

**BECKET +
MEADOWCROFT
ARCHITECTS**

**SMITH CENTRE
SCIENCE MUSEUM
INITIAL THOUGHTS**

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INTRODUCTION

The Smith Centre has been a great asset for the Science Museum. It has provided a comfortable venue for meetings, small conferences and a wide range of events to enable the Museum to interact with senior figures in the academic, commercial and political domains. It has also inspired new activities which have contributed to the fundraising efforts and to the development of the community of Fellows and patrons of the Museum.

The building that houses the Smith Centre is to be sold and the Centre relocated. This is an opportunity to revisit the functions of the Centre in order to increase its value to the Museum even further.

During Daphne Becket's visit to the Smith Center with Lady Smith, these future plans were discussed. Inspired by Ian Blatchford's vision, Daphne Becket and Phil Meadowcroft presented some of their ideas in a rough working form on December, 2014 in order to contribute to the evolving plans of the Museum.

In searching for an appropriate space to accommodate the new Smith Centre, the disused loading bay was proposed as a new dramatic centrepiece, to become a large reception and entertainment space, to which would be added in the adjacent available area, a lounge, a meeting room, and a library-display room. Locating the services (kitchen, toilets, storage etc.) could not be done at this stage as we do not have the necessary information about the rest of the building and its future management plan.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to gather the ideas we presented in December in a concise manner hoping to inspire and to contribute to the development of the thinking around both the future of the Smith Centre and the Museum-wide masterplan.

It should be noted that at this point we are working on ideas only based on a certain understanding of how the existing Smith Centre operates and on opportunities offered by the existing Groups Entrance space. We are aware that this will raise many more questions than it answers, but we hope that in doing this it will catalyze discussion and formulation of a clear brief.

Drawings

The drawings in this report are for indicative purposes and are not to scale.

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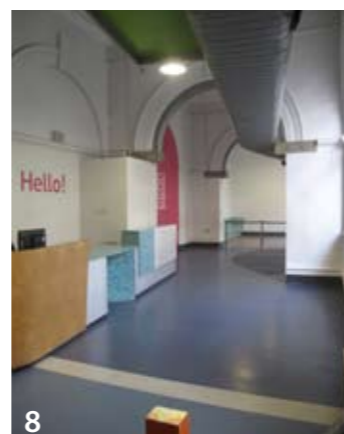
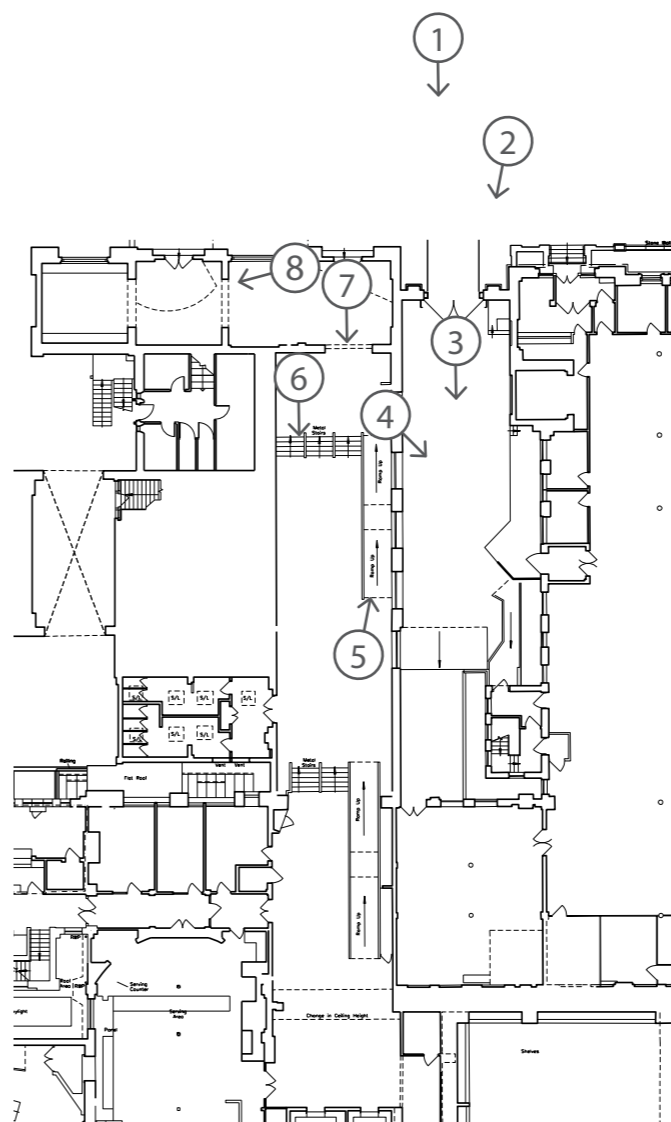
1.0 ASSESSMENT EXISTING SITE

The site is located on Imperial College Road, 25 meters from the existing Smith Centre.

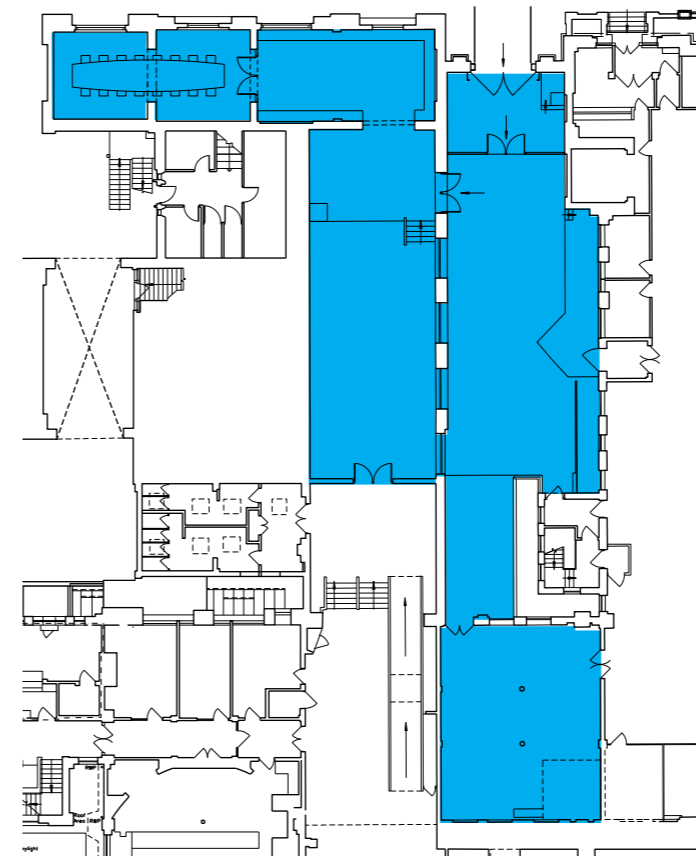
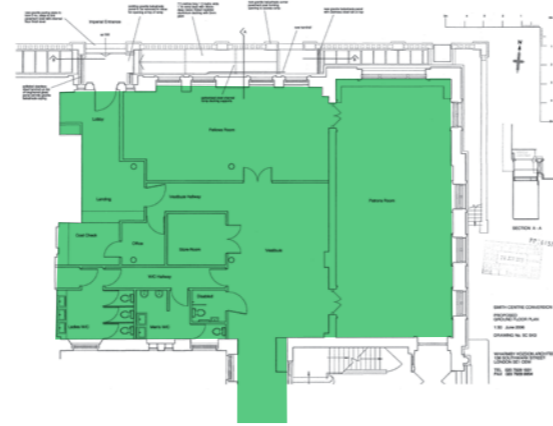
It is currently used as the group's entrance to the Museum and is comprised of:

- A. A disused covered loading bay accessed through a wrought iron gate. (photos 1, 2, 3).
- B. A neoclassical *enfilade* of rooms on the street front. (photos 7, 8)
- C. The current 'group's entrance' with disabled access ramps. (photos 5, 6).

