

# Vernon-Sicilian House & 21 Southampton Row

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Design and Access Statement - **Section 1 of 8**

July 2022

halebrown

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# 1.0

Introduction

# 1.0

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# Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Hale Brown Architects on behalf of Hogarth Properties Sarl c/o Knight Frank Asset Management ('the Applicant') in support of an application for the refurbishment of Vernon - Sicilian House & 21 Southampton Row ('the Site') within the London Borough of Camden.

The development looks to provide upgraded office spaces through internal alternation works, a small extension to Vernon House at existing 5th floor, together with new plant equipment, cycle parking spaces and other associated works.

At ground floor the development looks to provide an improved office entrance experience from the street to the office demises of Vernon - Sicilian House & 21 Southampton Row. As well as reposition the existing retail units to current market requirements, while retailing the existing frontages.

The description of development is as follows:

Full planning and listed building consent for internal refurbishments and external alterations.

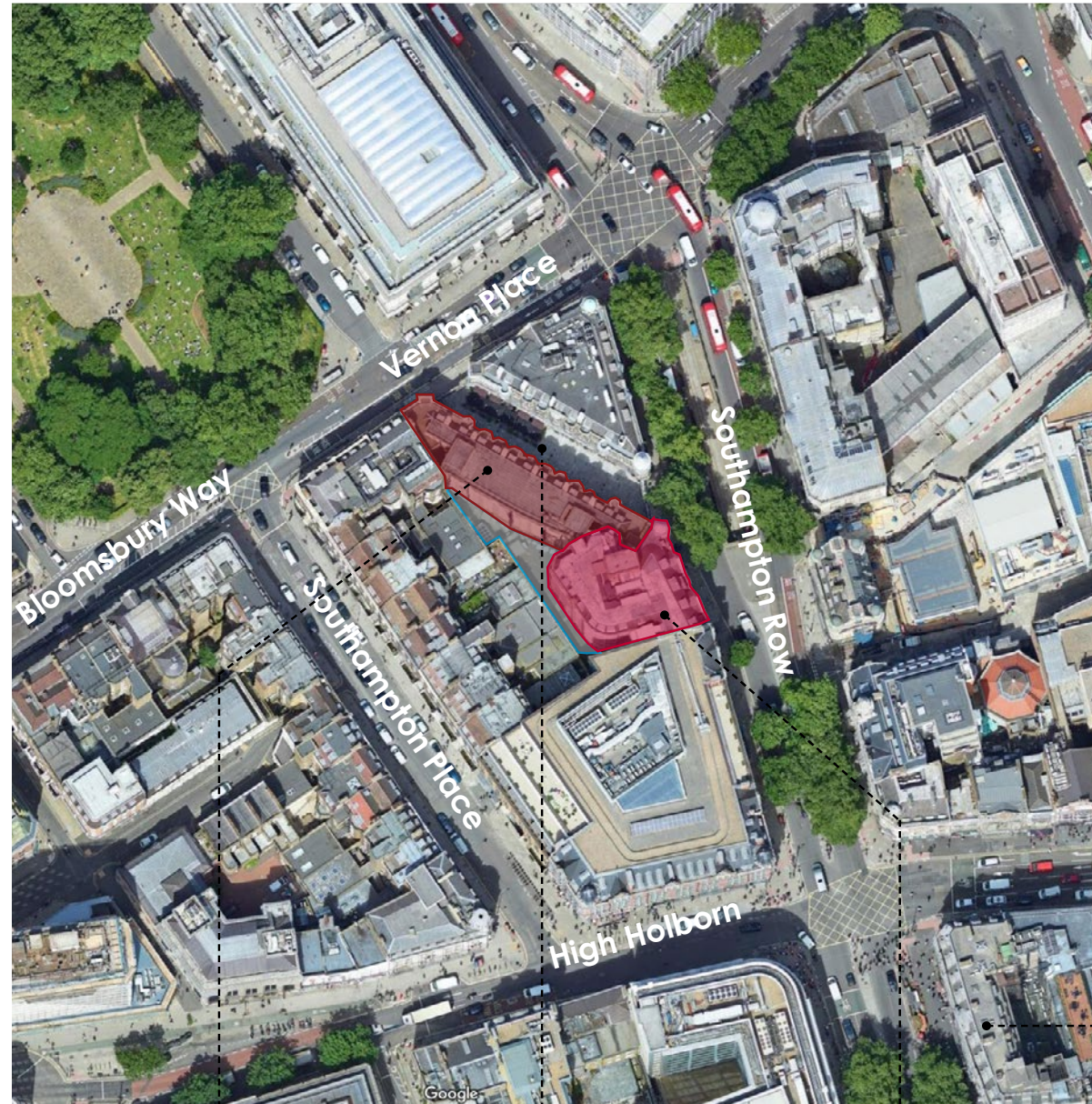
Full details and scope of the planning assessment is described in the submitted Town Planning Assessment, prepared by HGH consulting.

