

FRIENDS HOUSE

LONDON

DESIGN, ACCESS & HERITAGE STATEMENT

REFURBISHMENT & REPAIR WORKS WITHIN THE GROUND FLOOR LIBRARY / READING ROOM

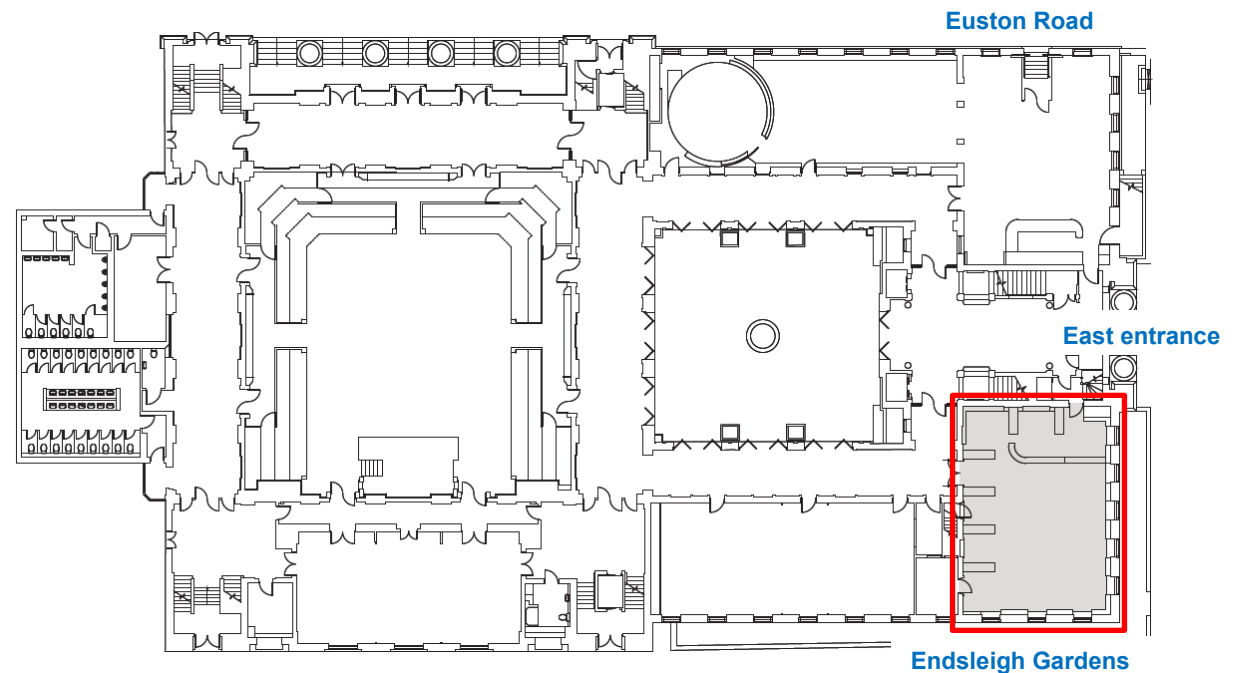
FEBRUARY 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Friends House is a Grade II Listed building which stands on the south side of Euston Road, opposite Euston Station. It is home to the head offices of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain. The 'Library Reading Room' which is the subject of this application is located to the south east corner of the building at ground floor level. The library is ancillary to the buildings main use as offices, meeting rooms and conference space.