It is unclear, pending further management directives to what extent the adjacent building area can be used for the Smith Center relocation, particularly service spaces such as WC's, Kitchen and Storage.

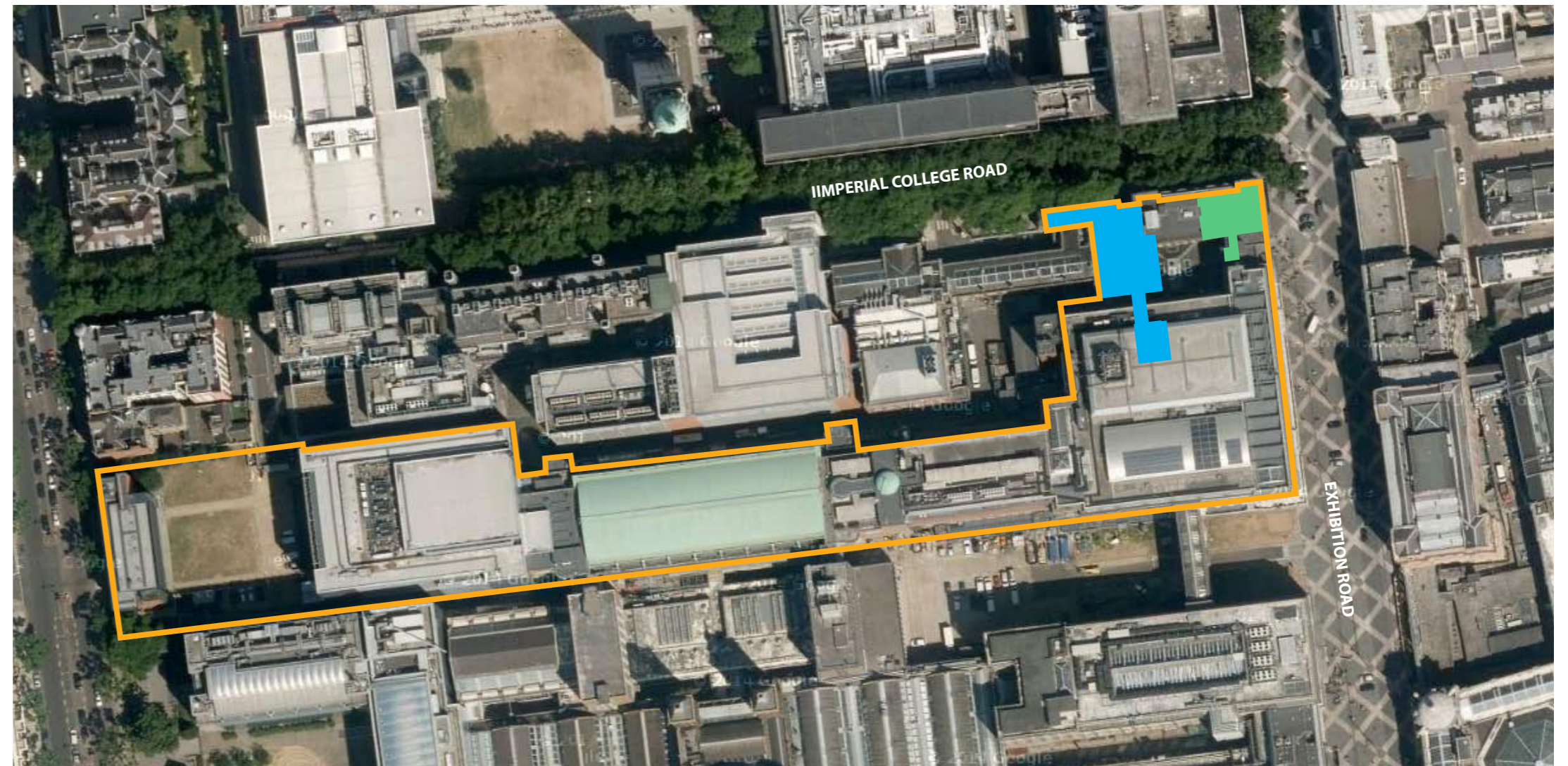


1.1 ASSESSMENT EXISTING SMITH CENTRE AND PROPOSED NEW SMITH CENTRE



- KEY
- SCIENCE MUSEUM
 - SMITH CENTRE
 - PROPOSED NEW SMITH CENTRE

Comparison of footprints of existing and proposed locations for the Smith Centre



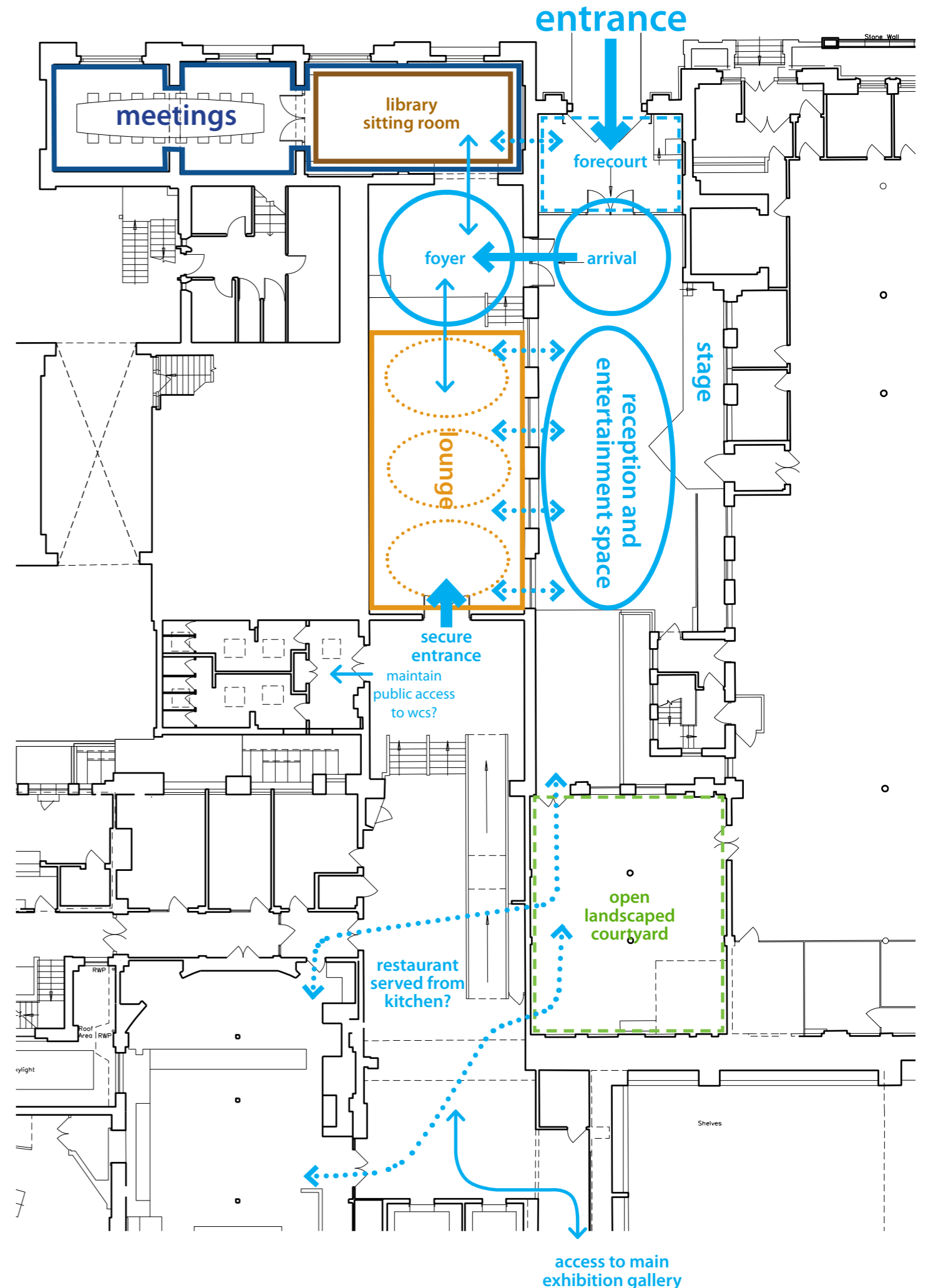
2.0 PROPOSAL STRATEGY

The main points of the strategy we explored in our presentation are as follows:

- The new Smith Centre is accessed through the existing arched gateway leading to the external forecourt. The loading bay becomes the place of arrival. The current entrance to the building on Imperial College Road is closed off, becoming a window.
- The loading bay is enclosed by glazed screens to become an internal space capable of accommodating a wide range of activities.
- The open courtyard at the end of the loading bay is to be landscaped and planted and would offer an excellent opportunity to display a large item from the museum collection.
- From the loading bay there is access into the main reception of the new Smith Centre within the space currently used for the 'groups entrance'.
- The 'groups entrance' and adjacent rooms running parallel to Imperial College Road become more formal rooms for meetings, receptions, lectures, conversation and reading.
- The 'groups entrance' lower area becomes the new Smith Centre main lounge with potential for subdivision into smaller more intimate areas to suit different functions.
- Existing windows between the Group entrance and the old loading bay become full height to bring in more light into the 'lounge' as well as establish visual connection and movement between the two spaces.
- The adjacent rooms running parallel to Imperial College Road become a meeting/conference room with a library/display area.

The three main spaces we identify in this strategy; loading bay, lounge, meeting room/library each already have their own very distinct architectural character which should be preserved and built upon as the quality of the rooms become better defined through their architectural detailing. The loading bay with its early industrial feel, the lounge with its 1970's functional look, and the elegant neoclassical rooms facing Imperial College Road.

A key feature of the Smith Centre are the display cabinets in which some of the 'hidden' collection of the Science Museum can be exhibited. These cabinets of course will be an important part of the new Centre and will not only be found in the library/seating area but will also be strategically placed in the lounge and the conference rooms; carefully detailed and acting as architectural elements to articulate and differentiate the spaces.



