



**DRAFT**  
**12.01.22**

## History, significance and background

Camden Town Hall (formerly St Pancras Town Hall) is the town hall for the London Borough of Camden. It was constructed between 1934 and 1937 and has been Grade II listed since 1996.

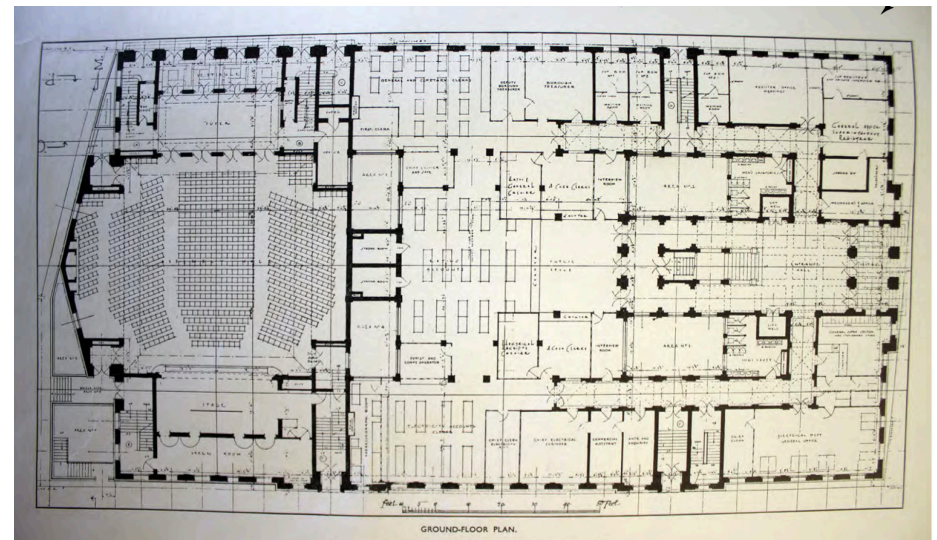
A statement of civic pride, which was of paramount importance during the 'golden era' of public building construction during the 1920s and 1930s, Camden Town Hall was designed to reinforce this and the movement towards wider public involvement both within local administration and with social events and ceremonies. During this era, town hall design rarely deviated from a grand entrance hall leading up to a centrally placed council chamber and public viewing galleries on the first floor.

The internal floor plan is symmetrical in nature and this is expressed in two pairs of light wells, four associated staircases, the central imperial staircase and the volumes of the council chamber and main function hall. The degree of decorative finishes which comprise of marble and timber panelling – much of it original – provides great aesthetic and high historical value.

Although considered one of the most traditional-looking town halls erected in London in the 1930s its windows – fenestration – are modernist; black painted, slender steel frames forming simple rectangular geometric forms, features particularly associated with Art Deco design in the early 20th Century.