This Design and Access Statement sets out an overview of the proposals of the scheme and sets out in detail the proposed design and access arrangement, including design evolution. This statement also includes site plans, existing and proposed drawings, as well as CGI visualisations and images of the proposed materials.



# 1.1

Bloomsbury Square Gardens  
London's oldest square laid out in 1665



**Vernon & Sicilian House**  
7 storey mixed use Grade II  
Listed building Constructed in  
1906-10



**Sicilian Avenue**  
Pedestrian parade  
designed by Robert Worley  
in 1906 in a monumental  
Edwardian style



**21 Southampton Row**  
8 storey mixed use  
Grade II Listed building  
Constructed in 1906-10



Holborn - London  
Underground Station  
Central & Piccadilly Lines

## Introduction The Existing Site

The site is located at the north end of Southampton Row on the junction with Bloomsbury Way/ Vernon Place. The site comprising of 21 Southampton Row, Vernon & Sicilian House is approximately 0.146 hectares. This includes a rear servicing yard that currently provides access to the buildings. Sicilian Avenue in front of the buildings is approximately 0.046 hectares.

All the buildings are Grade II listed and are located within the Bloomsbury Conversation Area. To the north of the site is Bloomsbury Square Gardens, London's oldest square laid out in 1665. The northern corner of the site is visible from the gardens.

Built between 1906-1910 Sicilian Avenue and Vernon & Sicilian Houses were designed as a pedestrianised shopping street of individual small retail units at ground and basement with flats above.

In subsequent years the flats were converted into office spaces with the removal of all the chimney stacks and fireplaces.

While the retail units were originally designed as individual units of between 12 & 14 feet wide, over the years a number have been combined with openings through the separating walls, in order to create units in line with current market demands.

In subsequent years and most noticeably today the remaining structural spine walls have made it challenging to retain or attract new tenants to these units. To the southern side of Sicilian Avenue only one retail tenant remains however they have recently given their notice to vacate. Their unit is one of the largest units already combined. On the northern side only one retail tenant remains.

On the office floors above while some original spine walls were removed in 1970's as part of an approved planning application, the remaining walls and the building's current servicing strategy makes the offices challenging to let. Modernisation of the spaces to current market demands is therefore also required.



## 1.2



1975 Photographs of Sicilian Avenue



## Introduction Sicilian Avenue Overview

Built between 1906-1910 Sicilian Avenue and Vernon & Sicilian Houses were designed as a pedestrianised shopping street of individual small retail units at ground and basement with flats above.

In subsequent years the flats were converted into office spaces with the removal of all the chimney stacks and fireplaces.

While the retail units were originally designed as individual units of between 12 & 14 feet wide, over the years a number have been combined with openings through the separating spine walls, in order to create units in line with developing commercial demands.

In subsequent years and most noticeably today the remaining structural spine walls have made it challenging to retain or attract new tenants. With all but two of the already combined units now being vacant.



2021 Photographs of Sicilian Avenue

### Vernon-Sicilian House & 21 Southampton Row

Design & Access Statement - July 2022





## Introduction

### Key Objectives

The existing office and retail provision have reached the end of their serviceable life-span and need to be refurbished and revitalised.

Fundamentally though the proposed works look at enhancing the existing heritage assets by retaining and restoring the remaining heritage envelope of the buildings. Internally the proposals look at reconfiguring and refurbishing the already extensively altered spaces to create units that meet current market demands and expectations.