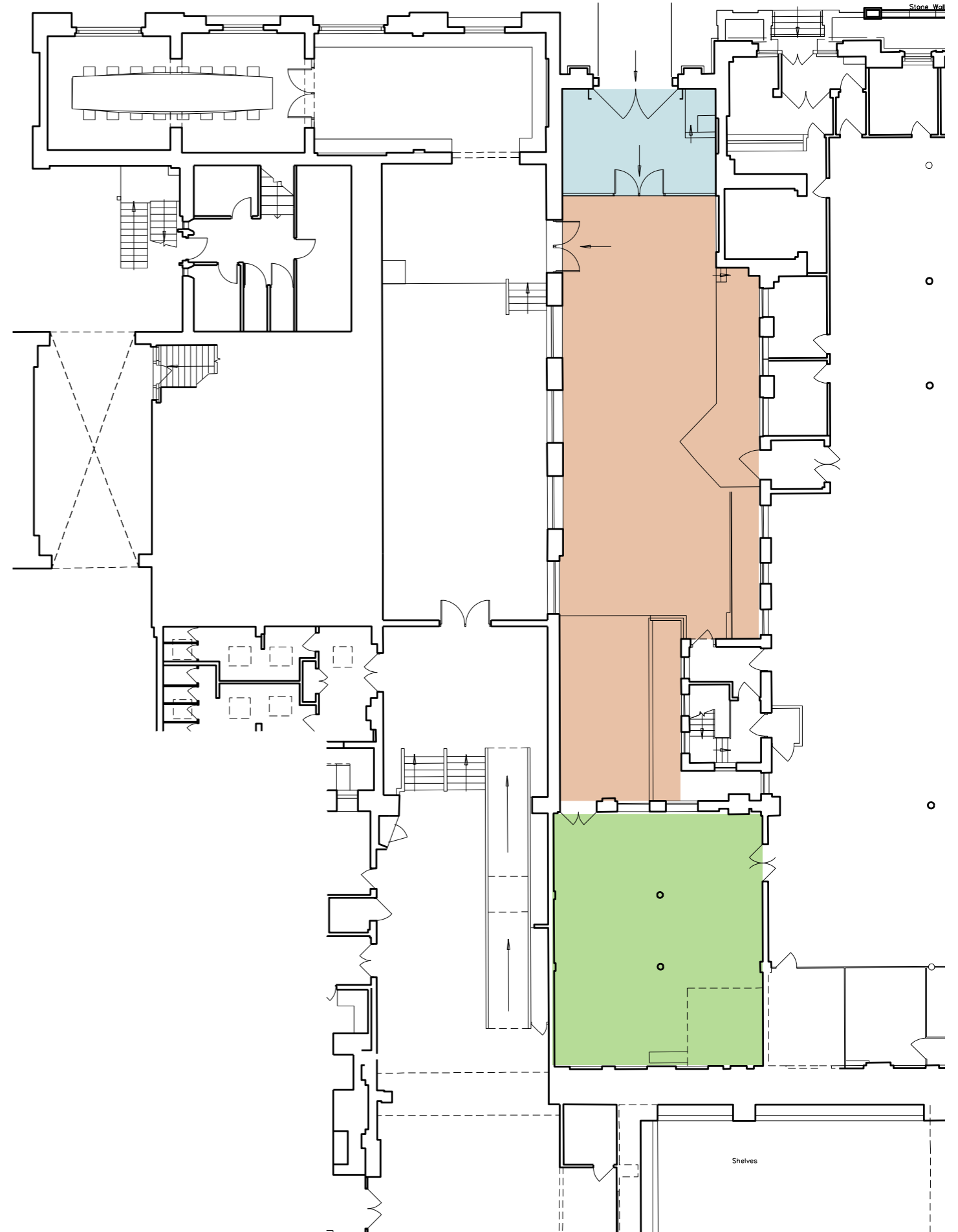
2.1 PROPOSAL LOADING BAY

The loading bay is potentially the most exciting and original space of the new Smith Center. It is important in order to exploit this potential to carefully retain its existing 'industrial' character and built upon it all the way through to the level of detailing while planning its restoration and necessary additions.

As a space it would be particularly well suited to entertainment and larger receptions.



The loading bay will provide a setting for Arts and events mixing a contemporary setting with an industrial atmosphere. This example is the Tramway in Glasgow, a converted Tram shed now used as an Arts Centre

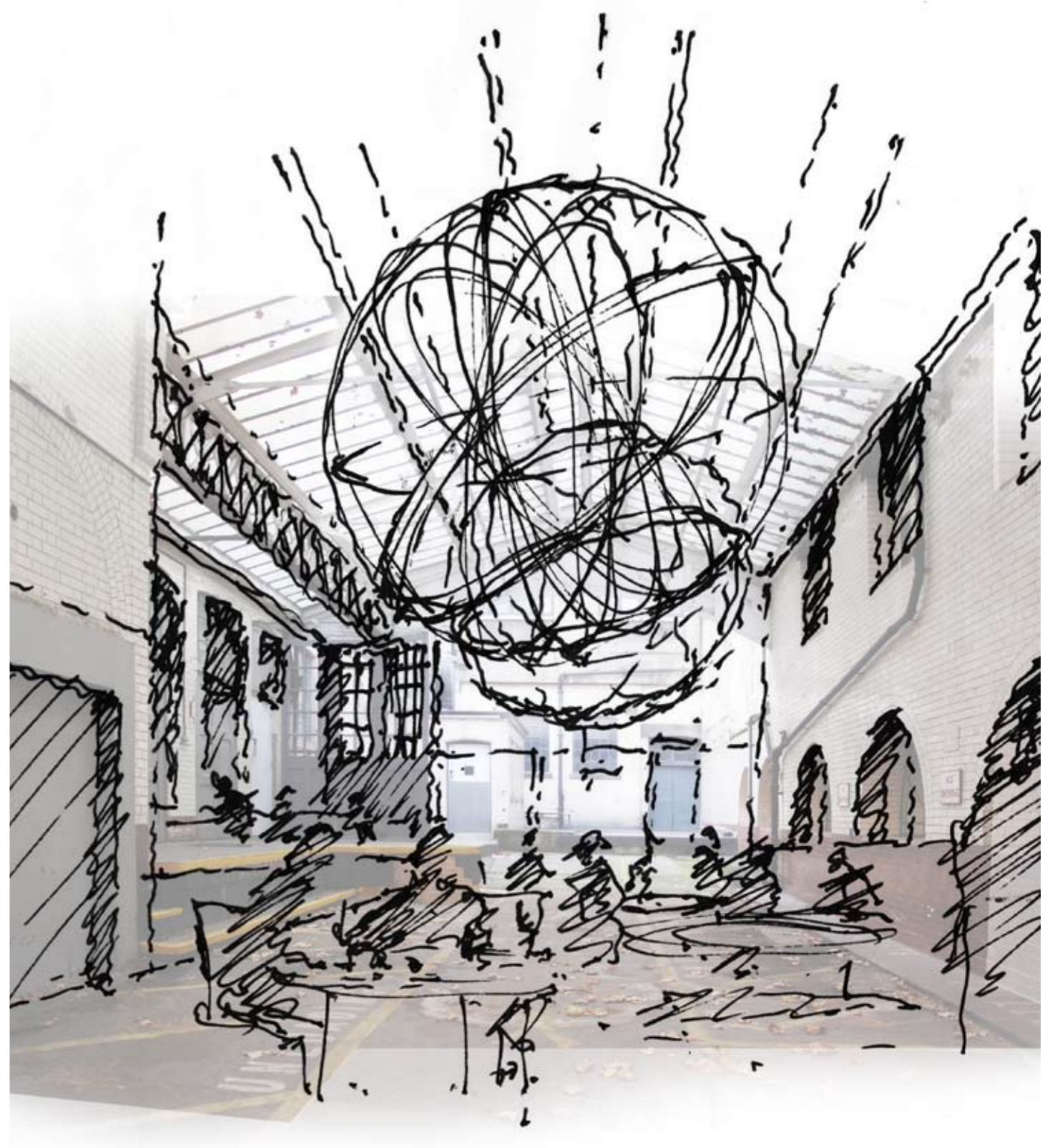


2.1 PROPOSAL LOADING BAY



The loading bay could also work as a dining room/court for a range of events and activities. Above is the Bluebird restaurant on Kings Road which is a similar top lit reclaimed industrial space.

A historic orrery (above) provides the inspiration for possible sculptural objects within the space. These thematically relate to time and innovation. They could be formed from LED tubes and used to light the space, also to record the daily and yearly cycles as a way of representing the Museum within the space.