1.2 At present the library is not as visible, accessible or as well used as it could be. Permission is therefore sought to re-organise and improve the space to create a more inclusive facility which offers:

- Space for meetings and training
- Display, exhibitions and events
- Flexible learning/engagement zone
- Worship space
- Improved access and circulation for wheelchair users

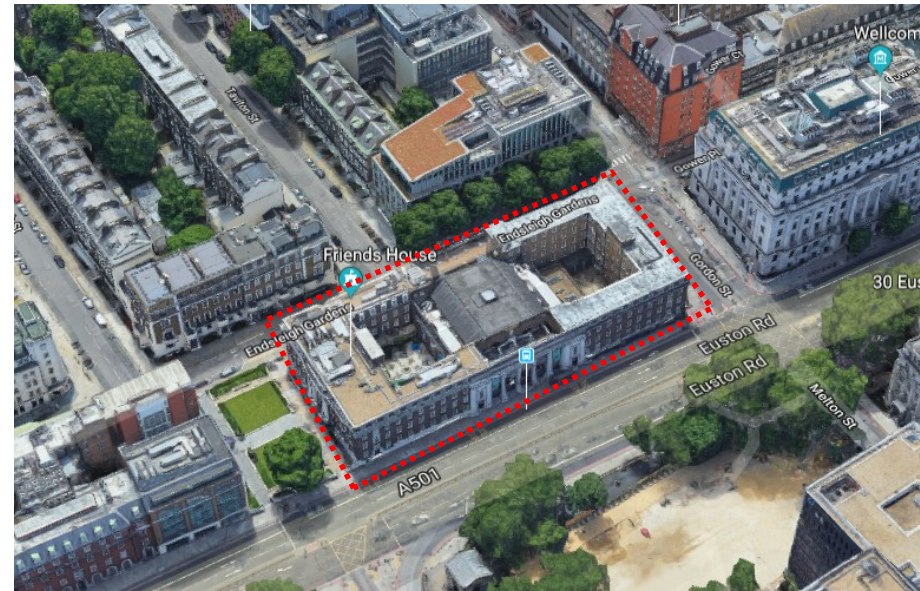


Ground floor plan extract showing library location within the building

- 1.3 The Library is a unique space and a key requirement in undertaking the development is to enhance the character of the room. It is proposed to reinstate the original character by stripping out some of the later additions including the curved enquiry desk and flush floor mounted galvanised steel cable containment which had been cut into the original oak floor. The timber floor would be repaired and restored and would remain exposed on completion.
- 1.4 Further aspects of the proposed development works include the installation of glazed panels to and the upgrading of automatic door control gear to the entrance doors, re-routing of existing power and data cabling, replacement lighting, general repair/maintenance of windows and blinds and redecoration of the space.
- 1.5 It is considered that the proposed refurbishment will have no adverse, only positive impacts upon the special character of the building. There would be no loss of any original fabric. Further much of the re-organisation work relates to the removal of non-fixed elements such as tables and freestanding shelving. However, this application has been prepared to avoid any potential future concerns regarding the extent of works undertaken given the listed status of the building.
- 1.6 This statement is set out as follows:
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| 2.0 | : | Site Description & Assessment of Heritage Significance |
| 3.0 | : | Relevant History |
| 4.0 | : | Relevant Planning Policy |
| 5.0 | : | Analysis |
| 6.0 | : | Conclusions |

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION & ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

- 2.1 Friends House (173 – 177 Euston Road), is a three storey plus attic and basement building which stands on the south side of Euston Road opposite Euston station.
- 2.2 It was built around 1927 to the design of Hubert Lidbetter who won the RIBA bronze medal for “best building erected in London” as a result. It is of steel construction, clad in brown brick with Portland stone dressings. The building takes the form of a long rectangular block, divided into three sections by two internal courtyards as highlighted in the aerial photograph opposite. The Euston Road elevation is dominated by a Portland stone tetra style in anti-portico whilst the garden facing east elevation is centred on a slightly projecting style in antis portico.



Aerial view of Friends House from the north looking south

- 2.3 It was originally designed to host the Quaker annual gatherings and so its layout included a large Meeting House to seat at least 1,500 Friends (Quakers) for these yearly meetings, a library and several rooms for meetings and worship.
- 2.4 Today, Friends House is the central offices of Quakers in Britain and still welcomes the annual meeting during Spring bank holiday weekend. The building has had many renovations and improvements since 1927, starting with the Main Meeting House. In 2014, following a year of renovation work, it was relaunched as ‘The Light’, a 1,000-seater auditorium. It now includes a glass roof light to provide natural light and a 200m² flat floor for exhibition layouts.