Key objective proposals include:

- Retain and restore the historic street frontages of the buildings to Sicilian Avenue.
- Review and update the currently vacant retail provision, while focusing on retaining the historic retail frontage.
- Improve the entrance experience from Sicilian Avenue to the office demises of 21 Southampton Row, Vernon & Sicilian House
- Improve the signage and street presence of these office entrances.
- Reposition the existing dated office provision to be attractive to current market trends and tenants.
- Update the servicing strategy for the buildings to meet modern requirements and sustainability targets.
- Enhance the environmental performance and energy efficiency of the buildings as far as is feasible considering the constraints of the Grade II listing
- Provide high quality end of journey facilities for cyclists for the wider estate



## Introduction

### Sicilian Avenue Existing Retail Layouts

Currently there are only two retail tenants remaining in operation within the Sicilian Avenue, with one of these recently indicating their intention to vacate.

Both of these tenants occupy spaces comprising of units that have been enlarged from their original proportions.

While new tenants have been sought the configuration of the small units and narrow staircases to the basements are not in line with current market demands, therefore put off a number of retailers.

As a result Sicilian Avenue is now largely deserted and only used as a pedestrian cut through.

Larger retail units are needed to meet modern retailers' needs.



Existing Sicilian Avenue Ground Floor

- Occupied Retail Units
- - - - Retail Becoming Vacant Shortly
- - - - Vacant Retail
- - - - Vacant commercial office
- ↔ Office entrances & Exits





## Introduction

### Extent of Application

While the applicant does own 31 Southampton Row on the other side of Sicilian Avenue this application solely looks at proposals for:

- 21 Southampton Row
- Vernon & Sicilian House

While similar restoration and refurbishment works are proposed for 31 Southampton Row, it is proposed that permission for these works will be sought via a separate planning application.