Euston Road elevation looking south



Symmetrical arrangement, Ground Floor plan 1937

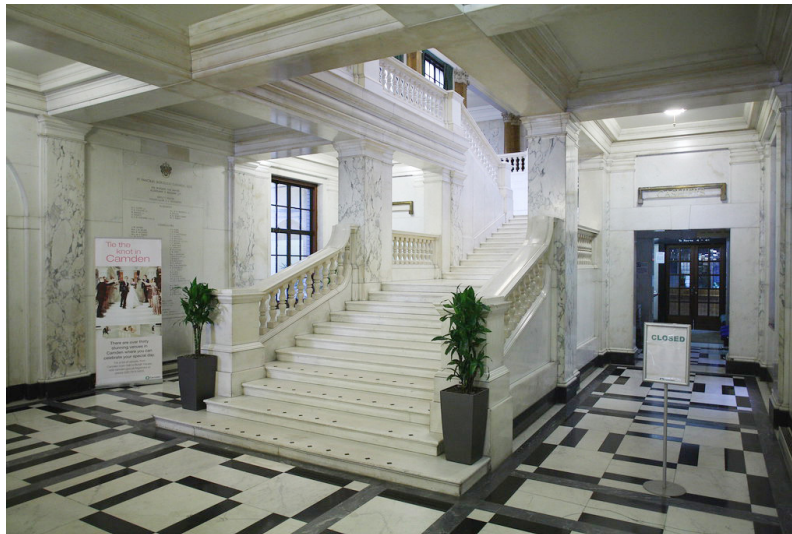


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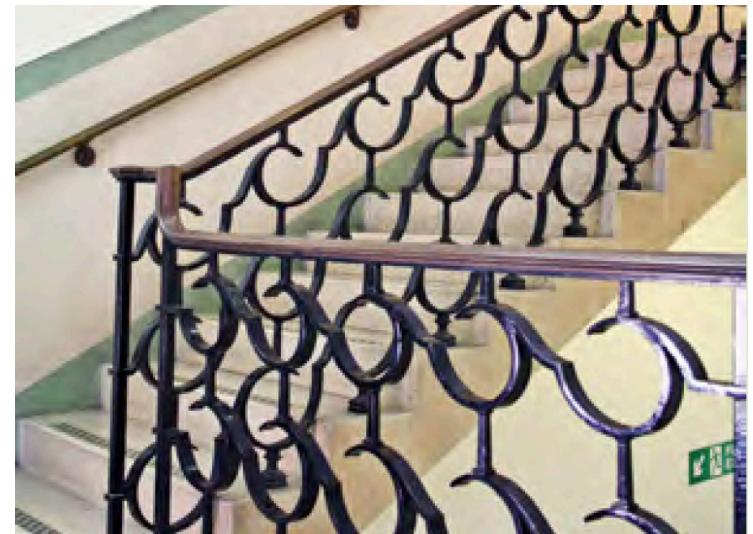
London Borough of Camden have commissioned Lendlease to refurbish the town hall and Purcell are their nominated conservation architects/designers.

LB Camden are retaining part use of the Basement, Ground and First Floor levels whilst levels Two and Three shall be let to tenants. The building will contain an autonomous area currently referred to as the 'Camden Centre' which will contain a restaurant/event space and will be operated by others. Tenants on the Second and Third Floor levels also have their own, dedicated entrance and lift access.

The refurbishment works are planned to be complete by the end of 2022.



Central imperial staircase



Decorative metal balustrade within western staircase

## Existing signage and initial thoughts

Prior to the current refurbishment project a strategic and joined up wayfinding system did not formerly exist in Camden Town Hall; signs had been added organically over a number of years applied in an ad-hoc fashion. Whilst the signs generally featured the Helvetica font (LB Camden's corporate font), the signs varied in colour between mid-green and acid-green, varied in size and placement. Font sizes were inconsistent across signs, whilst directional arrows featured in bewildering quantities. Visitors were required to report to a large circular reception/security booth (which blocked the sight line to the central imperial staircase) and were directed from there.

Our initial thoughts were, whilst needing to be functional and providing directional prompts as and when required, it should not impinge on the beautiful internal architecture. Wayfinding design should be intuitive and compliment the environment, both in terms of materiality and application.

The wayfinding scheme would need to cater for various culturally diverse visitors including;

- wedding/civil partnership couples
- wedding/civil partnership couples guests
- visitors registering births/deaths and attending citizenship ceremonies
- councillors/staff
- council chamber/services visitors
- the Mayor and staff
- visitors attending to passport matters
- electoral services
- deliveries



'Acid-green' self coloured Foamex signs to toilet door

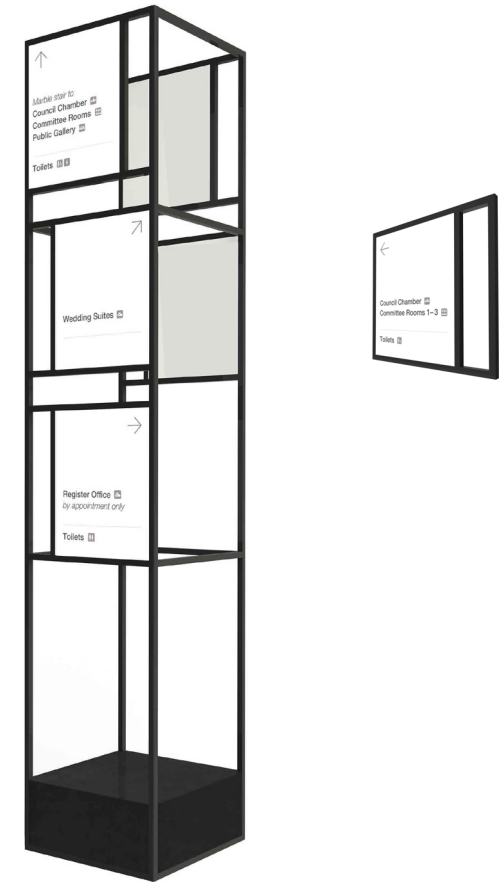


Direction sign, note arrow configuration

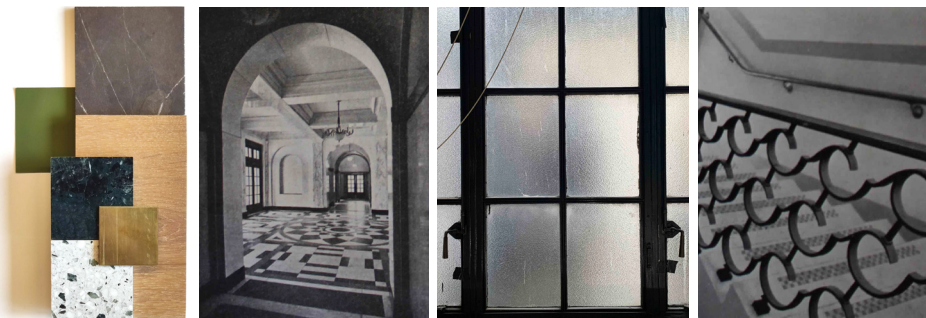
## Existing signage and initial thoughts

The wayfinding scheme would need to be DDA compliant and accommodate the needs of these visitor types and more.

