

Section 4

Site description and significance assessment.

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment

Site description

- 4.1 The Site comprises the former Holborn Town Hall and Library, which is grade II listed. The Site is bounded by High Holborn on the north and retail/restaurant/office buildings on the south, east and west sides. The Site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.
- 4.2 The former St. Giles Library now forms the eastern wing of the building and was constructed circa 1895, with Holborn Town Hall (centre and western wing) being constructed between 1906-08. The building has been comprehensively extended and refurbished over the last 100 years including the amalgamation of the library and Town Hall and reconfiguration of internal spaces.
- 4.3 The listed building is four storeys tall, with basements and attic levels, faced in Ancaster and Portland stone. Its roof is steeply pitched and slated with pedimented dormers and pilastered Dutch gables, which terminate in segmental pediments to end bays. The eastern building (to the left), the former Library, is mirrored in the detail of the Town Hall; creating a symmetrical façade of nine windows.
- 4.4 The windows comprise a central 3-light oriel through the first and second floors. The third floor windows and the central bays at ground floor have round-arched windows. The first floor windows open onto a wrought-iron balcony by the Bromsgrove Guild, with central emblem. Detailing on the 3rd floor includes three oculi linked by festoons.
- 4.5 To the rear of the building on the western side is an existing five storey wing. This is set lower than the mansard roof to the principal frontage of the building, excluding the lift overrun which extends higher than the mansard roof. However, as the lift overrun is set back from the mansard it is not visible from street level.
- 4.6 The façade of the listed building addresses High Holborn, which forms its immediate setting. It is a busy street, flanked by tall buildings on each side with narrow streets feeding into it. Looking west along the street, the grade II listed 199, 200 and 201, High Holborn (List UID: 1378880) can be seen, with the former library and town hall behind. The curve in the road reduces visibility of the Site from this angle.
- 4.7 The ground and basement was leased for an A3 unit in 2003 and has been refitted as recently as 2019, with continued use as a restaurant.

Significance Assessment

Methodology

- 4.8 The assessment methodology used here for assessing the significance of the identified heritage assets and their settings is as set out in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This proposes the use of three heritage interests – historical, archaeological, and architectural and artistic – in assessing what makes a place and its wider context special. The definitions for these interests are included in the online Planning Practice Guidance:
- **Archaeological interest:** *As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.*
 - **Architectural and artistic interest:** *These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.*
 - **Historic interest:** *An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.*
- 4.9 These interests are also used in the November 2017 consultation draft of Historic England's best-practice guidance document Conservation Principles. They replace the heritage values – evidential [now archaeological], historical, aesthetic [now architectural and artistic], and communal [now part of historical] – set out in the previous, 2008 version.

Significance Criteria

- 4.10 The intrinsic significance unique to each heritage asset can be defined as the sum of tangible and intangible values which make it important to society. The significance of an asset or place may reflect its age, aesthetic, architectural quality or fabric, as well as intangible qualities such as associations with historic people or events.
- 4.11 The significance of the identified heritage assets will be assessed using a number of significance ratings:
- Highest significance: A feature, space or theme which is significant at national or international level. These will tend to have a high cultural value and form an important element of a building or site.
 - Very significant: A feature, space or theme which is significant at a regional or national level. These will tend to have some cultural merit and form a significant part of the building or site.
 - Significant: A feature, space or theme which is of local or regional significance.
 - Neutral: A feature, space or theme which has no cultural significance but is also not considered intrusive to heritage value.
 - Intrusive: A feature, space or theme which detracts from heritage value.

