

URBAN AND REGIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF READING
HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT – EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL WORKS
ISSUE 01
NOVEMBER 2024

On behalf of Purcell ®
15 Bermondsey Square, Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 3UN
info@purcelluk.com
www.purcelluk.com

A team of experienced consultants from Purcell jointly contributed to the completion of this HIA.

Name	Position and Qualifications	Role
Tom Goodwin	Assistant Heritage Consultant	
Jon Wright	Senior Heritage Consultant	

Date	Issue	Revision	Reviewed	Approved
Nov 2024	01	First Draft	JW	JW

URBAN AND REGIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF READING

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	04	4.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	34
1.1 Introduction	04	4.1 Significance Assessment	34
1.2 Structure of the Report	04	4.2 Significance Plans	38
1.3 Site Location	05		
2.0 HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY	07	5.0 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT	44
2.1 Heritage Context	07	5.1 Introduction	44
2.2 Policy	09	5.2 Heritage Note and Commentary on Consultation	44
		5.3 Magnitude of Impact Definition	45
3.0 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT	13	5.4 Heritage Impact Assessment	45
3.1 Urban and Regional Studies, University of Reading	13	5.5 Interior	47
3.2 The Univeristy of Reading	16	5.6 Wayfinding	49
3.3 College of Estate Management	18	5.7 Conclusions	50
3.4 Howell, Killick, Patridge, and Amis	18		
3.5 HKPA and the University of Reading	20		
3.6 'Vertebrate Architecture' and the Architecture philosophy of HKPA	22		
3.7 Structure and Material	24		
3.8 Plan Form	25		
3.9 Servicing	27		
3.10 Landscaping	27		
3.11 Historic Development Plans	29		

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment, (HIA), has been written in support of the proposed external and internal works package for the Urban and Regional Studies (URS) Building at Reading University. The scheme as proposed is the result of consistent heritage advice and discussion regarding the listed building and its setting.

The Urban and Regional Studies building was designed by Howell, Killick, Patridge and Amis and completed in 1972. The building was listed at Grade II in 2016, as proposals for the building's alteration and extension were developed by Hawkins/Brown. Hawkins/Brown's proposals were refused Listed Building Consent in December 2018. The building is presently vacant, having been used as decanted accommodation for library services whilst Stride Treglown refurbished the adjacent library building.

Some strip out works, consented as a pre-cursor to these works have taken place and the building is currently not in use by the University.

1.2 Structure of the Report

Paragraph 200 of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their settings. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposals on their significance'.

A summary of relevant legislation, national, regional and local planning policy and guidance is provided in [Section 2](#). [Section 3](#) describes the historic development of the building as well as its context and position in post-war architectural culture. [Section 4](#) assesses its significance holistically and specifically, using significance plans to spatially locate fabric or spaces of value. Finally, [Section 5](#) addresses the heritage impact of the proposals from Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt (ACG) and assesses the proposals individually and collectively on the listed building and the surrounding heritage context.

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.3 Site Location

The Urban and Regional Studies building is located on the Whiteknights Campus of the University of Reading. The Whiteknights Campus is located to the south-east of the town centre of Reading, and is north-west of Earley, a historic village, now a suburb of Reading.

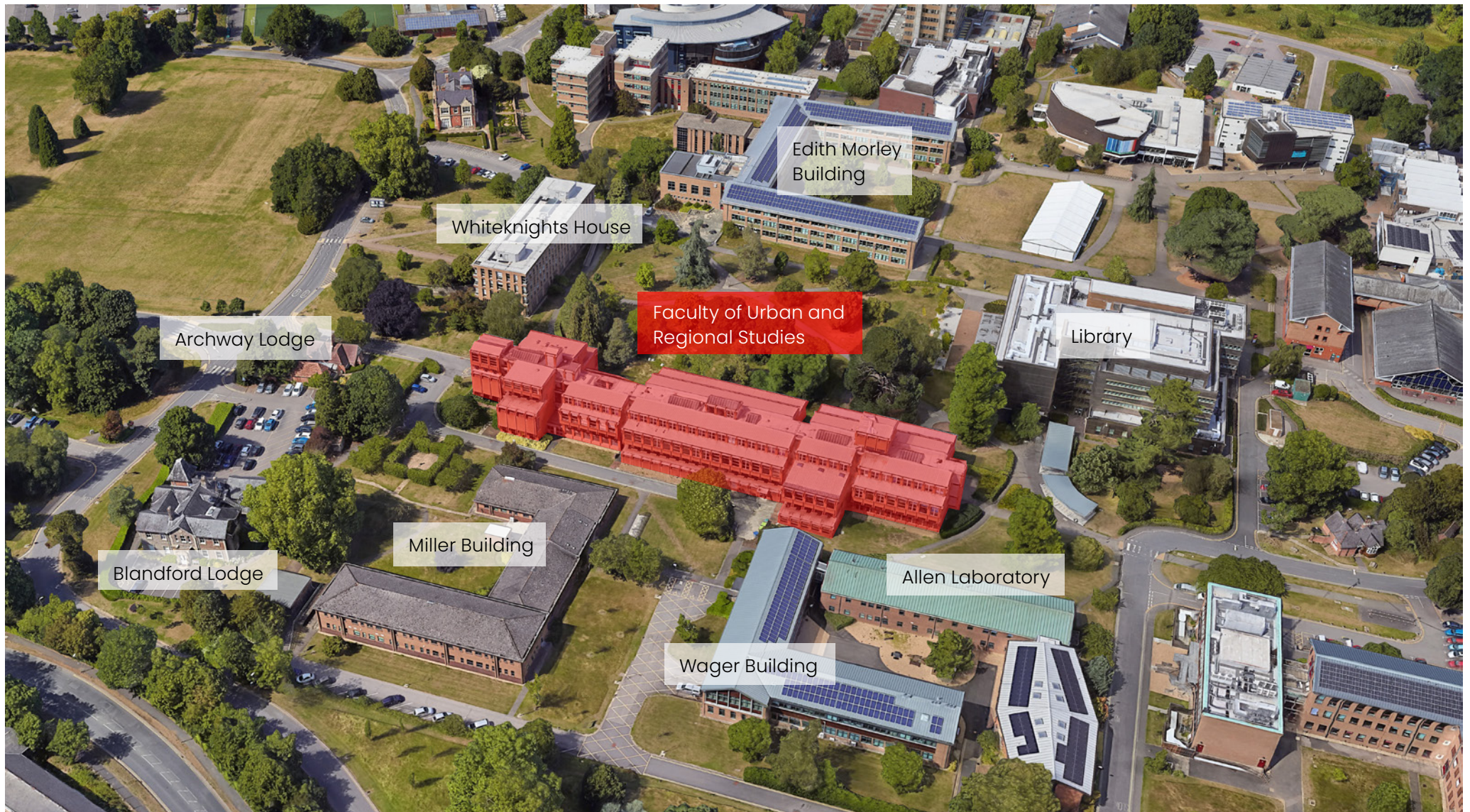
The building straddles Chancellor's Way, a historic route which traverses the historic Whiteknights Park on an east-west alignment. The park land, previously associated with a series of manor houses and villas from the 12th century to early 20th century has been developed as the main campus of the University of Reading in the post-war period. The Urban and Regional Studies building is located in the western portion of the campus, where the teaching facilities are most densely concentrated.

A series of modern university buildings form its immediate setting. To the north these are the Library, Edith Morley Building, and Whiteknights House, whilst the Allen Laboratory, Wager Building, and Miller Building are located to the south. The 19th century Archway and Blandford Lodges are located to the west and south-west respectively.



Location of the Urban and Regional Studies building, marked by a pin, within the context of Reading

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION



Location of the Urban and Regional Studies building in the Whiteknights Campus

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

2.1 Heritage Context

The application site, the Urban and Regional Studies building, is not located within a particularly sensitive heritage context. The site is not covered by Conservation Area, Scheduled Monument, or Registered Park and Garden designation, and nor are any areas within the 400 metre study area covered by such designations. No undesignated heritage assets or unlisted buildings of merit have been identified by Wokingham or Reading Borough Councils within the 400 metre study area.

HERITAGE ASSET MAP

(400 metre study area)

A

Urban and Regional Studies Building
(Grade II, LEN: 1435127)

B

Blandford Lodge (Grade II, LEN: 1157221)

C

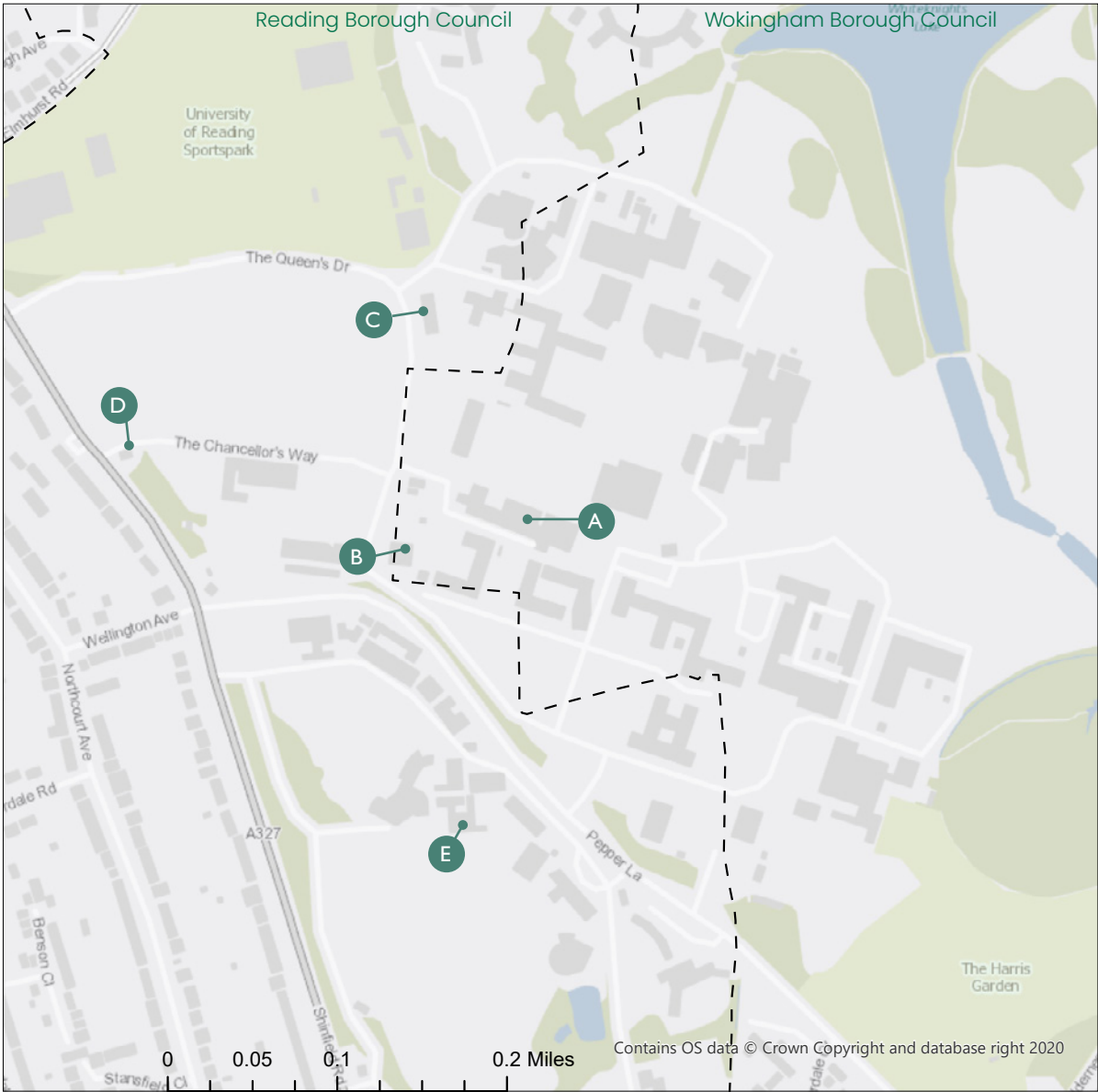
Whiteknights House Annexe
(Grade II, LEN: 1321864)

D

Lodge to Whiteknights Park House
(Grade II, LEN: 1113576)

E

School House and Attached Laboratories
(Grade II, LEN: 1113577)



Map showing heritage assets within the western part of the Whiteknights Campus of the University of Reading

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

A: Urban and Regional Studies building (Grade II, LEN: 1435127)

The Urban and Regional Studies building is a Grade II listed building. An assessment of the building's significance can be found in Section 4.0, Statement of Significance.

B: Blandford Lodge (Grade II, LEN: 1157221)

Blandford Lodge is a Grade II listed building located c. 50 metres to the south-west of the Urban and Regional Studies building. It was built in the late 19th century when the Whiteknights Estate was subdivided into a series of smaller estates. Blandford Lodge is a two to three storey grey brick building, with stone dressing to bay windows and pilasters. A Doric porch with modern infill is located centrally on the south elevation, beneath a central gable. A series of gabled and butterfly roofs, combined with a cantilevered corner turret and protruding tower create a picturesque roof scape. Much of its significance arises from its status as a fine piece of classical Victorian architecture, and historic interest as a surviving part of the 19th century development of the park. Although there is a degree of intervisibility between Blandford Lodge and the Urban and Regional Studies building, they derive a very limited degree of significance from one another, due to their highly limited group value. This arises from their differing dates of construction, contrasting architectural languages, and historic functions.

C: Whiteknights House Annexe (Grade II, LEN: 1321864)

Whiteknights House Annexe is a Grade II listed building, located c. 160 metre north-west of the Urban and Regional Studies building. It was seemingly designed by Alfred Waterhouse in the 1860s or 1870s and is a two storey red and grey brick building with a gabled attic floor and stone dressings. Its significance resides primarily in its characterful Victorian exterior, attribution to a leading High Victorian architect, and relationship to other historic buildings associated with the genteel, late 19th century development of Whiteknights Park. The building derives a limited degree of significance due to the proliferation of post-war university buildings within close proximity. Additionally, there is limited intervisibility between the Whiteknights House Annexe and Urban and Regional Studies, due to the presence of intervening built forms and mature planting. As such, the Whiteknights House Annexe derives no significance from the Urban and Regional Studies building and vice versa.

D: Lodge to Whiteknights Park House (Grade II, LEN: 1113576)

The Lodge to Whiteknights Park House is a Grade II listed building, located c. 330 metres to the west of the Urban and Regional Studies building. It is a two storey red and grey brick building, constructed in the late 19th century. Its significance largely arises from its external appearance, with fretted bargeboards, timbered gables, and diapered brickwork. The lack of intervisibility between the lodge and Urban and Regional Studies building, as well as their contrasting styles, functions, and dates of construction means that they do not derive any significance from one another.

E: School House and Attached Laboratories (Grade II, LEN: 1113577)

The School House and Attached Laboratories form a Grade II listed building, which is located c. 250 metres south of the Urban and Regional Studies building. The school was built as a house in the 1830s, before being converted to a school by Alfred Waterhouse in 1890. At this time a series of laboratories were added to the building. The building's significance is derived from its association with Waterhouse, a leading High Victorian architect, and historic use as a school, and aesthetic interest derived from the restrained classicism of the stuccoed 1830s building and the red and grey brick laboratories. The dense planting and accumulated built form between the Urban and Regional Studies building and School House mean that they enjoy little intervisibility, whilst their differing architectural styles and phases of construction mean that they would have little group value with one another even if there was great intervisibility. Overall, they are considered to not make any contribution to one another's setting.

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

2.2 POLICY

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

The following section sets out the policy context in which the changes proposed to the URS Building should be considered.

THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2012 (UPDATED 2019 & 2023)

16. CONSERVING AND ENHANCING THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Paragraphs pertinent to the consideration of LBC at URS are–

195. Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

196. Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account:

- a the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the

historic environment can bring;

- c the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- d opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

Proposals affecting heritage assets

200. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

201. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict

between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

203. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Considering potential impacts

205. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

206. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

- b assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

207. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- b no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- c conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

208. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

209. The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

210. Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred.

211. Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted.

212. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

THE NATIONAL PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE

On March 6th, 2014, what was the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched the Planning Practice Guidance website which

includes the section 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. The guidance is a live document intended to provide further detailed information about the implementation of the NPPF.

OTHER HISTORIC ENGLAND GUIDANCE

ENGLISH HERITAGE, CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES, 2008

The Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment were produced to strengthen the credibility and consistency of decisions taken and advice given by Historic England staff (formerly English Heritage). The guidance is intended to be read by local authorities, property owners, developers and professional advisers and is fully aligned with the NPPF and many Local Plans refer to it as important policy.

