of stairs from Friends House main entrance on the east will provide an impressive access to the new courtyard at first floor level. This design will repurpose the current underused, ground floor outdoor courtyard. This area, although attractive in summer sunshine, for much of the year presents a bleak, empty, and rather forlorn space.

The new garden space (accessible for people in wheelchairs) at first floor level, will receive more direct sunlight, and the redesign of the resulting internal ground floor space will provide breakout facilities for The Light, overspill areas for the popular Friends House café, and a calm reception and meeting space for visitors to all the various activities and meetings which take place at Friends House.

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees have been careful to retain an architect sympathetic to the needs of Friends as well as other users of the building and who have the necessary experience of working on listed buildings. John McAslan + Partners Architects meet these criteria and, importantly, are also local architects who have a strong understanding of the Camden area and future changes to the Euston road, having worked on the Kings Cross redevelopment and the proposals for the reinstatement of Euston Square.

The approach to the proposed design is to have respect for the building, its history and its potential use. The Trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting have identified the four key criteria for design success: they are sustainability, accessibility, stewardship of the building's heritage and projection of up-to-date Quaker values.

Simplicity in style and quality in construction are the bedrock of the design. It is worth saying here that simplicity does not mean adopting a culture of poverty, but instead of doing everything possible to source sustainable materials, avoid waste and extravagant management, as well as creating the best available carbon reduction heating and ventilation systems.

Quakers have never avoided engaging in commerce, but try to carry out that commerce in a way that minimises the harms of exploitation of people and resources, and promotes equality and truth. Quaker values are shown in the way in which the building is managed and resourced. Already Quakers have won awards for the sustainable, local sourcing of provisions for the vegan restaurant, and the Quaker Centre (a bookshop and café in the north east corner of the building) has, since its refurbishment in 2008, become

very popular and busy with members of the public as well as Quaker users.

The design aims to achieve greater clarity of space, light, and use. The quality of light and the way it is used in the building should be elevated through a new sense of connection between people, light and space. Quakers intend the phased works at Friends House to be a holistic process of re-connection and re-illumination, creating a new sense of flow from the outer garden through the repurposed courtyard to The Light. Stillness and restraint are Quaker virtues, yet in the building the stillness can feel heavy rather than reflective. Friends House as a whole needs fresh energy – literally, a new inner light. The design will enable it to be seen, and experienced, in a different way.

The architects' intention in the new work is to maintain an atmosphere that reflects and expresses the values by which Quakers seek to live their lives based on equality, respect for the environment, justice, simplicity and peace.



THE QUAKERS

Quakers historically have been at the forefront of groups involved in all aspects of improving social justice. They were one of the very first groups to oppose slavery. It led the Cadburys to create model housing in Bournville for their employees. Quakers were instrumental in the formation of what is now called Relate, and the Child Poverty Action Group. Quakers played a large part in the formation of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, now Oxfam. There are many other similar examples of Quaker works and initiatives over the years. All this is rooted in the Quaker silent worship; the ambience of Friends House gives the building a feeling of calm and peace.

The income from letting rooms in Friends House contributes to maintaining Quaker church and charitable activities. This proposal will help Quakers ensure that Friends House has a strong economic future to help support the wider work of the Quaker community. Quakers want Friends House to be versatile, accessible, sustainable and true to their roots by expressing their values and speaking to others in the way it is designed, used and managed. At the same time, it should reflect Quakerism as a contemporary faith relevant to the 21st century. In summary, the proposed redesign is intended to create for Friends' and others' use, a space which will continue to express Quaker values to the world, enable Friends to carry forward their valuable work and be an enhanced resource for the whole community.

2. THE VISION

Key Aims for the Development :

- THE PRINCIPAL VENUE to host Yearly Meeting and other meetings of the national Quaker church
- An active SPIRITUAL HOME for Quakers world wide;
- An INVITING AND ACCESSIBLE venue for Quakers and others to meet, work, build community and explore their faith
- A SHOWCASE for Quakers PAST AND PRESENT, bearing witness to the Quaker testimonies to peace, equality, truth and simplicity
- An exemplar of Quaker business operations, GENERATING PROFIT whilst acting with INTEGRITY, always respecting people and the planet.