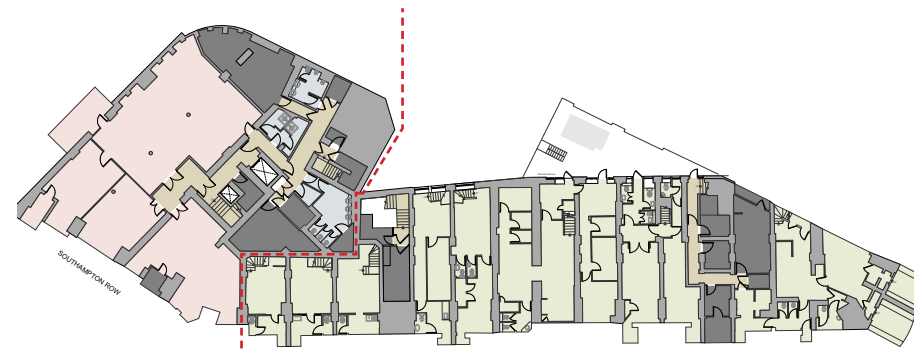
--- Extent of application

- 21 Southampton Row
- Vernon & Sicilian House
- 31 Southampton Row

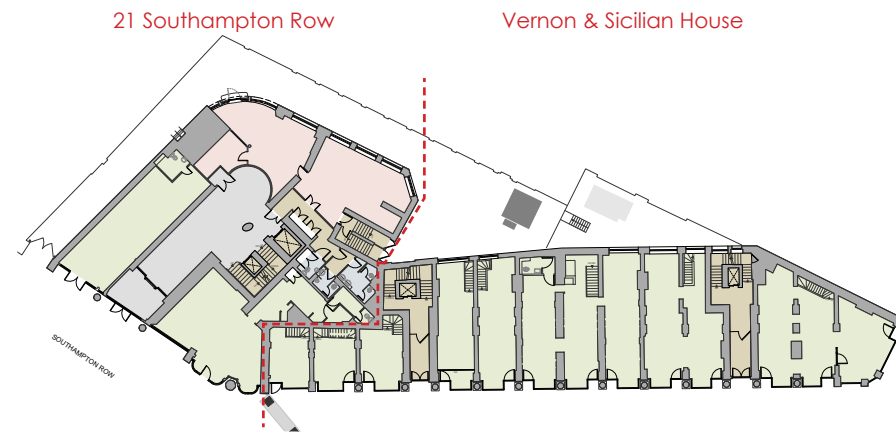
Existing aerial view of Sicilian Avenue



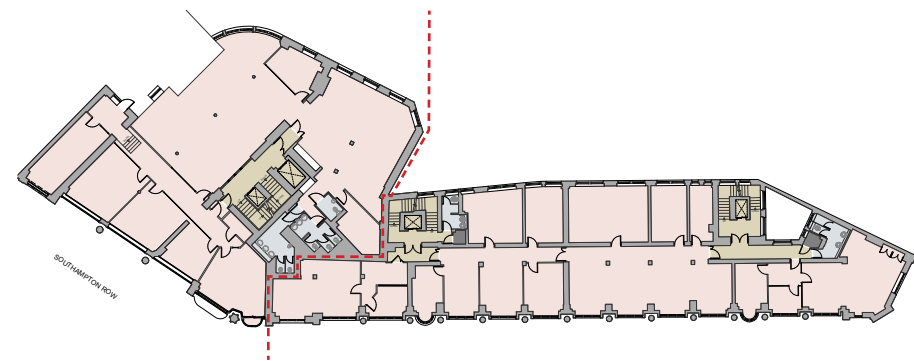
# 1.6



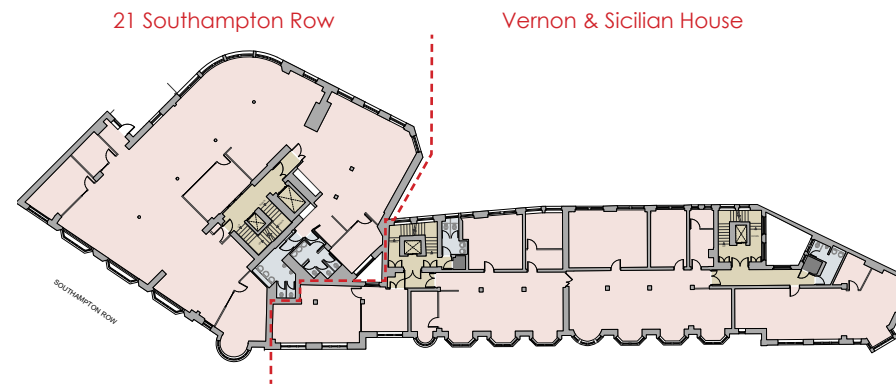
Basement



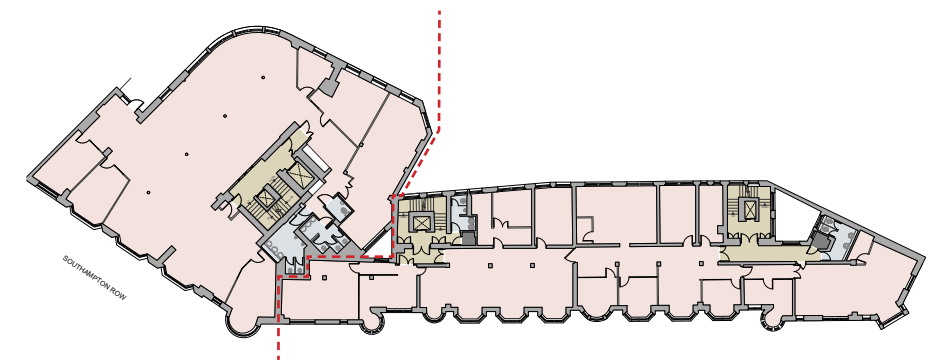
Ground Floor



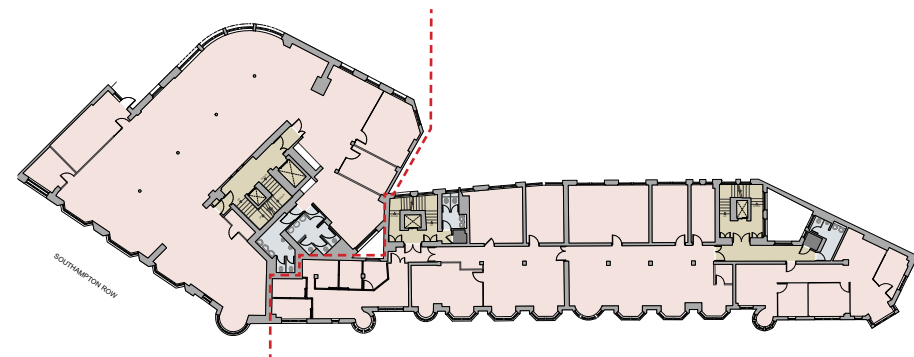
First Floor



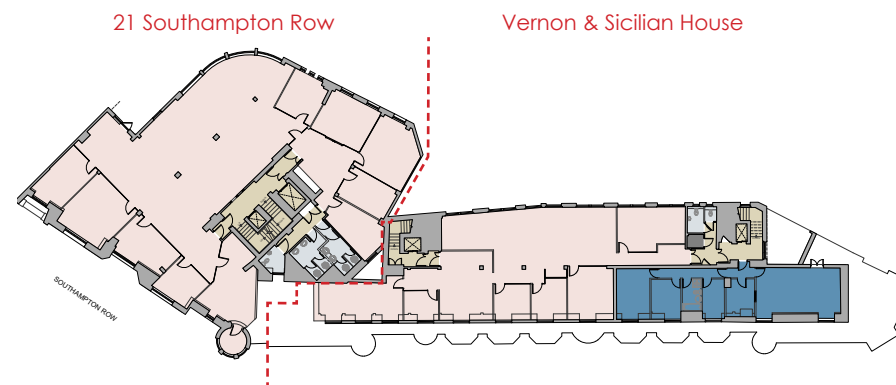
Second Floor



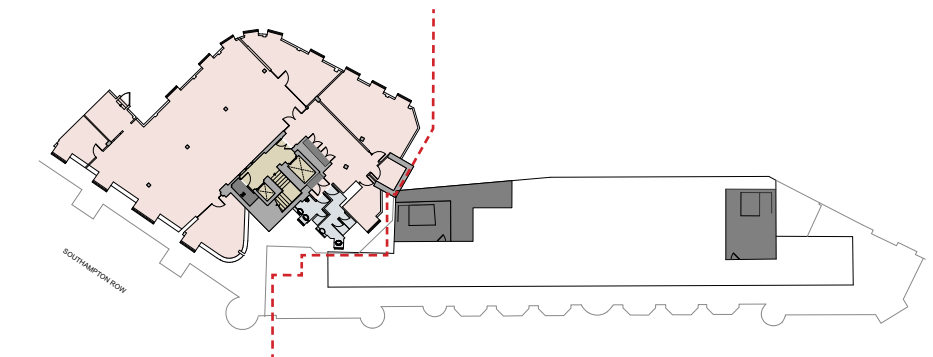
Third Floor



Fourth Floor



Fifth Floor



Sixth Floor

## Introduction Existing Plans

### 21 Southampton Row existing arrangement:

- B1 - Office
- Grd - Retail and office
- 1-6 - Office

### Vernon & Sicilian House existing arrangement:

- B1 & Grd - Retail
- 1-5 - Office