Internal Assessment

- 4.12 Internal assessment of the listed building reveals that features of the former Town Hall have been largely preserved.
- Basement floor**
- 4.13 The basement floor is the most altered floor. The original floor layout is almost illegible. This part of the building is considered to be neutral, in that it doesn't detract from the building, but doesn't provide any hint of the original layout either. Almost all rooms have suspended ceilings.
- 4.14 Overall, this floor is considered to be the least significant and therefore most flexible in terms of alterations.
- Ground floor**
- 4.15 The ground floor is considered to be very significant as it contains the main entrance and the former court room, both of which retain all the original interiors. As part of the building's conversion, it is evident that the layout has been reconfigured to suit the use of the Library as a restaurant and the Town Hall as offices.
- 4.16 At the centre, there is a large circular hall running up through each floor with adjoining main stair and wrought iron lift enclosure. The marble compass design and Doric half columns support an entablature under a shallow dome at each floor, with oak double doors leading from the hall into the rooms beyond. Corridors stretching out from the circular halls are predominantly vaulted, with granolithic paving and oak doors.
- 4.17 The former Court Room sits directly below the Chamber and is of a square plan form. The room has no fittings or furniture and is converted to office. However, it is evident that it too would have had oak panelling. There are high level arched timber windows beneath the vaulted ceiling with small patterned leaded panes. Similar to other doors within the Town Hall, the entrance to the space is through oak panelled double doors with decorative pedimented architrave, akin to the building's Baroque style. A similar door on the opposite facing wall, originally opened to the Library, is now blocked.

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment



Figure 4.2 Significance assessment of the Basement floor



Figure 4.1 Significance assessment of the ground floor

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment

4.18 To the front of the property within the central and eastern wing of the building the offices are located on the front elevation overlooking High Holborn. There are a number of lightwells within the footprint of the building serving each office wing.

4.19 The conversion of the ground floor of the Library has been undertaken recently. The front room are now private dining spaces but are still legible in their original form. Some features such as fireplace and windows have been retained. These spaces are considered to be of significance. However, the rest of the converted library does not appear to be legible. The restaurant conversion has led to major alterations, and whilst the ceiling panels are legible, the layout isn't. The insertion of the mezzanine has been undertaken carefully, without causing harm to the ceilings. The kitchen area has been completely modernised and none of the original fabric is legible and is considered to be intrusive.

First Floor

4.20 The first floor contains simpler rooms to the back, adjacent to the roof void of the Court Room. At the central hall is a statue of Emily Muriel, daughter of Alderman Charles Fitzroy Doll, Mayor of Holborn between 1912 and 1913; wife of Alderman John H Boraston, Mayor of Holborn between 1949 and 1950; and, sister of Christian G T Doll, Mayoress of Holborn between 1950 and 51.

4.21 The ancillary rooms to the east are of simple design with hardly any detailing. These are considered to be neutral.

4.22 The southern wing offices have not been photographed due to current presence of sensitive materials within. The fenestration is of particular importance with the original windows retained with their original ironmongery.

Legend

- Highest significance
- Very significant
- Significant
- Neutral
- Intrusive
- Not inspected



Figure 4.3 Significance assessment of the first floor

Second Floor

4.23 Perhaps the most significant aspect of the building, the second floor remains the least unaltered in the building. Of particular interest is the Council Chamber, which is of a square plan surmounted by a central dome with small cupola light. The walls are panelled in Austrian oak and retains the original court room furniture and plaques on the walls. Ceiling is plastered with decorative cornice details along the vaulted arches, supported by Ionic pilasters and columns. Windows are of small, patterned, leaded panes. The original seating furniture has been removed from the public gallery at the west of the room as well as the central area.

4.24 In the northern wing, the main alterations has been the removal of the toilets in the room immediately north of the stair/lift lobby. This explains the lack of detailing, the skewed floor layout and no fireplace.

4.25 The anteroom could be improved by removing the ad hoc furniture within it, to appreciate its original grandeur. The anteroom is terminated with an apsidal arch, where the toilet extension has been inserted. Whilst this is a later insertion, it has been undertaken with care and is considered to be of high significance.

4.26 In the southern wing, the Committee rooms to the front remain unaltered with original fire places, doors, architraves, windows and ironmongery. The windows along the corridor have been upgraded with secondary glazing to suit modern needs.

