

BIRKBECK UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

39 - 47 GORDON SQUARE

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

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Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Overview:

This design and Access statement accompanies the submission of a revised listed building consent application, following feedback from the London Borough of Camden on a withdrawn planning application (2020/4620/NEW). The proposed works in this application have been scaled down, with certain plans dropped that would have caused harm.

This Design and Access statement forms part of the submission for the Listed Building Consent for the

The aim of this statement is to provide an analysis of the proposed refurbishment of 39-47 Gordon Square, London for Birkbeck College, University of London, outlining project requirements, existing site constraints and heritage opportunities.

The refurbishment of 39-47 Gordon Square, as presented within this document, will enable the relocation of the School of Law into the building alongside the existing building users, the School of Art. Co-locating the faculties will allow greater collaboration and sharing of staff and student facilities within the university's Bloomsbury base.

The project will provide much needed investment in the modernisation of teaching facilities with improved welfare facilities for staff and students including social and collaboration spaces, Tea Points, and an enlarged cafe.

The proposed works will include a comprehensive suite of external maintenance and renovation including repairs to the Stucco façades as required; repair of the roofs; renovation of the historic ironwork and re-pointing of brickwork. These works will not only enhance the architectural significance of the listed buildings but improve the character and appearance of the conservation area and, by extension, the setting of the adjacent listed buildings.

This document is to be read in conjunction with the other submitted documents and drawings, all of which are listed within the application cover letter.

Project Scope:

The design team, comprising AHR Architects and Hydrock Structures and Services engineers and Alan Baxter Heritage consultants, have been appointed to prepare a Listed Building Consent Application for the refurbishment of 39-47 Gordon Square.

The main drivers for the project are; the rationalisation

of the School of Arts accommodation, the co-location of the School of Law and the repair and renovation of the building. In addition the building currently suffers from poor way-finding, challenges to accessibility and outdated mechanical and electrical installations.

Design work to date has focused on ensuring that the important historic setting of the site and the buildings historic features are fully understood. This has enabled the design team to develop proposals that are both appropriate for the setting and provide an enhancement to the listed building.

The Listed Building Consent Application includes detail for all proposed internal and external changes to the building. Separate Planning applications are to be made for the proposed improvements to the edge protection and access to the roofs as well as the proposed signage to the main building entrance. Details on these items are included within this Listed Building Consent application to allow proposals to be considered as a whole and in relation to the Listed Building and historic context.

The Buildings:

The site is located within No.s 39-47 Gordon Square, nine Georgian town houses on the eastern side of Gordon square in Bloomsbury, London. The terrace was converted to institutional and educational use in the early twentieth century before becoming the University of London after the Second World War.

No.s. 39-47 Gordon Square are Grade II-listed buildings located in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in the London Borough of Camden. They form part of the wider setting of other listed buildings on Gordon Square including No.s. 1-5, 14-15, 16-25, 26, 36- 46 and 47-53.

The town houses are connected by a more modern extension at the rear of No.s 39-45 on the ground and basement floor levels. On the upper floors the houses are connected by a central spine corridor, on each level, which links the houses remaining original staircases. The spine corridor penetrates the party walls between each of the buildings, effectively creating a single building. The basement level of building no. 46 is a private residence owned by the University of London and currently tenanted, this is out of project scope.

Despite these later alterations, the terrace retains a highly significant frontage onto Gordon Square that makes a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

The interiors of the building survive to varying degrees as do aspects of the original layout of the individual town houses.

Pre-Planning Advice and Consultation:

A more involved scheme has been submitted and withdrawn from planning with comments received from Camden Borough Planners

The Design Team undertook early discussions with a number of statutory consultees to capture comments in relation to the emerging design of the withdrawn scheme. The comments received from consultees and the Camden Planning team have been considered for the development of these revised refurbishment proposals.

The design has been developed with the assistance of additional consultants and their assessments of; ecology, heritage and planning.

Sustainability:

Birkbeck have adopted a RICS SKA methodology for assessing the projects environmental impacts and sustainability. This method of assessment is

far more appropriate for an existing Listed building refurbishment as opposed to a BREEAM assessment. The proposal specifically targets a reduction in the total operational energy consumption of the buildings, as well as recycled content targets for specified materials.

Programme:

The programme has been developed around Birkbeck's ambition to achieve occupation of the building in the early months of 2023.