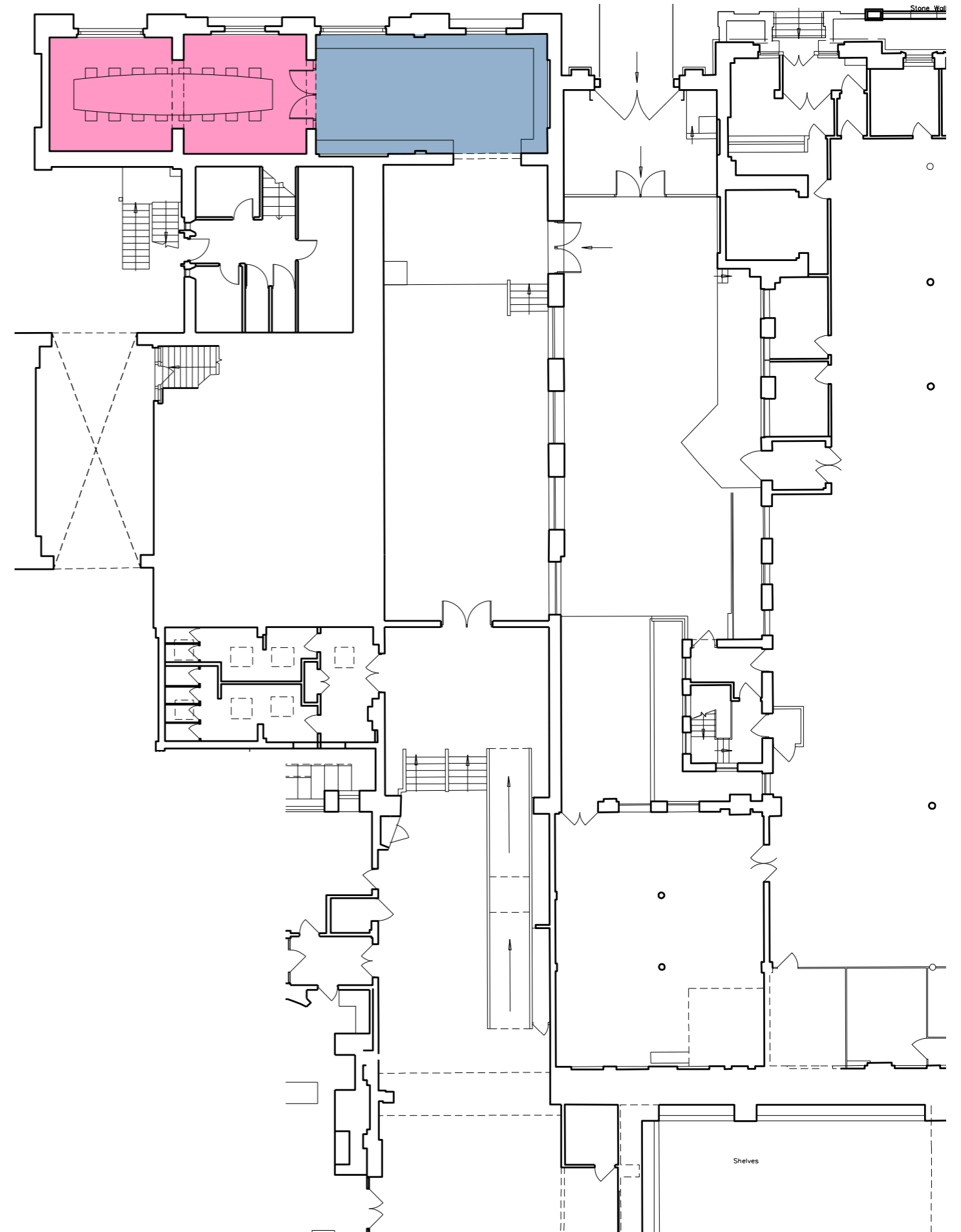
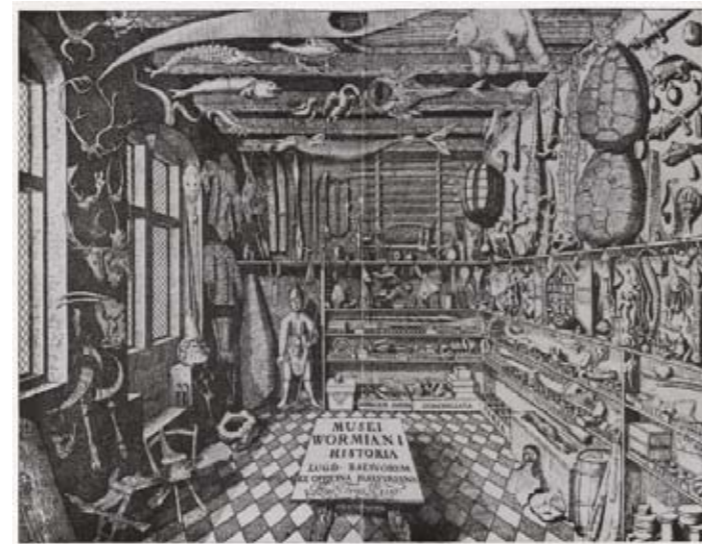
2.1 PROPOSAL
LOADING BAY



2.2 PROPOSAL MEETING ROOM / LIBRARY

The rooms we propose to become the formal meeting room and library of the new Smith Centre are located in the elegant neoclassical wing of the building looking out to Imperial College Road, immediately adjacent to the new reception area. Currently this space is part of the 'Groups Entrance' of the Museum.

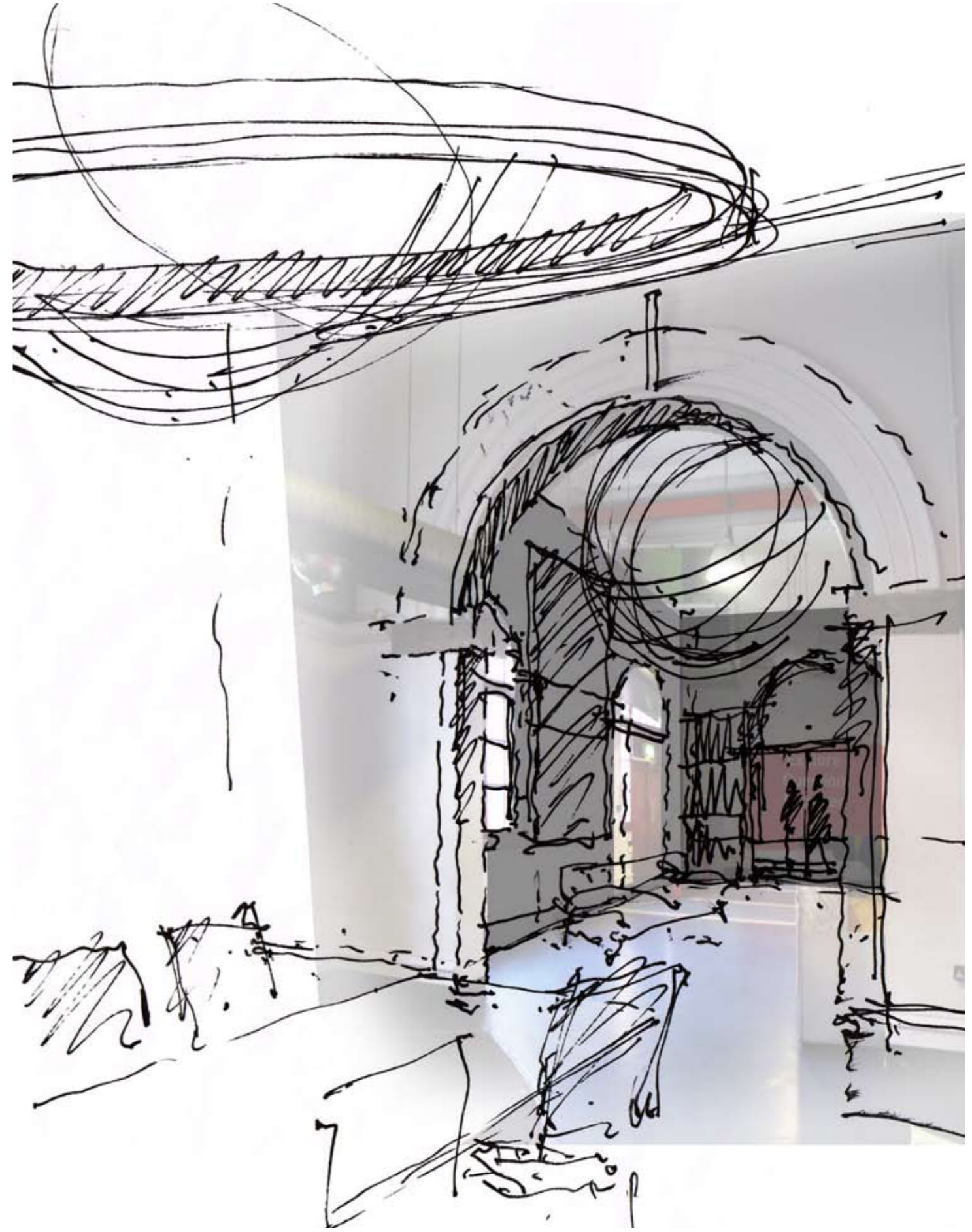
It is effectively one long room separated visually into three sections by tall interior arches. This setting would be ideal to house the small conferences and formal meetings happening in the Centre. There is also an opportunity to create a library/display room as an ante-chamber to the meeting room where one can have a quiet moment, read one's newspaper and enjoy the objects exhibited in the cabinets. The current door for the groups would be closed and a window placed in its stead. These two areas should have a carefully detailed screen that would enable the conference room to be separated during meetings but when there is no meeting allow the feeling of continuity to exist between the two spaces.