4.27 The Library wing, above the restaurant has also undergone recent alterations, mainly the insertion of the mezanine with a new staircase and office floor. The insertion takes care of the prominent bay windows within the space and sits just behind the cill, ensuring that the room remains legible.

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment



Figure 4.5 Significance assessment of the second floor

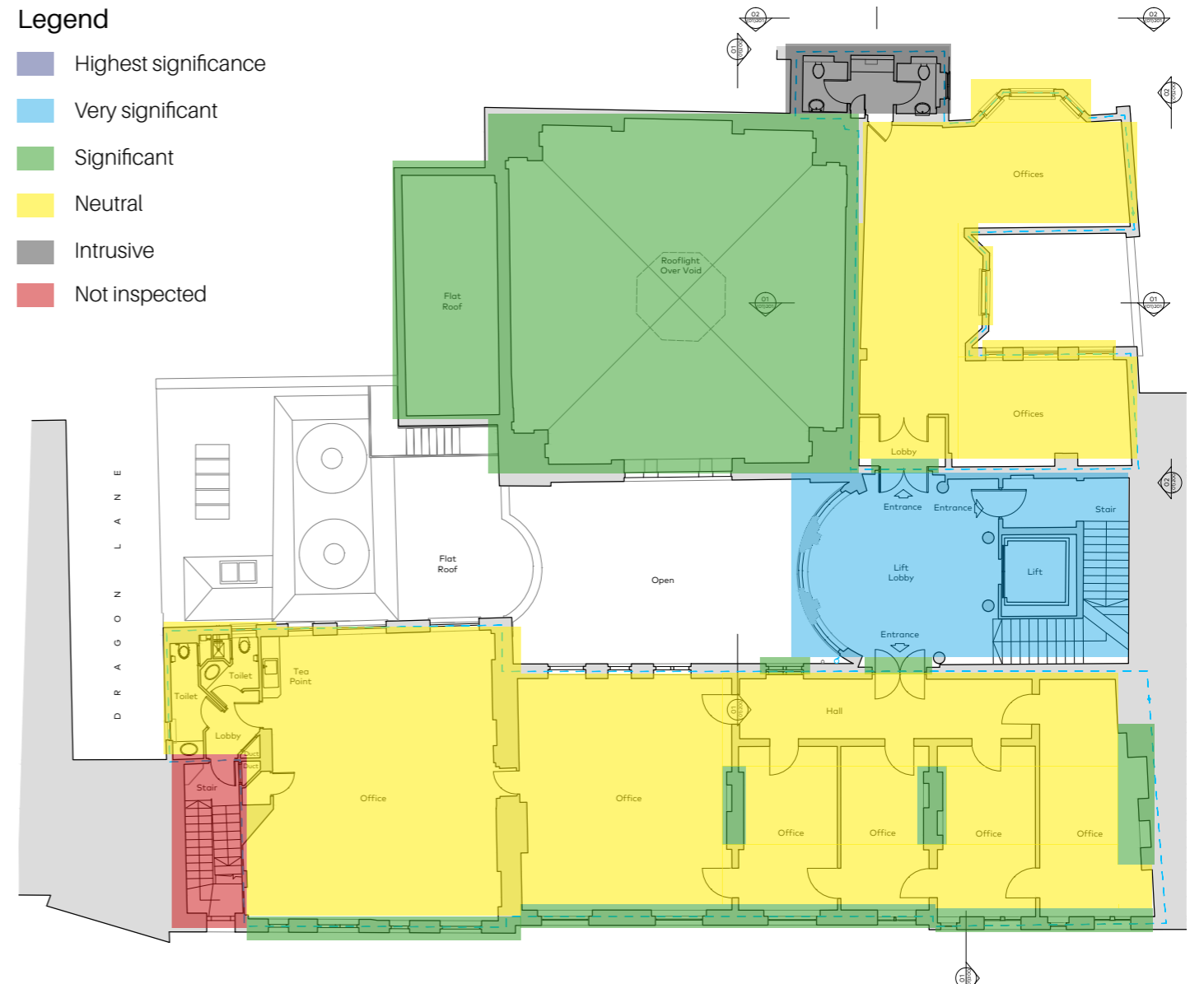


Figure 4.4 Location of photographs & Significance assessment of the third floor

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment

Assessment of Special Interest

Third Floor

4.28 The third floor is simpler than the lower floors. Whilst the fenestration with the ironmongery is of significance, along with the retained fire places, there is not much plaster detail. The rooms are easily legible with no partitions added, apart from utilities such as toilets and kitchenettes.

