

## Briefing Note

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**Our ref** 13801/04/JF/MLa  
**Date** 13 October 2021  
**To** Brighton and Hove City Council  
**From** Lichfields  
**Copy** Brighton College

**Subject** **Brighton College Performing Arts Building Application Ref. BH/2021/01845**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Application ref. BH/2021/01845 was considered at Planning Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 for:

*“Erection of a new Performing Arts Building, incorporating a 400 seat Theatre, 2no. Dance / Drama Studios, new 6th Form Centre, multiple new Classrooms and offices, storage areas, a Cafe and associated works.”*

1.2 Members resolved to defer the application seeking further clarity on:

- 1 Access to the performing arts building for all users
- 2 Extent of community use
- 3 Visualisations/views from outside the College
- 4 Transport/traffic impacts
- 5 Confirmation on the existing and proposed floorspaces

1.3 Further detail on these matters is outlined below to assist Members making a decision. Further information on the community use is provided in a separate note.

### **2.0 Accessibility to the performing arts building**

2.1 The proposed development is inclusive as required by Policy CP12 ‘Urban Design’. This policy requires that all development is inclusive, adaptable and accessible and Saved Policy HO19 requires new community facilities to be designed with accessibility for all members of the community. The design accords with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

2.2 In relation to accessibility, Members have requested further information on the design approach to the existing proposal and whether improved disabled access could be provided to all levels. The proposed development is accessible to all main floors with exception to the theatre balcony and technical balcony (third floor level).

2.3 Providing wheelchair access to these areas has been explored throughout the design process in discussions with the College and the approved Building Inspector, AIS. A note has been prepared by the architects, KRFT, which explains the design considerations that have informed the proposed wheelchair access (Appendix 1). In short:

- 1 To provide wheelchair access to these area, the lift would need to extend vertically which would change the massing of the building. Notably the curved roof would need to move

further north and so in the perspective view from the north (Home Ground/College Terrace) the building would appear relatively taller. Pre-application advice from the Council requested that opportunities to reduce the height of the building where possible were considered so that it was no taller than the Grade II listed Main Building. Providing wheelchair access to the building therefore needed to be considered alongside the Council's requirement to maintain the height in line with the Grade II listed building, and a balance struck to satisfy both requirements.

- 2 Other design constraints encountered when considering options for incorporating lift provision for all levels include compromising the structural design for the building and provision of necessary circulation routes, undermining the acoustic design for the theatre leading to potential noise issues arising from the theatre, and prohibiting roof maintenance access to the roof.
- 3 The College has an Access Policy to ensure full access to the curriculum and training for wheelchair users. For example:
  - (i) The in house lighting and sound control position at the back of the stalls is fully accessible and an additional variable height desk can be added at the side of the control desk for further technical control such as video or for a supervising staff member.
  - (ii) The motorised stage equipment enables training activities in technical theatre to take place at stage level to include wheelchair users.
  - (iii) There are control positions on stage from where a staff wheelchair user could operate flying equipment and orchestra pit lift using pendant controls.
- 4 The Building Regulations requirement is for 6 wheelchair spaces in the theatre. The proposed development provides 8 spaces in the stalls that provide good circulation, including level access to the stage, good level of comfort, proximity to toilets and acceptable visibility of the stage (including sightline for lip reading).

2.4 The proposed building has been designed to accord with Part M of the Building Regulations 2015, which sets the requirements for access to and use of buildings, and as above exceeds the required quantum of wheelchair spaces. Specific guidance has also been sought from AIS, noting that the auditorium is considered as a whole (rather than by level) with wheelchair access concentrated in the stalls where both level access and WC facilities are nearby. A note has been prepared by AIS which sets out a comparison of how the proposed development performs with 8 other new theatre projects and existing theatres (Appendix 2).

2.5 In addition, technically the inclusive theatre design for the audience has made provision for:

- 1 The hard of hearing with a Radio Frequency assisted hearing system, and projected surtitles such as Stage Text;
- 2 The visually impaired with short rows of seats which are easy to access near to the stage;
- 3 2 video links to studio spaces should there be relaxed performances or a neurodiverse audience.

