

6

Access

6.1 Inclusive Design

Birkbeck College and the University of London welcome applications from anyone with specific access requirements. Our mission is to ensure that our services are accessible to all. We also respect individual choice and strive to create an inclusive, flexible and supportive environment which recognises the diversity of every individual. Our aim is to develop a proactive approach to ensure that services are accessible for all, and that we create an inclusive environment which recognises the diversity of individuals within a flexible and supportive educational framework.

The design has been developed with inclusivity in mind. The design proposals set high standards for achieving access for all building users. The Design Team will continue to adopt an inclusive design approach to the detail design stages for all external and internal spaces within the proposed scheme.

Site Constraints and Challenges

The current building is occupied by Birkbeck College in continuous use from 8am to 10pm daily throughout the year. The building was once nine separate terraced dwellings, there are internal level differences between the houses most notably between No.s 46 and 47 where there is in excess of 400mm difference resulting in the requirement for a ramp access at each adjoining floor level.

The terrace is bound to the North, east and west by neighbouring properties with the only access to the building from the South via Gordon Square. The nine original doorways remain, however only the main entrance into house 43 is used as a public entrance by Birkbeck. Number 43 is the main entrance to all staff, students and visitors. The remaining entrances are however able to be used in the event of a fire.

Each building has six stories with one level below ground level. From Gordon Square there are also staircases leading to the basement levels of each house however these are only accessible by staff.

Six sets of original staircases remain within the current building, however there are also three later additional staircases, two provide access from ground level to basement level only whilst the third connects level 01 to 03. Despite and perhaps because of this great number of staircases, moving around the building is a confusing and disorientating experience for new and less experienced users of the building.

The building has one existing passenger lift and one platform lift. One providing access from ground level

to basement level only and the other providing access from basement to level 03. Level 04 is not accessible via a lift and only via staircases.

At each level the nine former houses are connected by a central corridor running from stair to stair. This corridor is domestic in scale has few if any passing places and many doglegs to navigate. Building users find the corridor claustrophobic and because there are no windows challenging to locate themselves within the building.

These sorts of issues are fairly typical for properties of this age and history and Birkbeck College continues to implement management solutions to ensure Disabled users of the building aren't discriminated. However the renovation of the building offers an opportunity to significantly improve accessibility, whilst of course assessing any intervention for its potential harm to this important heritage asset.

Proposed improvements- External Access

There is currently only limited signage to the building and the main entrance is not easily locatable. The proposals for new signage are as laid out in this document and within the submitted drawings. New signage, which is sympathetic to the historic asset would allow for the main entrance to be readily visible to all users and remove confusion as to which door way to enter.

The main entrance has an existing ramp providing wheelchair access at this level. This will be retained in the new scheme. The main entrance door is adequate in size to allow wheelchair access. This door being a traditional original door is heavy and unsuitable for powered opening, it is therefore left open when the building is in use. A second internal draught lobby is provided to enclose the building with powered accessible doors with appropriate manifestation.

The existing reception does not provide a positive impact on people arriving into the space therefore proposals relocate the lobby and provide a more welcoming reception area with improved space for meeting and waiting.

Corridors & Passageways

The domestic nature of the building raises a number of challenges for navigation and movement by disabled users. Birkbeck College are very limited in their ability to alter internal arrangements in the buildings particularly original walls and features. However feedback from current users has highlighted some

areas where alterations can improve accessibility and the legibility of the building.

On the ground floor removing the walls and widening the corridor in key areas will improve movement and allow for passing places. On first and second floors works to straighten out the numerous doglegs in corridors will naturally improve flow and improve visibility along routes. In some key areas walls adjoining the main corridor have been removed this creates natural passing places on otherwise fairly narrow corridors.

In other areas walls are completely replaced with glass screens allowing natural light and a sense of orientation for those moving through the terrace.

Vertical Circulation: Stairs

The scheme places less reliance on the existing original stairs which have protected historic design features not meeting current guidance. All the principle teaching spaces remain on the basement, ground and first floor, to assist with accessibility to all these areas the existing later addition stair currently serving the basement ground level is extended by an additional flight to serve the first floor also. This is a wider stair which being non original will be refurbished to meet the guidance in BS8300.

Vertical Circulation: Lifts

The main existing lift is proposed to be replaced with a new cart which meets current regulations. This lift continues to provide access to levels from basement to level 03, however level 04 will remain inaccessible via lift due to the existing low roof level. This situation is managed by Birkbeck College with only staff office located on this level. The lift will be operable independently without requiring staff assistance. The lift car will incorporate tactile buttons, visual landing level indication, audio voice indication of landing level, emergency lighting, telephone connection and alarm system.

The surrounds to the lift doors are of contrasting colour and/or finish to ensure easy recognition by partially sighted building users. Lift controls to have single press button operation, so that users are not required to keep continuous pressure on the button for the full extent of travel. Disabled refuges to be provided to comply with BS5839-9:2011, BS9999:2009 and BS8300:2009.

Visual Colour Contrast

The buildings will be decorated throughout with a colour scheme to be agreed that provides suitable visual contrast and assists orientation and way finding

for visitors and staff with limited sight. This complies with the Part M guidance for a LRV contrast of 30 points value.

WC Facilities

There will be a range of facilities to suit all needs. Unisex WC blocks have been designed throughout the building with separate accessible WCs. The provision of fully accessible toilets have been included to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations in terms of travel distances and BS 8300 in terms of design.

All accessible WCs can be accessed directly without passing through a Male or Female WC area, as a disabled user may be assisted by a member of the opposite sex. Facilities for disabled users are to have an alarm, complying with BS 8300, linked to an external flashing and audible beacon.

Summary

The design team and Birkbeck College have taken a pragmatic approach to improving accessibility and inclusion within the building whilst balancing the need to retain historic features and minimise the impact of any new development works. The proposal makes positive steps to improve accessibility with benefits for staff and students alike. The buildings facilities and management team have been involved throughout the process and are confident the proposals will significantly improve accessibility and help them meet the needs of students and staff.



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