HISTORIC ENGLAND, GOOD PRACTICE ADVICE IN PLANNING NOTE 2 – MANAGING SIGNIFICANCE IN DECISION-TAKING IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, 2015

The purpose of this note is to provide information on good practice to assist local planning authorities, consultants, owners, applicants and other interested parties in implementing historic environment policy in the NPPF and the related guidance contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance.

HISTORIC ENGLAND, GOOD PRACTICE ADVICE IN PLANNING NOTE 3 – THE SETTING OF HERITAGE ASSETS, 2015

This note provides guidance on managing change within the settings of heritage assets and supersedes 'The Setting of Heritage Assets', English Heritage, 2011

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

HISTORIC ENGLAND, ENERGY EFFICIENCY & HISTORIC BUILDINGS: SOLAR ELECTRIC (PHOTO VOLTAICS) 2018

This guidance document has specific relevance for the proposals and features a number of important clauses. Those most pertinent are as follows:

Harm

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out how the local planning authority, in making a decision, looks at balancing the harm of a PV scheme against the sustainability benefits of the proposal. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight is given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Even when carefully designed and managed, the installation, maintenance and eventual decommissioning of solar electric panels or solar slates is likely to cause some damage to the historic fabric of the building. To mitigate this harm, it is therefore critical that the means of fixing and the operation of the panels or slates are planned and agreed in advance, whilst also ensuring that their location does not impede rainwater disposal or hinder maintenance work such as clearing gutters.

Significance

The location of the panels and managing their visual impact is an important part of the design. All parts of the system that are visible should be considered carefully. It is generally not considered sympathetic to a building's appearance to have a solar panel or other equipment fixed to its main elevations; that is, the face or faces seen from the direction from which it is most commonly viewed. Buildings with main elevations aligned in the direction of optimal solar radiation may present special installation problems with regards to visual impact.

When assessing applications for PV installations fixed directly to the building or within the setting of heritage assets like historic buildings, the significance of the asset will need to be properly assessed. This assessment may well conclude that the roof covering; its appearance, perhaps a decorative array of tiles, or intrinsic historic fabric (for example ancient local stone tiles) is of high significance and therefore the impact of the PV is harmful. The understanding of significance of the roof is often critical.

Setting

When assessing the impact of PVs, including ground mounted arrays, the impact is often measured against inter-visibility and views of the asset where they would be visually prominent.

MADRID – NEW DELHI DOCUMENT, ICOMOS 2017

Approaches to the conservation of twentieth-century cultural heritage, was endorsed at the 19th General Assembly of ICOMOS in Delhi in December 2017. The document, authored by the ISC20 Scientific Committee, set out for the first time, a framework for the consideration of 20th Century Heritage.

The document contains a number of important clauses for consideration that help to frame the conservation understanding and management of change at the URS Building. A link to the complete document is given in the appendices but relevant clauses for guidance are given below.

Article 5: Acknowledge and manage pressures for change, which are constant.

5.1: Whether as a result of human intervention, or environmental conditions, managing change is an essential part of the conservation process to maintain cultural significance, authenticity and integrity. In some instances, change may be necessary to sustain a heritage place or site. Individual interventions and cumulative change can adversely impact cultural significance. Where change is necessary, impacts on the integrity and authenticity of the place must be assessed and monitored.

SECTION 2.0: HERITAGE CONTEXT & POLICY

Article 6: Manage change sensitively.

6.1: Adopt a cautious approach to change. In some instances, change may be necessary to sustain a heritage place or site. Individual interventions and cumulative change can adversely impact cultural significance. Where change is necessary, impacts on the integrity and authenticity of the place must be assessed and monitored. Do only as much as is necessary and as little as possible. Any intervention should be cautious. The extent and depth of change should be minimised. Use only proven methods of repair and avoid treatments that may cause damage to historic fabric, and cultural significance; repairs should be undertaken using the least invasive means possible. Changes should be as reversible as possible. Discrete interventions can be introduced that improve the performance and functionality of a site or place on condition that its cultural significance is not adversely impacted. When change of use is under consideration, care must be taken to find an appropriate reuse that conserves the cultural significance.

6.2: Assess the heritage impacts of proposed changes against the conservation policies prior to works commencing and aim to avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts. The cultural significance of a place needs to be defined and understood, so that any proposals for change minimize or avoid adverse impacts. Different elements, attributes and values may have variable tolerances for change, and this needs to be assessed and understood before developing proposals for adaptation or change so that the cultural significance of the place is managed and conserved.

6.3: The application of standard building and regulatory codes requires flexible and innovative approaches to ensure appropriate heritage conservation solutions. 9 The application of standardised legal and building codes (e.g. accessibility requirements, health and safety code requirements, fire safety requirements, seismic retrofitting, landscape requirements, traffic management and measures to improve energy efficiency) may need to be flexibly adapted to conserve cultural significance. Thorough analysis and negotiation with the relevant authorities and experts should aim to avoid or minimise any adverse heritage impact. Each case should be judged on its individual merits.

Article 7: Ensure a respectful approach to additions and interventions.

7.1: Additions need to respect the cultural significance of the heritage place or site. In some cases, an intervention (such as a new addition to a building or garden, a new infill building in an urban area and so on) may be needed to ensure the sustainability of the place or site. After careful analysis, new additions should be designed to respect the scale, siting, composition, proportion, structure, landscape, materials, texture and colour of the place or site. Additions should be discernible as new, identifiable upon close inspection, but work in harmony with the existing; complementing not competing, interpreting not imitating.

7.2: New interventions should be designed to take into account the existing character, scale, form, siting, landscape, materials, colour, patina and detailing. Careful analysis of previous plantings, buildings and sympathetic interpretation of their design may assist in providing appropriate design solutions. However, designing in context does not mean imitation.

Article 8: Recognise when use contributes to significance and manage accordingly.

Where a functional use contributes to the significance of a place or site, conservation should aim to sustain that use where possible. Where a new use is introduced as a means of sustaining the place, and where the previous use or functions contribute to cultural significance this should be clearly interpreted.

LOCAL POLICY

The Planning Statement prepared by BNP Paribas Real Estate that accompanies this application considers local and national planning policies in detail. Reference should therefore be made to this Planning Statement for further detail on Wokingham Borough Council's adopted planning policies.

Nevertheless, the key heritage and design policies in this instance are CPI and CP3 of the Wokingham Core Strategy and TB24 of the Wokingham Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Urban and Regional Studies, University of Reading

Whiteknights has a long history, stretching back to the medieval period, the area's present name derived from the nickname given to the late 12th century lord of the manor, John de Earley, who was also known as 'The White Knight'.⁰¹ From this point onwards the manor was known as Earley Whiteknights. Another legend suggests the name comes from the white cloaks and trousers that lepers in a local leper house were given by Abbot Aucherius in the mid-12th century. Yet another story claims that the White Knight in question was Gilbert de Montalieu, who killed the brother of his prospective wife, Editha, thinking him a rival lover. As a result of the tragedy Editha entered a convent and Gilbert went to Jerusalem as a pilgrim. Many years later his body was found on the grave of Editha's brother, with a letter on requesting he be buried with his victim, and a chapel and white column be erected in their memory.⁰²

In 1606 the manor of Arley was purchased by Francis Englefield and William Woolascot, with Englefield soon after buying Woolascot out of his share. The manor would be passed through the Englefield family for almost two centuries, being sold to George, Marquess of Blandford in 1798. During their ownership the Englefield's made some substantial changes to Whiteknights.

In the latter half of the 18th century they rebuilt Whiteknights House in a grand Italianate manner, with two large, bowed bays, articulating the park front of the building. Sir Henry Englefield, seventh baronet, also made an important contribution to the landscape of Whiteknights Park by introducing picturesque planting to the area in the mid-1780s.

It was around this time that Whiteknights Lake was formed, with a series of three large pools fed by springs and streams formed adjacent to the house.



T.C. Hofland, 'View of White Knights from the New Garden', in *Fourteen views of the mansion and garden seats of White-Knights, a seat of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough* (1819) (Yale Centre of British Art, Public Domain)

⁰¹ 'Parishes: Sonning with Earley, Woodley and Sandford', *A History of the County of Berkshire: Volume 3* (1923), pp. 210-225

⁰² I. K. S. Cooke, 'Whiteknights and the Marquis of Blandford', *Garden History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), p. 28

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Marquess of Blandford was even more focused on improving the parkland than Englefield, expending a vast sum of money on improvement schemes. By the time Thomas and Barbara Hofland recorded the gardens in 1819 the gardens included a Botanic Garden with greenhouses, a woodland area, the so-called 'New Gardens'. It also included a grotto, rosary, and Gothic chapel. His grand plans and extravagant lifestyle came at a great cost, with the Marquess, elevated to the dukedom of Marlborough in 1817, declared bankrupt in 1819. This saw the Whiteknights estate sold off at auction, with Englefield's Italianate mansion demolished in 1840. It was demolished and replaced by a new house, built for Sir Francis Goldsmid, who was a barrister, scion of a wealthy banking family and, M.P. for Reading from 1860 to 1872.

In the 1860s the Goldsmid's leased the estate out into a number of separate parcels, with six large family houses erected to separate portions of the sprawling parkland. The most significant of these was Foxhills, designed in 1867 by Alfred Waterhouse, the pre-eminent Victorian Gothic architect, responsible for the design of Manchester Town Hall and the Natural History Museum in London, for himself and his family. Waterhouse also designed three other houses on the estate, Erleigh Park (built 1859, now demolished), Whiteknights (1868) and the Wilderness (1873, only the stables survived).⁰³ He also carried out alterations to Whiteknights Park in the 1860s and 1870s.



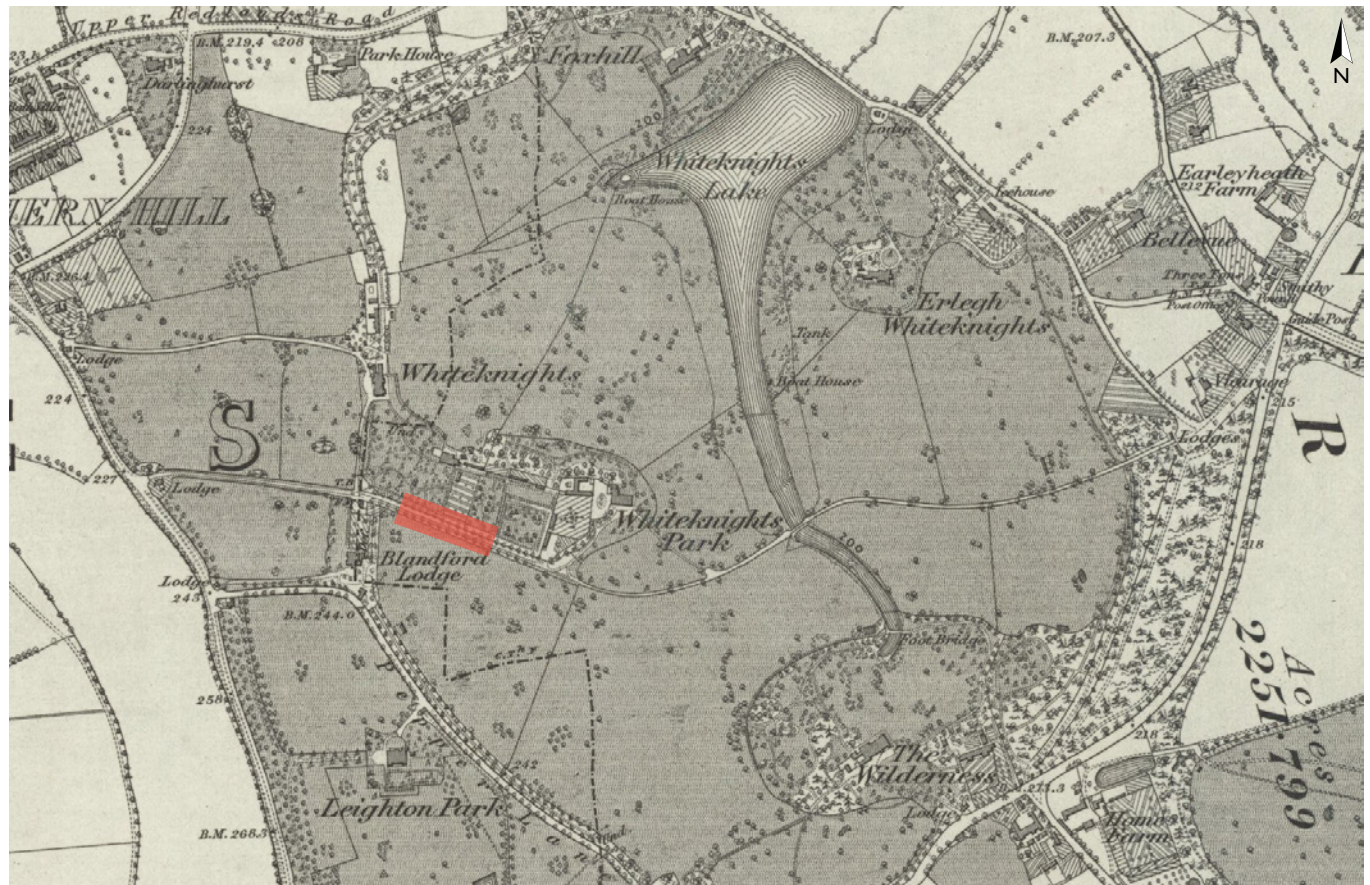
1883 Ordnance Survey map showing the Whiteknights Estate in its broader context

⁰³ Niklaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (2002), p. 203; Colin Cunningham and Prudence Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse, 1830-1905: Biography of a Practice* (1992)

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

At the time the 1883 Ordnance Survey map was produced the right of way that the building straddles, Chancellor's Way, was in use as a driveway up to Whiteknights Park, now known as Park House. This drive had a strong formal character, being lined with regularly spaced trees and led up to Park House Lodge, which survives to the present day as the University Chaplaincy Centre. To the west of Park House there were a series of associated stable and garden buildings, and areas of formal and kitchen gardens. These former areas of garden sit directly to the north of the URS building. Blandford Lodge, which survives to the west of the URS building, likely dates to the 1870s and is now Grade II listed. The Archway Lodge is located to the north of Blandford Lodge and is unlisted. It dates to the period between 1877 and 1898.

The key changes to the Whiteknights area between the 19th and first half of the 20th century were concentrated along Shinfield Road and Northcourt Avenue where dense residential development was undertaken from c. 1900 to 1930. Pepper House, a country house built in 1830, was converted into Leighton Park School in 1890, with a series of associated buildings – Grove House, Peckover Hall and the Townson Building – all erected to the north-west of the original building in the first half of the 20th century. These buildings survive to the south-west of the URS building.



