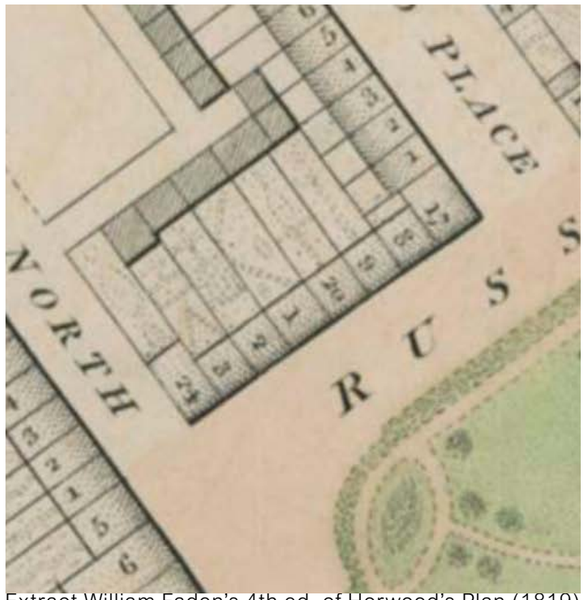


Extract William Faden's 4th ed. of Horwood's Plan (1819) showing Nos 17 – 24 Russell Square with ornamental gardens and outbuildings


View of buildings from SOAS, 1971 (UoL archive)


T S Eliot in his office with his secretary
(from faber.co.uk)

1.16 Design – heritage significance

The History and Significance of the existing Listed Buildings is more fully considered in the separate Heritage Statement submitted with these Applications.

Significance:
The significance of the existing buildings is considered as follows:

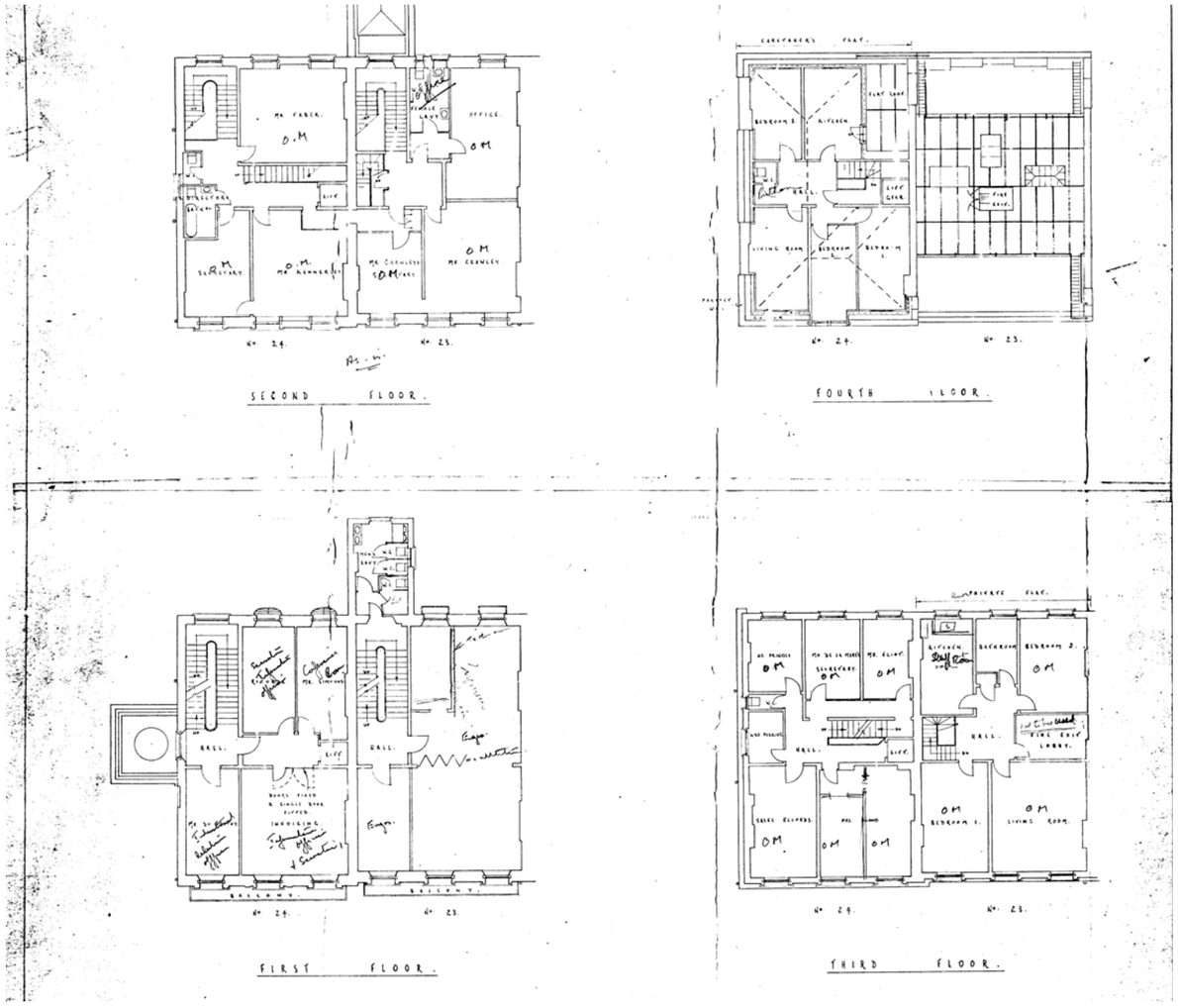
Evidential:
The remaining townhouses are significant as they are a surviving part of the composition of Russell Square, which has been much altered since it's initial development. The sides of the square now include a large replacement apartment and commercial block on the north-east corner, and a line of large hotel buildings along Southampton Row to the east as well as more original townhouses on the western side of the Square.

Historic:
The surviving no.s 21-24 Russell Square were originally part of a terrace of eight townhouses built in c1800-3 as part of the Russell Square and surrounding estate development. The 1815 Estate Plan and Horwood's map of 1819 show most of its houses are shown as having had gardens and outbuildings in the 1815 Estate Plan and
Horwood's map of 1819 – extract reproduced above.