## Introduction

### Existing Offices



21 Southampton Row - current office floors

Following agreement with the London Borough of Camden the existing office spaces of 21 Southampton Row, Vernon & Sicilian Houses have been stripped of internal elements agreed to be modern additions to the original building fabric.

These works have significantly helped to understand the existing building's structure. As well as uncover the extensive structural alterations and additions that have occurred since the building's construction.

Most notably within both buildings office spaces are the considerable structural openings and removal of original internal walls.

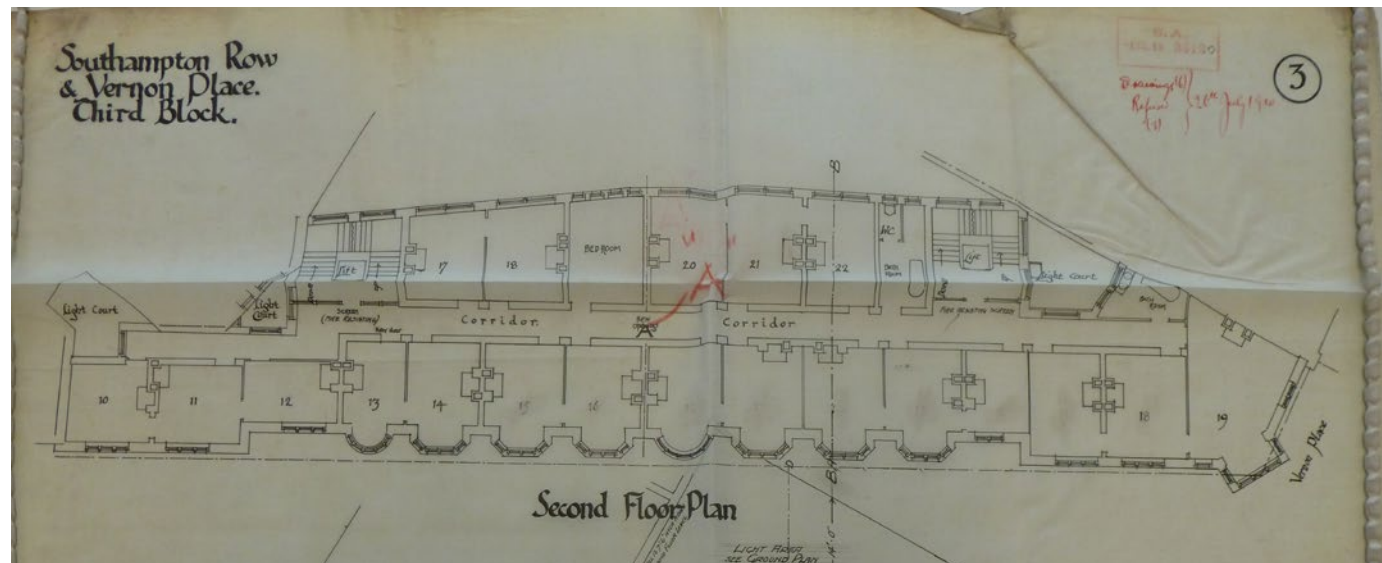
Additionally within 21 Southampton Row 5th and 6th floors and Vernon/Sicilian House 5th floor the construction of the 70's mansard roofs are also clearly visible.