SIMPLICITY

- Accessible and processional sequence through the building
- Versatile and flexible space that can be adapted and utilised for the long-term future
- Respect the simplicity of the existing design
- A design that embodies Quaker values of stillness and restraint

PEACE

- A green oasis providing a space for escape
- Mental health benefits of natural light, planting and gardens
- Calming design with a simple message
- Creating spaces for worship and contemplation

SUSTAINABILITY

- Suiting building for modern needs and minimising its carbon footprint
- Utilising passive design approaches to create flexible space, increasing Friends House's capacity
- Sustainable materials and re-use of existing materials
- Planting to improve air quality, bee pollination and mental health of users

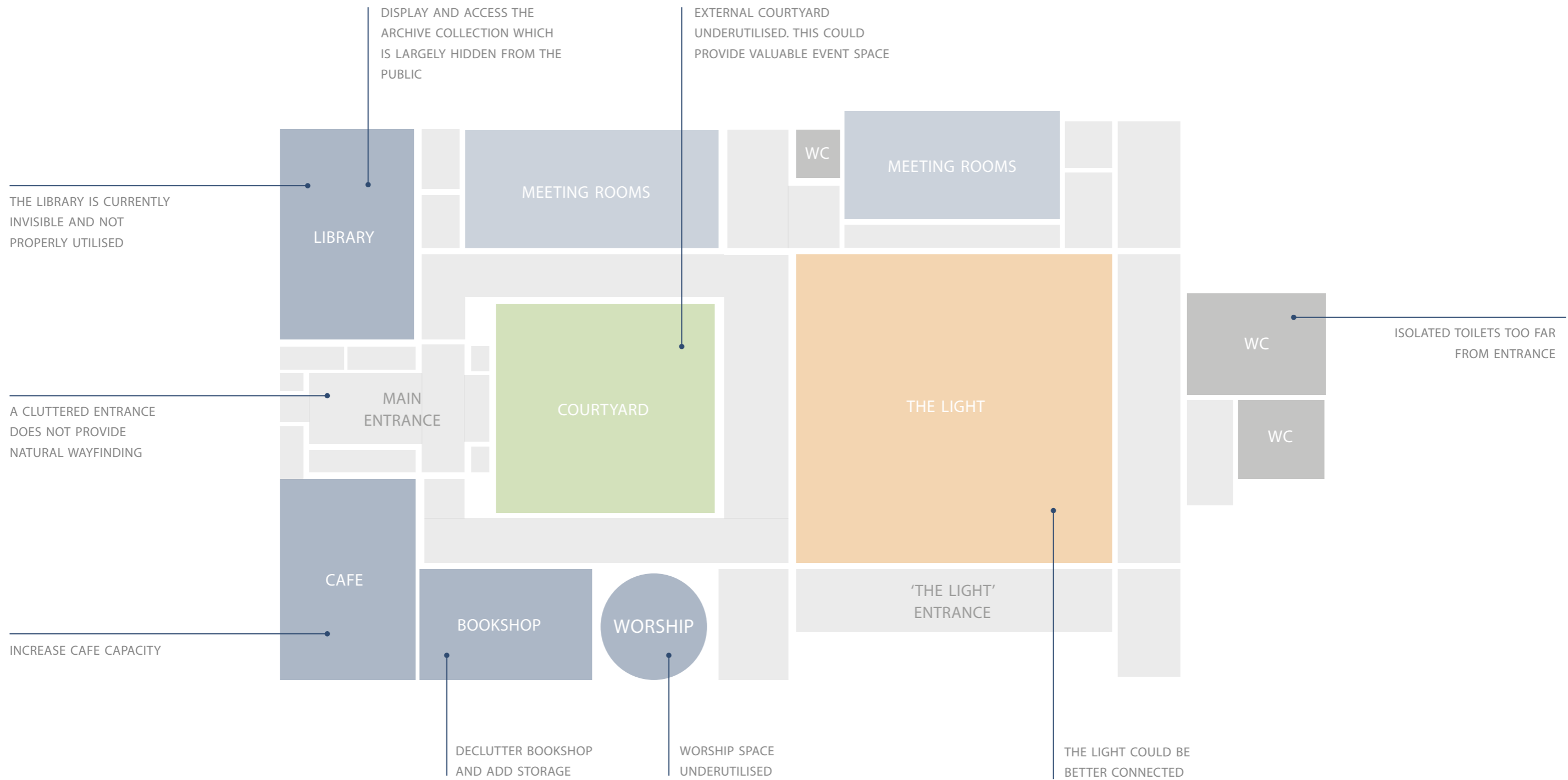
EQUALITY

- Openness and visibility from all areas
- Inclusiveness and providing access for all
- A building that serves the wider community
- A cherished building and garden open to the public and people of Camden

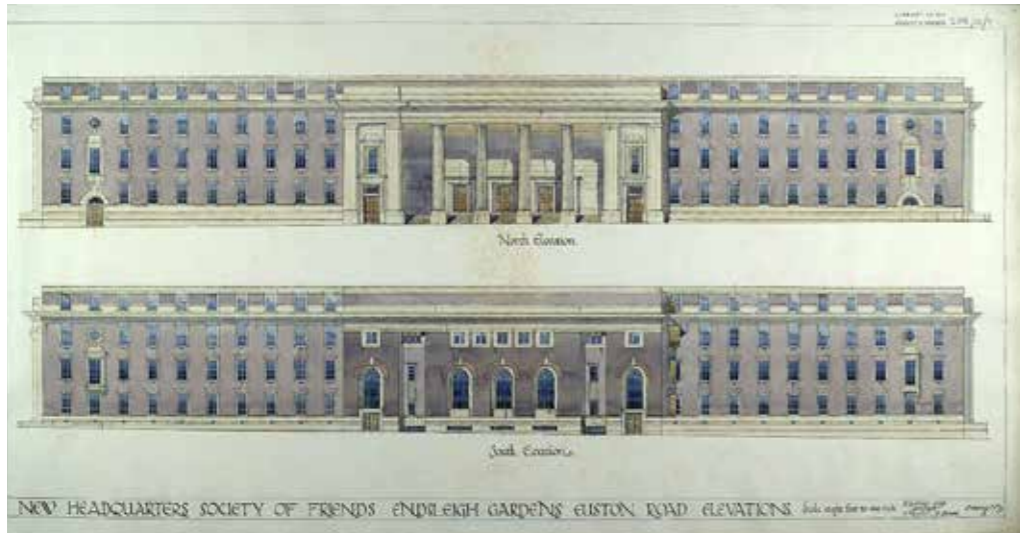
TRUTH

- Open and permeable building that opens itself to the public
- Simple palette of natural materials
- Respecting and honouring Lidbetter's design by reinstating original elements of design
- An honest design that reflects Quaker values

3. THE BRIEF



4. HISTORIC TIMELINE



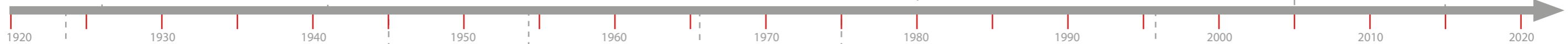
1926 Designed by Hubert Lidbetter, Friends House completed, receiving an RIBA Bronze Medal



