Estates Strategy Overview

1. Key strategic planning assumptions that need to inform our Estates Strategy

- **Student Numbers**: whilst there will be growth in annual intakes at undergraduate and postgraduate masters level, overall the total student population is likely to stabilise around the current level. This said, our strategy needs to provide the capacity and options for organic growth both of students and staff.

- **Mix of students**: The significant majority of students at undergraduate level will be taking three year evening degrees, studying more intensively and with potentially different priorities with regard to facilities and services. Schools have emerging initiatives in relation to professional and executive type education, for example a Birkbeck MBA as well as the potential for packaging and reframing of components of existing Masters level provision.

- **Subject Mix**: Plans that may require access to new forms of teaching infrastructure are most likely to be realised through partnership opportunities, using existing facilities elsewhere.

- **The Estate as Income Generator**: The Estate will continue to provide a significant source of recurrent income to the College (at the moment this is close to £3M), leveraging our evening teaching model. However, after a period of intensive growth to realise the full commercial potential of our ‘day-time’ space and support the College’s financial position, we need to dovetail this strategy, with our overall teaching and research priorities.

- **Stratford**: Whilst we have changed the proportions of space occupied at USS with our UEL partners, there is still spare evening teaching capacity available and we should maximise our use of the building.

- **The need to act**: The convergence of estate opportunities with increasingly pressing challenges, also coming together with the improving financial position and the major one-off opportunity of the bicentenary create a strategic context for the transformation of the estate to support the next phase of Birkbeck’s development.

2. The best possible facilities and environment for our Teaching

2.1 We have a long standing aspiration to teach our students much closer to, or within, our main campus facilities. Offsite teaching carries risk (long term availability of space, quality of experience, integration of experience in terms of links to other facilities, support, admin etc). The quality of our teaching space is an important part of the student experience, over and above the quality of the
teaching itself. Post 2012, the sector as a whole is investing in a major way in student-facing facilities as part of the quid pro quo for £K9 fees.

2.2 Where we are now – Partnerships, with Friends House and SOAS Senate House North Block (SHNB), provide a step forward as long term deals which secure high quality environments but not the basis of a complete solution; not least because in other contexts we are taking teaching space out of commission to address other priorities and problems. Still, half our teaching is done off site. So: one step forward, half a step back? SHNB alters the balance but does not deliver the whole aim. Equally, when we are teaching in our own buildings a considerable amount of our teaching space is interleaved with other types of space, most often academic office space in a configuration that is not necessarily optimal.

2.3 Where do we want to be?

- All our teaching done in our own facilities or in facilities we have significant long term control over with partners.

- General consensus that for staff and students a ‘10 minute walk’ from the main campus building defines what counts as ‘onsite’ in terms of a standalone teaching facility and that that locations further away require additional onsite facilities and support along the lines of the Stratford model.

- A preference for the consolidation of teaching space – a teaching block or teaching ‘zones’, linked to student support and other facilities. From the student perspective the relation between facilities is very important -the location of the seminar that follows the lecture is important.

- Related to the point above, we have teaching space interleaved with academic office space in configurations that are not optimal, particularly in relation to our Georgian Terraces in Russell Square, Gordon Square and Gower Street. Focussing teaching in dedicated facilities also provides a route to better use of the Georgian buildings and a means to support growth and better accommodation within these existing locations for Schools.

2.4 What facilities does the Birkbeck classroom provide?

- Comfortable, durable, flexible capacity to support various teaching modes.

- Accessibility; DDA compliance.

- Fixed and flexible AV to a high standard; Lecture Capture; Attendance Monitoring; Wifi and IT.

- Planning status compliant with the requirements of government policy (e.g. Tier 4);
2.5 Where do PhD students fit into the picture?

- A view that PhD students are more akin to staff in terms of Estates planning, requiring primarily School/Dept based facilities close to the academics with whom they work.

3. The best possible facilities and environment for our Research

3.1 Science research requires major headline infrastructure and is a significant component of the College’s research profile and presence in research and so has, from the Estates perspective, comes to the forefront.

3.2 Taking a forward view, the quality and sustainability of the laboratory facilities in the extension building are not fit for purpose in the long term. Providing controlled conditions for major research facilities in Estate environments not explicitly designed for this purpose is challenging now and, as operational tolerances reduce, will only become more so. There are limited opportunities for further ad hoc development and expansion with constraining factors being not only space itself but also underlying mechanical and electrical infrastructure. The cost of providing solutions and potential fixes at the margin is escalating dramatically.

3.2 This said we need to consider the contribution the Estate should make to underpinning research in relation to all disciplines. For example, for the arts/social sciences facilities that allow research collaboration, that provide the means to bring researchers together for seminars, presentations and conferences. Equally, the computer scientists within BEI have raised the issue of their supporting infrastructure as part of their post-REF thinking.