Fourth and Fifth floors

4.29 These are the most altered floors in the building. The fenestration on the fourth floor, along with original ironmongery is of significance. Internally, however, there are no features.

4.30 The fifth floor is heavily altered and modern and is considered to be of neutral significance. The front elevation windows, facing High Holborn have been modernised albeit retaining the proportions and appearance of the original windows. Details include ironmongery. There are no other features such as plastering or panelling.

4.31 These floors are considered to be flexible in terms of alterations as they are unlikely to impact upon the special significance of the building. The front elevation windows should, however, be retained.

Archaeological Interest

4.32 The Library and Town Hall were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively. This was perhaps the third iteration of the Site, earliest being Elizabethan terraces. As such, any potential for archaeological evidence has likely been lost due to repeated redevelopment of the Site.

Architectural and Artistic Interest

4.33 The significance of the heritage asset is principally derived from its High Holborn façade, which is of high historic and architectural interest and has retained features of its previous use as Holborn Town Hall and Library. The flamboyant appearance and French Renaissance architectural style and delicate features stands out within the street and contributes to the local townscape.

4.34 Purpose built as civic buildings, the Town Hall was deliberately designed to appear symmetrical to the Library, thus forming a significant group. The elaborate facade detail gives the buildings a high artistic and architectural interest.

4.35 In addition, the internal hallway and the former Council Chamber, retain much of their original details including the original court room furniture. The staircase and the wrought iron lift enclosure by Bromsgrove Guild, the main hall with marble floor in a compass design, and an arcade of Doric half columns supporting an entablature under a shallow dome are key features of the building's interiors, all well preserved.

4.36 As such, the overall architectural and artistic interest of the building is considered to be high.

4.37 However, the former Court room, unlike the Council Chamber, has lost much of its feature including any paneling and/or plaques. The double height space now stands redundant and underused with no features of historic interest retained. As such, the significance of the former Court Room (Suite H) is considered to be medium.

Historic Interest

4.38 The Library and Town Hall were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively, and are significant regionally to the London Borough of Camden, acting as a Town Hall throughout the majority of the twentieth century, and more widely as an example of an early twentieth-century municipal building within London.

4.39 The building's previous use as Holborn Town Hall informs much of its historical significance, as it has been strongly associated with municipal activities and provided a backdrop for events and key decision making for the district throughout the twentieth century.

4.40 Additionally, the historic use of the building as a Library and Town Hall provides the Site with an important communal aspect to the building. The Site has historically facilitated high levels of public interaction, resulting in the building being of value to the local community. The building has retained features that highlight its history as a communal building, enhancing appreciation and understanding of the history and former use of the heritage asset.

4.41 As such, its historic interest is considered to be high.

Summary of Special Interest

4.42 The listed building is considered to be of medium heritage value. The significance of the heritage asset is derived from its principal façade, which is of historic and architectural interest and has retained features of its previous use as Holborn Town Hall and Library.

4.43 The Library and Town Hall were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively, and are significant regionally to the London Borough of Camden, acting as a Town Hall throughout the majority of the twentieth century, and more widely as an example of an early twentieth-century municipal building within London. Key aspects of the building have been preserved, such as the entrances, connecting stairwells, the lift and Council Chambers and Court Room; these features provide noteworthy significance to the building.