The publishers Faber + Faber who occupied no.s 23 and 24 between the 1920s and 1971 (as referenced in the Faber company history www.faber.co.uk). During this time, in 1949, the print workshop and book store behind no.23 was built for the use of the publishers. The buildings have been in the ownership of the University of London since 1971 and have been used by SOAS for a mix of teaching and faculty offices until 2020 when the University vacated.

Communal: The buildings have been inhabited by a number of notable institutions and people, most notably by T S Eliot, who was a writer, publisher and director of Faber + Faber and who had an office in no.24. The plans of the offices from the time of the Universities acquisition show Geoffrey Faber's office to the rear on second floor, and Eliot's office the eastern-most office on the third floor. The Faber company history on their website shows a photograph of T S Eliot at his desk in his office (figures above).

Opposite: upper floor plans from UoL archive



Opposite: upper floor plans from UoL archive

Existing front and rear views

Aesthetic: The houses are a mostly intact example of the design of Russell Square as it was established by the Bedford Estate including the later terracotta design embellishments.

The buildings are designed in the manner of Georgian London townhouses, faced in London stock brick, with 6-storey houses at either end and a central pair of 5-storey houses. There is a continuous row of ornate iron railings at first floor level, and simpler railings at street level and leading to each entrance door. Stone steps lead to each door spanning over the perimeter lightwells which run along the south and west faces. The original design of the townhouses was embellished with terracotta detailing to the entrance door surrounds, window surrounds and parapet at the end of the 19th Century following the style of the Russell Hotel (as referenced in the Heritage Statement).

The rear facades are more plain but contain interesting an interesting varied collection of tall original windows to the principal rooms, the windows to the rear of no.s 21 and 22 being curved bays. The end elevation of No. 24 is composed of a series of blind brick recesses, with the main feature being an entrance portico at ground floor level built projecting from the centre of the end façade onto the street edge of Thornhaugh Street, and covering the entrance steps up to the raised ground floor level. No. 24 also has a side extension service wing/ mews building flanking onto Thornhaugh Street, in plain stock brick with a few simple door and window openings and ending in a double-service door and a pair of large vehicle gates giving access to a small rear yard in the north-west corner of the site.

Image above: Detail from an aerial view north-eastwards in 1939, showing
the large garage to the rear of Nos 21-24 Russell Square. (Historic England Archive, EPW060554)

Image above: Modern aerial view showing the garage removed and redeveloped as part of the IoE building which also replaced part of Russell Sq and Bedford Way.

1.17 Massing and Height

Massing – existing houses:

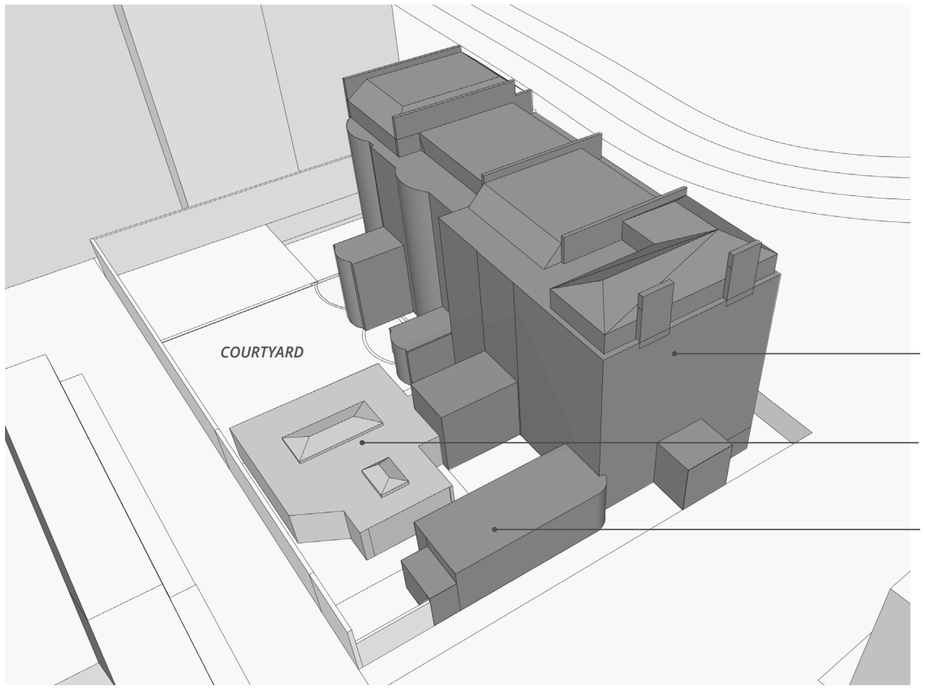
The existing houses are designed as a tall continuous terrace and comprise a lower ground, ground and three further upper floors, and fourth attic-floors at the ends house (no.24) and the former middle house of the terrace (no 21) providing emphasis to the original terrace composition. The houses extend to 23m overall height, 16.5m above street level to the parapets, and 21m above street level to the top of the fourth-floor roofs.
To the rear are closet wings extending to second floor level, and single-storey mews buildings extending to 5.4m height to the parapet above street level.
This existing massing viewed from Russell Square, the mews to no.24 and the closet wings will all be retained in these proposals.