2015 Major refurbishment of the Large Meeting House by JMP



1941 Bomb hit South East corner damaging roof, windows and doors - library not damaged.



1980s, 1990s and early 2000s
Further alterations and external
repair carried out

1945-1954 Post
war repairs and
improvements

1975-1980 Major
refurbishment
carried out by
Martin Lidbetter



1923 Endsleigh Gardens bought by the Society of Friends

1966 Hubert Lidbetter died and his son Martin was appointed consultant architect to Friends House.



1996 Building is listed at Grade II

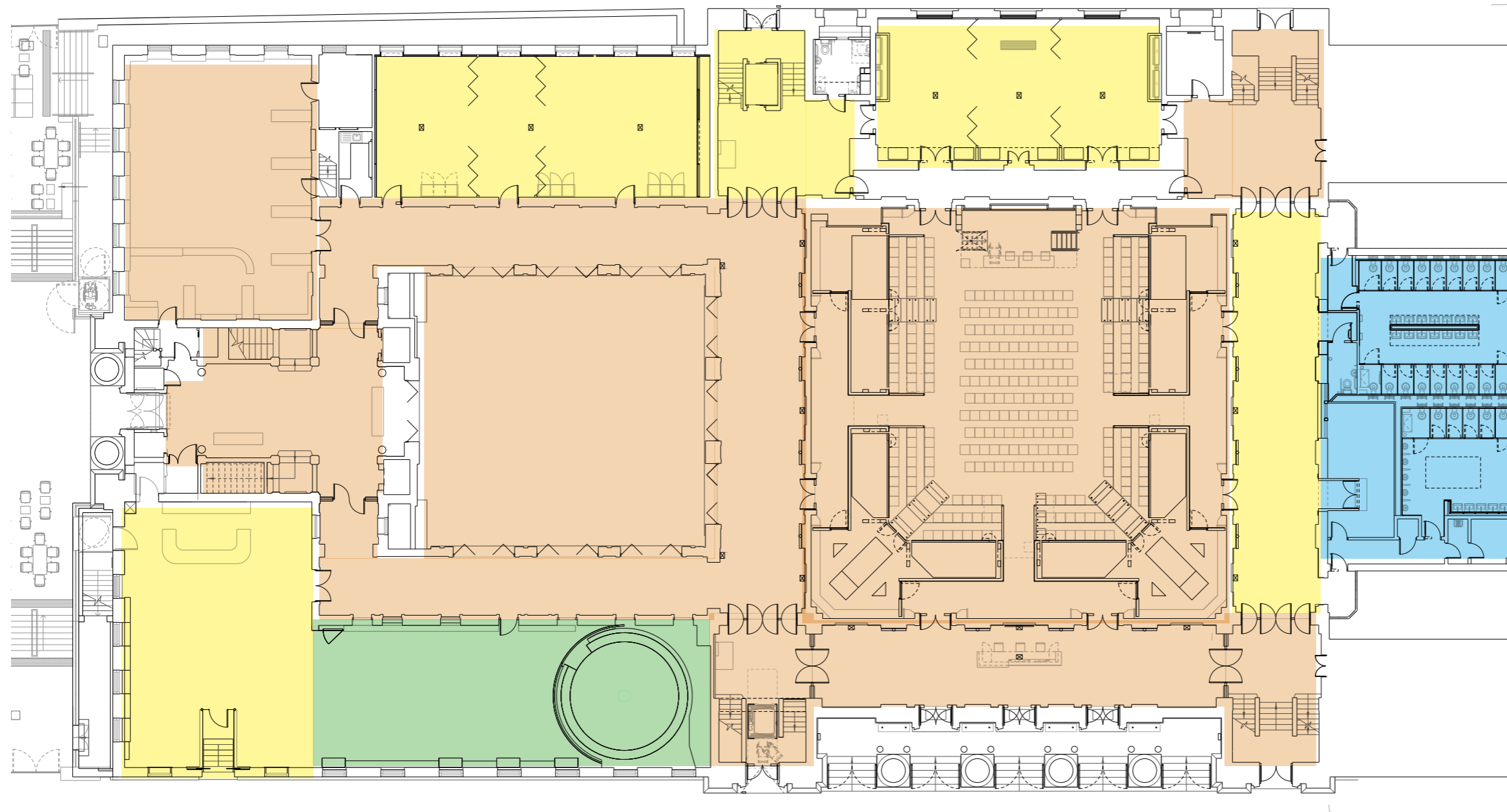
5. EXISTING BUILDING SIGNIFICANCE

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

As described in the Conservation Plan (2009 by Architectural History Practice Ltd)