Key dates from the project programme are as follows:

- Autumn 2020 - Development of Proposals
- Winter 2021 - Submission Listed Building Consent application
- Winter - Spring 2021 - Design Development of Proposals
- Summer 2021 - Work commences
- Works complete 2023

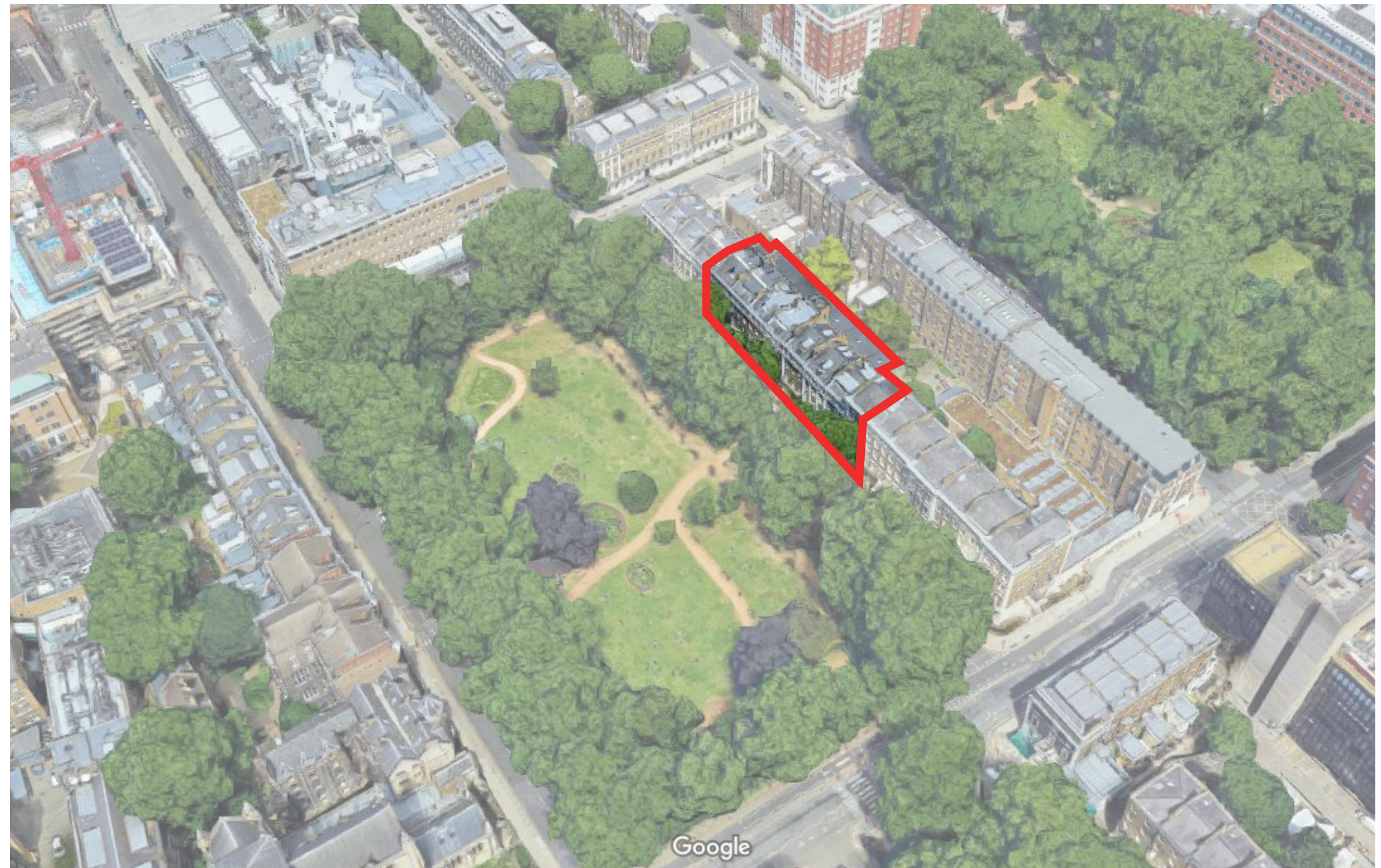
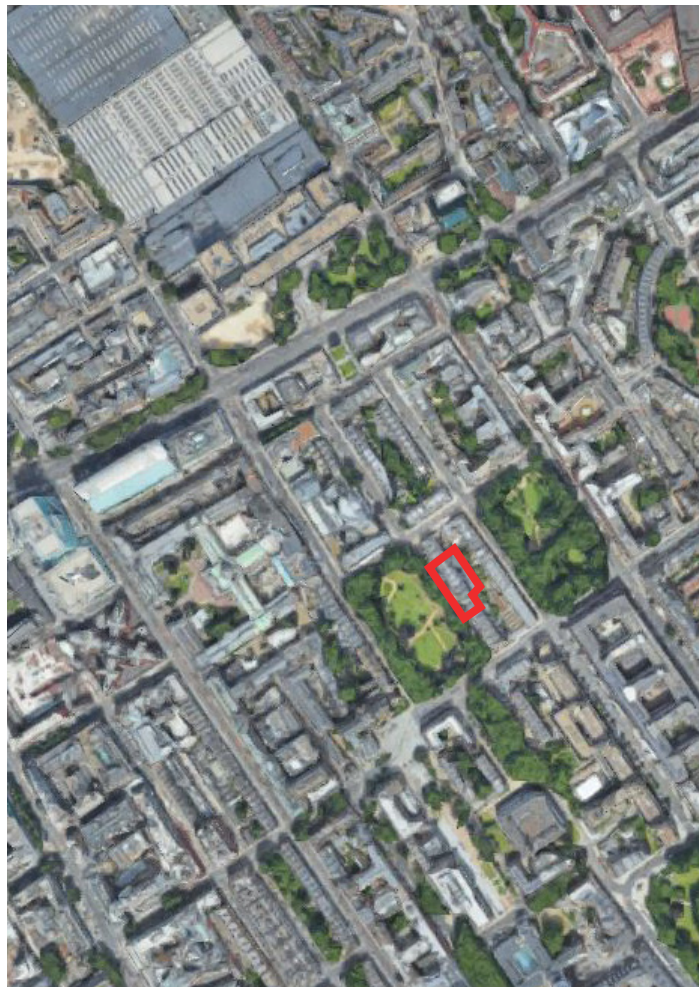