Massing and height – proposed new mews building:

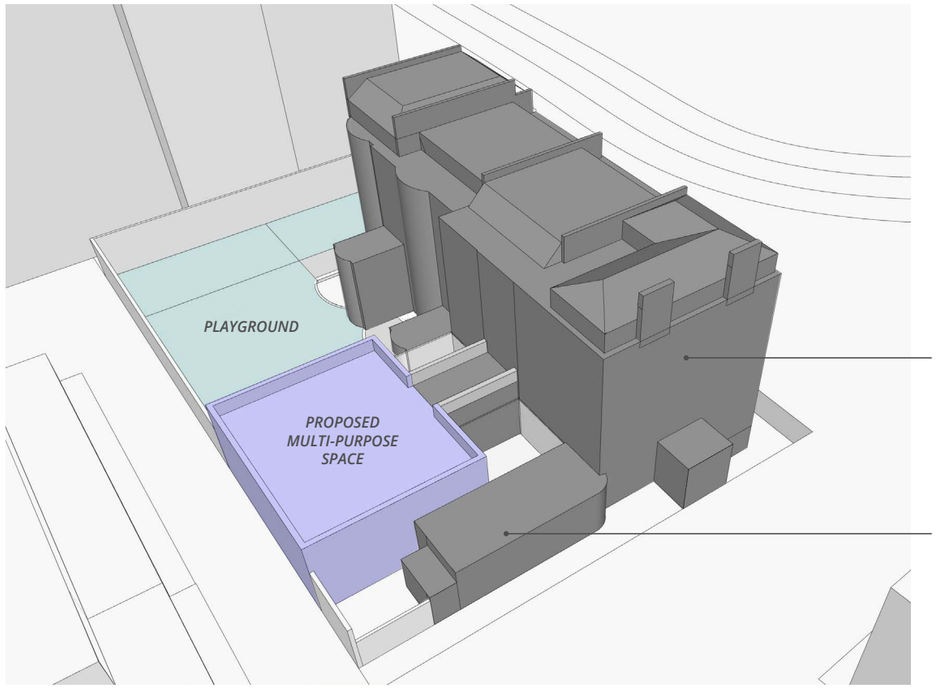
We have considered the heights of the existing houses, and the positions of the existing mews buildings surrounding the site in our development process to establish an appropriate massing for the proposed new building. We have designed the multi-purpose hall to be based at raised ground level similar to the existing print workshop, and to be limited to be no taller than the existing roof of the closet wing of no.23. This means that the parapet height of the proposed new building will be taller by approx. 2m than the corresponding parapet height of the mews of no.24, but shorter by 2m than the existing closet wing behind no.21.
The view of the proposed new mews will be principally from Thornhaugh Street, off Russell Square, and partly visible obliquely or viewed as a background building when approaching through the University precincts - linking from Torrington Square and Woburn Square to Thornhaugh Street from the west and north.
The proposed new mews building will be most obviously visible when stood on Thornhaugh Street. The proposed new building does not have a street frontage on any side – it will be set back from Thornhaugh Street behind the mews of no. 24 which flanks the street, to the north the new building addresses the boundary wall and private service ramp to the large IoE building, and the south and east facades face into the site. The massing of the site is dominated by the Institute of Education (IoE) building behind to the east and north which will form the backdrop of the new building and which extends to 7 principal storeys above ground level (26.5m) and with large plain concrete service towers rising 12.5m further than the highest occupied storey to a total height of 39m. The proposed new mews building is considered to be set back far enough to be read as subservient both to the main houses and to the no.24 mews and not to dominate either, and is dwarfed by the adjacent IoE building surrounding the site.

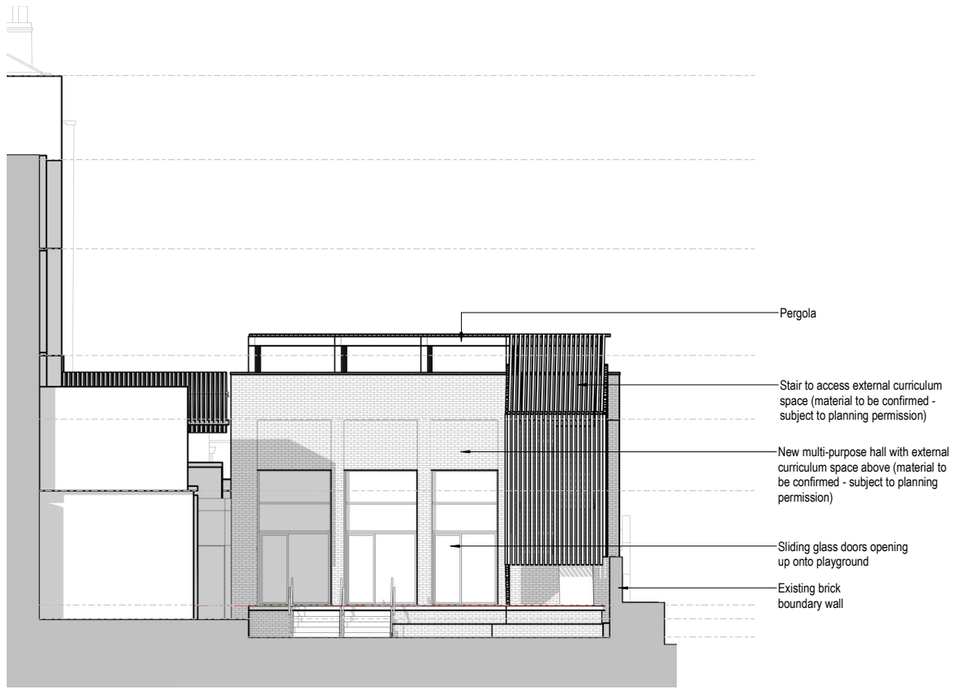
PROPOSED MASSING

EXISTING VIEW



PROPOSED VIEW





Initial elevations presented at pre-application stage

Pre-Application Advice – assessment of height:

The main concern raised in pre-application advice was to minimise the height of the proposed new building and to consider the impact of the proposal on the setting of the Listed Buildings no.s 21-24 as well as the Listed IoE building.

The initial design for the new building presented as part of the pre-application submission is shown above. The building in this design was proposed to have brick cladding, and to rise to a height of 8.8m above street level (measured from Thornhaugh Street). In pre-Application discussions with Officers this was thought to be high and we have therefore subsequently reviewed the heights necessary for the new building in order to minimise the overall height and mitigate its impact.

Through analysis of our design, we have been able to reduce the parapet height of the new building by 1.5m. The constraint on the overall height of the new building is to get level access to the roof level, the new building needs to rise to the height of the existing closet wing (and half-landing internally) of no.23. We have determined that we can reduce the parapet height by approximately 1.3m and also ramp down the connection from the main house to the new roof, lowering the roof by approximately 200mm. Protection to the edge of the terrace would be provided by a glass balustrade set in from the edge, and further protection to users provided by perimeter planting that prevents users standing directly at the edges of the terrace.