### **3.0 Visualisations / views from outside the College**

- 3.1 KRFT Architects has prepared visuals of proposed building from views outside of the College campus (see Appendix 4). The visualisations have been prepared using winter photography and so present a worst case scenario with increased vegetation screening views from College Terrace and Walpole Terrace in Spring/Summer months.
- 3.2 A virtual walk-through of the proposal can be seen on Brighton College's consultation website: <https://www.brightoncollegeconsultation.com/virtual-walk-through>

### **4.0 Transport/traffic impacts**

- 4.1 Brighton College is within a highly accessible location.
- 4.2 Theatre and musical events (that can't take place in the Music School) currently take place in the Great hall and in small venues in Kemp Town. The proposed development will re-provide existing facilities (albeit much improved so as to be fit for educational and performance purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) and so it will not in itself give rise to a net increase in pupils or staff numbers. Therefore, there will be no additional daily car or cycle trips created by the proposed development. Notwithstanding, the Transport Statement has undertaken a worst-case analysis on the basis of the increased floorspace (628sqm) concluding that the traffic impact would be negligible.
- 4.3 The College anticipates holding the same events as it currently does – for example: up to three year group performances (separate performances by fourth form, fifth form and sixth form) at the theatre, that run for up to 4 nights each; end of term music concerts (where it involves orchestras that exceed the music school capacity); GCSE and A level drama performances; and other performance related events. The Transport Statement explains that it is expected that the typical number visiting the site to attend performances will be around 250 people with a worst case scenario of 90 trips associated with this. The College already hosts such events at the campus and manages potential traffic impact via a series of measures to promote sustainable transport which are set out in the submitted Transport Statement and Travel Plan, including:
- 1 Online ticketing system which will promote alternative methods of travel to single occupancy car travel and will be supervised as part of the Travel Plan Co-Ordinator's on-going monitoring. The system would promote non-car travel, car sharing and also signpost quieter non-residential areas for parking for events and, where possible, the use of other College sites from which the College might be able to operate a shuttle service – dependent on whether minibuses are free from being used for other school activities. It will be supervised as part of the Travel Plan Co-Ordinator's on-going monitoring.
  - 2 Walking incentives.
  - 3 Travel information service (for example locations of bus stops, taxi information etc.).
  - 4 Assigning a Travel Plan coordinator to conduct surveys, promote sustainable travel and implement measures.
- 4.4 In terms of trip generation arising from external performances in the evening and community outreach, it is considered that the maximum number of performance evenings could be up to 10 per year, comprising the following:
- 10 nights per year for partner schools (assuming performance each night over the 2 week period which is not expected to be the case)

- Any nights not wanted by partner schools could be used by other external hirers.

4.5 The external events would be subject to the same measures to reduce trips associated with performances. In particular, the online ticketing system will also be in place for any external community events on site. Transport to and from site for external community groups (partner schools and partnership with the Syrian refugee group) would be outside of rush hour times and during the holiday period as relevant, when other traffic flows are lower.

4.6 A Travel Plan was submitted as part of the planning application and an updated version will be secured within the S106 legal agreement reflecting the above.

## 5.0 Existing and proposed floorspace

5.1 Please see Appendix 5 which shows the existing and proposed floorspace figures and floorplans for the proposal (from page 26 of the Design and Access Statement). It shows that the overall proposed Gross Internal Area (GIA) is 3,205 sqm, compared to an existing GIA of 2,577sqm.

	Existing (PAC, Lester & Science Buildings)					Proposed (Project 175)				
	B1	00	01	02+	Subtotal	B1	00	01	02+	Subtotal
Teaching room (m2)	0	420	470	475	1365	141	0	134	285	560
Recital rooms (m2)	0	0	48	120	168	259	0	0	655	914
Dining / Cafe / Kitchen (m2)	0	107	0	0	107	0	274	0	0	274
Library (m2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
WC's / Changing (m2)	79	0	0	0	79	37	3	48	6	94
Admin (m2)	0	49	21	0	70	30	9	55	37	131
Common rooms (m2)	0	0	0	0	0		127	86	0	213
Misc (excl from NIA) (m2)	237	163	223	165	788	460	10	428	121	1019
TOTAL GIA (m2)					2577					3205
									+	628

5.2 The proposed development seeks to consolidate performing arts facilities that are currently dispersed across the campus including in the PAC building, and replace teaching space provided in the Lester building, both of which are proposed to be demolished. In particular, it will provide:

- A new sixth form area (to replace a small sixth form area currently within the Lester Building).
- Enhanced recital rooms/studio space and new theatre.
- Improved café area (to replace that lost in the PAC building).
- Teaching space in the form of classrooms to replace that lost in the Lester building (to teach English and computing).