As with all of the projects on which we are commissioned, we applied minimalist intervention; our first approach was a single, centrally placed directional totem in the foyer. The totem comprised of an elegant black rectangular frame which was influenced by the fenestration of the building and this in turn supported graphic panels directing visitors to various destinations. The downfall with this approach was that we'd replaced one blockage to the across the foyer to the imperial staircase – the reception/security booth – with another and so this study was discarded. The preferred solution, building on the original symmetrical design thinking for the building, is set out in the next section titled 'Design statement'.



The first approach,, single totem intervention



# Design statement

## Introduction

The full refurbishment project marks a new chapter for the building and brings its operations up to current standards with some contemporary design interventions that compliment the heritage elements.

The wayfinding scheme comprises of two complimentary threads; which we refer to as 'Framework' and 'Flourishes' which work together to provide a minimalist, but effective building navigation guide for the various visitor types (many of whom shall be first time visitors) already identified in this statement.

There is a difference between the 'Framework' and 'Flourishes';

- 'Framework' elements are to read as new items that reference qualities in the existing building whilst fulfilling the statutory requirements of legibility and being accessible to the diverse audience of the town hall
  - They are robust but read as items that can be removed
- 'Flourishes' are directly applied to the existing fabric and as such read as part of the heritage
  - They read as permanent fixtures although the sign writing is reversible should the use of the space change

The two together provide a complete scheme that allows for easy navigation of the building with enough historical reference to celebrate the heritage, and are expanded upon on the following pages.

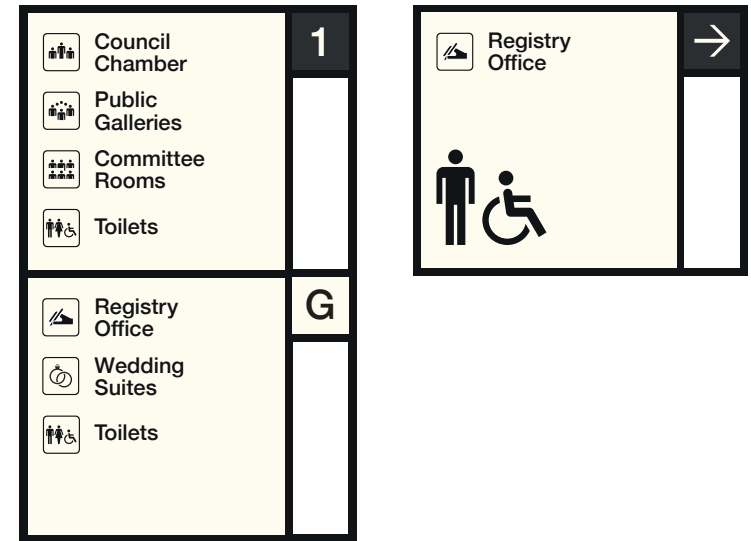


## Design statement

### Framework

The framework wayfinding is minimal, with the locations being determined following a detailed visitor flow analysis. Excluding the projecting signs to identify toilets along corridors and door labels, there are only four signs on the Ground Floor and six signs on the First Floor. The four signs on the Ground Floor comprise of two floor directories next to the two lifts and two directional signs positioned at the corridor thresholds located left and right off the main entrance lobby. The six signs on the First Floor comprise of two floor directories next to the two lifts and four directional signs which feature 'heads up' floor plans which locate the Council Chamber for visitors.

The design of the framework signs has a Mondrian influence with a strong graphic grid; this grid also provides a void where the substrate to the sign (whether marble on the Ground Floor or timber cladding on the First Floor) can be viewed. The sign panels are silkscreen printed 'Hi-Macs' (a self-coloured material) with a transparent protective over-lacquer as employed within the wayfinding scheme at 5 Pancras Square. Unlike 5 Pancras Square, where the 'Hi-Macs' was 100% opal white in colour, the 'Hi-Macs' at Camden Town Hall will be a warm cream in colour (this colour was selected using 'Hi-Macs' colour