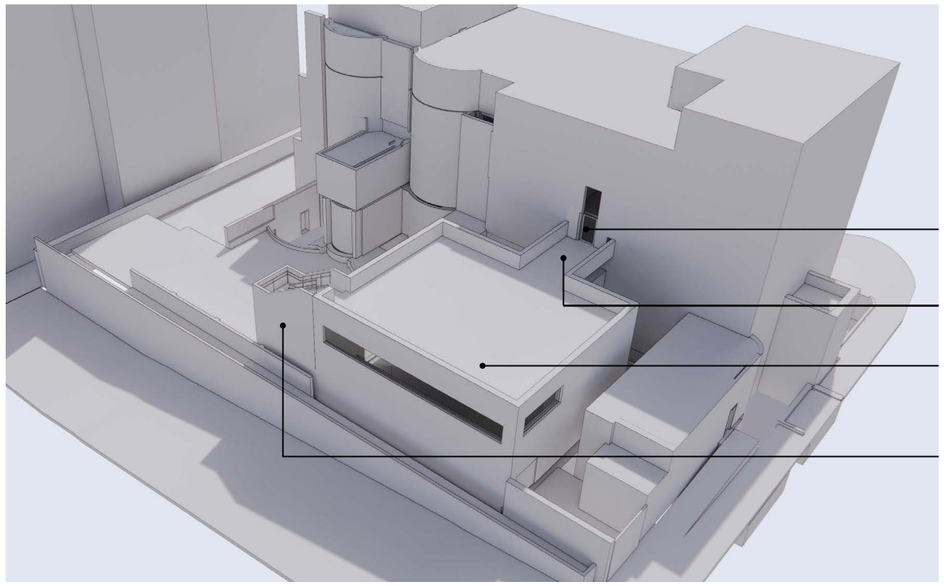
For reference, the datum heights are:
No.24 Mews wing: 5.4m above street level.
Print workshop: 4m above street level to the parapet, 5.2m to the ridge.
Proposed: Parapet line: 7.3m above street level.

Study elevations showing lowered parapet height and glass balustrade around external curriculum space

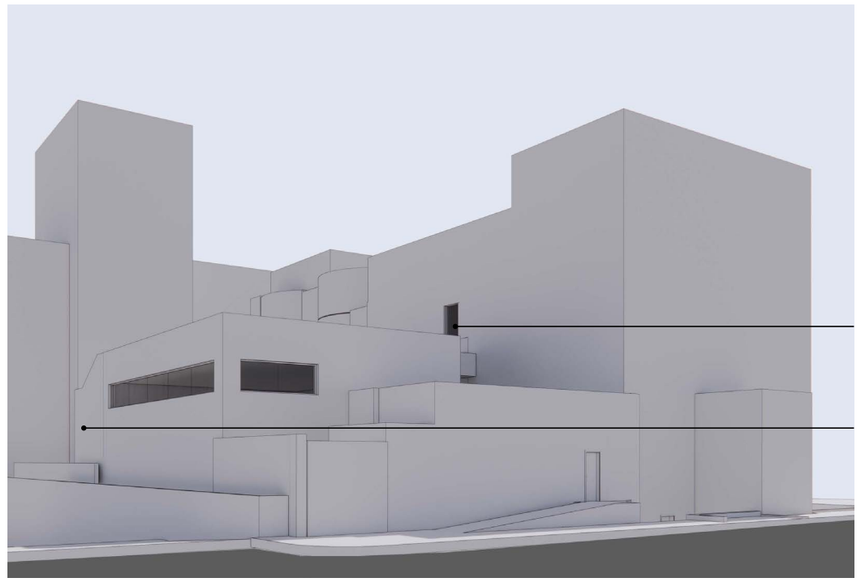
The images below explore the impact of a timber frame and metal frame pergola - a set back metal structure is more successful in making the proposed building appear smaller due to the lighter structure