2.2 PROPOSAL
MEETING ROOM /
LIBRARY



Joseph Wright's *A Philosopher Giving that Lecture on the Orrery, 1776*



2.2 PROPOSAL MEETING ROOM / LIBRARY

The right and below are 3D computer model images of the meeting room and library spaces. These indicate the scale and proportion of the spaces and an imaginary gathering of eminent Nobel Prizewinners.

These images show bare rooms as away of beginning to show and investigate their possible use and character. The intention would be that these spaces could be lined with bookshelves and display cabinets housing objects and artefacts on permanent or temporary display.



2.3 PROPOSAL RECEPTION / LOUNGE

The 'Groups Entrance' area with its stairs, ramps and low ceilings becomes in part the main reception area of the new Smith Centre and in part its main lounge with potential for subdivision into smaller more intimate areas to suit different functions.

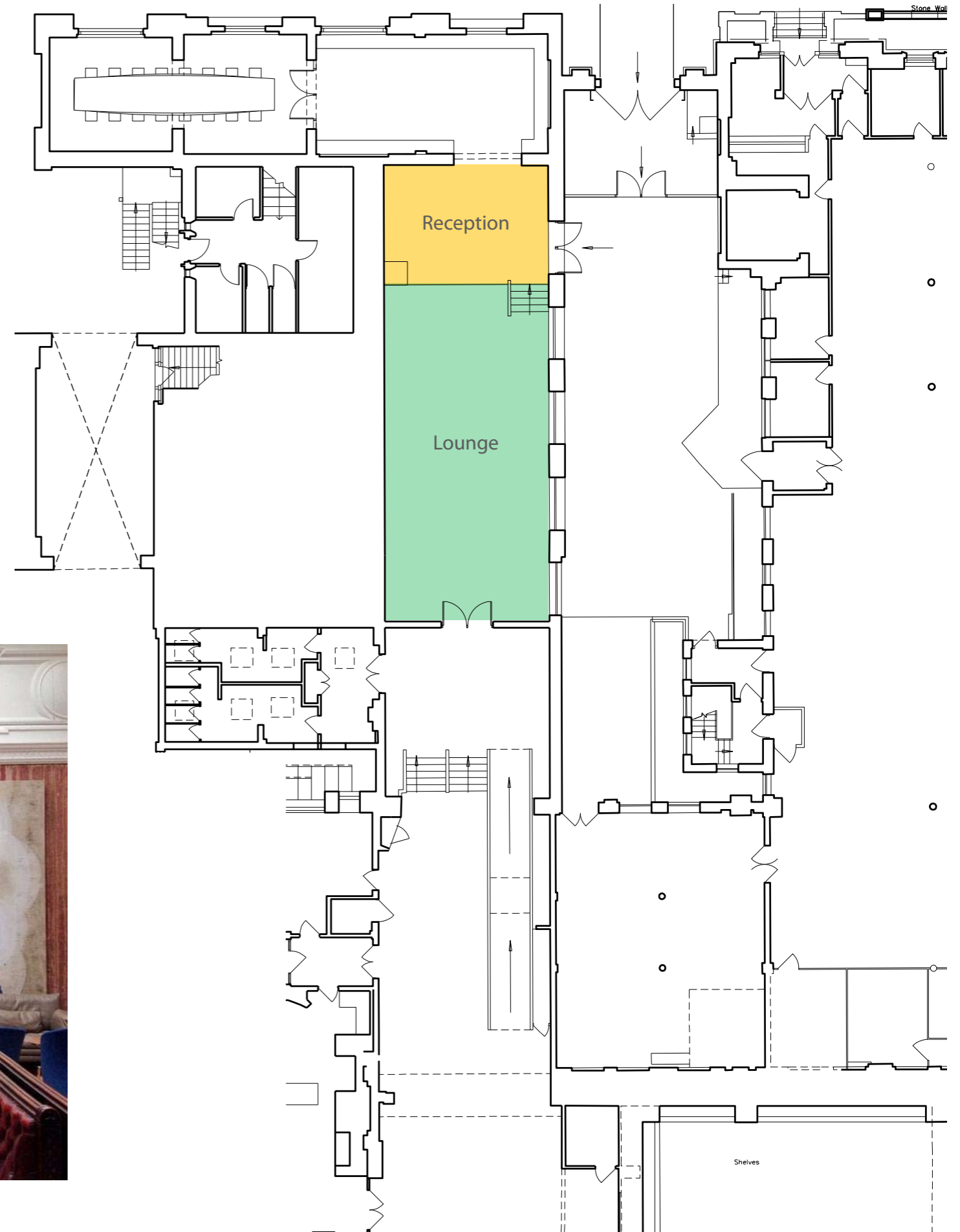
The reception is the key element to which all the Smith Centre main rooms connect to. It would be accessed through the loading bay.

The lounge, at a lower level, could accommodate a number of activities including small lectures, presentations and screen projections.

In the event of a crowded performance the windows/doors between the lounge and the loading bay would be opened (they are both interior spaces) and the guests would be able to move freely between the two spaces at either ends of the rooms.