1883 Ordnance Survey map, approximate site of the URS building outlined in red

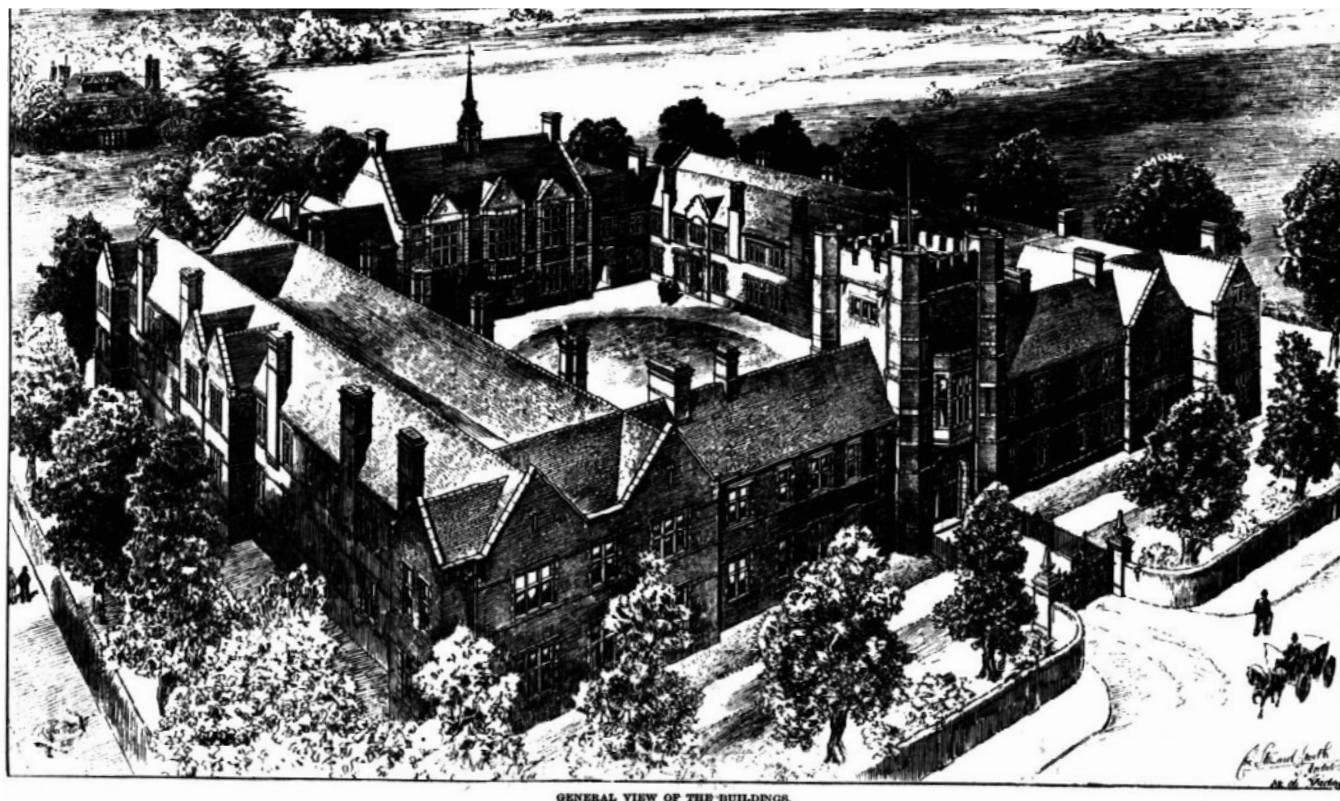
SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.2 The University of Reading

The origins of Reading University can be traced to the Reading Town Council's foundation of school of art and science within the town in the latter half of the 19th century. These schools were then converted into Reading College in 1892, as part of the Oxford University Extension Movement. This movement was aimed at bringing 'education of a university type within reach of those who cannot go to university', bringing with it a grounding in 'liberal' and technical education' and a means by which 'the chosen intellects of all classes may climb to the universities themselves.'⁰⁴ Much of the college's teaching and administration occurred in the medieval former Hospitium of St John, part of the former Reading Abbey complex.

By 1906 Reading College's activities were largely focused on and around London Road where they leased five acres and series of five connected terraced houses for university use. In 1905 the Great Hall was erected on the London Road campus. In 1908 Wantage Hall was built. This quadrangular building, which drew inspiration from medieval Oxbridge colleges, housed a grand hall, residences and was entered from Upper Redlands Road via a grand, crenelated gatehouse.

In 1926, the College successfully petitioned for the grant of a Royal Charter, and had university status conferred the following year. The University remained on the existing London Road site, but it was considered that the site was significantly too small to accommodate the university's post-war growth. As such, a new site in close proximity to



Wantage Hall drawn from an aerial view by C.S. Smith, the architect (*Reading Standard*, Saturday 31 October 1908, p. 7)

⁰⁴ J. C. Holt, *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years* (1977), p. 2

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

the existing buildings was sought. The ownership of the estate had passed buildings through the Goldsmid family for a century, ending up in the hands of Sir Henry J. D'Avigdor-Goldsmid. D'Avigdor-Goldsmid had mentioned in passing the difficulty and cost of maintaining the expansive estate to the university bursar, E. H. Carpenter, at a dinner they both happened to be attending in London. Carpenter requested first refusal on any sale, with the purchase of Park House and a further 7 ½ acres agreed by July 1946. At the same time, parallel negotiations were underway to purchase the whole site, all 230 acres.⁰⁵

New buildings were gradually erected in Whiteknights, the university's architectural approach seeking to ensure the 'great natural beauty of the Park must be preserved, and even enhanced, and that the buildings to rise on it shall be appropriate to their background in design, construction and material.'⁰⁶

Early construction on the campus was largely carried out by the firm of Easton and Robertson (later known as Easton and Roberston, Cusdin, Preston and Smith), who were selected as main campus architects in December 1948.⁰⁷ They designed the Faculty of Letters, a large U-plan building to the north of the URS building, which was completed in 1957.

They also designed the library directly to the north-east of the URS building, which was completed in 1964 and overlaid and altered substantially by Stride Treglown in the 2010s.



1994 Ordnance Survey map, approximate site of the URS building outlined in red

⁰⁵ J. C. Holt, *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years* (1977), pp. 137–41

⁰⁶ Sidney Smith and Michael Bott, *One Hundred Years of University Education in Reading: A Pictorial History 1892–1992* (1992), p. 61

⁰⁷ J. C. Holt, *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years* (1977), p. 190

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.3 College of Estate Management

Following the First World War Sir William Wells pushed for the establishment of a new college to train prospective auctioneers, estate agents and valuers. Following Wells' concerted campaigning the College of Estate Management was founded in 1919, with its first premises, located at 35 Lincoln's Inn Fields, purchased two years later. From 1938 the College was able to award degrees from the University of London.

Post-war, the College relocated to a purpose-built building in Kensington. Named Atlantic House, it is located on St Alban's Grove and designed by the practice of Montagu, Evans and Son. Construction work on the new building was completed in 1955.⁰⁸

In line with a growing demand for full-time courses the College felt its work would be better supported by a closer association with a university. Its association with Reading began in 1967, where its teaching would be delivered through a newly founded Faculty of Urban and Regional Studies. Whilst the University delivered many of the College of Estate Management's degrees, it continued to operate independently in the delivery of distance learning, conferences and sector research.⁰⁹

The College brought substantial financial resources with it, the sale of its land in Kensington creating £1.25 million of funds to be expended on a new residential hall and the Faculty of Urban and Regional Studies building, which this present application pertains

to. Both the residential hall and URS building were designed by Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis (HKPA).

3.4 Howell, Killick, Partridge, and Amis

Bill Howell, John Killick and Stanley Amis met in 1948 at the Architectural Association in London. Howell, two years older than the others, had studied at Gonville and Caius, Cambridge before moving to the AA, where Amis and Killick were entering their 4th year.¹⁰ The AA was a leading architectural school, playing a key role in post-war architectural culture, with roughly half of the leading British architects of the period passing through the institution.¹¹

Upon their graduation from the AA in 1950, Howell, Killick and Amis joined the architect's department of the London County Council. John Partridge arrived there via a different route, signing up to a part-time architectural training scheme administered by the L.C.C. and Regent Street Polytechnic in 1943 when he was working in the council's public health department.¹² After a stint in the schools division of the L.C.C. architect's department he later transferred to the district valuer's department, which was responsible for the L.C.C.'s housing provision during the Second World War. Robert Matthew, then head of the L.C.C. architect's department organised a coup to reclaim control of housing provision, with Partridge moving to the newly formed housing division of the architect's department in 1950. It was in this team that the four partners of HKPA first met.

The housing division was broadly divided between two competing architectural approaches with the softer Scandinavian-inspired modernism (otherwise known as New Humanism or New Empiricism) of Communist architects contrasting with the sensibilities of the 'anarcho-aesthetes', who drew inspiration from international architects like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, and were more overtly formalist.¹³

Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis were firmly placed within the latter grouping. This is manifest in their most important project at the L.C.C., the design of the Alton West housing estate in Roehampton. As one later commentator observed, it 'used a formal Le Corbusier-derived classical language', breaking with the Empiricist grouping in the housing division in its emulation of his Unite d'Habitation housing typology.¹⁴ Much of Alton West is now included on the National Heritage List for England; the five slab blocks which most clearly relate to Le Corbusier's work are listed at Grade II*, Nos. 2-26 Minstead Gardens (even) and Nos. 1-33 Minstead Gardens (odd) are listed at Grade II, and the surrounding landscaping is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden.

⁰⁸ London County Council, 'Kensington New Town', *Survey of London: Volume 42, Kensington Square to Earl's Court* (1986), pp. 130-50, para. 56

⁰⁹ University of Reading, *Handbook for Members of the Council, 2012-13* (2013), p. 10

¹⁰ Sherban Cantacuzino, *Howell Killick Partridge & Amis: architecture* (1981) p. 10

¹¹ Patrick Zamarian, *The Architectural Association in the Post-War Years* (2020), p. 7

¹² Geraint Franklin, *Howell, Killick Partridge and Amis*, p. 10

¹³ Elain Harwood, 'London county council architects (act. c. 1940-1965)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2009); Geraint Franklin, *Howell, Killick Partridge and Amis*, p. 21

¹⁴ Roy Landau, *New Directions in British Architecture* (1968), p. 49

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1956, Howell and Killick left the LCC and established their own practice, supplementing their income by returning to the AA as teachers. The same year, they worked with Partridge, Amis and Alison and Peter Smithson on a scheme for the Sydney Opera House competition, eventually won by the Danish architect Jørn Utzon.¹⁵ The Smithsons were, like Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis, former L.C.C. architects, on the cutting edge of English architectural culture in the post-war years. They were the driving forces behind Brutalist architecture in the country, exemplified by the Hunstanton School in Norfolk (Grade II*).

Bill Howell and the Smithsons had already established a strong relationship by this point in time, with Howell attending the 9th conference of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in 1953 alongside the Smithsons. He went on to present two unrealised housing schemes he worked on with Alexander Killick (sheltered housing for the Architects' Benevolent Housing, and the hypothetical 'Low Kensington' study, which established a low-rise, high-density housing typology) at the 10th CIAM conference in Dubrovnik in 1956.¹⁶



Alton West Estate, designed by Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis in the housing division of the L.C.C. Architect's Department

¹⁵ Geraint Franklin, 'Sweet Geometry: Edward Reynolds at the Architectural Association, 1956–58' *Architectural History*, 62 (2019), p. 190

¹⁶ Geraint Franklin, *Howell, Killick Partridge and Amis*, pp. 116–7

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1959 Howell, Killick and Partridge was established as an architectural practice, following the team's second place finish in the landmark competition for a college campus for the newly founded Churchill College at the University of Cambridge. The plans were worked up in Howell's basement and, although unrealised, represent the first of the firm's striking collection of university buildings. This was followed by commissions to design buildings at the University of Birmingham (Faculty of Commerce and Social Science, 1959–64), St Anne's College, Oxford (Wolfson & Rayne Buildings, and Gatehouse, 1960–6), St Anthony's College, Oxford (masterplan, 1960–1; Hilde Besse Building, 1966–70), the University of Cambridge (University Centre, 1963–7), Downing College, Cambridge (Senior Common Room and Kitchen Block, 1965–9), and the University of Warwick (Mathematics Research Centre houses (1966–70). All of the above projects, aside from the St Anne's Gatehouse, demolished in 2014, are on the National Heritage List for England. Amis joined the practice later, in 1961.

The firm also worked on projects for the L.C.C., designing Acland Burghley School in Camden (Grade II, 1963–7) and the Weston Rise housing estate in Islington (1962–8). The firm's later work took in theatres, submarine repair facilities, prisons and courts, the latter body of work including the Hall of Justice, the highest court in Trinidad and Tobago.

In recognition of HKPA's leading role in the architectural culture of 1970s Britain Bill Howell was appointed to one of the most influential academic posts, replacing Leslie Martin as head of the School of Architecture at the University of Cambridge.¹⁷ Howell died in a car crash in 1974, three years after Killick had passed due to Multiple Sclerosis.

Looking at their work in the round, Otto Saumarez Smith observed:

*'Their buildings result from a happy mixture of a magpie approach to historical influences, a theatrical sense of the potentials of expressed structure, sensitivity to detailing and materials, and a deeply sympatico outlook on users, clients and briefs.'*¹⁸

3.5 HKPA and the University of Reading

In 1969 Bickerdike, Allen, Rich & Partners (BAR) developed a masterplan for the campus which argued that the university should change its approach to its layout in line with shifting requirements.

*'The policy of development in Whiteknights has been to spread buildings thinly, so that parkland rather than buildings dominates. This was apparently determined when people had in mind a small University of some 1,500–2,000 students, when it was practicable for landscape to flow freely among loosely located buildings. Today this has already changed [...] Our function has been to examine the implications of growth in respect of land, density, movement, landscape, and building forms, and the changes that may be needed not merely to deal with the problems foreseeable up to the 1980s, when the University will likely have some 8,000 students [...] but to peer beyond this period into the more distant future.'*¹⁹

The URS building formed part of BAR's proposed densification of the campus, terminating the southern side of a loose quadrangle, enclosed to the east by the library, west by Whiteknights House and north by the Faculty of Letters. This plan envisaged the concentration of teaching activities to the south-west of the Whiteknights site, with residential halls to be constructed to the extreme north and eastern fringes of the park, open parkland separating all three.

As Geraint Franklin observes, the selection of HKPA to design the URS building may have arisen from

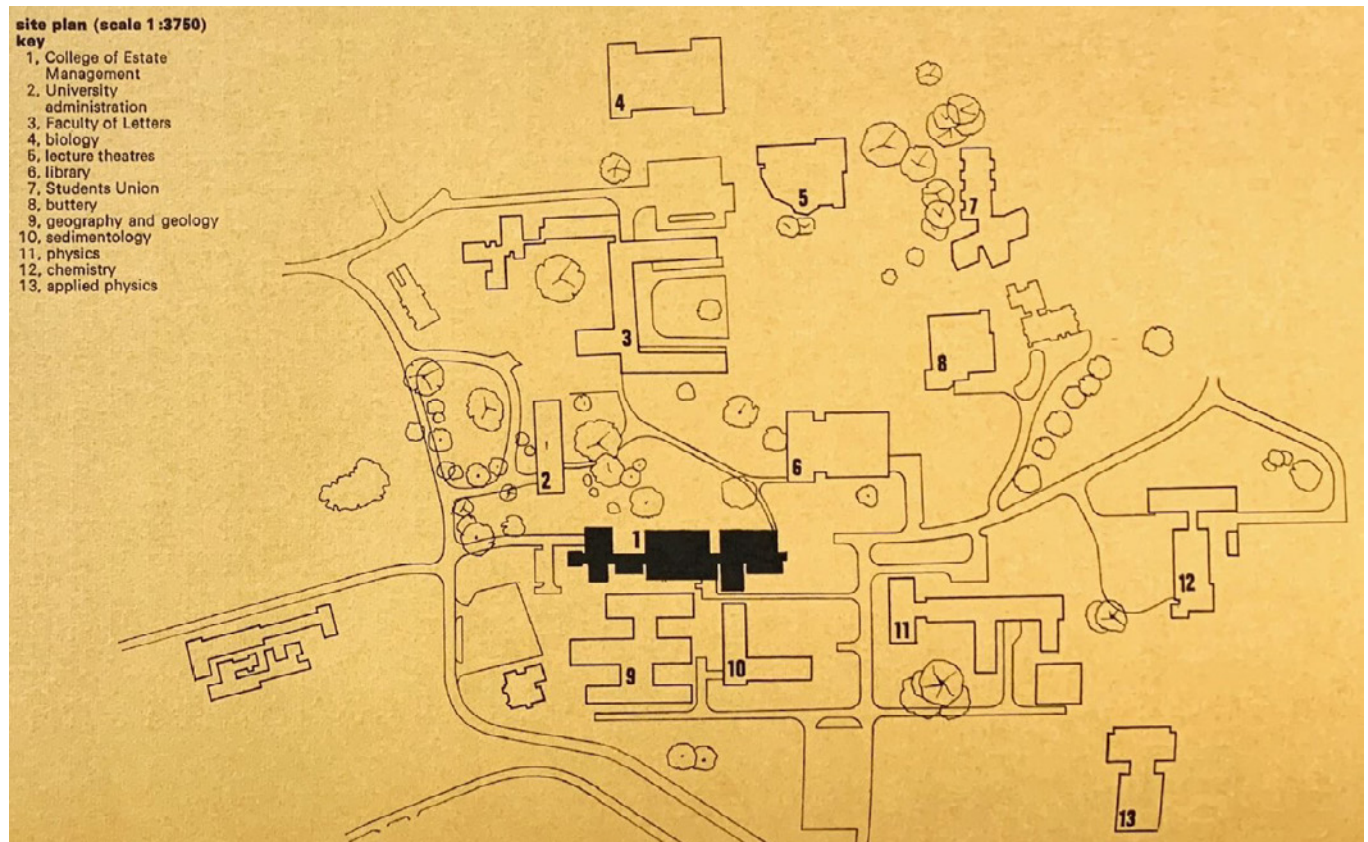
¹⁷ Andrew Saint, 'The Cambridge School of Architecture: A Brief History' (<https://www.arct.cam.ac.uk/aboutthedeptment/aboutthedepthome>)

¹⁸ Otto Saumarez Smith, 'HKPA: Fun with brutalism', *RIBA Journal* (August 2017) (<https://www.ribaj.com/culture/book-review-geraint-franklin-howell-killick-partridge-amis>)

¹⁹ Quoted in J. C. Holt, *The University of Reading: The First Fifty Years* (1977), p. 192

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

two important connections. Firstly, in the interlude between his time at the L.C.C. and the foundation of HKPA, Stan Amis has been employed by Easton and Robertson, architects to the university. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, John Killick's father, Sir Alexander Killick, was a governor and former president of the College of Estate Management, the institution that was bankrolling the project.²⁰ By 1959 Killick's Multiple Sclerosis had worsened to such an extent that he was engaged by the practice as a consultant, with Stan Amis running the project for the firm as job architect.²¹ Despite this, John Partridge recalled that all the practise partners had a hand in the URS building's design.²²



Site plan showing the south-western portion of the Whiteknights Campus in 1973. The URS building is shown in black (AR, Nov 1973)

²⁰ Geraint Franklin, *Howell, Killick Partridge and Amis*, p. 102

²¹ Geraint Franklin, *Howell, Killick Partridge and Amis*, p.