KEY :

- CONSIDERABLE
- SIGNIFICANCE
- MODERATE SIGNIFICANCE
- MINOR SIGNIFICANCE
- NO SIGNIFICANCE



6. SCHEDULE OF CHANGES

ENTRANCE AND COURTYARD

- Entrance - declutter to allow original Ledbitter design intent
- Courtyard room is a new space with clearly visible difference in architectural style. Sensitive treatment is needed at junctions.
- Courtyard is retained as a first floor garden space

LIBRARY

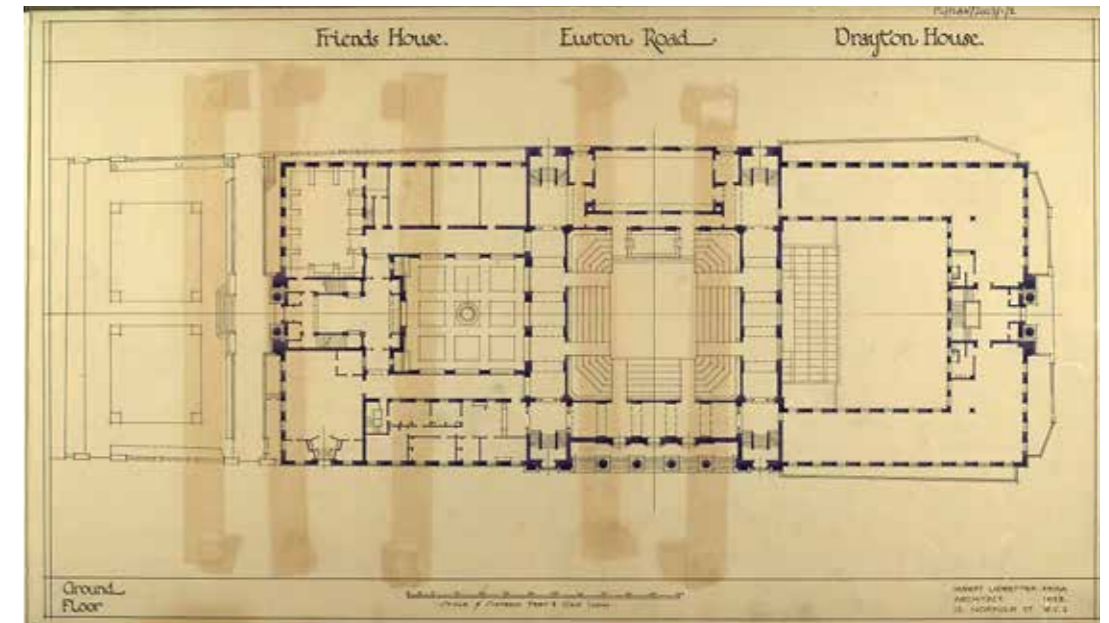
- Conservationist approach to Library - strip out unsympathetic alterations and declutter, conservation of original joinery etc
- First floor library opening up of niches

OTHER PROPOSED ALTERATIONS

- Exhibition - careful integration into corridor / minimal damage to building fabric / minimal blocking of views
- WC expansion in space of 'moderate significance' - vital to the functionality of the building
- New opening into bookshop - symmetrical and sympathetic to library door opposite
- Cafe additional WCs added to space of 'minor significance'. There have been many alterations to this space over the years with little historic interest remaining.
- Bookshop - sympathetic fit out of a space of minor significance
- Original opening to bookshop reinstated

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Retain clarity of the original plan
- Reinstate clear view through from the entrance
- Retain original building fabric



Original uncluttered plan (1926)



Recent photograph of the Entrance showing the view to the courtyard blocked by the reception desk