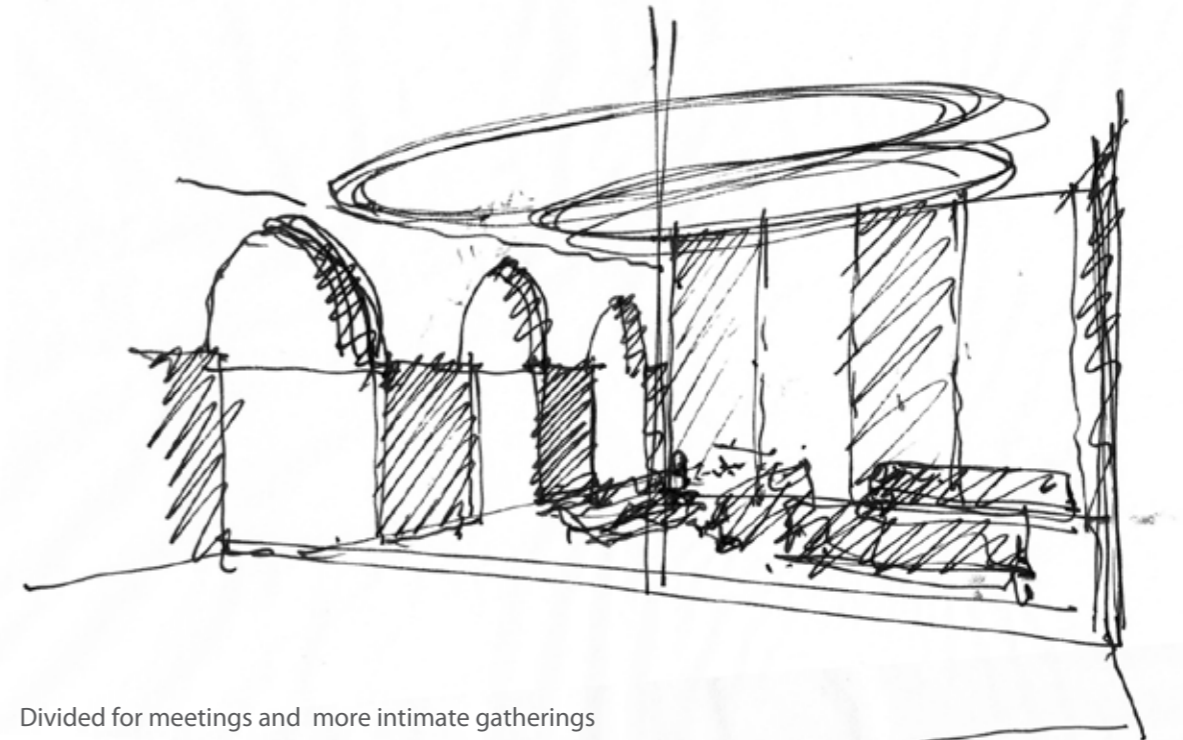
The Academicians Room and the Keeper's House at the Royal Academy are good examples of contemporary spaces with a range of equivalent uses.



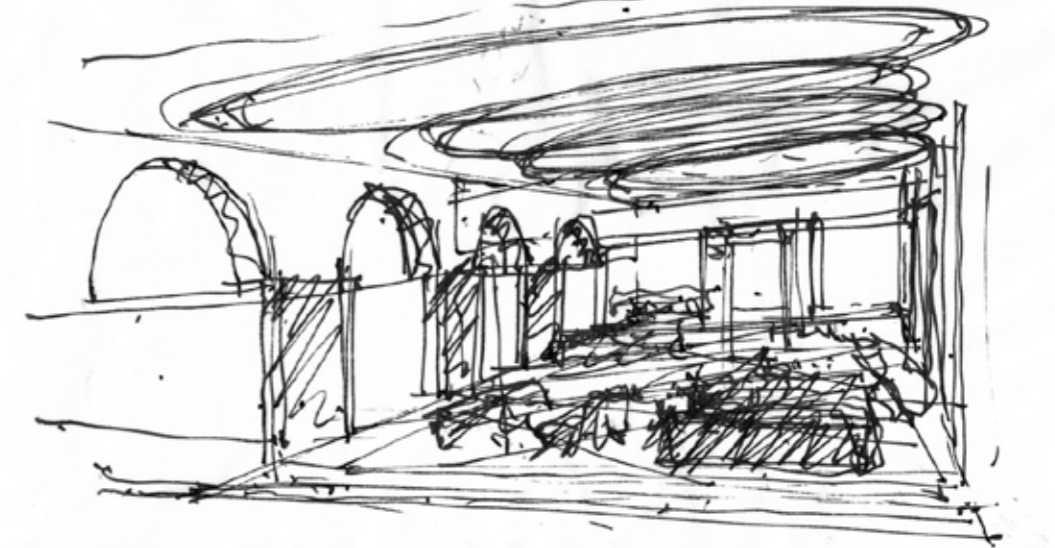
2.3 PROPOSAL
RECEPTION /
LOUNGE



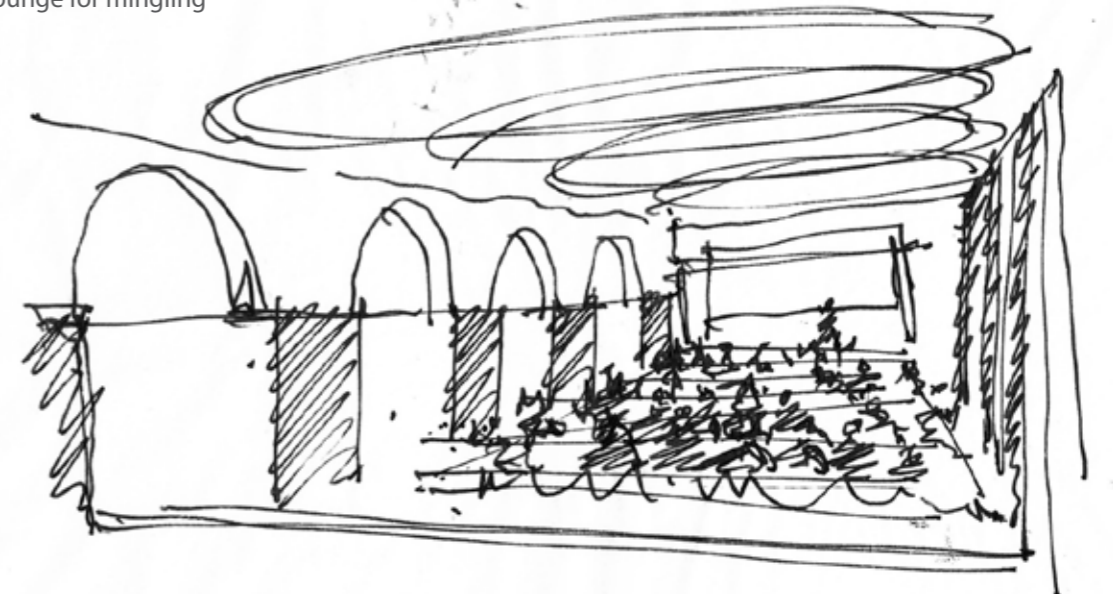
Coram's new reception building designed by Philip Meadowcroft Architects in Bloomsbury features a flexible space for private meetings or large gatherings and lectures