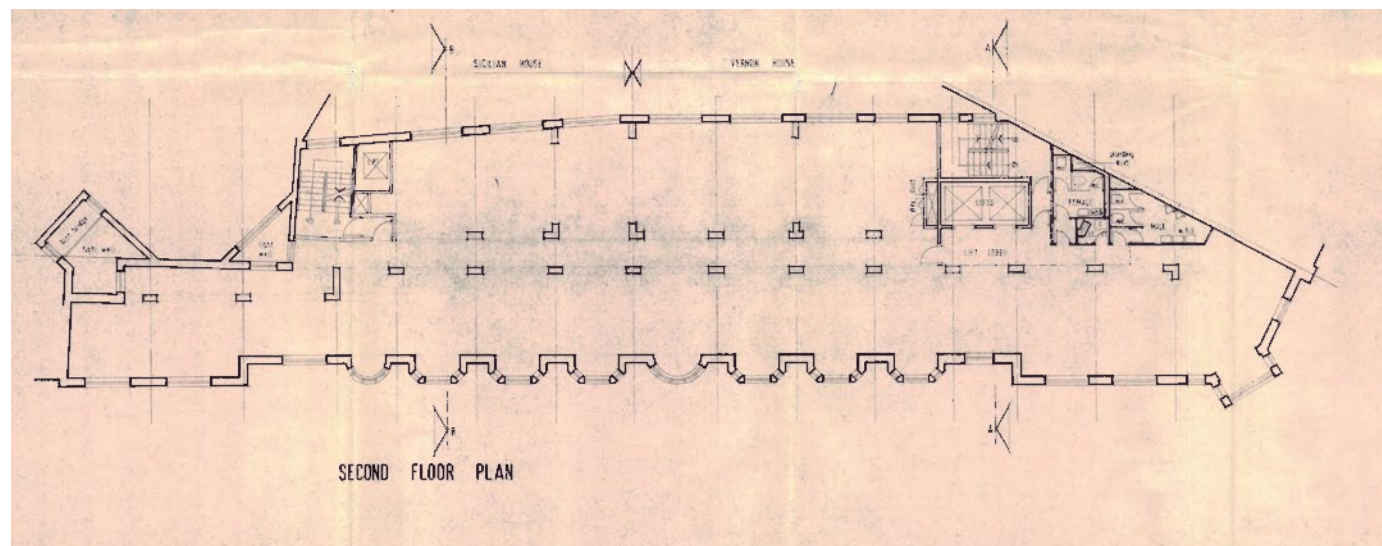
Vernon, Sicilian House - current office floors