View of friends House following construction in 1927



Refurbished meeting space 'The Light'

2.5 In 1996 the building was listed (Grade II). The listing description states:

*"Includes: No.30 Drayton House GORDON STREET. Central Offices of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, including offices, meeting halls **and library**; separate lettable office accommodation incorporated in Drayton House to the west of block, completing the symmetry of the main facade. Completed in 1927 to the designs of Hubert Lidbetter, ARIBA; Grace and Marsh Ltd. General Contractors. Steel construction sheathed in brick laid in English bond and Portland stone dressings; metal framed windows to rear elevation, otherwise wood sashes, all of original design. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys and attic over basement. Long rectangular block divided in 3 by 2 interior courtyards; large meeting house at the centre, square in plan; **library at south-east corner of block**; small meeting house, formerly double height now subdivided, to rear of centre block, windows to south. Long elevation to Euston Road dominated by tetrastyle in antis portico, itself framed by bays; this central section, which marks the extent of the large hall, in Portland stone, with recessed ranges leading to hall's foyer. Slightly recessed side ranges of 10 windows each. All openings flat arched unless otherwise stated. The penultimate ranges to either side marked by the use of Portland stone, having a semicircular windows to ground floor, balconied window to first floor set in moulded architrave, and keyed roundel to second floor. Cornice band continuous to entire block and separating second from attic storey. East and west elevations identical and centred about a distyle-in-antis portico, slightly projecting from side ranges of 5 windows each. To east elevation series of terraces and walls lead down to garden, which is enclosed on north and south by a low Portland stone wall with railings similar in design to those enclosing*

basement areas. South elevation features projecting range of 5 bays, the openings round-arched with metal framed windows; bays one and 5 are separated from the centre 3 bays by a recessed range. The latter 3 windows mark the extent of the former small meeting house. INTERIOR: main entrance to offices through east elevation, into low lobby with stairs to second floor; this overlooks the east courtyard with circular brick fountain and French doors opening from corridors to north and south. Most of the ground-floor corridors and stairs retain original fixtures and finishes; committee rooms, some of them with moveable partitions, also retain original panelling, door furniture and fittings. **The library is double height, 3 x 4 bays at east corner to Endsleigh Gardens. It was sensitively refurbished in 1993, retaining much of the original woodwork, and galleries to west and north.** Great Hall with flat roof coffered, carried on square piers and pilasters, with galleries on three sides. Drop acoustic ceiling from line of architrave hides original ceiling, but this is said to be survive intact above. Railings and fitted furniture to hall also intact. 3 entrances to hall foyer from Euston Road; these doors of original design. Small meeting house of 3 bays to rear, south, has been divided to provide committee rooms on ground floor. Courtyard between Drayton House and central block has been partly filled in by recent 2-storey addition providing extra toilet and other facilities for Great Hall. The addition has been sensitively designed. The interior of Drayton House not inspected. It is said to retain much of its original finishes. The building retains most of its original character, fittings and finishes. The interiors are well designed and detailed, particularly in the east block around the courtyard. Hubert Lidbetter designed many buildings for the Society of Friends; this is the most ambitious. (The Builder: 24 June 1927: 1008)."