1.2 SITE LOCATION

The site is comprised of nine Georgian town houses on the eastern side of Gordon square in Bloomsbury, London, within buildings 39-47. These are connected by a later modern extension at the rear, on the ground and basement floor levels.

The site is within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in the London Borough of Camden. The building fronts Gordon Square to the South West.

The building has the original front door ways to each building on the terrace, however the main entrance to this building facility is via the ground floor main door of building number 43.



1.3 BRIEF

The key briefing strategies required for this project are as follows:

- Improve heritage assets
- Improve the arrival experience
- Increase the number of staff accommodated
- Improve the quality of teaching spaces
- Enhance circulation and way-finding
- Centralise and improve the accessibility and quality of welfare facilities
- Improve maintenance access, specifically roof access

Improving heritage assets

The building has undergone a change of use from residential to higher education. The current floor loading of the building is greater than in a residential situation and the existing structure doesn't comply with even current residential loading standards. There are signs and experience of deflection and subsequent damage to ceilings. Modern IT, AV, mechanical and electrical services installations have resulted in unattractive interventions to the historic fabric. The proposals seek to address this damage and provide solutions which are respectful of the heritage asset.

Alterations are proposed to improve the effectiveness and quality of teaching and to improve the experience of using the building, in particular orientation and movement. Birkbeck and its design team, have taken a fully heritage-led approach to these adaptations, locating larger teaching rooms in areas more able to tolerate change than others and where possible, working with the original layout to provide the necessary facilities.

Some interventions will affect or involve localised removal of less significant historic fabric but these are kept to a minimum. In all cases these are considered justified by the needs of providing a twenty-first century educational facility. Birkbeck's continued stewardship of this important asset is contingent on it remaining a viable learning facility capable of meeting the needs of contemporary learners and academics.

All interventions have been balanced and guided by avoiding harm to more significant areas of the building. Overall where potential harm is identified it is not significant and substantially outweighed by the positive benefits of undoing much of the detracting internal reconfiguration, repairing and reinstating of historic features and the long-term benefit of maintaining the terrace in an appropriate higher-educational use.

Improved arrival experience

Consideration has been given to improving access to the building and the de-cluttering of the reception area to improve flow. Opening up more of the reception space to the corridor within the rear extension immediately focusses visitors on the central stair and the cafe directly ahead of them. This provides an opportunity for simple way-finding signage to improve visitor orientation.