²² John Partridge interviewed by Jill Lever, *British Library Sound Archive* (3 September 2002) [00:50:40]

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.6 'Vertebrate Architecture' and the Architectural Philosophy of HKPA

It is worth noting that HKPA did not disseminate their thoughts on architecture widely, with only two principal forays made into the world of theorising through contemporary journals – Bill Howell's talk on 'Vertebrate buildings: the architecture of structured space', published in the RIBA Journal in 1970, and the partners' talk at the Architectural Association, published in *Arena* as 'Attitudes to Architecture' in November 1966.

In the former article, Bill Howell set out the firm's approach to 'vertebrate architecture', which was concerned with the enclosure of people and activities within legible structures. Howell thought that this architectural approach was timeless, setting out a lineage for the trend which stretched back to Stonehenge, an example of 'space defined (not yet fully enclosed) by actual, palpable structure.' Stonehenge showed, in Howell's words, the 'simplest and most dramatic ideogram of man's defiance of gravity, a heavy object supported in space so that you can walk underneath it.'²³ This brings to mind the long colonnade of the Urban and Regional Studies Faculty, which spans the width of Chancellor's Way.

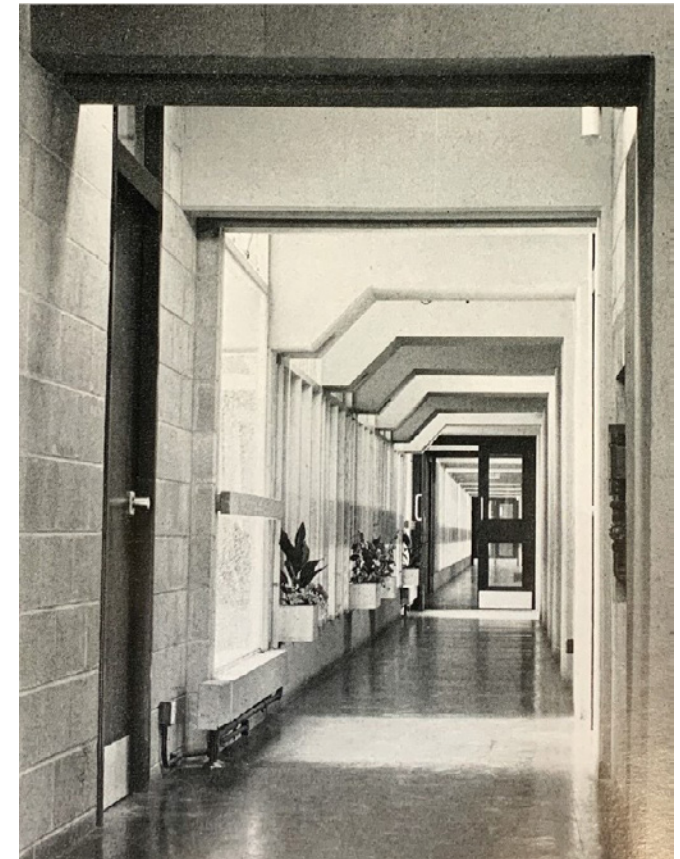
HKPA thought that the use of actual palpable structure in buildings arose from an innate interest in a sense of enclosure and interest in the articulation of structure, an argument substantiated by his reference to the wide-ranging appreciation people have for a whole range of structures, with Stan Amis, the partner in charge of the URS building noting that 'We respond



The long colonnade over Chancellor's Way partially encloses a large space, the long spans of the columns stimulating an appreciation of the structure

to the feeling of palpable support every time we go into a half-timbered cottage with exposed beams, or prefer the interior of a boat with its ribs and bulkheads to the tedium of a suburban parlour all wallpaper and distemper.'²⁴ As such, the firm made the legibility of structure a central concern in their work, being especially concerned with the introduction of columns into interior spaces where possible, finding that otherwise they got 'lost' within the thickness of the wall. At URS, the columns are largely set within the wall thickness and so the sense of palpable structure is provided internally by the beams, which widen as they reach the wall surface.

This was seen to provide a form of aesthetic interest, with Howell arguing that the firm's approach to



Photograph of an upper floor internal corridor, showing the legibility of the structure (AR, November 1973, p. 286)

²³ William Howell, 'Vertebrate buildings: the architecture of structured space', *RIBA Journal*, vol. 77, no. 3 (March 1970)

²⁴ Quoted in Sherban Cantacuzino, *Howell Killick Partridge & Amis: architecture* (1981) p. 37

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

structure might appear costly at first glance, as they did not encourage their engineers to make their structural designs more economical, but thought that it accounted for the firm's lack of decorative interior fittings.

*'If we spend more on the structure then it can't be spent elsewhere. But perhaps by spending a bit more on the structure, we may not need a whole lot of interior decoration, or by going for a fairly elaborate finish on the columns, for instance, we can save having to cover them up with mosaic.'*²⁵

This is true of the URS building, where the finely detailed beam ends, provide the main source of articulation externally. The treatment of this beam ends, which strongly emphasises the trabeated construction of the building through its strong articulation of the meeting of beams and columns, occurs in a handful of places within HKPA's work. The most striking realised example of this approach is at the Weston Rise Estate, designed and built between 1965 and 1968 for the L.C.C. where beam ends break forward from the building line, supporting the pre-cast concrete façade of the building, as at the URS building.



Weston Rise Housing Estate, Islington. Photographed 1969 by Henk Snoek (RIBA, RIBA26194, Permission pending)

²⁵ William Howell, 'Vertebrate buildings: the architecture of structured space', *RIBA Journal*, vol. 77, no. 3 (March 1970)

Japanese influences

The URS building also belies HKPA's interest in Japanese architecture. As Peter Schmitt, a former employee of the practice, wrote, the influence of Japanese stylings pervaded the firm's office, which included 'Japanese Ho-o-den of nageshi and ramma in raw pine with hessian panels and a timber slatted ceiling.'²⁶ Japanese architecture was a popular touchstone in post-war architectural culture due to its perceived 'sort of reverence for the natural world, and, from that, for the materials of the built world' and the clear logic of structural expression which ran through it, with the meeting of post and lintel often highly articulated in Japanese joinery and timber construction.²⁷ By similarly articulating the structure by prominently detailing the junction of post and beam HKPA's desired sense of 'palpable structure' could be read externally.

²⁶ Peter Schmitt, 'An architect to the day he died: my friend John Partridge RA', *Royal Academy* (September 2016) (<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/john-partridge-tribute>)

²⁷ As argued by Theo Crosby and the Smithsons, whose theorising was adjacent to that of HKPA - Theo Crosby, Alison Smithson, and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism', *Architectural Design* 25/1 (January 1955), p. 1

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.7 Structure and Materials

HKPA worked with Frank Newby of Felix Samuely and Partners. Newby had lead the practice since 1956 when the eponymous Felix Samuely had died; the latter was a pioneering engineer at the cutting edge of English architectural culture since he had left Nazi Germany in the early 1930s. Newby ensured that Samuely's practice retained its cachet, working on a series of highly significant post-war buildings, including James Stirling's acclaimed Red Trilogy (the History Faculty at the University of Cambridge, Engineering Building at the University of Leicester, and Florey Building for Queen's College, Oxford – the two former buildings are Grade II*, the latter is Grade II), Cedric Price's Snowdon Aviary at London Zoo (a Grade II* listed tensile structure), and the American Embassy by Eero Saarinen (Grade II).

The URS building moved beyond the subtler articulation of external structure evident in HKPA's earlier works. Where octagonal columns were revealed between splayed pre-cast panels at the Acland Burghley School and Hilde Besse building at St Anthony's College, the URS building more overtly demonstrates its structure to the viewer, representing, in one commentator's eyes, 'a major departure from previous practice' by HKPA.²⁸

The URS building has a load bearing concrete frame, with all of the structural members up to 2.5 tons in weight being pre-cast, with any heavier members cast in situ. Beams with longer spans were post-tensioned, in order to increase their rigidity, with the associated anchorage pockets visible in a number

of beams ends visible across the building.²⁹ A heavily pigmented mix of concrete was used across these members, intended to blend the colour palette of the building with the neighbouring buildings on campus thanks to its red-tinged tan colour, which matches the stock brick of the Faculty of Letters and concrete cladding of Whiteknights House.

The concrete members all have a fair faced finish. They contrast with the infilling, pre-cast concrete spandrel panels, which are textured with Thames Valley gravel and tinted a less pronounced red. This speaks to HKPA's oft adopted differentiation between fair-faced structural members and roughly textured infill panels, evident at Acland Burghley. Otherwise, single-glazed windows set within metal frames, and metal infill panels (textured) and weathering details (flat) were used to clad the façade.

The roof of the building has been retained, and is formed from sheets of aluminium with standing seams. The underside of the roofs was originally clad in wood wool or woolcrete panels. The partitions are formed from unplastered blockwork, which was originally left unpainted, as were most of the internally expressed columns and beams.³⁰



Standard beams (below) and post-tensioned beams, distinguished by the infilled anchorage pockets (above)

²⁸ A.E.J. Morris, *Pre-Cast Concrete in Architecture* (1978), p. 351

²⁹ A.E.J. Morris, *Pre-Cast Concrete in Architecture* (1978), p. 356

³⁰ 'HKPA Vertebrate: College of Estate Management, University of Reading', AR, vol. CLIV, no. 921 (November 1973), p. 284

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

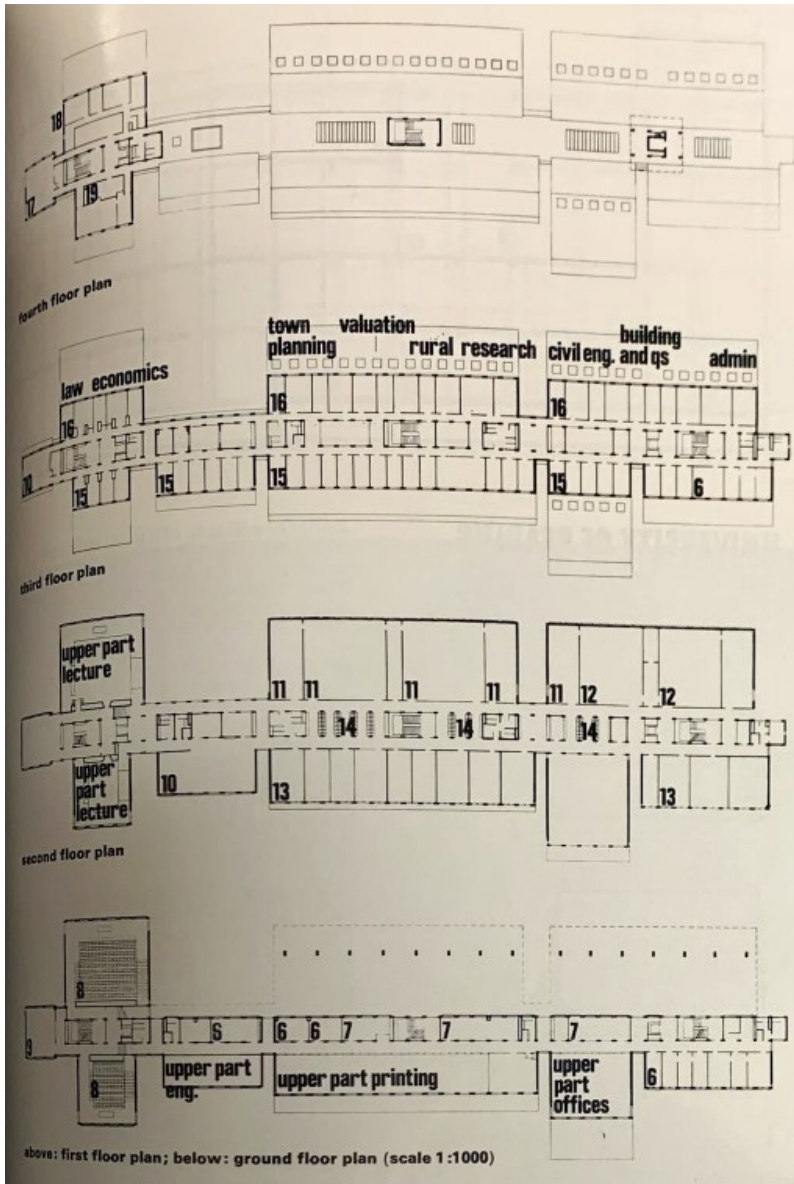
3.8 Plan Form

The plan form of the building was closely devised in line with the College of Estate Management's requirements, with the Architectural Review reporting in 1973 that 'small lecture theatres were needed but much of the teaching is done in small tutorial rooms that double up as professors' or lecturers' offices.' These were split between staff teaching law, economics, town planning, valuation, rural research, civil engineering, building and quantity surveying.³¹

The building was conceived to focus academic functions on the upper floors of the building, with administrative uses and printing rooms focused on the ground and first floors. Meanwhile, the double-height lecture theatre, located to the north and south of the western end of the building, remain accessible from the first and second floors. The neighbouring audio visual room, forms the western terminus of the building and is accessed at first floor level, but is a double height space. Aside from these spaces, the remaining teaching and student uses were concentrated on the second and third floors. The second floor was dominated by studios and classrooms, with academic staff offices on the third floor doubling as tutorial rooms. A students' common room was located above the audio-visual room at third floor level, with a boardroom or trustees' meeting room located above. The fourth-floor level also originally housed a self-contained flat.

A 6 metre wide central core runs the entire length of the building, with this space being dominated at

³¹ 'HKPA Vertebrate: College of Estate Management, University of Reading', *AR*, vol. CLIV, no. 921 (November 1973), p. 283



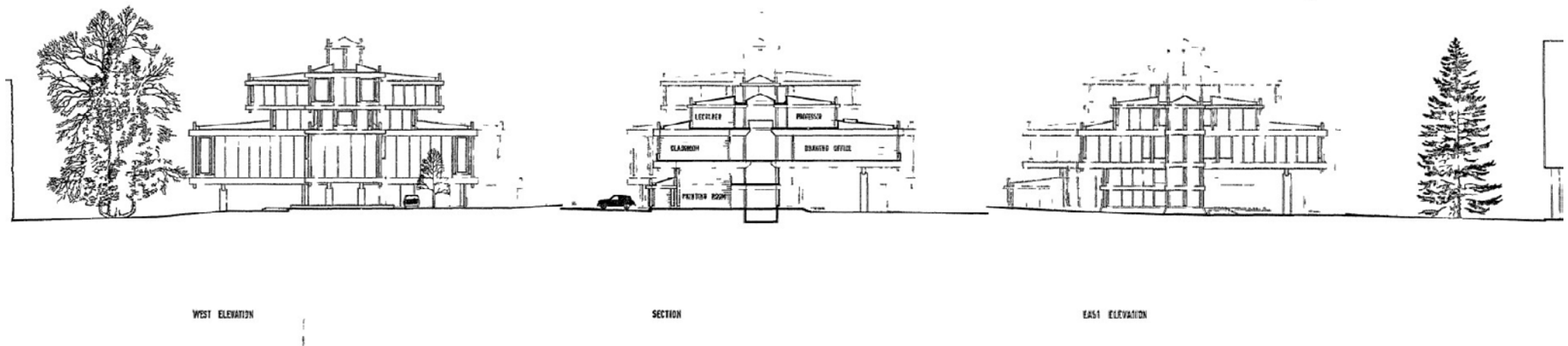
Floor plans of the URS building upon completion (*AR*, November 1973, p. 283)

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

all levels by staircases and the sole circulatory route within the building, which runs to east to west, across the spine of the building. At lower-level enclosed rooms infilled the remaining space within this axial route, with lockers (now removed), WCs and other auxiliary uses located within the spine to the upper floors.