2.6 The building also stands within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Appraisal Statement comments:

"5.10 Friends' House (grade II listed), Nos 161-167 (odd) and a late 20th century office building form the principal frontage to Euston Road to the south of the square. The main entrance to Friends' House is expressed in a neo-classical style as a three-storey Doric colonnade. With its neighbour at Nos 161-167, it is constructed in red brick with Portland stone detailing and rises a total of four storeys. However, Nos 161-167, which reads as a single block, has a larger scale than Friends' House owing to its taller storey heights and its mansard roof punctuated by small attic windows which align with the openings below. The small, formal garden to the east of Friends' House (designated as a public open space in the London Borough of Camden Local Development Plan 2010) provides an attractive, comparatively peaceful space, defined by Portland stone boundary walls and decorative entrance gates. It is the only surviving element south of Euston Road of the original Euston Square, and provides a pedestrian link through to Endsleigh Gardens. There are vistas of the grandly-scaled terrace on the south side of Endsleigh Gardens which once formed the southern edge of Euston Square (located in Sub Area 2). The mature tree within the gardens is an important element in the Euston Road streetscape."

2.7 Internally, the building has been the subject of refurbishment and modernisation over time. The library however, retains much of its original character as shown in the following pictures.



Wide angle view showing the library as it is today



View toward enquiry desk



Cable boxes set within floors



Existing main doors into library



Door furniture



Enquiry desk



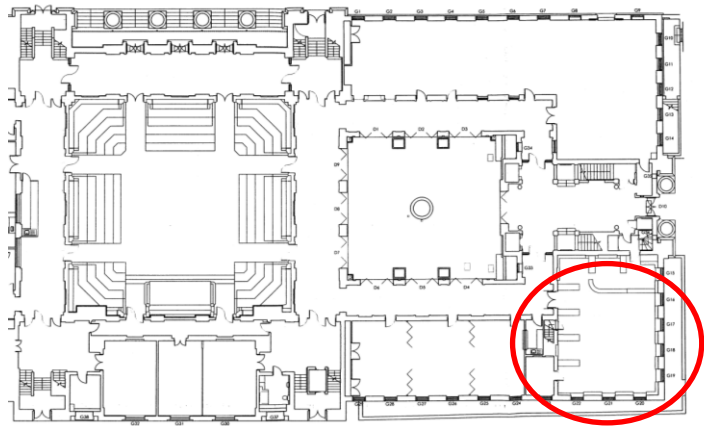
Example of suspended lighting

Description of Heritage Significance

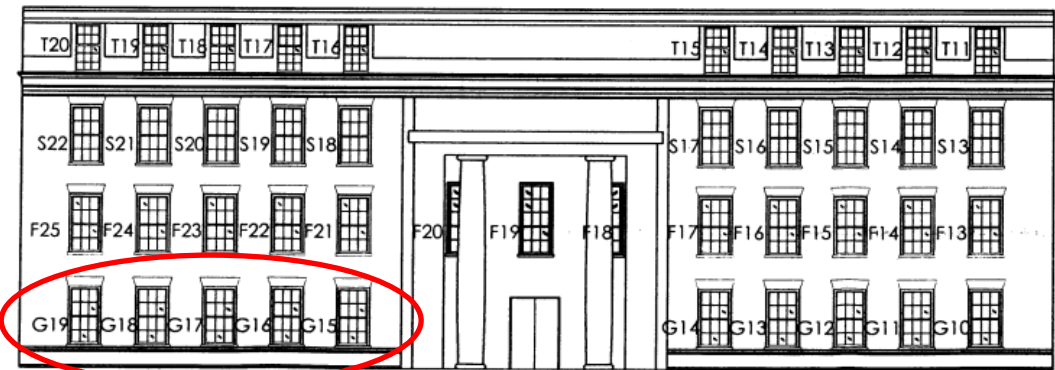
- 2.8 Friends House was constructed in 1927. Its fabric is not therefore of particularly historic origin nor is the use of a steel frame construction an example of a rare or unusual building technique. The building was not listed on this basis. Rather it is considered that the special significance of the building derives from two main aspects.
- 2.9 Firstly the building holds significance due to its association with the Quaker movement and its use as the annual meeting place since construction in 1927 and also the development of the use over time as a more general meeting place and conference venue for a variety of groups and organisations. Its location adjacent to Euston Station assists in this regard with those visiting from outside of London gaining a sense of arrival upon exit from the station and viewing the building immediately to the south.
- 2.10 The design and architecture of the building also holds significance. As noted above the design was awarded the RIBA bronze medal award for the best building erected in London in 1927. The building commands a significant presence in the Euston Road street scene and so the Bloomsbury Conservation Area with the Portland stone façade dominating significant lengths of view along the south side of the road. The building's presence is accentuated by the fact that it stands apart from its neighbours with the garden space to the east side and the gap created by Gordon Street to the west.
- 2.11 Internally, the building retains some significant features. Most of the original layout remains at ground level, albeit modern alterations have provided a more open plan café area to the north east corner. The upper levels have been refurbished to provide meeting rooms. The basement level as described above is primarily comprised of modern fabric and a layout defined in the early 1990's and then reorganised more recently in 2018 / 2019.
- 2.12 The library as noted in the listing description was sensitively refurbished in 1993. Some fixed panelling and joinery remains and holds significance whilst other elements of furniture such as the enquiry desk and tables that do not form part of the building structure and are of modern origin do contribute to the overall significance.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 The Council's planning records show a fairly extensive planning history dating back to the 1980's. Unfortunately, as the building wasn't listed until 1996 there are no records relating to the library refurbishment which took place in 1993.
- 3.2 The only record which appears to include works within the library area is from 2010, 2010/3346/L for "Alterations to provide secondary glazing to windows and doors."