4.44 The building's previous use as Holborn Town Hall informs much of its historical significance, as it has been strongly associated with municipal activities and provided a backdrop for events and key decision making for the district throughout the twentieth century. The interior has been subject to some alteration in the twenty first century through its conversion to office use, however key features of the former Town Hall have retained their original and early fittings, and are ornate in their design, adding to the buildings' interior aesthetic value.

4.45 The historic use of the building as a Library and Town Hall provides the Site with an important communal aspect to the building. The Site has historically facilitated high levels of public interaction, resulting in the building being of value to the local community. The building has retained features that highlight its history as a communal building, enhancing appreciation and understanding of the history and former use of the heritage asset.

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment

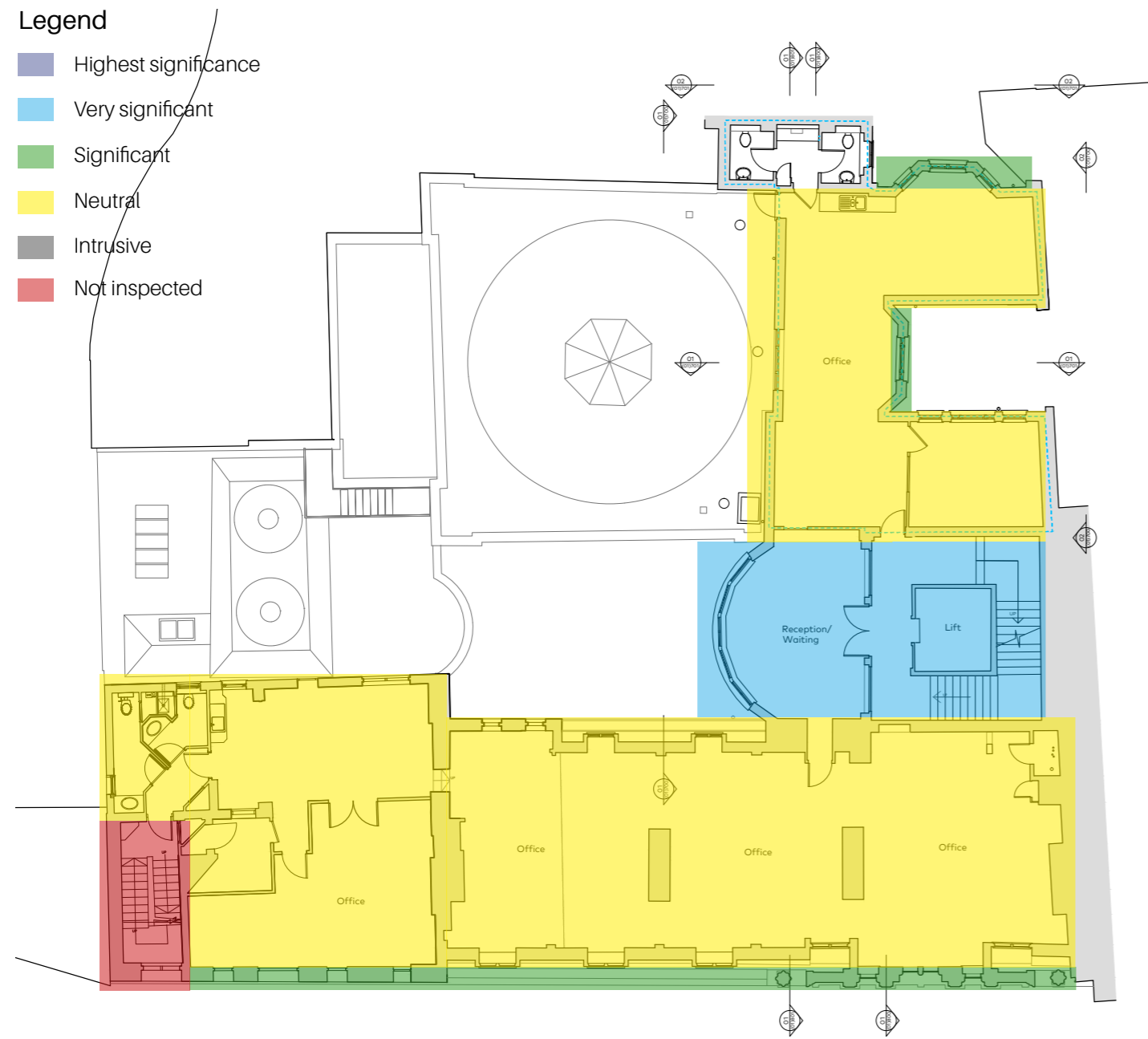


Figure 4.6 Location of photographs & Significance assessment of the fourth floor

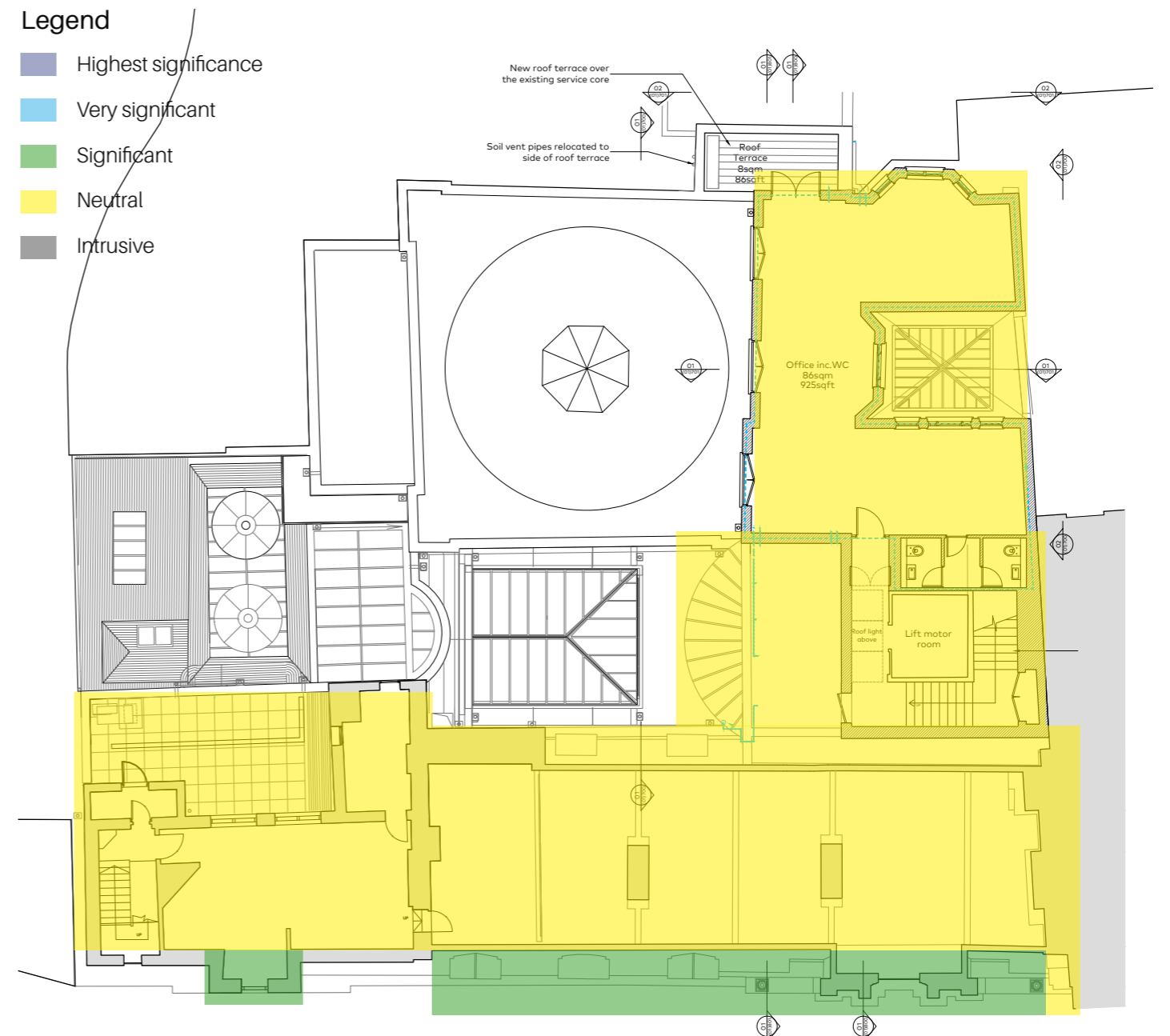


Figure 4.7 Location of photographs & Significance assessment of the fifth floor

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment



Figure 4.8 View of the front entrance hall, ground floor



Figure 4.10 View of the former Court Room, ground floor



Figure 4.12 Front room on the ground floor



Figure 4.14 Typical arrangement of ancillary rooms opposite the Court Room and Council Chambers

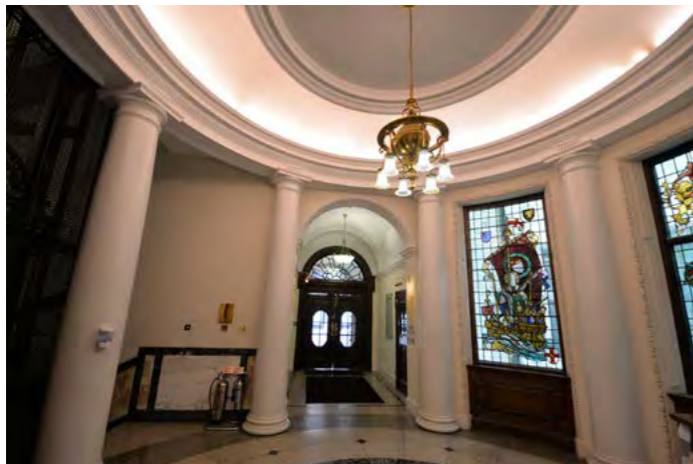


Figure 4.9 View looking across the hall towards the entrance door