The complex arrangement of spaces, shown in both plan and section, stemmed from the varied space requirements of different uses and the desire of the architects to reduce the visual prominence of the building within the landscape, given its significant scale and the relatively low-lying disposition of the remainder of the campus.

This considered approach to massing also introduced opportunities for visual drama internally and externally, creating funnelled views from the central corridors towards the surrounding landscape, framed by the side returns of the various teaching and administration spaces that protrude from the spine of the building.



Complex section of the URS building shown in series of elevation and section drawings by HKPA (left, west elevation; centre, central section; right, east elevation) (University of Reading)

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

3.9 Servicing

The servicing of the URS building was initially accomplished by concealing the services within floor and ceiling voids. HKPA departed somewhat with the celebration of servicing which was associated with their close associates, the Smithsons. The Smithsons' approach was predicated on the idea of 'as found' aesthetics. They sought to assemble 'existing components from families-of-components already available in industry [...] into architecturally finite elements, each part being indispensable structurally and architecturally,' which saw water, electricity and other service runs exposed internally.³² However, HKPA did not ascribe to this philosophy. Howell, aware that the firm was open to accusations of philosophical infidelity by making the structure of the building highly legible but obscuring the services, argued that 'Displaying structure and concealing plumbing is not really all that inconsistent – after all, there's a world of difference between a chap who likes displaying his biceps and one who walks round with his fly zip undone.'³³

The water tanks, housed in a cantilevering, rectilinear volume above the roof, is an especially highly articulated part of the building's design. Lift overruns also sit atop the centre of the building's roof. The building was heated by district heating, with steam pumped to the building passed through a heat-exchange to warm hot-water radiators. The aforementioned water tanks provide a pressurised cold water supply. Air conditioning was originally

provided to the two lecture theatres and audio visual room, with these three spaces also provided with dimmable lighting.³⁴

3.10 Landscaping

HKPA created a unified surface treatment to the areas around the building, complementing the buff concrete using brown pavers. These continue for the length of the colonnade, wrapping round to the western end of the building and stepping up to form a pond beneath the piloti which carries the westernmost volume of the building. Originally there was no hedge and only diffuse planting separating the URS building from the impromptu quadrangle it formed the southern end to.

The landscaping surrounding the URS building was largely inherited from the Whiteknights Estate history as a landscaped parkland associated with a series of wealthy owners. The URS building was designed in close dialogue with this landscape, with drawings by HKPA showing the position and crown size of trees at the time of construction. This suggests that the central recess to the north elevation, between the large lecture hall to west and teaching spaces to the east, was designed to accommodate the sprawling crown of a mature beech tree (now removed), appearing to be axially aligned with this recess.

As Colin Amery observed when reviewing the building in 1973: 'one walks on agreeable brown tiles and notices the architects' careful attention to the colour of the building: all brown and buff, toning with the bark of the cedar tree and the superb copper beech.'³⁵



North elevation of the URS building, looking across the open greensward (AR, November 1973, p. 279)

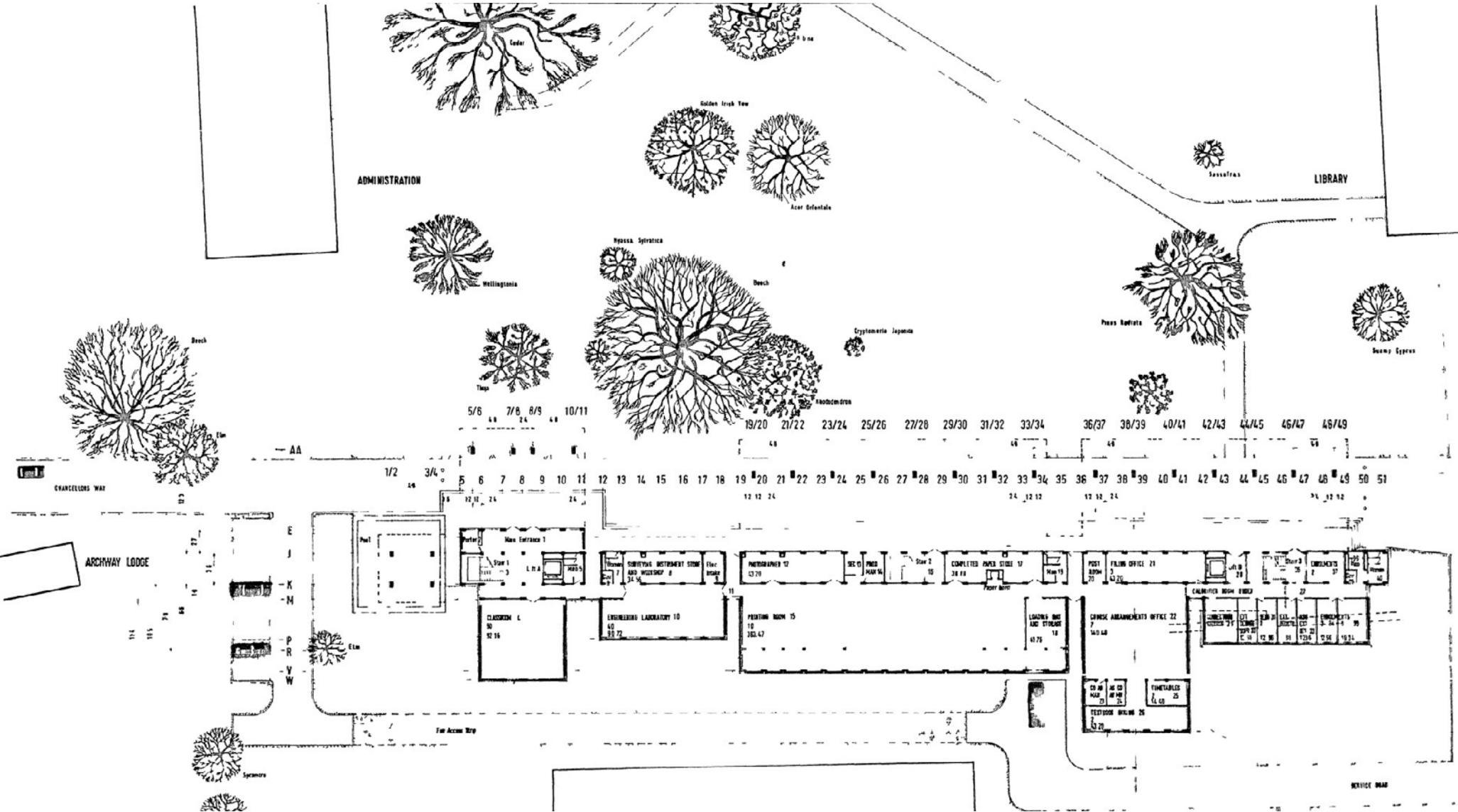
³² Peter Smithson, 'Reflections on Hunstanton', *arq*, 2 (Summer, 1997), p. 38

³³ William Howell, 'Vertebrate buildings: the architecture of structured space', *RIBA Journal*, vol. 77, no. 3 (March 1970)

³⁴ 'HKPA Vertebrate: College of Estate Management, University of Reading', *AR*, vol. CLIV, no. 921 (November 1973), p. 283

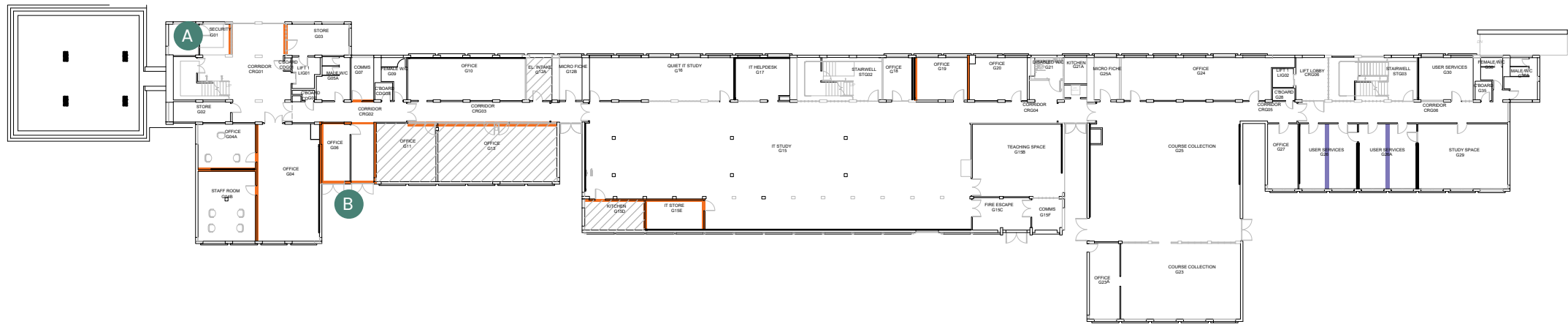
³⁵ Colin Amery, 'Criticism: College of Estate Management, University of Reading', *AR*, vol. CLIV, no. 921 (November 1973), p. 287

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



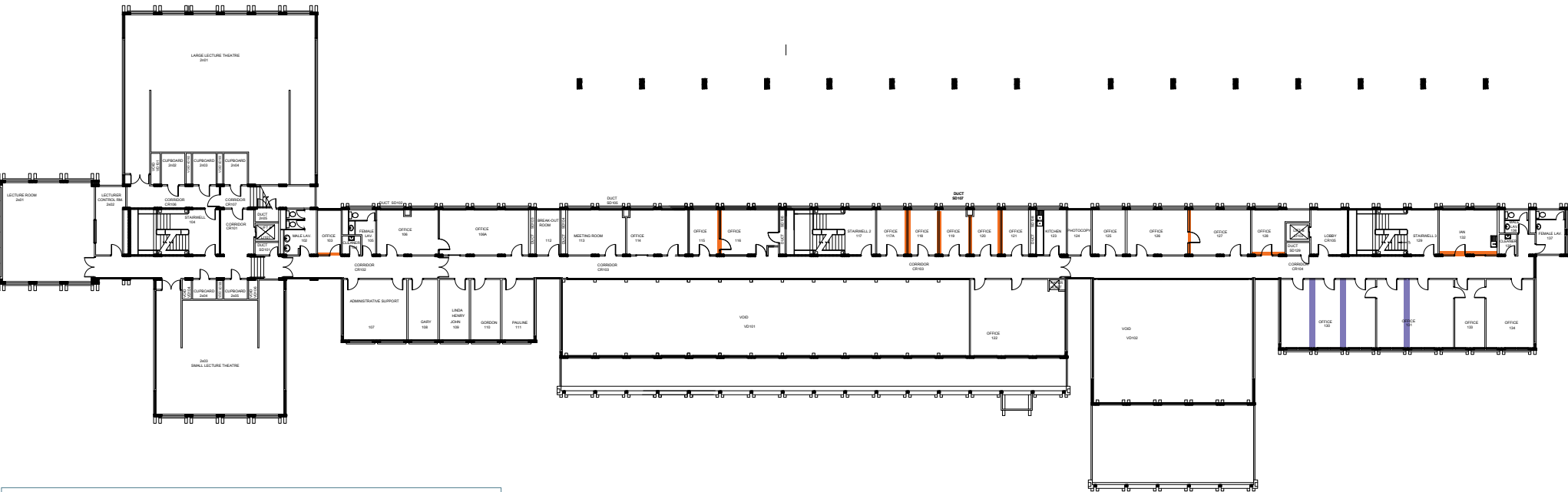
Ground floor plan and landscape by HKPA (University of Reading)

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



- Later Partitions / Structure
- Original Partitions / Structure, subsequently removed
- A Former porters' lodge, altered configuration
- B Later extension

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

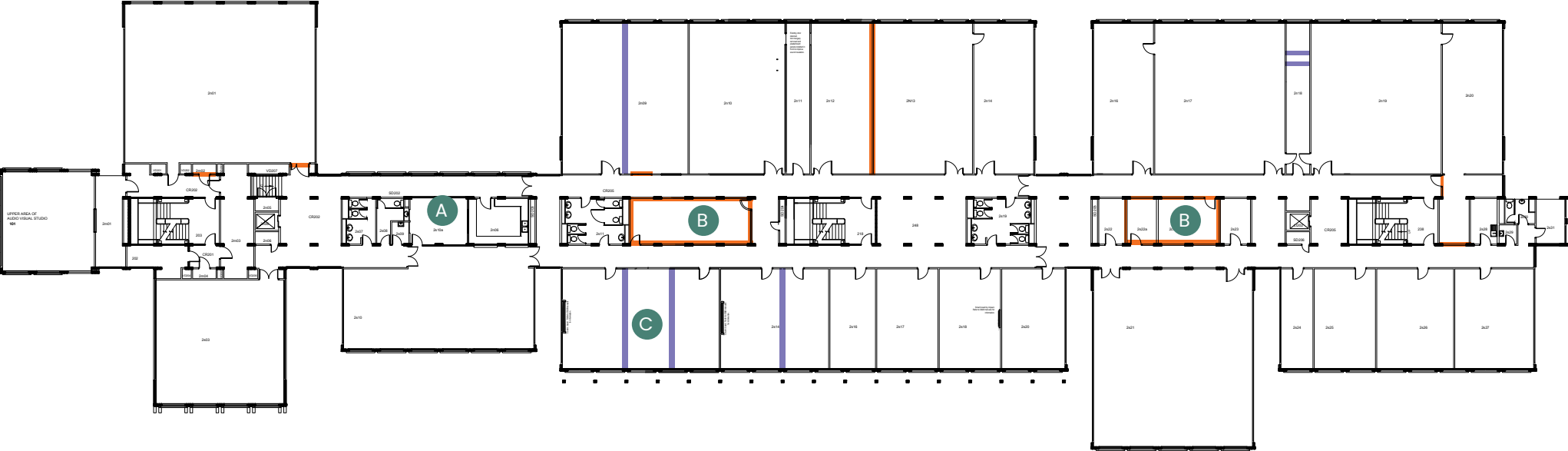


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

- Later Partitions / Structure
- Original Partitions / Structure, subsequently removed

This plan is not to scale

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

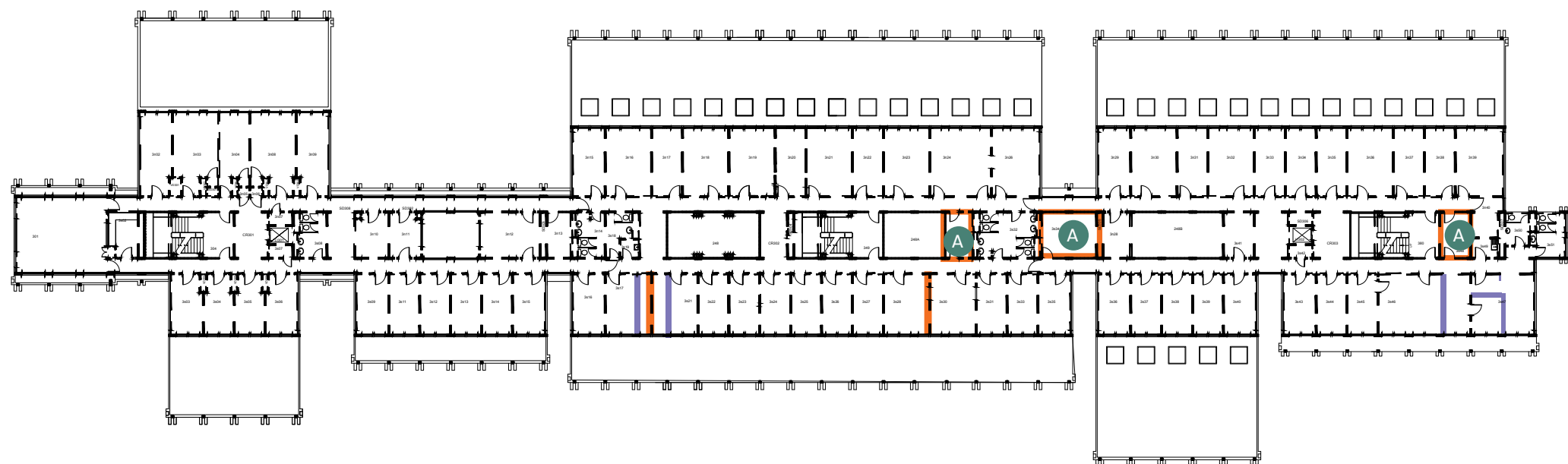


SECOND FLOOR PLAN

- Later Partitions / Structure
- Original Partitions / Structure, subsequently removed
- A Patio
- B Open locker space, later enclosed
- C Removed original partitions