To the right of the glass entrance lobby doors a small Bloomsbury group permanent exhibition space is proposed. Whilst raising visitors awareness of the historical importance of the building it will also celebrate the School of Arts connection to the group.

Increased staff accommodation

A key driver for the refurbishment is the planned co-location of the Schools of Arts and Law. The building currently houses the School of Arts. This has required an analysis of the current utilisation of accommodation and proposed alterations to enhance and increase office and administration space.

The solution proposes agile administration spaces shared between schools at first floor with academic offices at levels 2, 3 and 4. Teaching rooms of varying sizes are located at ground, first and basement levels. External works are proposed in the basement lightwells to improve the outlook with lighter walls to reflect daylight and paving reinstated. Academic offices are shared depending on the size and capacity of the existing room.

Improved teaching spaces

The current teaching facilities are tired and require full refurbishment. The AV and IT provision requires upgrading in line with advancements in other Birkbeck teaching buildings to ensure that all facilities within the estate can be used easily by staff and students alike.

The refurbishment increases the quality and variety student facilities with teaching rooms now accompanied by smaller informal teaching, meeting and seminar spaces. Environmental comfort from modern heating and lighting systems will greatly enhance these spaces for students and staff. New finishes and re-decoration will further improve quality.

Enhanced vertical circulation

New voids are cut in the modern extension at levels 1 and 0 to visually and spatially connect basement

and ground floor and to bring light into the centre of the floor plan. The intention is that by opening up the reception area and cafe space students will be encouraged to use the central accommodation stair for general use. This will aid orientation in the building and reinforce the cafe as a central social hub.

The remainder of the building is accessed via the existing stairs and refurbished lift. Lift access is not possible to the buildings fourth floor, however like-for-like accommodation is available on lower, lift accessible floors. Building management will ensure those with access needs will be accommodated on throughout the remainder of the building.

Enhanced horizontal circulation

At Ground floor the route connecting all the houses within the rear later extension will be widened and enhanced.

The architectural language of the existing cinema is utilised to give a cohesive visual language to the new additions along this enhanced ground floor route. An angular cafe bar, reception desk, and built in seating and roof light behind No. 45 are provided. The effect will be to create an updated contemporary version of the Cinema interior in more neutral tones which doesn't detract from the impact of the original intervention. This will use similar shapes and angles but with a reduced palette of colour and materials.

At First and Second floors the proposal removes the wall between the central corridor and the rear room in several locations. This later addition to the building has had a very significant heritage impact. This reinstates the historic proportions of the rear rooms across the terrace and radically transforms the experience of navigating through the houses. Some of these partitions are replaced with fully glazed screens to form meeting rooms whilst bringing brings shared light from rear rooms into the corridor and providing views out. Building users will have a clearer idea of their position in the terrace.

The arrangement straightens the corridor (most evident in No.s 41 and 42) and on level 1, two of the rear rooms are left open to the corridor providing wheelchair passing places and areas for informal meetings and breakout. These enrich the corridor encouraging its use rather than being a confined thoroughfare.

Staircases are required to be lobbied for fire protection. Fire doors are proposed to each stair lobby. These would operate on alarm and in general use would be held open so as not to impede circulation.

Centralised and enhanced welfare facilities

The building requires an investment to meet the needs and expectations of students and to bring it in line with the quality of facilities across the wider estate. The approach taken will increase WC numbers in line with expected occupancy and reorganise toilets to be more accessible and easier to locate. New toilet blocks are proposed at levels 0, 1 and 2 in a central location adjacent to the main central accommodation stair.

Improved maintenance access

The building has suffered historically with challenging access provision for maintenance making routine planned maintenance task more expensive and disruptive. Health and safety is of paramount importance and having well considered, safe and easy to use access will greatly benefit the Universities Facilities management team in the upkeep of this important heritage asset.

Works are proposed to flat roof areas to provide edge protection and improved access on pitched roof areas.