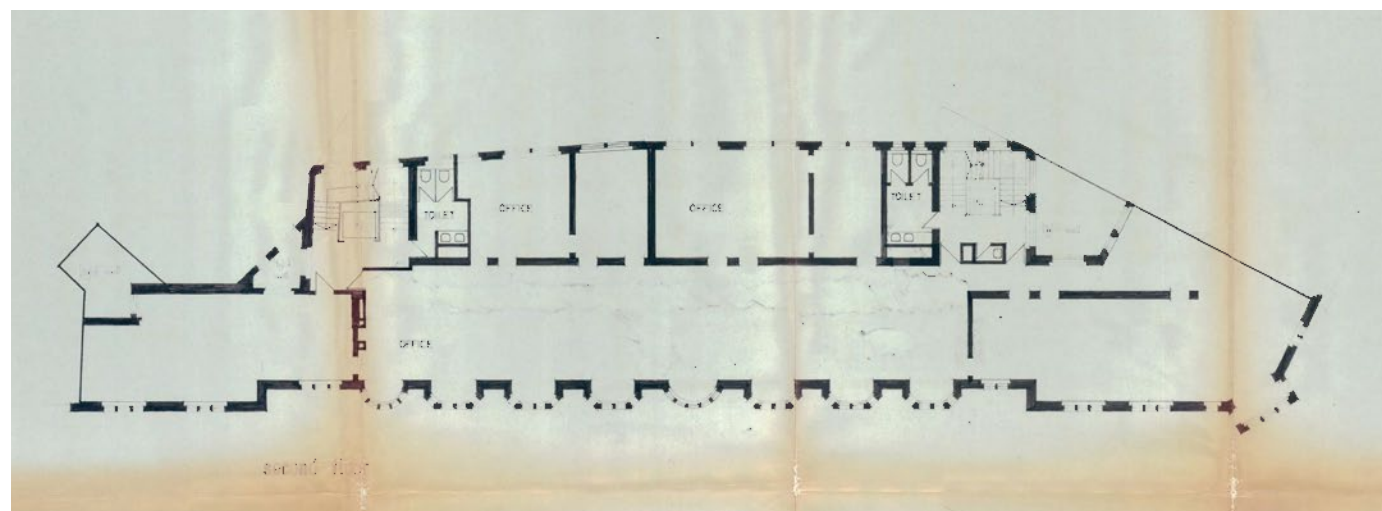
## 1.8



1910 - Second floor  
Archive drawing



1975 - Second floor  
Planning drawing



1977 - Second floor  
Planning drawing

## Introduction Planning History

Vernon and Sicilian Houses were originally constructed between 1906 and 1910 to the designs of R J Worley. At the time of construction the scheme was criticised as being old fashioned, though it is now considered a fine example in the use of brick and terracotta combinations.

Since its construction the facades of Vernon and Sicilian Houses from ground to fourth floors have remained largely unaltered. Internally though the building's uses, layout and fifth/sixth floors have been heavily altered.

The upper floors were originally designed as residential flats but that use has long since been abandoned with the floors being converted into office use. This had a significant impact on the plan form of the building in that it removed all the chimney stacks and fireplaces. Their removal has resulted in the consequential loss of most cornices and other original internal architectural features of the building.

In 1975 permission was granted for the removal of the internal spine walls, infilling of the lightwell to Vernon House and the reconstruction and extension of the fifth floor mansard.

A subsequent application was submitted and approved in 1977 which still looked to rebuild the fifth floor but scaled back the extent of spine wall removal to the now office floors.

As part of these approved works externally it is also understood that the original brick chimneys fronting onto Sicilian Avenue were replaced with GRP imitations chimneys.

**Please refer to submitted heritage statement for further detailed analysis.**



## Introduction

### Planning Pre-application advice

In June 2021, a pre-planning application was submitted to the London Borough of Camden. Proposals within the submissions included:

- The reconfiguring of the ground floor of 21 Southampton Row and Vernon House along with the 3no. small retail units between the existing entrances
- Internal alterations to the offices with the removal of remaining spine walls to Vernon and Sicilian House
- Reconfiguring of existing roof top plant areas to create additional roof terraces.

As noted within formal feedback from Camden, while no objections were raised about the internal proposals to the office floors, concerns and objections were raised about the proposed ground floor and roof top proposals.

Subsequent meetings were held with Camden Planning officers in September, where amendments to the ground floor and roof top plant and terrace areas were tabled.