This plan is not to scale

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

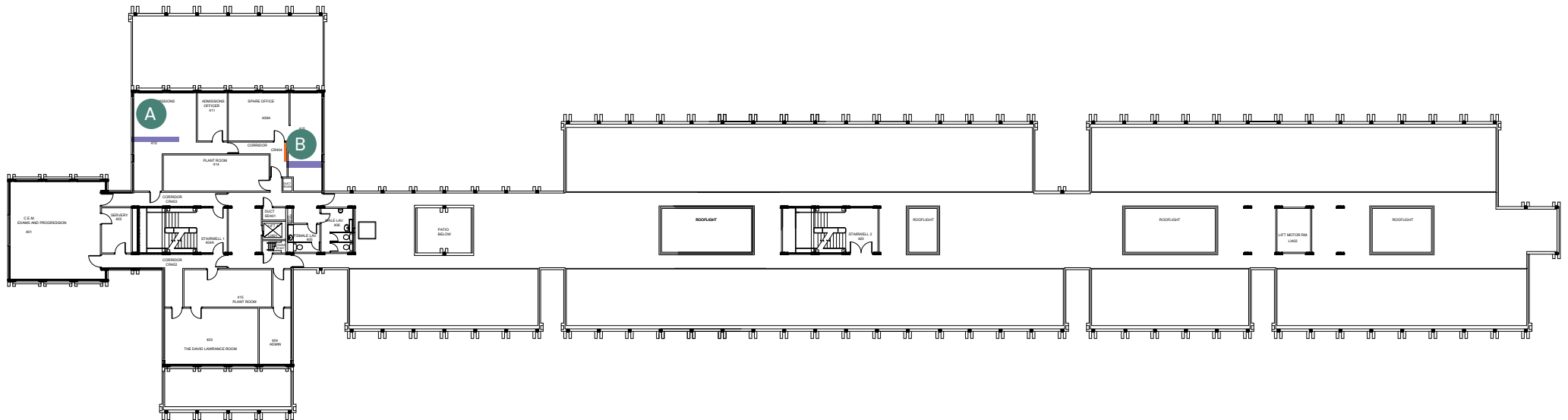


THIRD FLOOR PLAN

- Later Partitions / Structure
- Original Partitions / Structure, subsequently removed
- A Later infill to corridor

This plan is not to scale

SECTION 3.0: HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



FOURTH FLOOR PLAN

- Later Partitions / Structure
- Original Partitions / Structure, subsequently removed
- A Former bedroom spaces, partition removed
- B Former bedroom / kitchen spaces, partition removed

This plan is not to scale

SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 Significance Assessment

Introduction

Significance can be defined as the sum of the cultural values which make a building or site important to society. When making an assessment of significance numerous aspects are considered including architectural interest, historic interest, group value, social value, former uses and local distinctiveness. These aspects can be grouped under a series of four values outlined in English Heritage's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008): Evidential, Historic, Aesthetic and Communal. A description of each value is given under the headings for each section.

The significance of the URS Building is assessed using significance ratings from High to Detrimental.

This section addresses the intrinsic architectural, historic and communal qualities of the building and its landscape. To this end the building does have a range of heritage values that are here set out in more detail and expressed in a sequence of coloured plans which are given at the end of the section.

- **High:** A theme, feature, building or space which is important at national or international level, with high cultural value and important contribution towards the character and appearance of the heritage asset and its setting.
- **Medium:** Themes, features, buildings or spaces which are important at regional level or sometimes higher, with some cultural importance and some contribution towards the character and appearance of the heritage asset and its setting.

- **Low:** Themes, features, buildings or spaces which are usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or their value. Minor cultural importance and contribution to the character or appearance of the heritage asset and its setting.
- **Neutral:** These themes, spaces, buildings or features have little or no cultural value but do not detract from the character or appearance of the heritage asset and its setting.
- **Intrusive:** Themes, features, buildings or spaces which detract from the values of the heritage asset, its setting, character and appearance. Efforts should be made to remove or enhance these features.

Key Elements Of Significance

- As a Grade II listed building designed by one of the leading practices of the Post-War Period, HKPA
- As a key building in the wider historic campus of Reading University
- For its impressive structural qualities derived from a variety of lines of architectural enquiry including Brutalism and Japanese methods of construction
- For its designed setting including the re-imagining of the historic carriageway and ornamental pond and the use of colour as a metaphor for the surrounding landscape
- For the contextual and rare use of pigmented concrete in two tones

- For the expression of 'vertebrate architecture' as a means of spatial planning and educational engineering in building design
- For the consistent use of materials on the interiors, including timber and steel, which give a coherence and unity across the building

Impacts On Historic Significance

The building is not particularly old and has not been through a huge number of changes though there are certain areas where there has been change to the interior layout. The condition of the building and its structural and cosmetic issues notwithstanding, these internal changes have not been damaging to the key areas of the historic building. The following list just makes note of the alterations.

- Changes to the ground floor Porters Area and a small infill extension to the south west
- First floor plan changes and original partitions removed
- Second floor locker spaces lost and enclosed by new rooms
- Corridor infill on the third floor
- Loss of plan form to the flat

SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Evidential

“The potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.”

Low Significance

URS is a relatively recent building which has been well-documented since construction and is supported by recent scholarship. There is consequently little more to know about the construction techniques and skills that went into it that we do not already understand. Of note in terms of original archive material is the fact that this assessment has been unable to source the extensive RIBA archives of the HKPA practice as these are currently not accessible (Please see RIBA response note at Appendix B). There is the possibility to understand more about the building's design genesis and construction within this archive but this is not thought to be hugely significant – more an embellishment of what we already know.

Its use as an educational building for a specific subject meant it was a rather bespoke piece of architecture, the design of which was closely allied with functional requirements. This is a facet shared by a number of university buildings of the Post-War period and does have something to tell us about the way in which Post-War architects provided purpose-built spaces that were often client-led and programmatic in their design ethos. This is an important facet of URS and is manifest principally in the plan form of the ground and first floors mostly. This tells us about how the building was used for teaching and learning and expresses its social engineering, and this is a part of its ongoing evidential value.

For the above reasons the building's evidential value is considered to be low.

Historic

“The ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.”

The historic value of the URS Building rests principally on its association to HKPA. HKPA were a complex and interesting Post-War practice where support and collaboration were key to the output.

The four partners all worked closely together, overseeing each other's work. For such a practice, there was a remarkable degree of coherence in the aesthetic qualities of their architecture. Their key buildings – of which URS would be one – demonstrate a consistent expression of historic reference, focus on structural form and attention to detail with materials and finishes. URS expresses all these attributes and for its place in the canon of HKPA's work, has considerable historic value.

One of these attributes can loosely be termed contextualism and this is manifest in the use of colour which was designed to match the existing buildings on the campus at the time of construction and echoing and continuing, of the historic campus in the new building.

HKPA designed a number of important Post-War buildings and their work in the sphere of higher education – particularly at Oxford and Cambridge colleges – is well represented on the national list. Their work was widely published and has received

consistent critical and scholarly attention, most recently as part of the C20 architects series published by the RIBA/C20 Society. Their largest and most notable project, Roehampton Lane (the Alton Estate) is one of the key works of Modern Movement architecture in Post War Britain and remains a touchstone for architects. Although there were a few private commissions, the legacy of the practice is largely either public or educational and this echoes the origins of the four men at the LCC Architects Dept in the early years of practice. Within the context of their work, the URS building stands as something of a culmination of their collective ideas but is not hugely noteworthy or pioneering as an expression of them. Ideas about structural expression are well-evidenced in their earlier work, which would include the Hilda Besse building at St Anthony's and the work at Downing College in Oxford and the boldness of form evidenced by Roehampton and St Annes had also been explored before. URS took the idea of structural timber forms in concrete – trabeation – to a logical and large scale conclusion and for that, does hold historic value but it was not widely copied and inside their oeuvre was only continued in less successful projects like the Weston Estate.

SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

There is also historic value attached to the history of the College of Estate Management, the life of which had begun immediately after the First World War having been founded by Sir William Wells in 1919. Three years later, the College was granted a Royal Charter which would detail the core purpose of the college, namely to provide truly accessible, relevant and cost-effective education, enabling students to enhance careers, increase professionalism and contribute to a better built environment. The University College of Estate Management celebrated its centenary in 2019. The URS Building and the residential hall also designed by HKPA were purpose built for the College after it sought closer ties with Reading University in 1967.

For these reasons the historic value of the URS building is considered to be medium overall.

Architectural & Aesthetic

"The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place."

BY ELEVATION

NORTH – HIGH

SOUTH – MEDIUM

WEST – HIGH

EAST – LOW

EXTERIORS – VARIED SEE PLANS

INTERIORS – VARIED SEE PLANS

LANDSCAPE VARIED SEE PLANS

Introduction

The architectural value of the URS Building rests on a number of interrelated values to do with its design, materiality and setting. These elements are below taken in turn as a prelude to significance judgements about the four principal elevations and their settings. Plan form and key interior spaces are then discussed. The values given in the text are then expressed in a series of coloured plans which are given at the end of the section.

Design

The URS building is architecturally distinctive and is a developmental expression of a number of sensibilities of the HKPA practice throughout their active years. Of primary value to the aesthetic of URS is HKPA's collective interest in expression of structure and the legibility of structural components in any given design. Although this is seen in a number of HKPA buildings, the scale and repetition of the beams at URS make it one of the most expressive of any of their major works and the trabeation is an important visual component in this regard. This element of the design also had an important relationship to Japanese architecture, which was a touchstone for a number of important architects Post-War, including the Smithsons. There is also value in the expression of 'vertebrate architecture' where functional sequences of spaces were designed as nodes off a main, central spine and where the movement of people was a considered element of the design. HKPA were concerned with this in most of their projects and it again echoed wider pre-conceptions of the period – particularly in higher education. Sir Denys Lasdun's Academic Teaching Wall at the University of East Anglia (UEA) was a larger

version of this socially-engineered solution for large-scale teaching spaces where laboratory, seminar and faculty accommodation was concentrated in repeating sequences off a central spine corridor that had a social function. Some of those ideas are expressed – albeit in a smaller way – at URS, with stairwells, corridors, atria and communal breakout spaces expressed centrally on plan as part of circulation.

Materiality

Concrete was the chosen material for HKPA on a number of their most important projects and the firm developed a high level of sophistication in using both in situ and precast types of the material. The firm's oeuvre has been widely characterised as Brutalist and this indeed holds true for many of their major, early works including Roehampton and Acland Burghley School, both of which rely on exposed concrete finishes for their aesthetic character. Acland Burghley is rather a pre-cursor to URS as the structure is a combination of pre-cast and in-situ concrete elements, clad with pre-cast panels with an exposed aggregate finish of Walley flints. At URS, the distinctive two-tone colouring does carry significance both as an interesting contextual design element and as an aesthetic choice.

Setting

The immediate setting of the building is part of its architectural design and there is a formal and designed relationship between some of the internal and external spaces. Most significant in this regard is the covered walkway to the northern side, Chancellor's Way. This is a modern interpretation of a historic route and shows a deference in the architectural design to the historic context of the site.

SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

An ornamental pond to the west is another element and there is an internal courtyard on plan. The wider parkland setting was also a highly considered element in the design and the building was meant to respond to the existing planting and trees – some of this planting has gone but the echoes of it are carried in the building's visual identity.

Elevations

For the combined expression of these elements, there is a differential in significance between the various facades, how they are seen in near and long views and how they sit within the landscape. The northern and western elevations are considered to be high for their expression of architectural form and visual relationship with the formal and informal landscape settings. The southern elevation is medium as it is not as appreciable from any distance and is seen as part of the wider built environment of the campus to the south. The eastern end is considered to be low for the same reason and because it has less visual interest than the other elevations.

Interiors

There is a considerable variance in the architectural and visual significance of the interiors. This is a reflection of the fact that concentrated efforts were clearly made by HKPA in the design to give certain areas more visual impact or identity than others – a fact reflected in the list description's exclusion of all internal partitions between rooms. The stair cores and atria are considered to be of high significance for their expression of materials and importance to the circulation routes which connect the spine corridors on all floors except the basement and the roof. The larger, communal round floor spaces are also considered to be either high or medium but most of the teaching rooms and smaller offices are considered to be low. Areas of later alteration are either low or neutral and this would include the current Porter's areas and entrance. The significance of the corridors is varied on every level, getting less significant to the upper levels than on the ground and first floor. Where elements have been lost – like the locker/breakout areas – there is less significance due to these changes in plan form.

Communal

"The meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory."

Low Significance

As a building with little or no public profile or access, the wider communal value of the building is minimal. Within the grounds of the University and as part of the life of the university however, there is significance attached to it by those who have taught or learnt within it or who have experienced it inside and out as part of the wider campus. As a result of this the communal value is considered to be low.

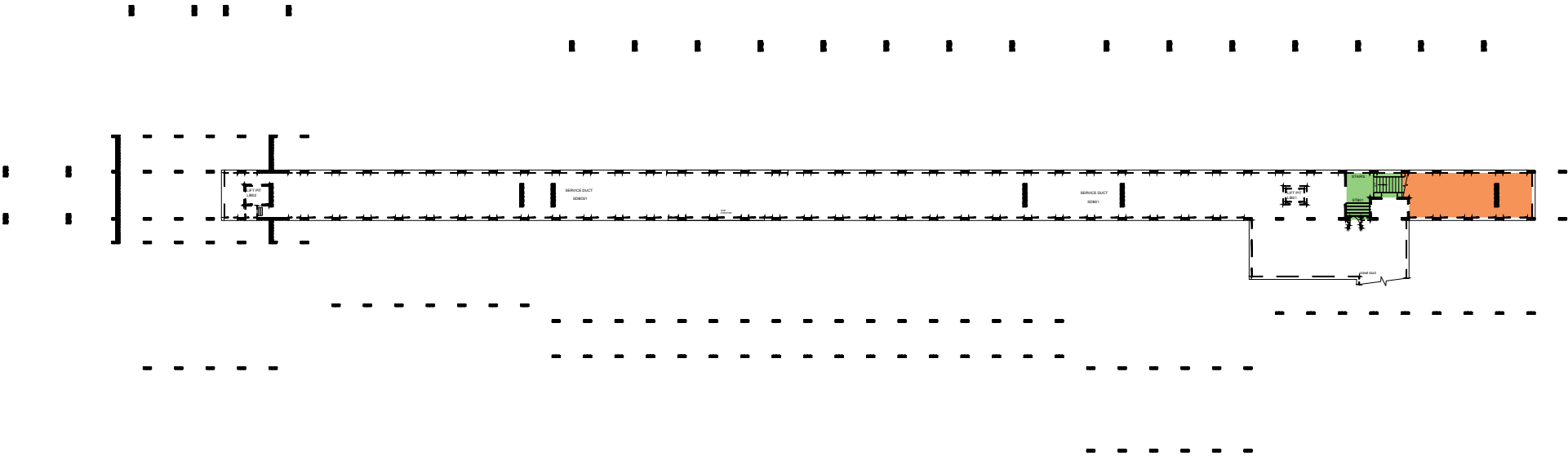
SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.2 Significance Plans