Lowered brick parapet, glass balustrade and timber frame pergola

Lowered brick parapet, glass balustrade and metal frame pergola



3D View

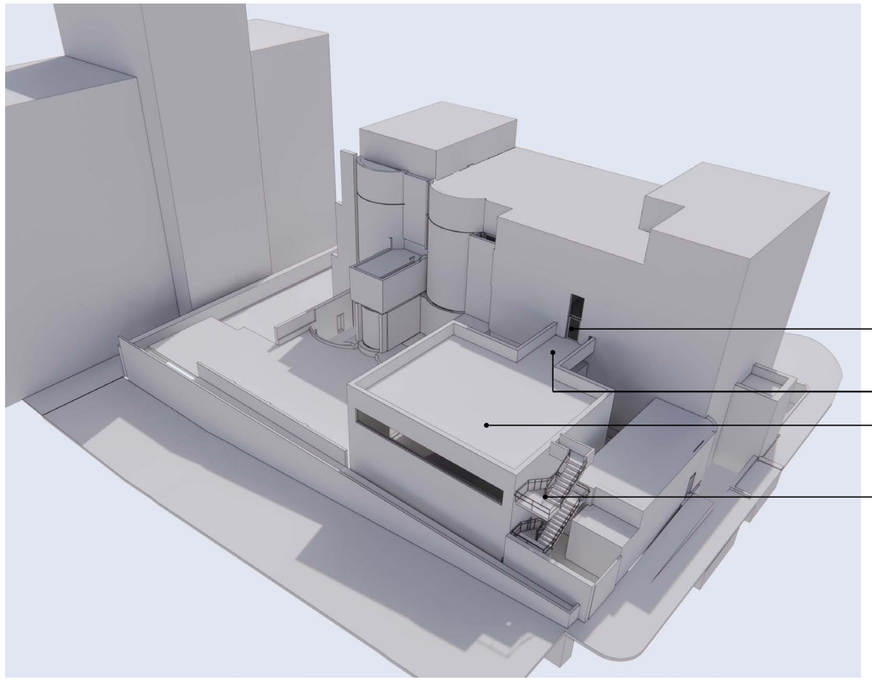


View from Thornhaugh Street

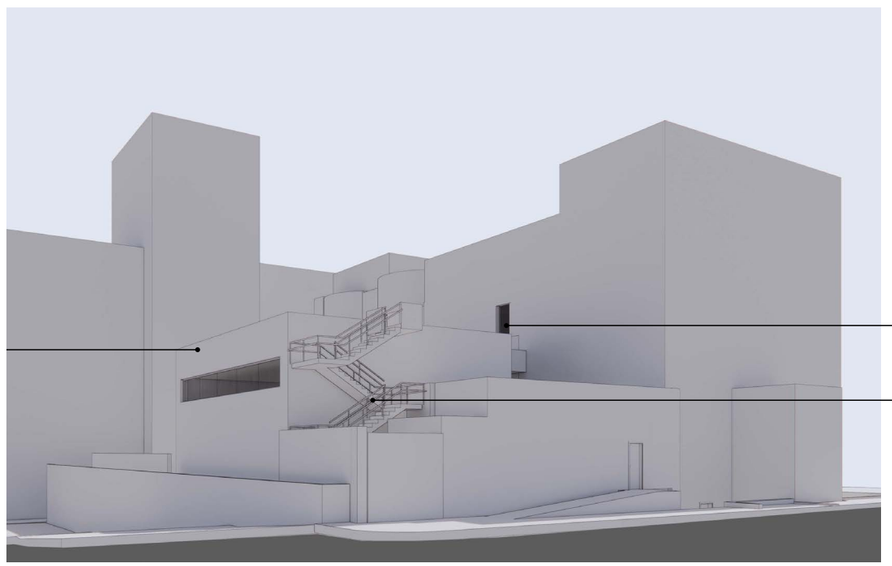
Roof terrace and linking stairs:

In order to provide safe means of access to the roof terrace, two means of exit are required. To accord with the Equality Act, the principal means of access should give stepfree access for wheelchair users and those with limited mobility.
The following studies show the alternative positions investigated. There are potential positions within the existing lightwells, and also at the extremities of the new building against the boundary wall. The positions closest to Thornhaugh Street were discounted as being too visible from the street. The positions within the lightwells are practical, but were felt to be too enclosing to the existing buildings, blocking views of the rear facades. Instead a hybrid solution is proposed that utilises part of the existing building and a stair situated on the boundary wall positioned away from the street: Our proposed extension is designed so that the new roof terrace will be level to the half landing between first and second floor levels in the main house. Alternative means of escape from the roof will be provided in the opposite corner down to courtyard level. The secondary stair has been designed to be external with shelter, to be as lightweight and compact as possible, and positioned away from the Listed buildings and from Thornhaugh Street.

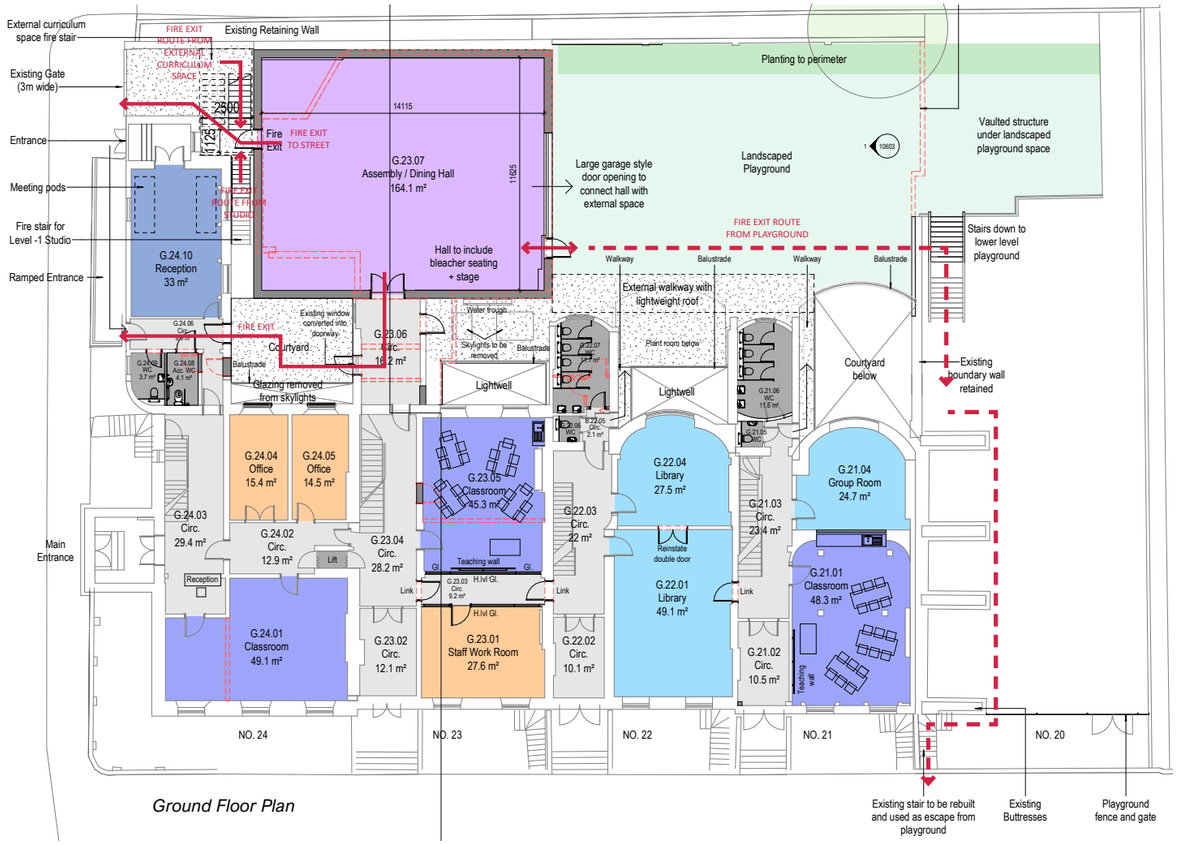
Roof terrace and linking stairs - Options study
Option B