**Appendix 1: KRFT Design Rationale Note**

**re: Lift provisions**

This design note has been written in response to queries raised by BHCC planning committee.

Brighton College will comply with current regulations and good practice to make reasonable provision for people to gain access and use the building and its facilities, regardless of disability, age or gender. It has been important to ensure that all rooms within the proposed could be accessed by all. A balance between internal functional requirements and external massing has been sought in response to planning and heritage concerns

Approved building inspector AIS, who have extensive experience of providing theatre buildings, have been consulted throughout the design development with regards to access issues. Theatre consultants SSV have also been appointed from concept design onwards. It was considered during design development that reasonable provision should include:

- Wheelchair users must be able to use all rooms within the project.
- Regulations require a minimum of 6 places for wheelchair users. Their location as discrete areas can be at the rear, front, side or within the seating. We have achieved up to 8 places at rear of the stalls (within 9m of the stage) Each have good independent circulation behind their positions and have had sightlines assessed by theatre consultants.
- For seating on a stepped terraced floor the locations at rear of stalls is considered suitable for cinemas / theatres as per Diagram 15 of part M (originally taken from BS8300). Positions have been designed flexibly to allow chairs and wheelchairs positions to alternate to allow mixed groups to sit together.
- Levels within theatre designed so that rear crossover (and seating) align with theatre stage to allow wheelchair access to stage on both sides via sound locks.
- A wheelchair user can operate lighting or sound from the control desk at stalls level. Includes space for a wheelchair user with special height requirements operating technical aspects of a show alongside the control desk.
- A wheelchair user can operate the flying system from a pendant at stage level and (if they have the upper body strength) helping rig lights on a lighting bar lowered to stage level, or tying on drapes to a rigging bar.
- A wheelchair user singer can be part of a choir at the side of the thrust stage configuration, on a raised Nivoflex platform.
- The theatre balcony and technical gallery can be accessed via stair which is ambulant accessible compliant.
- With further discussion with the H&S officer a wheelchair user performer being part of the orchestra in the pit (at the side of the stage or by being lowered on the mechanised orchestra lift).
- With further discussion with the H&S officer and the hiring of a mobile wheelchair lift on occasion to sit on the orchestra lift, a wheelchair user conductor could conduct an opera or musical

Provisions for wheelchair access to the balcony and technical gallery were investigated during design development. AIS assessed the theatre auditorium as a whole with concentration of the wheelchair accessible in the stalls where both level access and wc facilities are nearby. To achieve wheelchair access to balcony and technical gallery the proposed lift would need to be extended vertically to reach these levels. Design options investigated and their restrictions are outlined below:

1. To open the lift shaft at balcony level on the East side would require a lobby within the current 'void' space.
  - The void here has been carefully calculated by Computational fluid dynamics (CFD) modelling to provide a 'smoke reservoir' below a series of AOV roof vents as part of the building fire escape strategy. This prevents smoke buildup in event of fire from affecting emergency egress. Therefore the massing of the building would need to be increased to provide a smoke reservoir of the same volume in addition to the new lobby. This would conflict Planning and Conservation requirement to reduce scale and massing as much as possible in Conservation area and in the context of the listed buildings as advised in pre-application discussions.
2. To open the lift shaft at balcony level on the South side directly into the theatre:
  - would create a major acoustic problem compromising the use of the theatre altogether.
  - would clash with the structure as it would be needed to form a circulation route through the structural truss supporting the theatre (which only exists above stalls level)
  - would not provide a level pathway to the front of the theatre balcony where wheelchair positions are best suited.
3. To move the current lift shaft north and open on South side
  - would require increasing the size of the roof volume.
  - would also clash with the structure as it would be needed to form a circulation route through the structural truss supporting the theatre (which only exists above stalls level)
  - would also not provide a level pathway to the front of the theatre balcony where wheelchair positions are best suited without affecting the 'smoke reservoir' mentioned above in point 1
4. To open the lift shaft at balcony level on the West side.
  - would require a three side opening lift which may not be technically feasible. (Suitable providers for a 2 sided lift have already been difficult to find).
  - would clash with the only position for roof maintenance access.