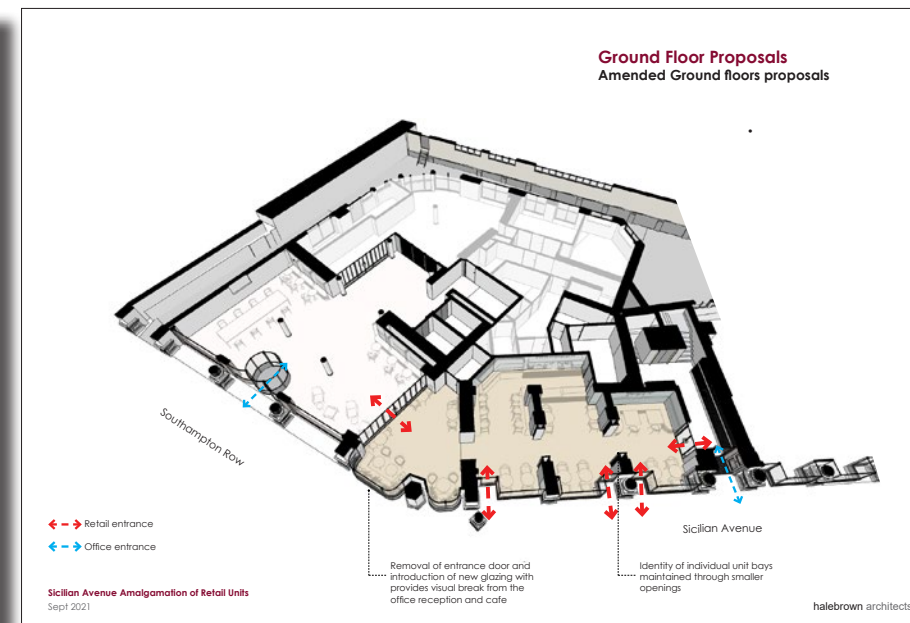
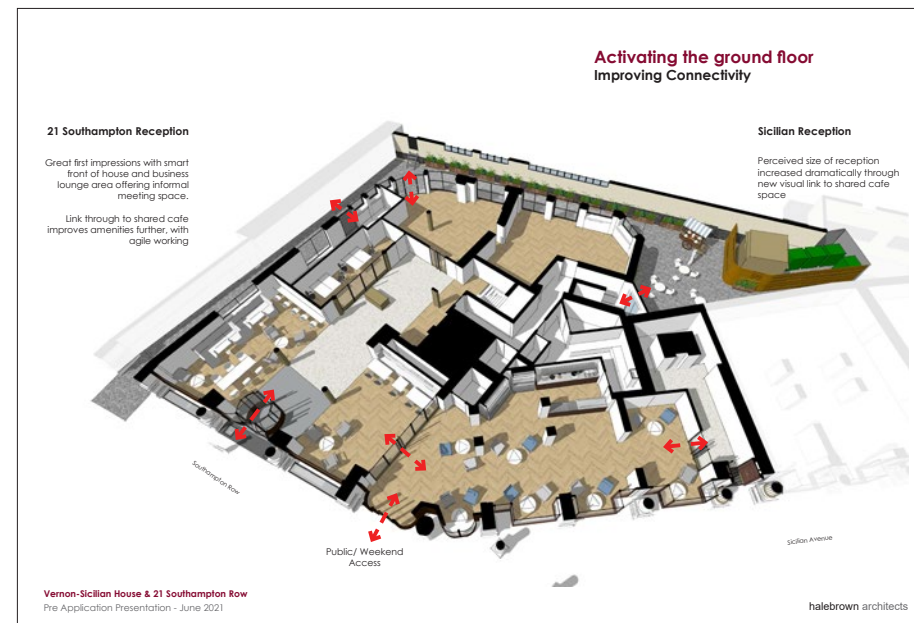
Feedback from these meetings concluded that:

- The amalgamation of the 3no. small retail units with the existing office entrances would not be supported.
- The creation of roof terraces would not be supported.
- The creation of continual visual mass through the screening of proposed roof plant equipment would not be supported as a staggered roof scape was preferred.

In line with this feedback the following proposals have been revised to reflect the comments made by Camden with:

- The ground floor office entrance revised to allow the 3no. small retail units being retained as existing stand alone units.
- The removal of the previously proposed roof terraces to both buildings.
- The removal of the previously proposed plants screens to roof top plant areas, in order to create a staggered roof scape

**Please refer to submitted planning statement for further detailed analysis.**



Design proposals tabled in Pre-application and secondary meetings with Camden's Heritage & Urban Design Office