The Entrance as originally built in 1926



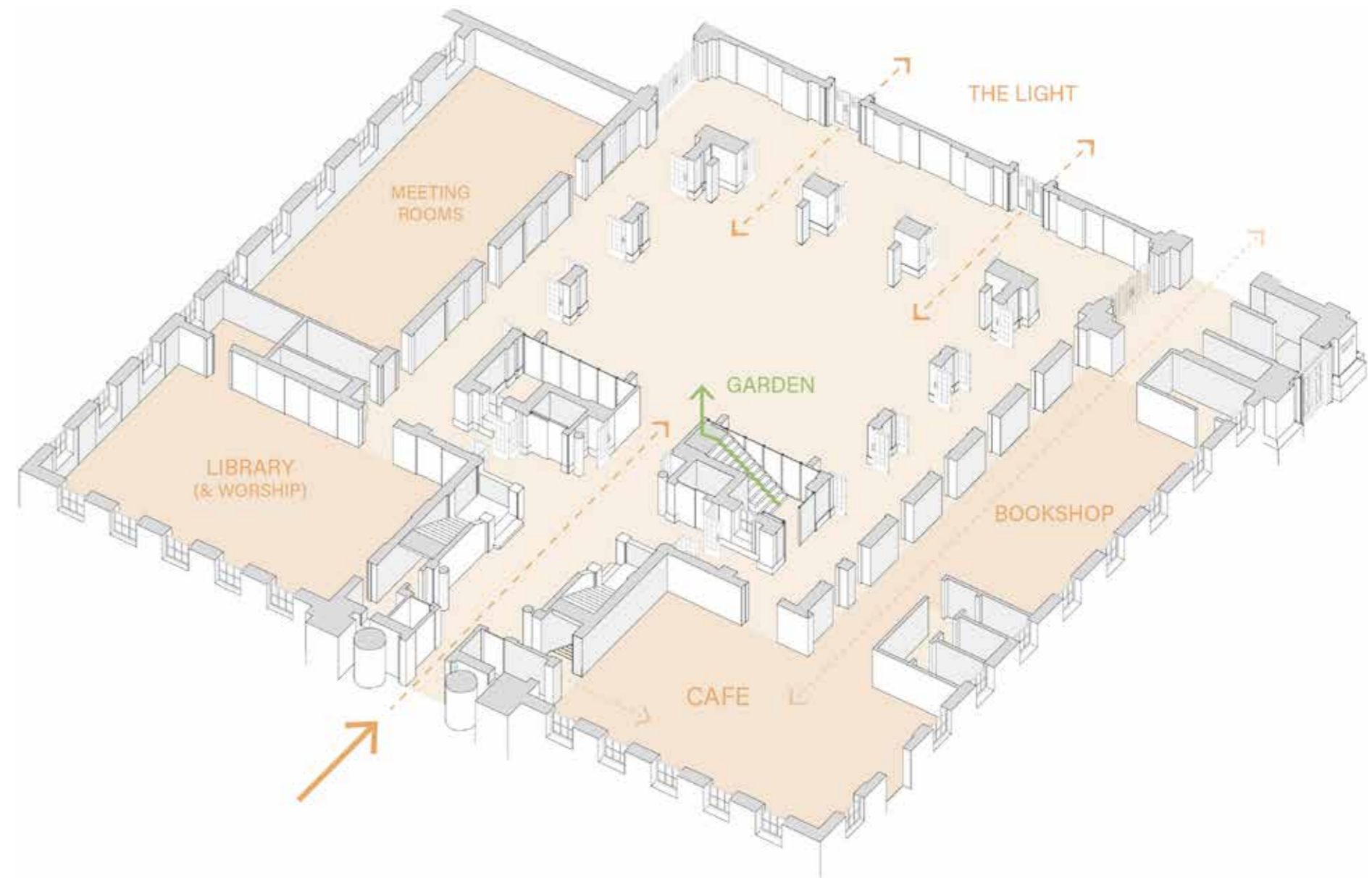
The Library as originally built in 1926

7. DESIGN PROPOSALS

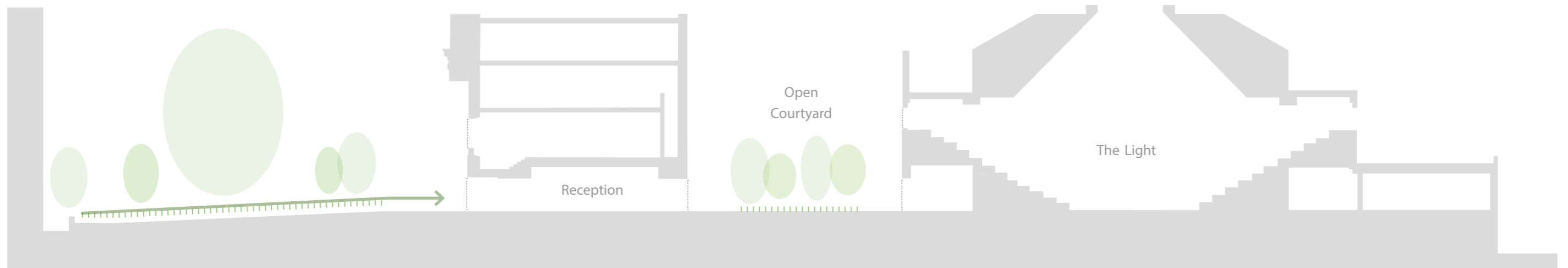
The project brief required the building to be adapted to meet its growing user requirements. The building in its current configuration does not meet the demand for public space, educational space, cafe seating, and other spatial requirements. The ground floor of the building has the potential to offer much more usable, flexible public space with much greater connectivity.

The brief for the site was to create a permeable, accessible and enhanced ground floor to provide a welcoming arrival experience with greater visibility to the rest of the floor. Simple interventions to the ground floor entrance and courtyard beyond provide a more connected floor plate with greater usability.

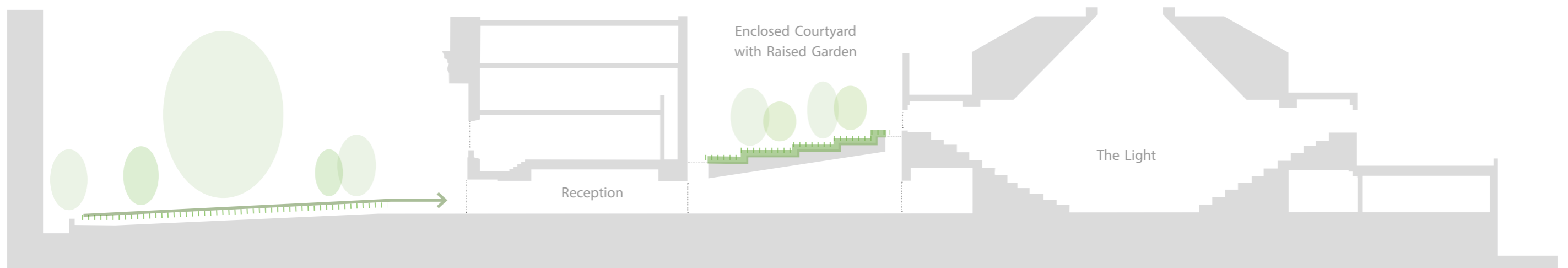
The existing courtyard is located in the heart of the floor-plate. Whilst providing a good point of orientation and viability between the key spaces it is currently very underutilised. The introduction of a landscaped roof to the central courtyard will create a new internal public space with clear visual and physical connectivity to the entrance, the light and wider building complex. This creates the opportunity for a flexible events space, spill out space for the cafe and greater connectivity to the library and light beyond. Not only does this increase the building's capacity it provides greater flexibility for a number of uses.



7. DESIGN PROPOSALS



FRIENDS HOUSE HAS A SHORTAGE OF PUBLIC SPACE. THE EXTERNAL CENTRAL COURTYARD CURRENTLY SEVERS THE CONNECTIVITY OF THE KEY CENTRAL SPACES



BY LIFTING THE COURTYARD GARDEN WE CAN CONNECT THE GROUND FLOOR LEVEL AND PROVIDE A VALUABLE NEW EVENT SPACE

7. DESIGN PROPOSALS