Divided for meetings and more intimate gatherings



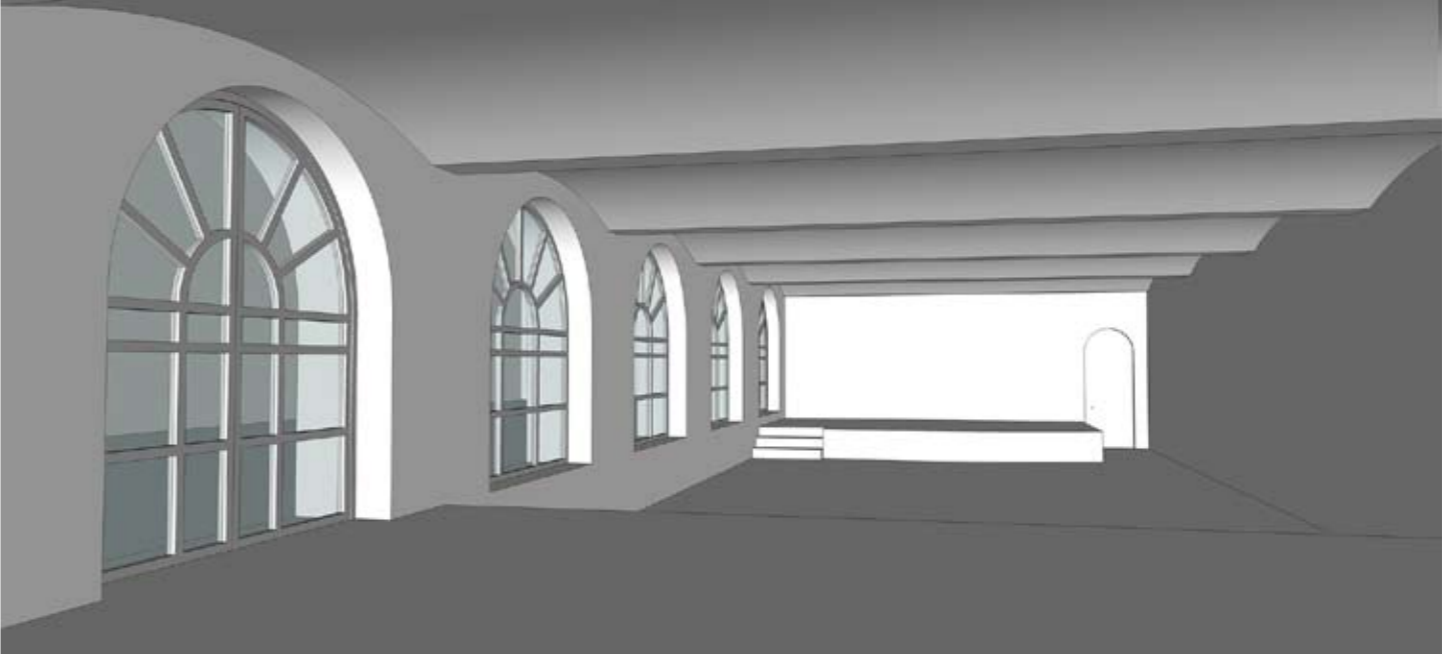
Open lounge for mingling



Potential for lectures

2.3 PROPOSAL
RECEPTION /
LOUNGE

The image on the right is a view taken from the 3D computer model in order to show the scale and proportion of the space with ramp removed ceiling scalloped between beams and windows extended to be full height to increase the visual and physical connectivity between the lounge and the loading bay.



3.0 A NEW SMITH CENTRE

The plan to relocate the Smith Centre to the Museum's Groups Entrance and disused loading bay offers a great opportunity to transform 'back of house' spaces into an extraordinary setting for a range of activities which contribute to the Museum as a whole and to this area of London.

The distinct character of London has in part evolved from its capacity to assimilate change and to occupy interstitial spaces. The spaces 'in between' are as potent as the focal buildings and places. Arcades (e.g. Burlington), alleys, passages, courtyards and mews are a few examples of spaces which are 'back of house', subservient transitional spaces which also have their own specific character and identity.

The loading bay is a service space which already has a significant presence by virtue of the arched entrance from Imperial College Street. It has the capacity to become one of London's iconic 'found spaces' as part of the Smith Centre and to form a valuable intermediate space between the public realm and the protected spaces of the Smith Centre and the Museum.

The new Smith Centre's position with a street frontage gives it a strong public presence and capacity to give a public face to both the Smith Centre and the Museum. It is an intermediary space which links the entrance to the Smith Centre interior and as such has enormous potential beyond its more obvious roles as entrance, gathering and event space for the Centre – for example a space for temporary exhibitions or performances. It is currently a utilitarian space, one with extraordinary character when imagined as part of the Smith Centre. Just how it transforms will evolve from consideration of the full range of activities which could take place and through discussion with all those involved in the Centre and the Museum.



**ABOUT
BECKET & MEADOWCROFT
ARCHITECTS**

DAPHNE BECKET

Daphne Becket established Becket Architects, a solo practice, in 1990. Since then the practice travelled to suit the projects at hand, from the UK to the USA, via Hawaii, Indonesia, Jordan, Switzerland and more recently Greece. She is experienced in a wide range of projects including restoration and re-use of existing buildings. Her restoration of three 16th century windmills on the island of Patmos earned Greece a EUROPA NOSTRA award (EU prize for cultural heritage) 'For outstanding achievements in the conservation, enhancement and adaptation to new uses of European Architectural Heritage' she was further recognised by 'The Best in Heritage' (Under special patronage of the International Council of Museums).

Since Becket Architects was established it has regularly collaborated with other practices chosen for their skills best suited to the character, location and needs of the projects.

Daphne studied at Cambridge University graduating with, in addition to the required B.A., M.A. and Diploma in Architecture, an M.Phil in the Philosophy of Architecture, under Dr. Dalibor Vesely and Peter Carl. She has taught both theory and design in the UK and the USA.

In a parallel but related professional track Daphne worked on several feature films (design) and co-produced a number of documentary films

PHILIP MEADOWCROFT

Phil Meadowcroft established Philip Meadowcroft Architects in 2013 following ten years as design director at his previous practice Meadowcroft Griffin Architects which he founded in 2003. He was responsible for developing MGA's design ethos and a diverse portfolio of award winning projects which carry through into his present practice including; Lauriston Primary School in Hackney which received a National RIBA Award for Education, numerous schools and Childrens Centres, new buildings for children's charity Coram in Bloomsbury, large scale masterplans for the GLA, projects for the London Legacy Development Corporation, public space designs, one off houses and galleries. Phil was director at Eric Parry Architects for ten years and project leader for a number of award winning projects including the new student accommodation and Masters lodge for Pembroke College in Cambridge and a new office building for Stockley Park in London. He studied architecture at Cambridge University where he was a visiting diploma studio tutor alongside Dalibor Vesely from 1986 to 2003.

Since establishing Philip Meadowcroft Architects, Phil has continued to combine research, teaching and practice. Recent projects include: A new entrance and education centre for Coram - completed November 2013; a new creative therapy pavilion and £6 million education and office building for Coram to be completed February 2015; and Canal Park with J&L Gibbons, East and muf for LLDC.

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