BASEMENT

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Neutral
- Detrimental

This plan is not to scale



SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

GROUND FLOOR

■

 High

■

 Medium

■

 Low

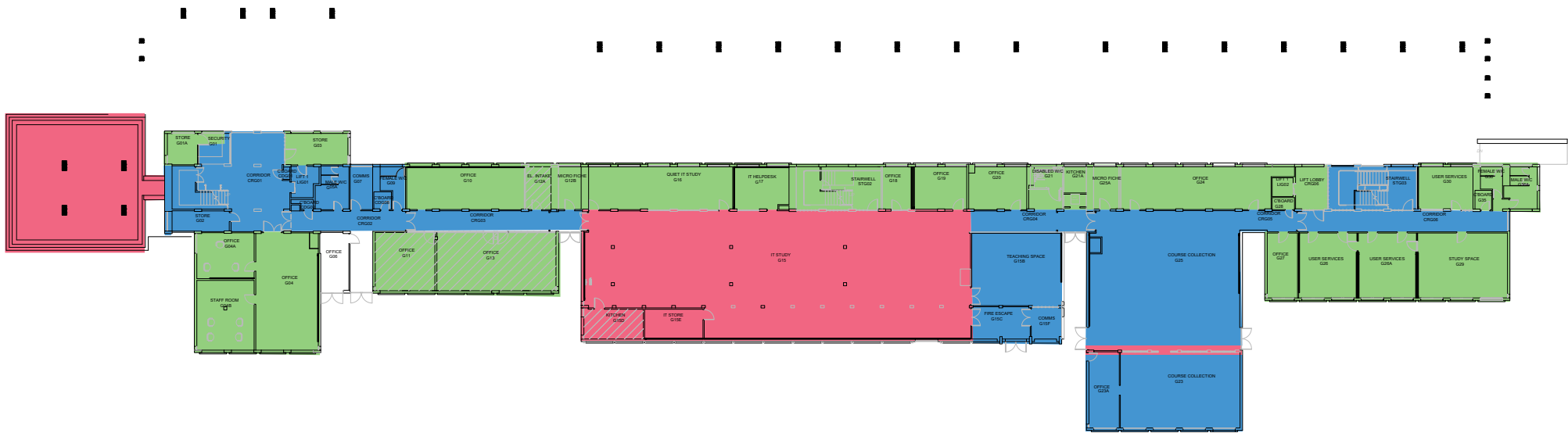
■

 Neutral

■

 Detrimental

This plan is not to scale

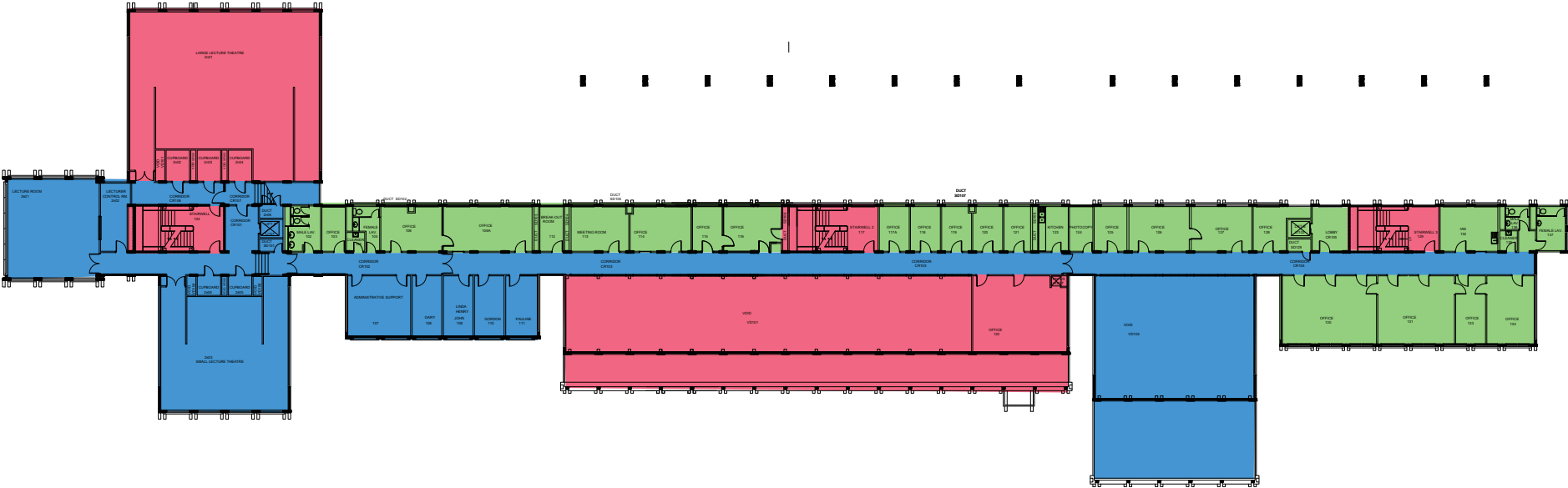


SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

FIRST FLOOR

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Neutral
- Detrimental

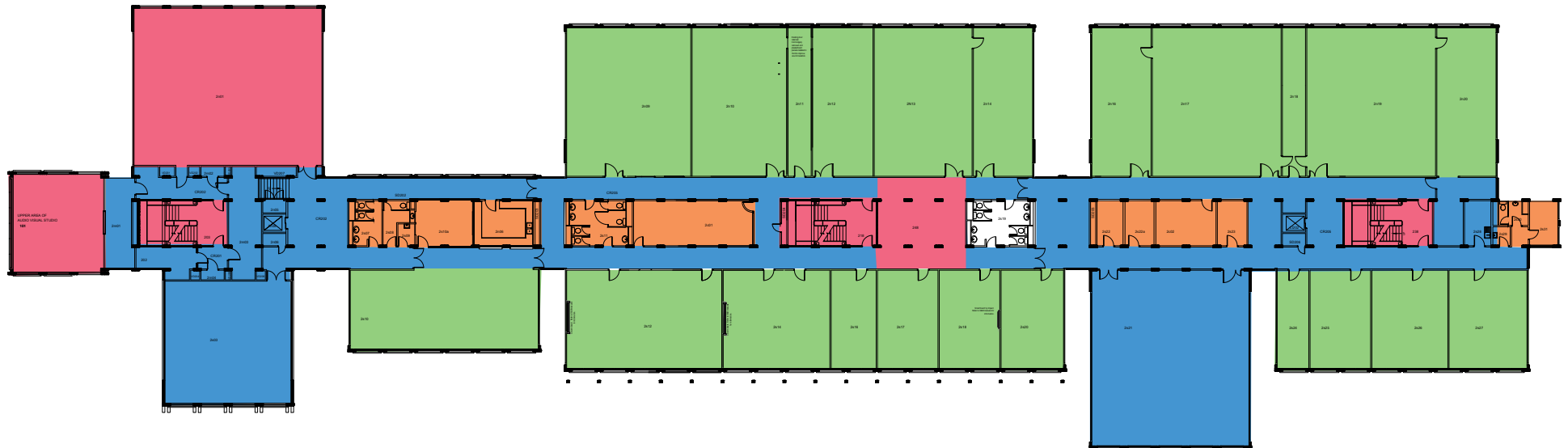
This plan is not to scale



SECOND FLOOR

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Neutral
- Detrimental

This plan is not to scale

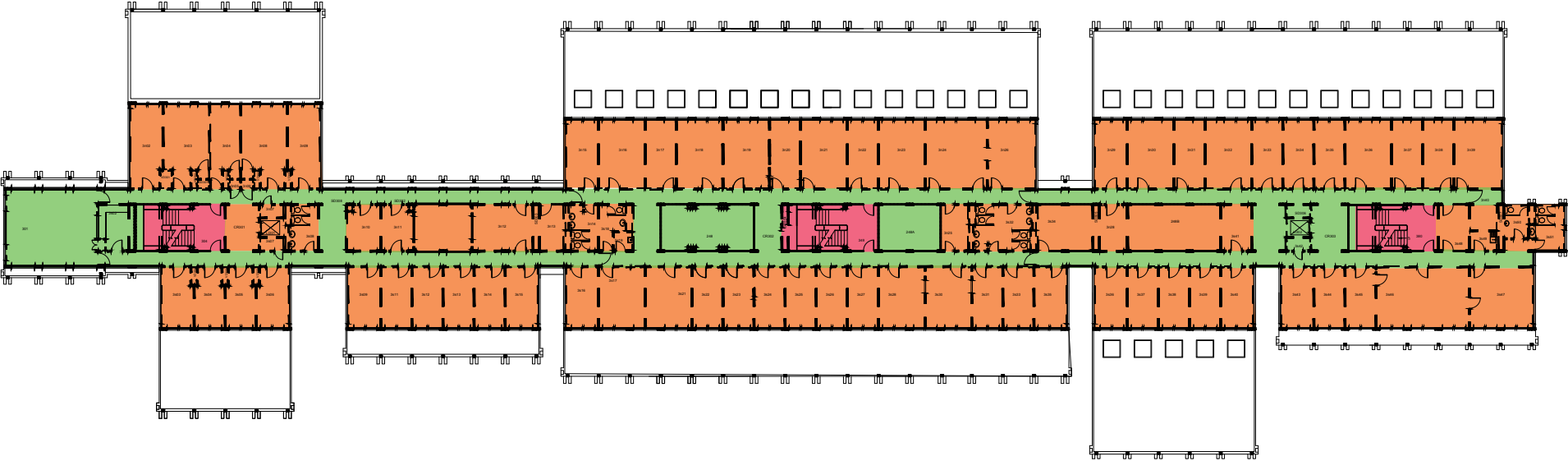


SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

THIRD FLOOR

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Neutral
- Detrimental

This plan is not to scale

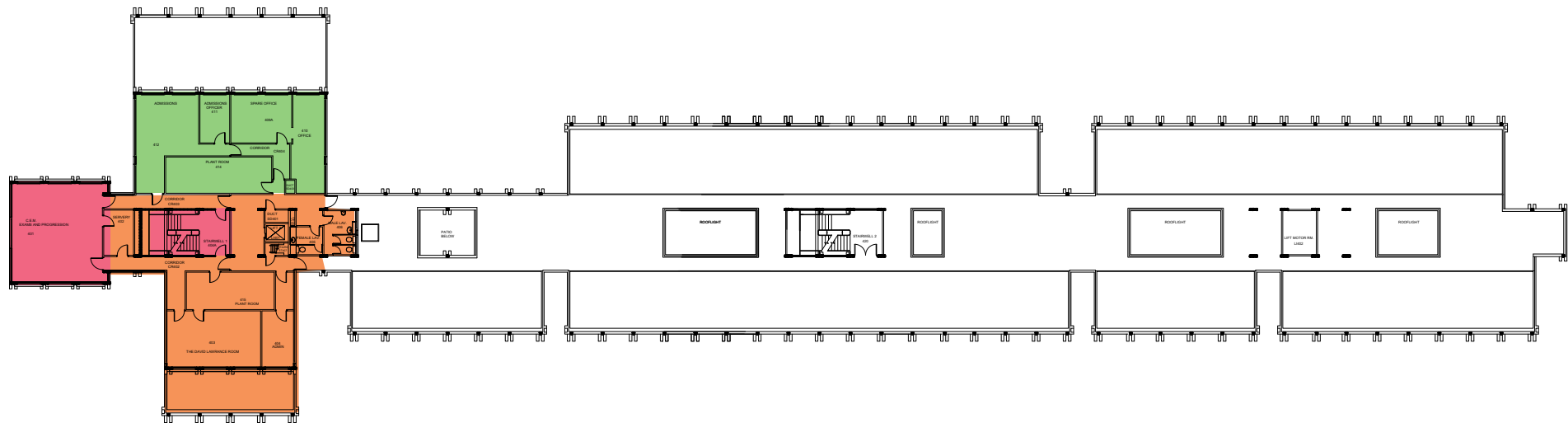


SECTION 4.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

FOURTH FLOOR

- High
■ Medium
■ Low
■ Neutral
■ Detrimental

This plan is not to scale



SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

5.1 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been written to be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement (DAS) produced by the architects Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt. The various elements of the scheme, have all been developed by the architects in the context of consistent heritage advice and historic assessment. Thus, the external and internal works for the listed building here assessed are considered to be, individually and collectively, conservation-led. The URS Building has its own setting, some of which was responded to as part of the original scheme. There has been a particular drive in this suite of works to re-energise and restore the immediate setting in areas of high significance. In addition, there are other heritage assets on the campus and although none of these are really in the immediate vicinity, the impact of the scheme on them is also assessed here.

The primary drivers of this project are detailed in the DAS and amount to a comprehensive effort to put the URS Building – a notable piece of Post-War architectural heritage by HPKA – back at the forefront of campus identity and amenity. The building is currently not in use and presents a number of refurbishment challenges to make it fit for the next phase of its life. This includes repair of the concrete, improvements in environmental performance and upgrade of existing fabric as well as functional alterations for new uses to serve academic and social functions.

This part of the report follows the sequence of proposed changes as they are set out in the DAS before a concluding section makes a judgement on the overall impact of the scheme against the policies in the NPPF.

It is the finding of this section that in NPPF terms, the combined impact of the scheme is at the lesser end of 'less than substantial harm' to the listed building. Weighed with the public benefit of re-use for academic purposes and with the environmental and fabric repairs proposed, this package of works is therefore acceptable and proportionate to the significance of the heritage asset.

5.2 Heritage Note and Commentary on Consultation.

At Stage 3 the Purcell Heritage Consultancy team have continued to provide consistent advice to the university and the project team through the DTM's and in a series of other meetings concerning design detail and conservation. As with Stage 2 there has been engagement with the LPA and the Twentieth Century Society – the statutory consultee for all listed buildings post-1914. These discussions have been broadly positive giving clear steer on certain design decisions.

Twentieth Century Society

Following presentation of the proposals the Twentieth Century Society gave their initial view in a letter dated 27th September. In it they were broadly supportive of the scheme and singled out the approach taken to the new screen in the former print room, the new stair enclosures to the east and west stairs and the enclosure of the lightwells on Level 2. The Society noted a degree of harm from the loss of plan form on Level 3 but agreed with the approach taken to provide better accessibility which in their view mitigated any heritage impact.

The Society also confirmed in the letter that the proposed external stair cores to the east and west warranted further discussion internally at the Society and they withheld commentary until a further letter was received on 2nd October. This letter raised concerns regarding both need and scale. Following a response from the project team on these issues, the matter was then discussed at the Society's October Casework Committee and their view was contained in a further letter dated 10th October. Although convinced by the need the Society expressed concern about the design. As a result of this commentary, the design has been further modified in response and has been the focus of effort to achieve a compliant design that is aesthetically compatible with the listed building.

In summary, the engagement with the Society has been both positive and supportive and their comments have been responded to through heritage advice and architectural design.

Purcell/ACG

Throughout Stage 3, the close collaborative approach between Purcell and ACG has continued with constant advice on suitability, risk and heritage impact being paramount areas of discussion on all aspects of the proposals. This has meant that Stage 3, as with Stage 2 has resulted in a conservation-led scheme that has responded to the brief and the needs of the university in a manner consistent with the building's significance as a heritage asset.

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

5.3 Magnitude of Impact Definition

This report uses the following definitions to express the level of impact on the URS Building and its surrounding heritage context

High Beneficial: The development considerably enhances the heritage values of the identified heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

Medium Beneficial: The development enhances to a clearly discernible extent the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

Low Beneficial: The development enhances to a minor extent the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

No Harm/No Change: The development does not change the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

Low Adverse: The development erodes to a minor extent the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

Medium Adverse: The development erodes to a clearly discernible extent the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

High Adverse: The development substantially affects the heritage values of the heritage assets, or the ability to appreciate those values.

5.4 Heritage Impact Assessment

5.4.1 Concrete Repair

The benefits of repairing the historic concrete at the URS building are really twofold. Firstly, there is a necessity to clean the concrete and protect it as much as possible from future decay as a result of progression of the carbonation front and associated corrosion of reinforcement and cracking and spalling of concrete. Secondly there is the need to address the range of different patch repairs which are indicative of a number of different defects including previous repair efforts. Both these important elements have been addressed in the survey document out of which has come a range of recommendations. The work done by CRL, Curtins and Purcell does constitute in and of itself a long-lasting heritage benefit to the listed building in that it provides a baseline assessment and a range of best practise methodologies that can be used both now and, in the future, to protect the historic building. URS is notable, if not completely unique in its use of pigmented concrete and this combined with the structural language of the architecture is part of its significance. The heritage offer to clean protect and conserve the concrete at URS is a specific package of work that will help define the nature of concrete repairs going forward and could be the start of a long-term routine maintenance programme across the building.

It is proposed to clean the concrete by a method proportionate to its heritage significance which will go some way to tackling the biological growth, grime and discoloration off the surface and reinstate the potency of the colour the building was intended to be. Whilst the precise method for this is not yet known, trials and discussions with leading practitioners

will ensure that the most suitable techniques will be used. The subsequent coating of the concrete which will happen both on the in-situ and pre-cast elements will likewise be subject to trial by the leading practitioners in the field following discussion between the university, Curtins, the manufacturers and Purcell. At this stage it is proposed that a clear coating be used to protect the cleaned concrete and to preserve and enhance its colour and appearance.

The patch repairs that are proposed will be building wide but they will be focused on high priority repairs where deterioration or previous repairs have made the building unsafe from a health and safety perspective.