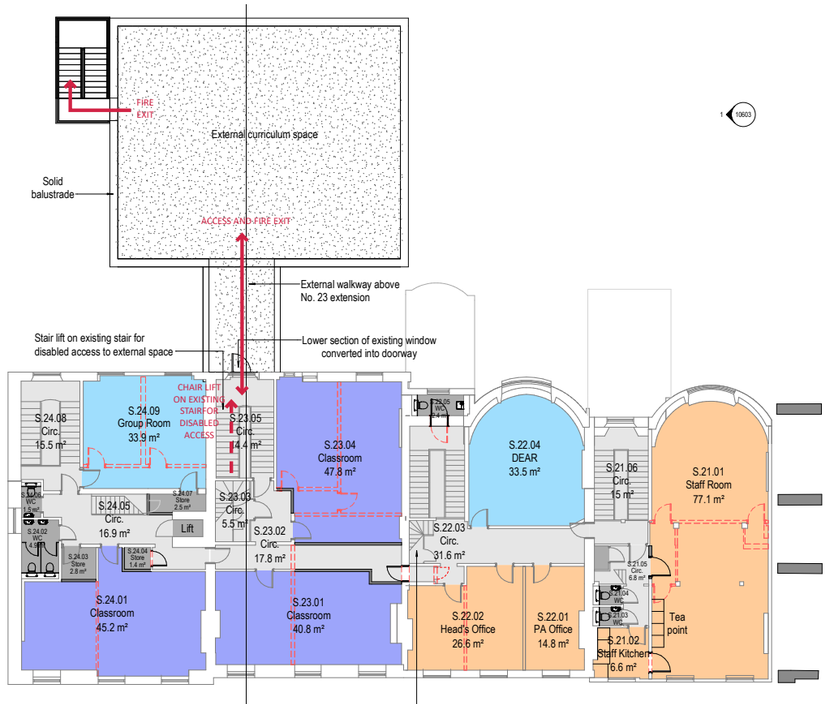
3D View



View from Thornhaugh Street

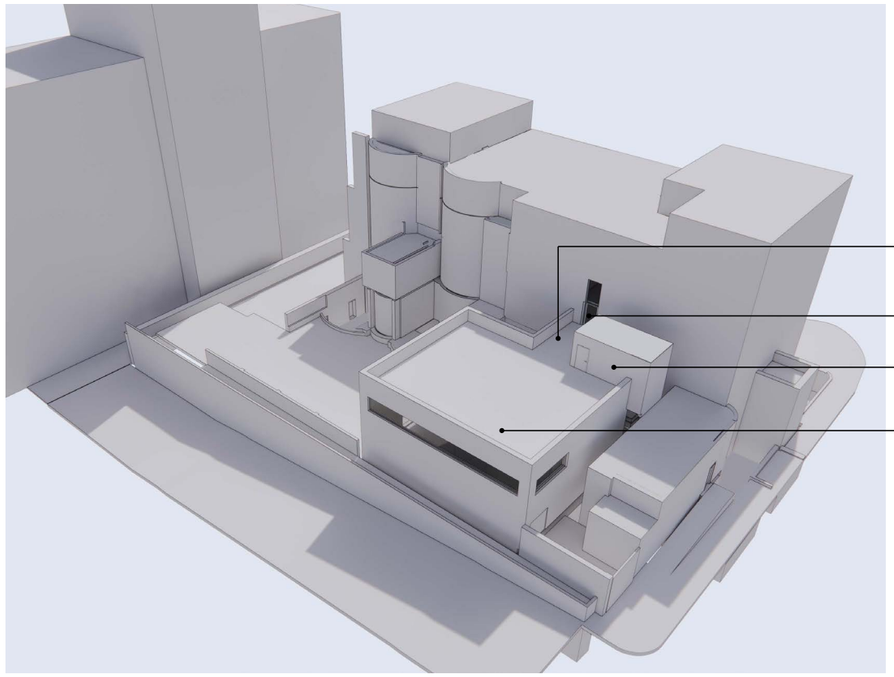


Ground Floor Plan