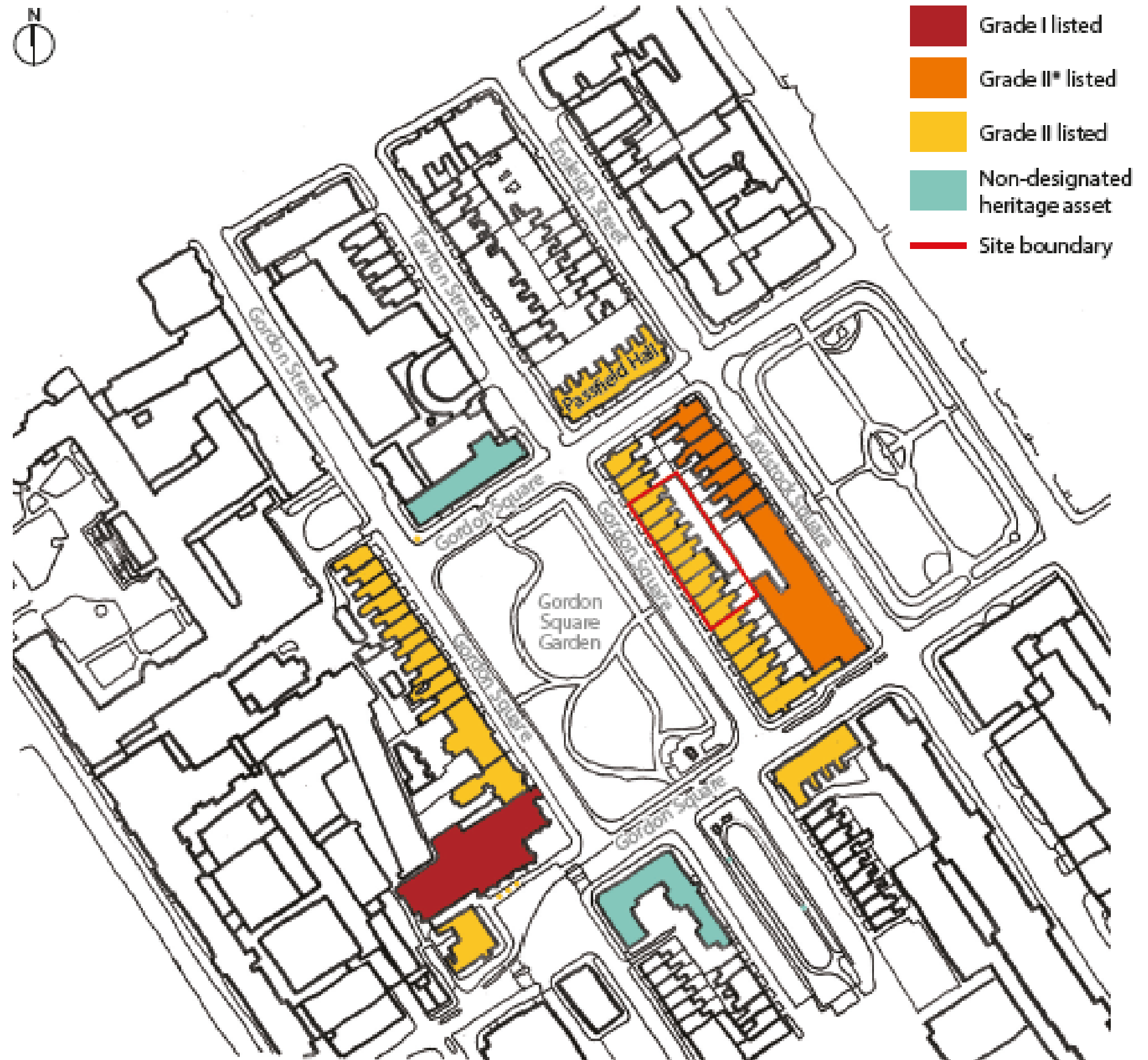
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ASSESSMENT

2.1 HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

DESIGNATION PLANS

No.s 39-47 Gordon Square are Grade II Listed building. The full Listed and description can be found within the accompanying Heritage Statement prepared by Alan Baxter.



SIGNIFICANCE

The special interest of the listed buildings is manifest in their original 19th century fabric and lies primarily in their external appearance and their contribution to the composition of Gordon Square, the wider street scene and the conservation area. Elements of the original plan form and original interior features, where these remain intact, are also of high significance.

Later internal fabric additions to the terrace, and in particular those added as part of the 20th-century change of use of the terrace from single family dwellings to apartments and then to educational use, are of no particular architectural or historic interest, and in many cases detracts from the significance of the listed buildings.

A 21st-century remodelling of the rear extension of the auditorium by Surface Architects won a RIBA award in 2007, and strongly contrasts to the heritage features present in the remainder of the building.