- would only provide wheelchair provisions at the highest / furthest level from stage which are considered poorer quality than provisions at stalls level.

The list above is not extensive but conveys the lack of viable options. Consequently it was not considered possible to provide lift access to balcony level without increasing the volume of the building in the roof curve, which would conflict with planning directions to reduce the mass / scale of the building.



**Appendix 2: AIS Precedent Study Note**



**Precedent Study by AIS (Building Control):**  
**Comparison of access arrangements for new theatres**

Approved building inspector AIS has undertaken a comparison study of Brighton College's proposal vs other relevant UK theatre projects with regards to access provisions.

The 8 new theatres compared against can be identified by capacity and year of completion as follows:

- **Theatre 01** ( 800 seats / completion: due 2025 )
- **Theatre 02** ( 309 seats / completion: 2018 ) - Royal Academy of Music
- **Theatre 03** ( 3000 seats / completion: Opens 2022 )
- **Theatre 04** ( 900 seats / completion: 2017 ) - Bridge Theatre
- **Theatre 05** ( 500 seats / completion: due 2023 )
- **Theatre 06** ( 340 seats / completion: 2014 ) - Sam Wannamaker Theatre
- **Theatre 07** ( 600 seats / completion: due 2024 )
- **Theatre 08** ( 400 seats / completion: 2012 ) - Marlow Academy Theatre

	Brighton College Project	Precedent - New Theatres (sample of 8 approved by AIS as compliant with Building Regs)	Existing Theatres (sample of 16 approved by AIS as compliant with Building Regs)
<b>Area / zone</b>			
<b>Auditorium / Front of House seating – stall seats / circles</b> (note: the auditorium is treated as a whole with concentration of wheelchair access in the stalls where both level access and wc facilities are nearby)	Yes	Yes ( all 8 )	Yes ( selected areas only )
<b>Other Front of House areas, to include bars, cloak rooms, toilets etc</b>	Yes	Yes ( all 8 )	Yes ( selected areas only )
<b>Orchestra Pit</b>	Yes	Not Required	Not Required
<b>Back of House Areas to include routes to dressing rooms and stage</b>	Yes	Yes ( all 8 )	Not Achievable
<b>Other Back of House / Maintenance areas</b> (note: The technical grid will be managed by a school appointed technician during performances. Outside of performances the technical grid features rigging bars that lower to stage level for all to experience the technical aspects. Refer to KRFT Design note )	Not Required	Not Required	Not Achievable

**Appendix 3: List of partner schools**

- 1 Brunswick Primary School
- 2 Fairlight Primary School
- 3 Hove Junior School
- 4 Rudyard Kipling Junior School
- 5 Southover Primary School
- 6 St Andrews Primary School
- 7 St Bartholemew's Primary school
- 8 St Bernadette's Primary School
- 9 St Margarets junior school
- 10 Stanford junior school
- 11 Woodingdean Primary School
- 12 Dorothy Stringer High school
- 13 Durrington High School
- 14 London Academy of Excellence
- 15 Patcham High School
- 16 Peacehaven Community School
- 17 Varndean School
- 18 Moulescoomb Primary School
- 19 Elm Grove Primary School
- 20 Carlton Hill Primary School