3.3 Where do we want to be?

- Sustainable facilities to support world-class research in science, providing an environment that can viably support ongoing development, involving shared investment with our academic partners, UCL.

- The scope to recognise the discipline to discipline differences that exist in supporting staff in their research. An historian’s office is different from a laboratory scientist’s office. In some contexts an office may be primarily a ‘teaching base’, in others it represents a ‘research haven’.

- Research in all areas thrives on contact, discussion, collaboration, networking: the interchange of ideas and information – the right space can promote, enable and accelerate this aspect of the research environment.

- In a digital landscape the IT infrastructure delivered through, and within, the Estate is a key enabling factor.
4. **The best possible facilities and environment to support our students in their studies**

4.1 There are acknowledged difficulties in hearing what the student voice is saying in relation to our planning and giving weight to what in reality are a number of different voices, from different constituencies, often encountered anecdotally. We need to engage more systematically with the student body.

4.2 **This said, what themes and discussion points are emerging?**

- Students, studying in the intensive evening mode, are spending more extended periods of time in the College and want this to be recognised in the facilities they have available to them. Birkbeck’s current space is rooted to our more traditional study model with utilitarian facilities catering for students coming in and out of the College in focussed bursts around their teaching and assessment. This provides a context for some of the requests highlighted here.

- More social and common room facilities (as distinct from more café/catering outlets).

- More space for informal group study, linked to more emphasis on group work and a wish, outside of teaching contact time to study more at, rather than away from the College.

- The SU have highlighted the benefits to a more accessible location for the Union (currently on the 4th floor of the main building next to the bar).

- Further integration of student services through the student centre and surrounding facilities may require additional space.

- In the context of proposals that involve more teaching in dedicated space outside of a student’s ‘home’ School, well located, accessible space for student-facing support within Schools.

- For the future, do we need to consider more extensive routes to provide student accommodation, for international students and for home students?

5. **The best possible working environment and facilities for our staff**

5.1 In some university estates strategies, this resolves itself to a heated debate about the right size for an academic office! But it is not just a matter of square metres. Fixtures and fittings, heating and cooling, effectiveness of maintenance have an impact. The “balance” space of corridors, entrances and exits, “public space” has a significant impact on perception and perceived satisfaction. The same is true of services – the front desk, security, cleaning and range and quality of food provision and catering. Green space is important, as, according to our building occupants, is making the best of the “dead” external space around our buildings, particularly the Georgian Terraces.
What factors need to inform our planning:

- Space planning needs to differentiate between staff groups and functional areas – the needs of PhD or post doctoral researchers, for example are different from a senior academic and different again from, for instance, the admissions team with Registry Services.

- What are the specific needs relating to student-facing support staff and other support staff?

- Do we wish to continue to separate out and co-locate professional service functions in Egmont House?

- How much do we want to look at changed working patterns and the potential to rationalise space needs linked to this and other factors?

- What does the broader environment need to provide?

- What agenda are we promoting in relation to social and communal space: interaction, communication, collegiality, a physical context for academic collaboration, the importance of the ‘corridor conversation’, a sense of identity and at what level: dept/school/college?

FURTHER ISSUES THAT NEED CONSIDERATION AS PART OF THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

6. Maintaining the Estate

6.1 What are the key issues?

- Long-term maintenance issues concentrated in certain parts of the Estate, such as the Malet Street Extension Building (MSEB). We have adopted a “holding/containing” Strategy on MSEB to allow time to determine its future, but the decision window cannot stretch beyond 1-2 years.

- Any plan needs to ensure and demonstrate an appropriate balance between investment in developing new space and facilities and maintaining existing ones.

- The use of the Estate, particularly those parts of it support teaching, has intensified over the past five years. We will need to recalibrate the range and frequency of maintenance/refresh work required.

- We need a clear plan for the long term infrastructure to provide heat and power to the Bloomsbury campus.

7. Our Impact on the Environment

7.1 What are the key issues?

- Given the age, nature and condition of current buildings, we have a difficult Estate against which to secure significant environmental improvement.
- New developments need to support our environmental agenda. Consideration of environmental impact needs to be part of the evaluation/prioritisation/selection process for Long Term Maintenance and capital expenditure.
- Our carbon management plan needs to be integrated into, and demonstrated to be deliverable, our overall Estates Strategy.