The concrete repair works are considered to be of High Beneficial impact to the listed building and its setting and an enhancement to the setting of the other heritage assets on the campus.

5.4.2 Additional Stairs

The two additional staircases that will be situated on the exterior of the building have been carefully positioned so as not to impact the key elevations. Seen in views from the north and from the west the building is very much a landmark on the campus and protecting the northern and western elevations in close, medium and long views has been of paramount importance to the scheme. The functional requirements that have driven the need for additional new staircases and the design evolution of them, is set out carefully in the DAS but the impact of them on the listed building is assessed in detail here.

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

The design of the stairs is obviously dictated in part by regulation and accessibility. Beyond that, the scale, form and materiality of the proposed new structures have been the subject of considerable debate with the preferred option being a new form that is distinct from the expressive language of URS and which protects views out from one of the building's key internal spaces.

The rounded form is designed to be complimentary and distinctive while purposely not trying to blend, ape or mimic the powerful trabeated style of URS. The material qualities of the structures are equally important in this regard and are designed to contrast but not detract. It is considered that the clear break with form and materiality that they represent will keep the legibility of the URS building on these elevations, intact. As shown clearly in the historic development plans, the adjacent built environment of the southern and eastern settings of the URS were already well developed and these locations therefore also have less of an impact on the wider historic environment.

There is an obvious visual impact from the additional staircores on the listed building and although there are also clear functional and operational benefits, these impacts are important to acknowledge. The two staircores are of a similar, matching design but will each have a slightly different relationship to the host building, and they are discussed individually below.

The Southern Stair (West End)

The decision-making process around the design of this staircore has been focused around whether or not it should be rectilinear or curved. For two primary reasons, the curved option is proposed, and that decision is primarily based on heritage grounds. As

the building carries its language from inside to outside and vice versa – its structure legible wherever you are in it or wherever you are stood in its setting – it has been just as important to consider views from it as toward it. Any rectilinear volume placed in the recess where the new stair is proposed would block important views from the oriel window on the eastern elevation of the southern lecture theatre. This was not considered acceptable from a heritage perspective because there was an opportunity to design it out. The opportunity has been taken and therefore the curved elevation protects views from and to this part of the building.

Secondly, and perhaps more broadly there has been a focus on the celebration of the stair core as an architectural statement and feature in its own right. This of course has a long track record in architectural history but there are particularly good examples of expressive staircores in post war buildings and these often do have a language distinct from the host building even if they are contemporaneous.

It is acknowledged that this is a major intervention to the listed building and for all the reasons above, combined with the vital new functionality it will provide, a balance has been struck between heritage concerns and the optimum viable use of the building for the future. With all these elements considered together the impact of the southern stair on the listed building is considered to be medium adverse but that impact is strongly mitigated for all the reasons given.

The Eastern Stair

The proposed new eastern stair will be seen and experienced rather differently from that on the South elevation. Designed as a pair, the staircores will have the same overall form and materials but the eastern

stair is a combined design which includes stairs and a lift core that are visually expressed externally as distinct volumes – curved and rectilinear, respectively. This staircore is less an insertion and more of an extension and the massing of it has been designed specifically to conserve key views of the listed building from the north looking obliquely across the northern setting to the east. Once again, the break in form and the clear new language of the architecture proposed is seen as the right response to a post-war building of such idiosyncratic and expressive form. For the reasons that this extension is less integrated into the whole and that the eastern elevation is of a lower significance than the southern elevation, the impact of this design is considered to be low adverse.

5.4.3 Landscape Overview

The setting of URS has altered little over time as the University has developed the Whiteknights campus. Buildings to the southern and eastern side in particular, in the form of the Miller and Wagner buildings, the Allen Laboratory and to the northeast, the library always meant the western and northern elevations were more open. The western and northern settings have seen little change, and these settings are seen as significant both in how the building is viewed and the contribution it makes to the wider campus. The landscape strategy has therefore been to concentrate on these areas of higher significance and address some long-standing issues to do with the undercroft area in particular. Planting has also been a focus to improve the soft landscaping in key areas and a new bike and bin store is proposed to support functionality and servicing. It is considered that these changes are medium beneficial to the listed building and its setting as they improve visual identity, key elements of designed setting, functionality and wayfinding. It is also considered that

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

these elements cause no harm to the surrounding heritage context of the campus and the settings of the adjacent assets. The proposals are dealt with individually below.

5.4.4 Landscape – Paving & Undercroft

The original brick paving to the undercroft has a number of condition and performance issues that require attention as part of this scheme to improve the setting. A number of pavers on steps and in other areas require repair and replacement and this will be done like-for-like. Where possible pavers will be cleaned and re-used. The current nosings are worn and wholesale replacement is here proposed to give better grip in wet weather. The anthracite step nosings will form two neat black lines along the edgings of the steps along the whole length of the undercroft area. This is both a visual improvement from the current situation and a functional and safety improvement for users. There is a visual impact to the scheme, but this is seen as a cosmetic improvement to the listed building and the combined impacts of this element are therefore considered to be low beneficial.

5.4.5 Landscape – Access

The current ramped access to the building varies at either end in terms of scale, gradient and compliance. The ramp to the west is of higher significance to the listed building in terms of use and visibility and this one will be restored and new handrails to match existing put in. The ramp to the east requires a shallower gradient and therefore needs to be adapted and lengthened. This will be done in matching materials to limit visual impact and is being done alongside the wider refurbishment of the brick paving throughout. This will maintain

the visual identity of the undercroft as a formal, designed setting. The alteration is a change from the original design and so a small degree of harm is acknowledged. However, as part of the wider strategy to improve functionality and user experience and to improve the accessibility from the eastern side –as well as the benefit of enhancing the aesthetic significance of the undercroft through repair and cleaning, this harm is more than mitigated. Overall, the proposals for the ramps at both ends is seen as low beneficial to the listed building and its setting.

5.4.6 Landscape – Vegetation

The removal of the existing hedge along Chancellor's Way will mean the loss of a non-original feature which detracts in a minor way from views of the listed building. This side of the building is highly significant for the manner in which it was designed to address its setting and the design of the elevation indeed responded to the mature trees that remained from the parkland setting of Whiteknights. As seen in the 1973 Architectural Review image (page 27) and from the contemporary Colin Amery commentary, there was a close dialogue between the architecture and the landscape on this side and to a certain extent this has been eroded over time. The proposals here are to re-instate some of that lost relationship and introduce planting more suitable and responsive to the site and setting of the building. Of particular note, is the proposal to restore a mature tree to the recess on the northern side which has a distinctive and architectonic value to the listed building. Combined these proposals constitute a medium benefit to the listed building and its setting.

5.4.7 Bike and Bin Store

The URS Building currently has no provision for bin storage, and this commonly has a detrimental impact by virtue of there often being unhoused bins around the outside. This consolidated bike and bin store, located to the western elevation will solve that issue as well as providing much-needed bicycle parking space. Designed as a long, low volume that is sited in an area currently used for parking, the design of this new building will not interfere with the important views of the west elevation of the URS and views of Chancellor's Way will be unaffected. There is a degree of harm to the setting that is acknowledged but is mitigated by the thoughtful design and by the functional ancillary support to the listed building. However, as a new element in an area of high significance, there is a low adverse impact from this element of the proposals.

5.5 Interior

5.5.1 Interior Overview

The interior spaces of the URS are rather mixed in terms of both historic development and current look-and-feel. There are areas where the original character of the building, its structural language and style are fully appreciable, but these contrast with areas where later accretion or alteration has obscured the original design intentions. This section of the HIA assesses the impact of a range of internal proposals that have been collectively considered to bring a sense of unity back to the interior of the listed building. Focusing on allowing the language and tone of the original design to remain and in places be enhanced, these proposals are designed to bring back a consistency to the interiors that has been lost or eroded over time. Overall, the

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

conservation-led approach has been driven by the significance assessment of interior spaces in this HIA and represents a collaborative effort to ensure a sustainable future for the listed building.

5.5.2 Main Entrance

The current situation at the main entrance is very mixed in terms of legibility of the historic fabric. The mismatch of signage, coverings and painting have led to a loss of significance. The proposals seek to put back the clarity of this area and celebrate the structural components of the building. The concrete uprights and themes will be stripped back to their original finish on the new lighting scheme to create a welcome space that celebrates the architectural detailing that has been obscured by later addition and alteration. The new wooden screen is not seen as impactful on what is a space with a robust architectural character. The entrance foyer has particular importance as a space where the relationship between the external appearance and internal appearance of the building can be read and appreciated. The celebration of these key elements and a stripping back of later accretions is therefore seen to be of medium benefit in heritage terms.

5.5.3 Double Height 'Print Room'

The print room is an area of high significance to the listed building which indicates the former function and celebrates the internal and external language of the building in a highly visible way. It has been central to the internal scheme to retain the key qualities of the print room – its scale, language and material quality. This has been done by prioritising the structural components and stripping back plays of accretion and paint which have interrupted or obscured the room as a complete and unified space. For functional

reasons it is necessary to have a dividing structure that enables the university to use both sides of the room, and this has been achieved by the insertion of a folding screen which when open leaves the integrity of the space intact. The resultant proposals are then the result of valuing the intrinsic architectural qualities of the building and only inserting new elements where necessary for function or performance. It is notable that a material from the original design has been chosen in the form of woodwool slab. It is acknowledged that the insertion of the screen and to a lesser extent the baffles in the ceiling do have an impact on the listed building. However, the balance that has been struck between enhancing the legibility of the original design and the functional requirements for a sustainable future for the space mean that there is no harm caused to the listed building from this element of the proposals.

5.5.4 Lecture Theatres

The lecture theatres are important set-piece spaces within the building. Although they are of different sizes the spaces themselves, their material makeup and architectural composition allow for legibility of the HKPA original design intent. The original materials palette was quite simple and effective, consisting of exposed beams, timberwork and wood wool insulation. Both theatres have a raked seating arrangement that looks down towards the presentation area side lit by distinctive Oriel windows on either side. It has been important in these spaces to consider the clarity and aesthetic value of HKPA's original design and to stick to a limited materials palette for the refurbishment. As with the print room on the ground floor woodwool baffles have been used in the ceiling and the distinctive timber slat work is replicated on either side of the new seating. As

elsewhere in the building where concrete has been painted over this will be stripped, allowing the original finish to be legible once more. These proposals will bring back a sense of unity between the two lecture theatres and make them key communal areas where the character of the building is carried most visibly. For these reasons the proposals to both lecture theatres are considered to be of medium benefit to the listed building.

5.5.5 Second Floor Circulation/Lightwells

These areas were once open circulation space, imagined by HKPA as areas of social interaction – a pause perhaps in the long corridors that define the character of the architecture as a spine with functional rooms on either side. Infill and partial enclosure meant that these spaces had lost their architectural and social value, and it has been a focus of these proposals to bring both those qualities back. The removal of later partitioning and an opening up of these spaces to the roof lights will effectively return these areas to their original plan form which is seen as a considerable benefit. The structure of the beams will be legible once more, with the important circulation routes visible either side. The social value of having a space to pause to study or to interact is considered to be a heritage benefit in the context of what HKPA originally intended to achieve and this, coupled with the clear aesthetic benefits mean that this element of the proposals is considered to be highly beneficial to the listed building.

5.5.6 General Teaching Spaces

The significance of these spaces is different on every floor but collectively they represent most of the interior floor space in the building. The focus for the proposals has been to ensure unity of finish and

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

consistency of materiality – qualities that were part of the original HKPA design. These qualities have been lost as spaces have diverged in look and feel and as subdivisions have divided larger teaching spaces. The proposals for these spaces then, as elsewhere, include the use of wood wool slab for baffling and the stripping back of any accretions to reveal better the concrete structure. These general approaches will enhance the listed building and are seen overall as low beneficial.

5.5.7 Third Floor Circulation

The corridor spaces on the third floor are the narrowest in the building and although they do reflect the spine corridor concept at this upper level, they are no longer compatible with academic use for accessibility requirements. The design ethos therefore on this level has been to open up these spaces whilst rejuvenating and celebrating the key elements of significance in this case the timber screens to the light wells. The existence of the corridors is echoed in the floor plan by use of differing floorcoverings which will pick out the circulation routes and delineate between corridor and resource and social study space. It must be acknowledged that there is a degree of harm to this change through loss of fabric and plan form. However, it is considered that this is mitigated through design and justified for reasons of both functionality and accessibility. These spaces will be important in the social life of the building and with the screens to the light wells restored there is further balance between harm and benefit. Overall, these changes in the circulation on the third floor are nevertheless considered to be low adverse in impact.

5.5.8 Timber Glazed Screens

The timber glazed screens in the URS building carry particular significance for their consistency, design and materiality. Encountered at all stairwells within the building these screens reflect the structural language of the building – albeit in timber rather than concrete – and contribute to an aesthetically pleasing sequence of spaces. The proposals balance restoration of the fabric of the screens with Interventions to improve their performance. As with other elements of the scheme the most important thing has been to focus on unity of design across the building. This has diverged since construction with some screens over painted, some varnished and some left untreated. The proposals have therefore focused on bringing back a coherent treatment to all the screens so that wherever they are within the building they have the same visual identity. The key change is the removal of the wired glass for replacement with clear safety glass, but this is not considered to be hugely detrimental in terms of loss of fabric because it will increase visibility and provide consistent treatment. This balance of restoration and functional improvement is considered neutral in heritage terms and therefore there is no harm from this element of the proposals.

5.5.9 Internal Stair Cores

The internal stair cores are of high significance for the manner in which they carry the language of the HKPA design and for their fundamental relationship to the circulation. Whilst they remain largely intact in terms of plan form, their material and aesthetic qualities have been eroded by overpainting and the introduction of non-original materials. The intention has, as elsewhere, been a balance of restorative effort

and suitable new design elements. The proposed timber guard panels are reflective of this balance being slightly larger than those existing but being of the original material. The current colour of the balustrade is considered to be detrimental to the spaces and this will be altered to better harmonise with the use of natural materials to the screens and panels. Overall, the look of these spaces will better reflect the original intention, and the consistency of treatment will ensure coherence across the building. For this, these changes are considered to be medium beneficial to the listed building.

5.6 Wayfinding

The exterior wayfinding elements and lighting at both the east and west entrance are required for the successful functioning of the building and have been developed as part of a strategy for the refurbishment of the undercroft area. To keep the visual identity of Chancellor's Way intact as a long, low undercroft the new balustrading and signage has been designed to have minimal impact on key views. This has been done primarily by making them 'open' rather than solid and this keeps the long views of the steps intact. New lighting and signage are not seen as harmful and will enable better wayfinding and visibility. There is a degree of harm acknowledged from the new rails, but this is minimal for the reasons given. Therefore, only low adverse impact is registered.

SECTION 5.0: HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

5.7 Conclusions

The combined impacts of the Stage 3 works package, firstly, cannot be seen in isolation and should be considered as part of the wider works contained within the Stage 2 package. It is important to note also that these works must be assessed in the wider context of the University's broader and more long-standing commitment to the conservation and maintenance of the listed building. This includes a commitment to one of the most important elements of the building – the concrete.

Taken collectively these works are part of a fully comprehensive package that addresses some of the challenges the building is facing. They have been raised collectively in close collaboration between client, heritage consultants' stakeholders and the architects. A significant amount of expertise in the field of conservation, surveying and historic research has informed these proposals and all the elements have been focused on making the URS Building both fit for purpose and cared for – performing the function it was designed to perform in a sustainable manner.

The various elements assessed in this section have a variety of impacts individually but collectively represent a net benefit to the heritage asset. It is the finding of this section that in NPPF terms, the combined impact of the scheme is at the lesser end of 'less than substantial harm' to the listed building. Weighed with the public benefit of re-use for academic purposes and with the environmental and fabric repairs proposed, this package of works is therefore acceptable and proportionate to the significance of the URS, its setting and the surrounding heritage context.

All rights in this work are reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means (including without limitation by photocopying or placing on a website) without the prior permission in writing of Purcell except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Applications for permission to reproduce any part of this work should be addressed to Purcell at info@purcelluk.com.

Undertaking any unauthorised act in relation to this work may result in a civil claim for damages and/or criminal prosecution. Any materials used in this work which are subject to third party copyright have been reproduced under licence from the copyright owner except in the case of works of unknown authorship as defined by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Any person wishing to assert rights in relation to works which have been reproduced as works of unknown authorship should contact Purcell at info@purcelluk.com.

Purcell asserts its moral rights to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Purcell® is the trading name of Purcell Architecture Ltd.

© Purcell 2024