**Appendix 4: Proposed Visuals (prepared by KRFT)**

Image 1: View from College Terrace

Image 2: View from Sutherland Road

Image 3: View from Walpole Terrace

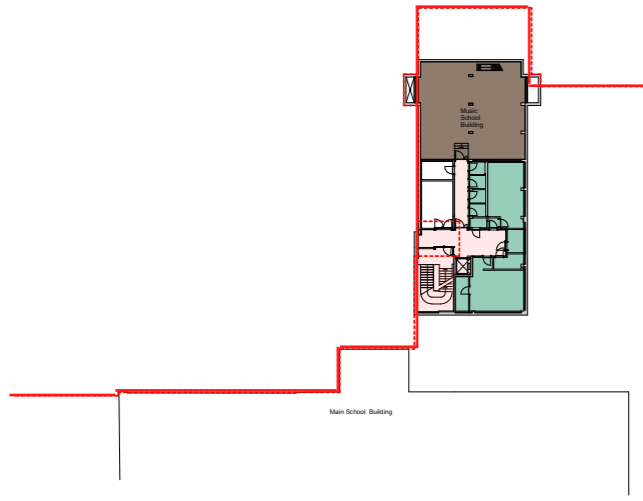




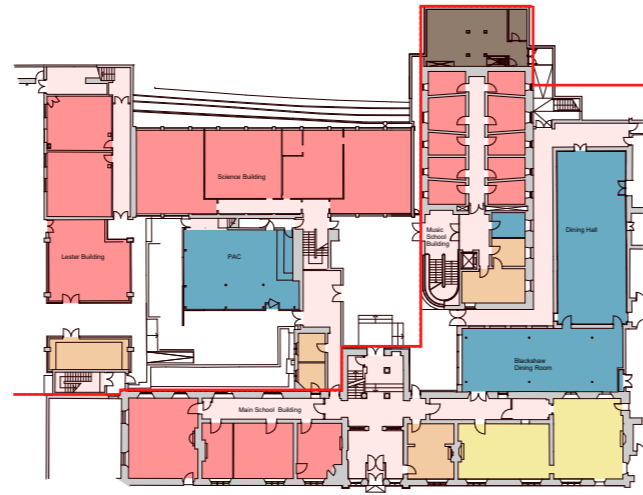




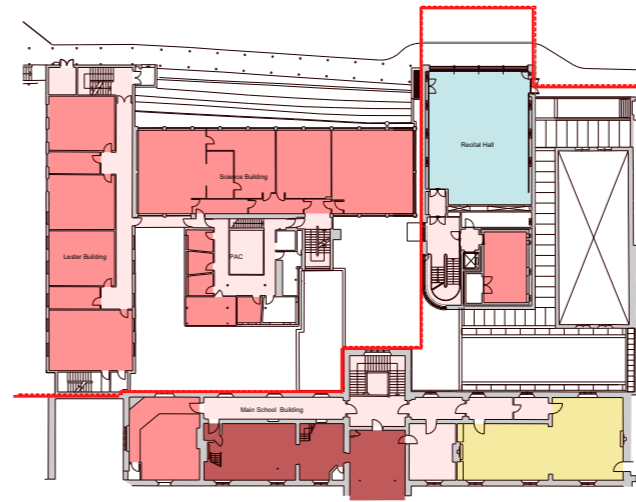
**Appendix 5: Existing and Proposed Floorspace**



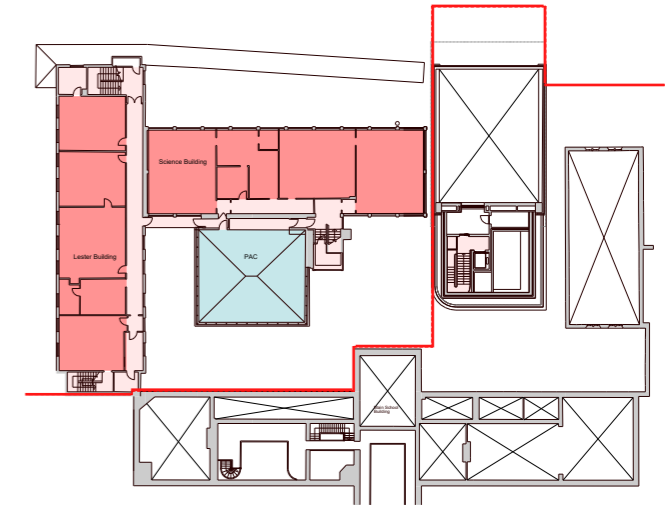
Existing Basement Plan



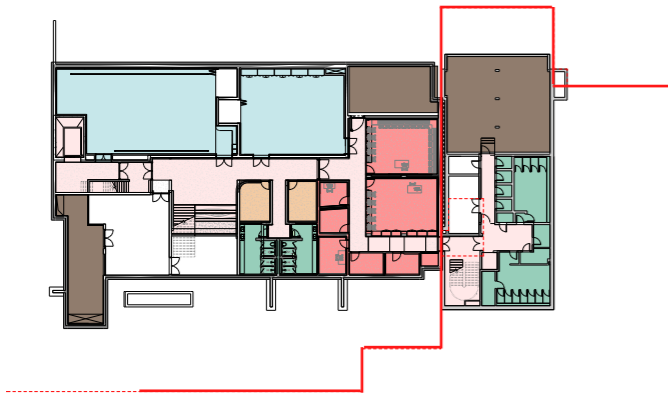
Existing Ground Floor (Campus Level) Plan