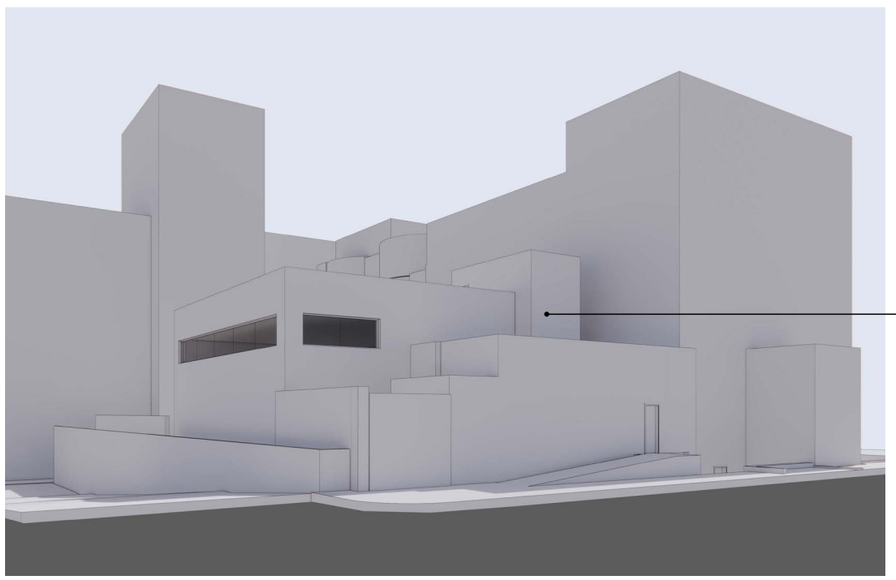


Second Floor Plan

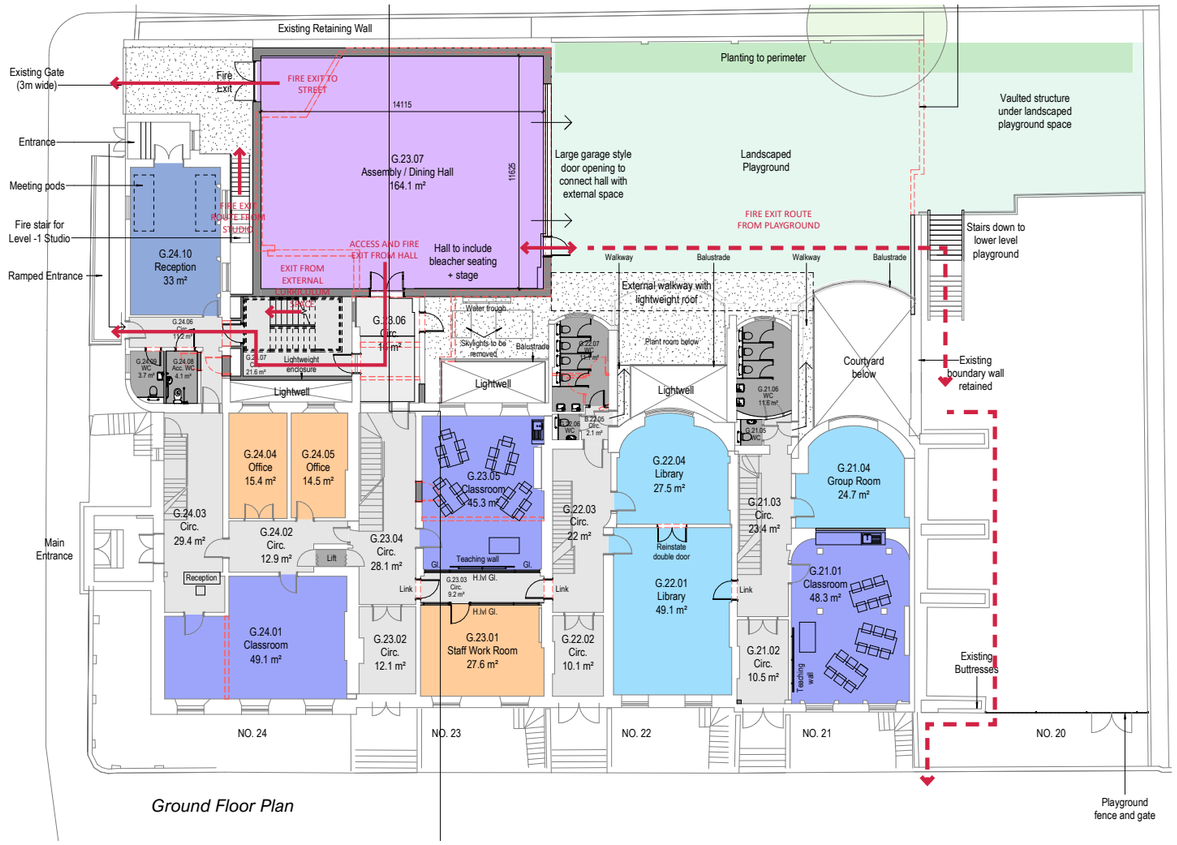
Roof terrace and linking stairs - Options study
Option C