Figure 4.11 View of existing kitchen and toilet on the ground floor

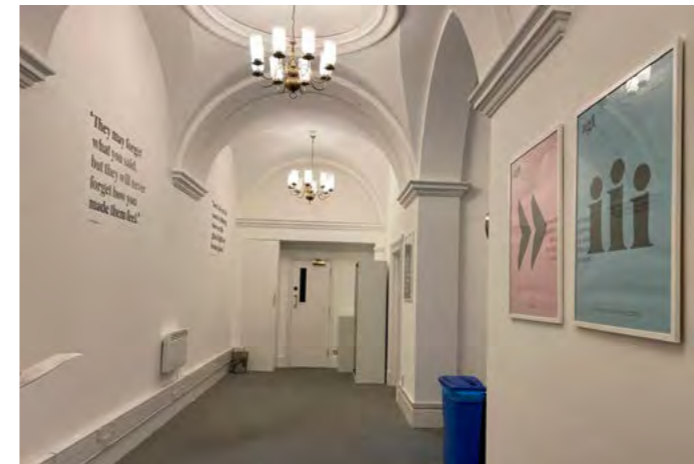


Figure 4.13 Corridor within the first floor, rear wing, below the Council Chambers



Figure 4.15 Compass design marble floor at the foyer of each floor

4 | Site Description and Significance Assessment



Figure 4.16 View of Council meeting rooms on second floor



Figure 4.18 View of Council Chamber, the ceiling in particular



Figure 4.20 View of office rooms above the restaurant, within the Library



Figure 4.22 View of office rooms on the second floor of the Library, showing existing mezzanine



Figure 4.17 View of Council Chamber



Figure 4.19 View of the corridor outside the Council Chambers



Figure 4.21 View of office rooms on first floor of the Town Hall



Figure 4.23 View of existing mezzanine on second floor, Library