Plan extract from 2010



EAST ELEVATION

East elevation extract from 2010

- 3.3 The secondary glazing as permitted was fairly simple clear sheets sitting behind the main windows. It was installed and remains within the library today.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019)

- 4.1 The NPPF provides the government's guidance to the planning system on a range of planning issues. Decisions on individual planning applications should normally be taken in accordance with the policies and objectives set out in the framework.
- 4.2 At paragraph 7 the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 11 makes clear that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Chapter 16 is entitled "Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment". It advises:

"189. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance....."

190. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

192. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;

- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

Camden Council Development Plan

- 4.3 Policy D2 states that the Council will seek to preserve and where appropriate enhance heritage assets and their setting. In terms of designated heritage assets D2 confirms that:

*“.....The Council will not permit the **loss of or substantial harm** to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:*

- a. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;*
- b. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;*
- c. conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- d. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.*

The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.....

Listed buildings are designated heritage assets and this section should be read in conjunction with the section above headed ‘designated heritage assets’.

To preserve or enhance the borough's listed buildings, the Council will:

i. resist the total or substantial demolition of a listed building;

j. resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building; and

k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.

5.0 **ANALYSIS**

- 5.1 As described in Section 1, listed building consent is sought to enable the refurbishment of and minor alteration works to the existing ground floor library within Friends House.
- 5.2 The accompanying plans, schedule and photographs describe all of the proposed works. As the Council will note a number of the elements listed such as the removal of free-standing book cases, tables, re-organisation of furniture etc. do not strictly require listed building consent. However, they have been included to provide an overall picture of the refurbishment.
- 5.3 Of the works proposed it is considered that listed building consent is required / may be considered to be required for the following elements:
- The addition of glazed panels to the main entrance door
 - Replacement lighting
 - Removal of the steel cable containment runs from within the floor - repair / restoration of the wood floor
 - Re-routing of cables / lighting and window blind controls
 - Repair and repainting of windows
- 5.6 Each of these elements is now discussed below in terms of the potential impact upon the listed building and its significance.

Glazed Panels to Entrance Doors

- 5.7 As outlined in Section 1, the library is currently an underused space and it is proposed that the room is refurbished and re-organised to allow more flexible use and to improve its accessibility to all.

5.8 The existing double doors are timber with four obscure glazed panels in the upper section as shown opposite. The doors are of reasonably pleasant appearance but not understood to be original. The handles and locks are of modern design and appearance and the doors appear to have been designed to modern fire safety requirements.