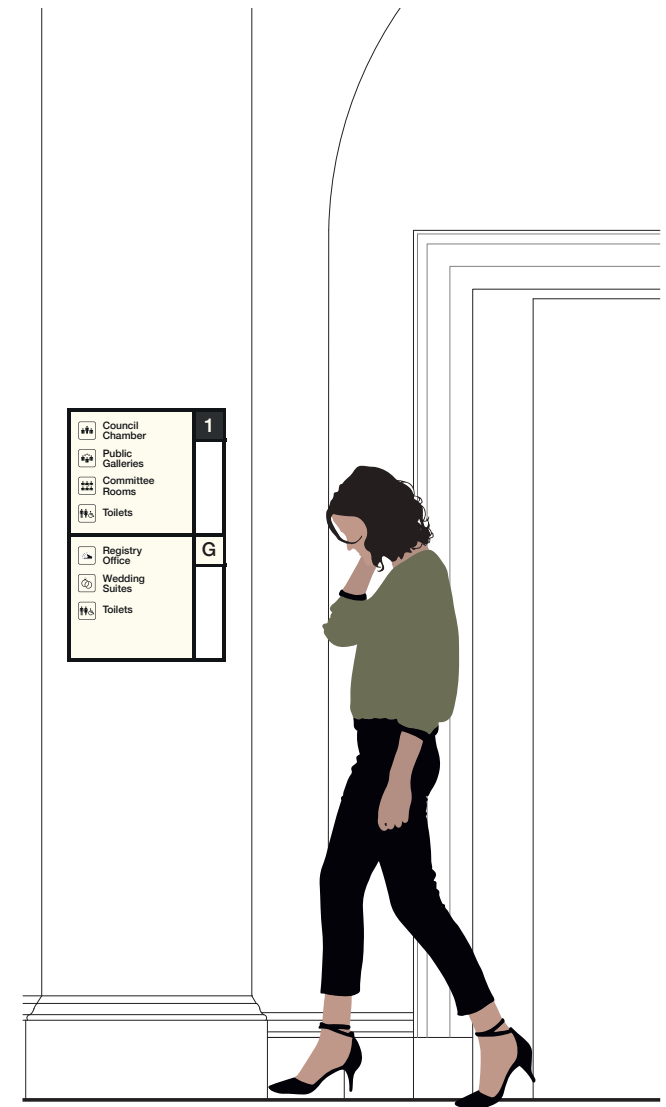
## Design statement

swatches in the ambient light of the town hall). The type font used is Helvetica – London Borough of Camden's corporate font – a sans serif font ideal for use within wayfinding schemes. As with 5 Pancras Square, pictograms have been widely employed to aid visitors for whom English is not their first language.

We have opted to screw fix the Framework signs through an aluminium backing plate arrangement as this ensures structural stability whilst any holes can be made good with a specifically coloured filler, buffed and polished. Other benefits include;

- mechanical fixings whilst being structurally fit for purpose will be as small as possible
- allows signage to easily removed should the signs need updating (good longevity)
- they are secure and pose little risk of being removed by members of the public

We haven't opted for 3M VHB tape as the adhesive can tend to leach in to the surface of the substrate causing stains which can be difficult, if not impossible, to remove.







## Design statement

### Flourishes

Whilst supporting the Framework wayfinding scheme, the Flourishes also provide placemaking and enhance visitor experience. The font employed for the Flourish elements is based on the building vernacular already employed for the historic building title, sign-written directional signs (one or two still remain but are in a poor state) and benefactor and accreditation boards located on the Ground and First Floors.

We are aiming to appoint a pre-eminent artist – Phillip Surey – to stone carve or traditionally sign write all of the Flourish wayfinding elements in the building. The motto of the London Borough of Camden, 'NOT FOR SELF BUT FOR ALL' will be stone carved in to one of the main entrance steps so that visitors pass over this on entering the building. The two existing period glass and brass signs located over the thresholds (formerly used to sign 'COUNTERS') to the Wedding Lobby shall be re-purposed with gold (gilded) lettering to the reverse; these two signs will also be remote illuminated using brass swan-neck light fittings specified by Purcell elsewhere in the renovation project. Lettering shall also be sign-written or stone carved and filled with black enamel to the front of the marble staircase balustrades on the Ground Floor; this architectural lettering will guide visitors up to the council chamber and public galleries on the First Floor.



## Design statement

### Summary

To summarise, as with all projects on which we are commissioned, we employ a sensitive and minimalist approach. We firmly believe that the removal of any of these elements, whether Framework or Flourish would be to the detriment of the public orientation and experience of this wonderful building, which we feel confident will become an exemplar for all other public town halls.

**'When work is a pleasure, life is a joy!'**

Maxin Gorky

We believe good design is naturally inclusive.

2019 RIBA publish 'Are you an inclusive designer?' written by Julie Fleck OBE, including two of our projects: Camden Council HQ, London / Liverpool Philharmonic, Liverpool.



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