Key elements of noted highest significance are as follows:

- The front elevation of all houses, although some later additions detract
- Rear elevations of all houses, although some later additions detract
- Surviving elements of plan form, particularly on the ground floor and first floor
- Original features such as cornices, ornate ceilings, chimney pieces, principle staircases, secondary staircases, doors, architraves etc. where they survive.

DETRACTING FROM SIGNIFICANCE

The detracting items within the building are noted as follows:

- Missing fanlights above several front entrance doors and the introduction of some internal boxing that blocks views through some of these openings;
- The insertion of extractor fans to several windows, particularly on the front elevation;
- The repaving of the majority of the entrance bridges with elements of concrete;
- The introduction of visible safety railings to the roofs, particularly where they are visible from street level;
- The alteration of elements of the original fenestration pattern to the rear, such as where WCs were inserted or principal staircases were removed and the internal floors reconfigured;
- The alteration of the original plan form, including the insertion of corridors to create lateral connections throughout the buildings and further incremental changes at all levels;
- The insertion of ad-hoc internal services, including exposed wires and pipework, trunking, areas of boxing in, control panels etc.;
- The loss of historic features and the introduction of features that are not in keeping with the character of the listed buildings;
- The removal of chimney pieces and the blocking of chimney breasts, as well as obscuring some chimney breasts with bookshelves;
- The addition of low-quality textured wallpaper, often in main circulation areas;
- The insertion of several WCs on staircase landings and above the stairwells on the third floor

The existing building has been reviewed, assessed and has been assigned levels of significance to all external and internal fabric. The following diagrams (next pages) have been prepared by Alan Baxter who are Heritage Consultants for the project.

HERITAGE GUIDANCE, RECOMMENDATIONS & APPROACH

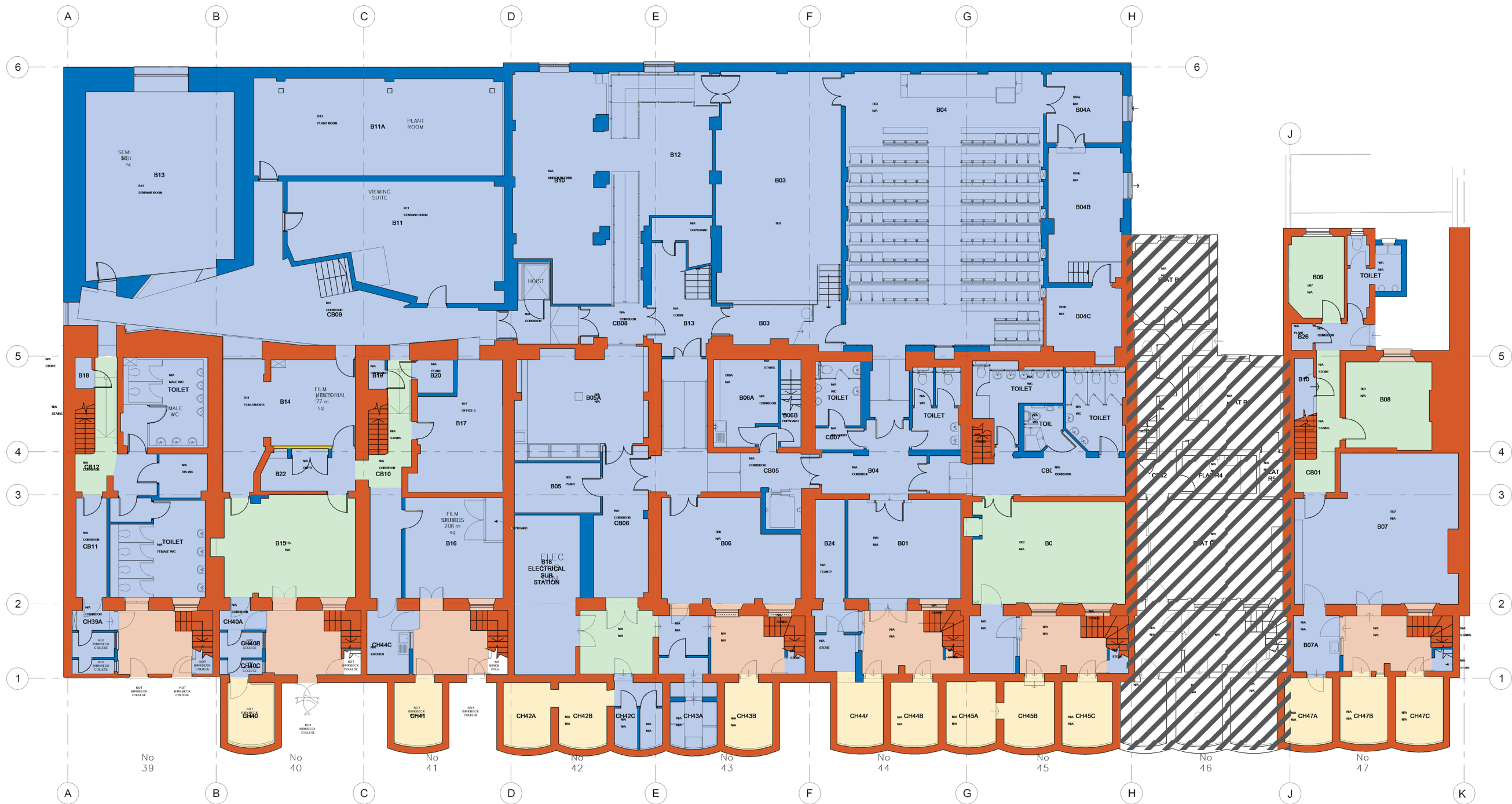
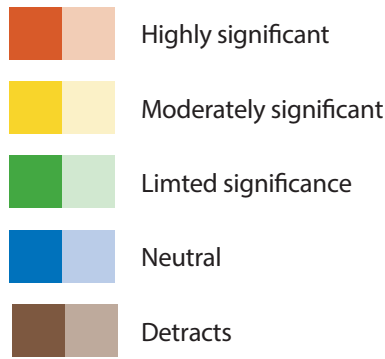
Alan Baxter Ltd have assessed the heritage impact of the proposals for the reconfiguration and refurbishment of Nos. 39 – 47 Gordon Square in their accompanying Heritage Statement.