5.9 Unfortunately due to their design the doors do not provide visibility into or out of the library and so do not facilitate ease of access. There are health and safety concerns that users cannot see other uses coming through the doors and so there are instances where the doors open and hit people coming in the other direction, particularly wheelchair users. Combined with this the solid appearance acts as a visual barrier rather than drawing people into the space.

5.10 To improve this situation it is proposed to install clear glazing in the upper section in place of the obscured and to mirror this below as show on the submitted drawings.

5.11 It is considered that these works will have no material impact upon the heritage significance of the building and will greatly aid access to and so useability of the library space.(However, should the Council consider it more appropriate, the Applicant would be happy to replace the doors completely with new glazed doors and then re-use the existing doors elsewhere in the building. We would be pleased to discuss this option with Officers).



Doors as existing.

Replacement Lighting

5.12 There is modern strip lighting throughout the library set in 'U' shaped runs within the various shelving alcoves. This is poor quality lighting and not efficient to run. It is proposed to replace this in the positions shown on the plans with new LED lighting in line with relevant guidance and codes which provides a better standard of light and is also more efficient in terms of energy use.

Removal of cable containment runs and repair of wood floor

5.13 As shown on the submitted plans and in the pictures opposite metal channels have been set into the library floor which carry the cabling for the electrics, lighting and blinds.

5.14 The runs are not visible within the room as the floor has been covered with carpet tiles. (Removed in pictures to show the containment).

5.15 It is proposed to remove the carpet tiles and also remove the metal cable containment. Replacement oak boarding to match the existing timber flooring will be installed where the containment has been removed. The entire floor is to be sanded and refurbished to assist the assimilation of the new timber pieces.

5.16 It is considered that this element of the proposal represents a significant benefit. The timber floor will be repaired and again visible to users of the space with the metal cable boxes removed and the new timber provided to make good.



Examples of the metal cable boxing cutting through the floor

Re-routing of the cables

5.17 Alongside the repairs to the floor as noted above and the general re-organisation of the space much of the cabling within the metal boxing will become redundant and that which is retained / renewed will simply be routed beneath the flooring between the joists.

5.18 Switches associated with the lighting and blind operation which have been set into tables and the main library desk which are to be removed are



Existing switches within enquiry desk



Existing switches at entrance to library

proposed to be replaced just inside the main entrance doors next to the existing switches as shown in the photograph above and as set out on the accompanying plans.

Repair / repainting of Windows

5.19 The existing windows to the library (as shown in the following pictures) are in need of some repair, and repainting. The repairs would be minor works such as the chipping out of rotten timber and filling as necessary.

5.20 The windows would be repainted (white) following the repair works.

Summary / Assessment

5.21 The proposed works would not result in any material loss of original or historic building fabric or any features of merit.

5.22 Similarly, no changes in plan form i.e., loss of existing partitions, walls, openings etc.is proposed, only a re-arrangement of freestanding furniture.



Examples of windows in need of repair and repainting

5.23 The heritage significance of Friends House is derived from its historic relationship with the Quaker movement and also the grand external façades with Portland Stone dressings that create an imposing presence in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The proposed changes for which permission is sought through this application would preserve the overall significance of Friends House.

5.24 The proposal therefore complies with the guidance set out in Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy D2 of the Camden Development Plan and will assist the applicant in providing the additional and enhanced facilities required to support the continued successful operation of Friends House.

6.0 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The works proposed by this application for listed building consent are confined to the library which is located at the south east corner of the ground floor of Friends House and relate primarily to the re-organisation and re-planning of the space to provide a more flexible space with better access and overall useability.
- 6.2 As demonstrated in this statement, on the supporting plans and as the Council will readily note when undertaking a site visit, no original or historic fabric or plan form would be impacted.
- 6.3 The proposals would have no adverse impact upon the heritage significance of Friends House and so officers support for this application is requested.