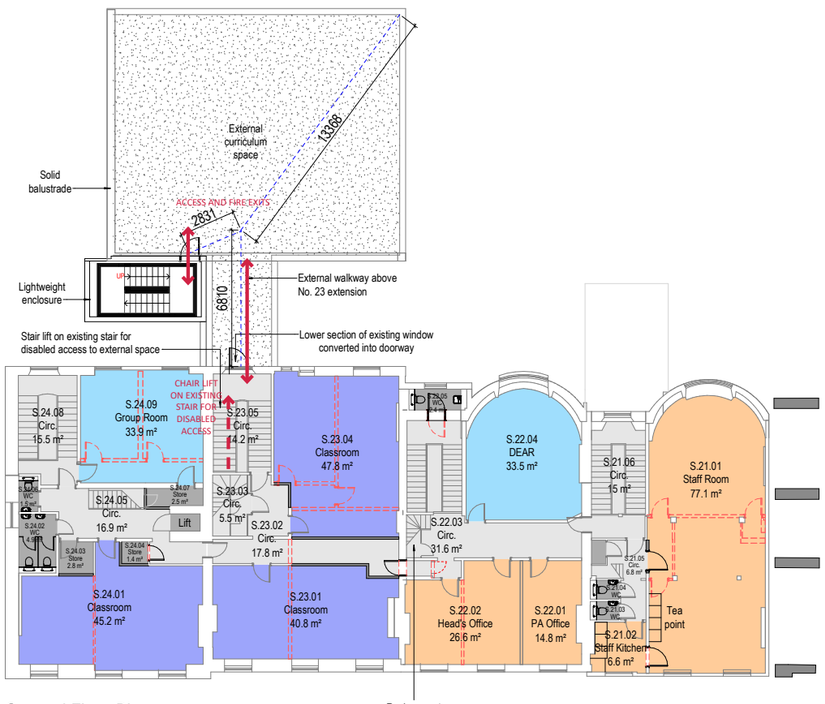
3D View



View from Thornhaugh Street



Ground Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

Proposed building clad in softwood timber battens

Proposed Thornhaugh Street Elevation

1.18 Design - Materials

The setting and style of the proposed new building is as a back-site mews building.
The existing buildings are characterised by mostly plain London stock brick walling with shallow blind window recesses to the main house (characteristic feature of Georgian buildings relating to the window tax), and a plain brick wall with small openings a pleasing curve to the Mews.
Our proposed new building is intended to harmonise with the muted style and pattern of the original buildings. The brick colour of the existing buildings is a buff to the principal elevations, with a darker mottled buff with black staining to the rear.
The design intent of the new building is to be seen as distinct from the original buildings, not trying to mimic them in any way but being respectful of the surroundings.
A number of cladding materials were reviewed that we and others have used successfully in similar locations: a buff or pale tone brick, timber, or metal cladding.
Timber has been chosen following our review as a ‘softer’ material than brick, and to provide a subtle contrast and layering to the buildings when seen from Thornhaugh Street, emphasising that the stock brick is the original buildings, and that the timber building is a modern and subservient addition.
The proposal is that the new buildings will be clad in vertical softwood timber battens, set in hit-and-miss style over a dark painted background to appear as a screen or ‘veil’ infront of the new building. The larch or similar wood species battens have been chosen to weather from their initial pale buff/yellow colour to a silver grey, providing a tone that we believe will be harmonious to the surrounding buildings.
The proposed timber cladding creates a simple cubic form enclosing the single volume of the new School hall. The ancillary additions serving this form are expressed as lightweight and subservient to both the new and existing buildings. The linking corridors proposed within the lightwells between the new building and original houses are proposed to be framed of small section steel posts and beams with translucent polycarbonate cladding giving daylighting to the spaces but an element of privacy to the surrounding rooms.
The access walkway , pergola and exit stair from the roof level are expressed as lightweight ‘accessories’ or secondary servant items to the main building, designed with dark painted small section steel framing, carrying perforated metal cladding, to form a further translucent ‘veil’ or screen to the activity within but without the bulky nature of a full enclosure. The pergola on the roof terrace extends the use of the space for outdoor lessons and break times during inclement weather, as well as offering additional visual screening to the users of the terrace. The design intent of all these ‘accessories’ is that they should be read as discrete infill elements, with bolted connections where they meet the ground and/or existing masonry, capable of being removed without affecting the main fabric around them.
Limited high level window openings are proposed to the new building following the cue from the existing west elevation, to provide good daylight but to avoid issues of overlooking or of overheating. The internal-facing elevations are designed with larger openings to provide greater daylight into the new space and connections between the new extension and the courtyard and existing houses.

Proposed Visuals

Playground view

View from Thornhaugh Street

View from Thornhaugh Street

Facade options study - brick

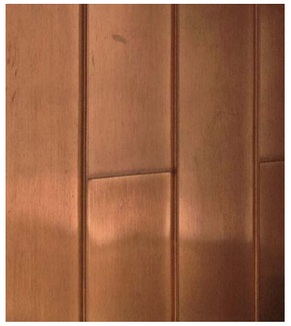
Light grey / buff coloured brick

Larch battens cladding the stair, bridge and roof terrace pergola

View from Playground

View from Thornhaugh Street

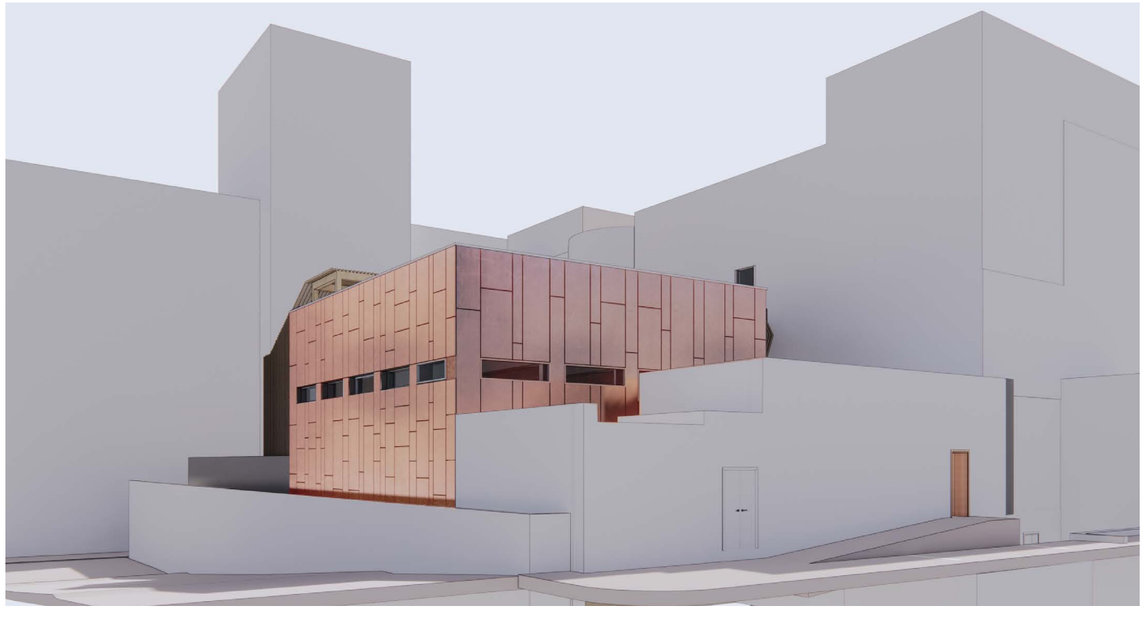
Facade options study - metal cladding



Vertical Copper cladding on the building facade

Larch battens cladding the stair, bridge and roof terrace pergola

View from Playground



View from Thornhaugh Street

Key to viewpoints

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1.19 Assessment of design proposals

Assessment: street views, massing, impact

From Thornhaugh Street the new building will be viewed set back behind and flanked by the mews of no.24 and the side elevation to no.24; On approach through the University precinct from Woburn Square to the north the new building will be viewed to the side of the existing no.24 mews and set infront of the taller existing townhouses; On approach from the west through the SOAS precinct at the end of Tavistock Street the new building will be visible similarly to the view from Thornhaugh Street, as a secondary layer of building set behind the existing single storey no.24 mews building. In all these views the dominant feature is the existing townhouses and the surrounding IoE building, which is both much larger and has a significant presence due to the large expanse of dark curtain wall glazing punctuated by the very tall lighter concrete service cores. In comparison the differences of height and composition of the proposed new extension and the existing no.s21-24 are of a much smaller scale.

In our opinion the proposed new building is sympathetic to the existing Listed buildings and does not dominate or adversely affect any of the surrounding Listed buildings which have their own strong character and remain clearly visible and unaffected in these proposals.

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