This Listed Building Consent application is guided by the heritage advice of the London Borough of Camden following the withdrawal of the previous planning application (2020/4620/NEW) and Alan Baxter’s recommendations following their in depth research of the building’s history.

Listed below are the changes to the proposals, including those that have been dropped from the previous application:

- The partitions formerly proposed in the front rooms on Levels 02 and 03 have been dropped from this revised application
- In the previous application it was proposed to use the rooms at the front of the basement as offices. This would have necessitated CCTV along the façades for security reasons. In response to conservation officer advice from LB Camden, the internal layout has been reorganised so that these rooms will be classrooms with a lesser security risk, omitting the need for CCTV
- Brick repairs and re-pointing will now only be localised
- With a reduced amount of cooling required, the proposed risers will be smaller in size than they were in the previous planning application. This reduction in size will lessen their impact on the historic fabric
- New risers will also only be in locations where they already exist (where possible), with the formerly proposed risers in the front rooms of the terrace being removed from this application
- Only one door will now be blocked up on Level 00 between Nos. 43 and 44
- The reconfiguring of the toilets at B1 level in No. 45 has slightly changed
- There are no longer toilets proposed in Nos. 43 and 44 in the twentieth century extension at the rear

- There will no longer be a Level 01 extension at the rear of the building at Nos. 43 and 44
 - There will no longer be the installation of exterior lighting.
- Other opportunities taken in the development of proposals to improve the heritage assets are as follows:
- Reinstatement original appearance of front doors, including reinstatement of fanlights, reversal of modern interventions and removal of surface-mounted services
 - Reinstatement of the original plan-form where possible, especially on principal (ground and first) floors
 - Rationalisation or concealment of internal services, including the removal of boxing/risers in principal rooms
 - Removal of intrusive light fittings and replacement with a more sensitive lighting scheme
 - Repair and redecoration of internal walls and ceilings
 - Removal of non-original WCs from staircase landings and infill above stairwells on the third floor
 - Reinstatement of stone paving on front steps where these have been altered with concrete or are in poor condition



SIGNIFICANCE PLAN - BASEMENT LEVEL



SIGNIFICANCE PLAN - GROUND FLOOR

- Highly significant
- Moderately significant
- Limited significance
- Neutral
- Detracts



SIGNIFICANCE PLAN - SECOND FLOOR



SIGNIFICANCE PLAN - FIRST FLOOR