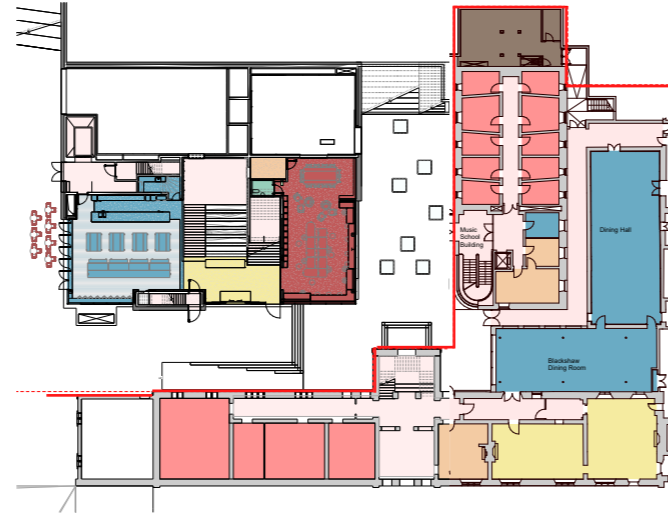
Existing First Floor (Home Ground Level) Plan



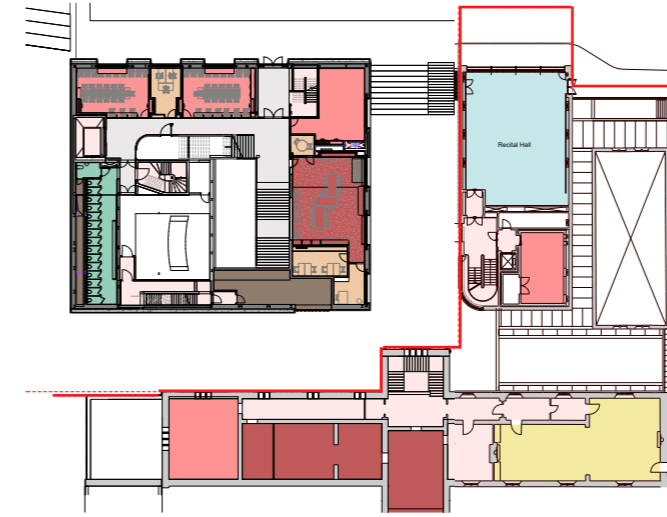
Existing Second Floor (Theatre Level) Plan



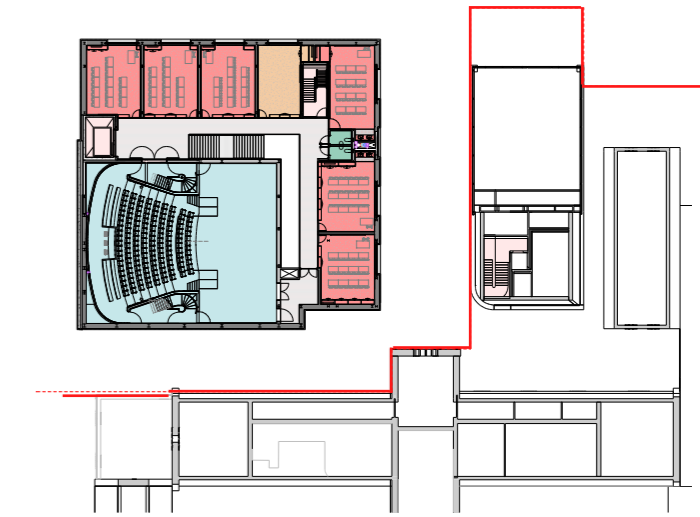
Proposed Basement Plan



Proposed Ground Floor (Campus Level) Plan



Proposed First Floor (Home Ground Level) Plan



Proposed Second Floor (Theatre Level) Plan

- Plant Room
- WCs
- Teaching Rooms
- Admin.
- Recital Room
- Common Rooms
- Dining/Cafe/Kitchen
- Circulation
- Library

note: areas shown in adjacent table relate to buildings shown within site boundary only (red dashed line)

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