8. Development Opportunities available to realise our requirements

8.1 Options still considered possible from our original master planning exercise (see Appendix B):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Space created</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zone A: Demolish the Malet Street Extension Building and rebuild to create a teaching and research space</td>
<td>12,000 Sq M but lose existing building so net gain of 6,000 Sq M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone C: Develop the rectangular site outside the Council Room on the Malet Street side to the full height of the existing Malet Street building</td>
<td>2,400 Sq M of primarily teaching space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone D: the missing wing of Senate House</td>
<td>4,900 Sq M of additional teaching/office/lab space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone F: North Heating Chamber</td>
<td>Still viable but not to the height/scale originally proposed in the Masterplan. Could provide either dedicated research facility or teaching space – potential to link up to our basement facilities under Torrington Square?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.2 There are possible development opportunities further afield outside the tight Torrington Square focus of the Masterplan – in the Euston area for example. Potentially such options involve less development/University of London constraint but at the cost of proximity to existing Birkbeck services/support/facilities.

8.3 Part of the new University of London Estates Strategy is to maximise both the use and revenue generating capacity of the estate by rationalising occupancy between sites covered by the Bedford Estate educational covenant and those which are not and which therefore have more commercial potential. Their aim is to create more academic space within the covenanted area, for example in Senate House, to realise this aim. Given that the Birkbeck Estate straddles covenanted and non-covenanted areas, there is an opportunity to capitalise on this in a way the furthers the objectives of both the College and University. Obviously, the crucial determinant here is the terms of such trade. We have signalled to the University our willingness to discuss this strategically.
9. Partnership Opportunities

9.1 As already reported to Governors, discussions with UCL, centring originally on the North Heating Chamber site as an opportunity for the provision of laboratory facilities to accommodate a proposed UCL-BBK joint Institute for the Mechanism of Molecular Machines, as well as additional teaching space including a large lecture theatre, have broadened.

9.2 Whilst we had made significant progress with the academic and business case for the project, discussions with Camden planning officers led to the conclusion that only the smallest of the development options would be feasible in planning terms.

9.3 At this point, Birkbeck suggested a broadened scope for the project, encompassing laboratory facilities and larger scale development opportunities linked to collaboration over teaching space. Birkbeck currently rents significant teaching space to UCL during the day, and Birkbeck rents UCL space for evening teaching. A potential collaboration might involve the extension building site, the North Heating chamber location or other options in the area. This is being followed up positively on both sides with the expectation that, as part of their Estates planning a prioritisation, UCL will be in a position to commit formally to a joint feasibility study by the end of the month.

9.4 Obviously, this approach builds on a long-standing partnership with another university institution and has the potential to lead to a space sharing arrangement similar to that already successfully implemented with the University of East London.

9.5 Other potential partnering opportunities also exist. We have well-established, commercial relationships as part of our existing space lettings operations and there is interest in space developments that expand teaching facilities in Bloomsbury.

10. Funding situation and options

10.1 Whilst HEFCE’s capital funding is now severely limited, it is still in existence. Also, opportunities still exist through the Catalyst fund to support facilities that underpin academic collaboration and which showcase innovative shared infrastructure demonstrating a value for money proposition.

10.2 As with USS, Cost sharing through partnership makes certain major options both more affordable and less risky.

10.3 The College continues to building significant cash reserves and these are forecast to grow assuming we can maintain our current levels of operational surplus.

10.4 The run up to the 200th anniversary provides an ideal opportunity to maximise external foundation and donor funding for long term strategic developments.

10.5 The College has no borrowing. The fact that the College proposition around increased teaching space has a commercial dimension – the opportunity to let daytime spare capacity- means that certain options may be effectively supported by borrowing and that this might be part of the best tactical solution in terms of the overall funding package for the developments that ultimately are agreed in relation to the Estates Strategy.
11. **Next Steps**

11.1 At this stage this overview has been produced through a sequence of structured discussions involving Schools, Professional Service functions, particularly those focussing on student facing services, and those directly responsible for key estates and IT infrastructure. We have reflected ongoing conversations with the Student Union and, as mentioned, synthesised direct anecdotal input from students.

11.2 The purpose of the overview, supplemented by underpinning data which is being drawn together in parallel, to provide the context for the detailed development of the Estates Strategy, identifying and appraising options in relation to the long term institutional needs we are setting out. Clearly, the options for collaboration, particularly with UCL need to be integrated into this next phase of the process.

11.3 In terms of the immediate future, we are reaching the limit through which ad hoc development and reconfiguration of the existing estate can generate additional space cost effectively both in terms of actual and opportunity cost. The next practical step in realising our aim in relation to teaching space, through our involvement with SOAS in Senate House, is just under 2 years away, and represents a helpful, but only partial step forward. Under any strategy scenario involving major transformation or refurbishment of the current Torrington Square estate, there will be a significant decant requirement in order for the College to maintain its operations. The College’s Bloomsbury estate is heavily skewed to leasehold property ultimately controlled by the University of London (UoL), with all the restrictions that entails. It is in our longer term strategic interest to hold more property outside of the UoL environment. This said, freehold and long leasehold property acquisition opportunities in the area adjacent to the College are relatively scarce. Our ongoing property searches over the last 12 months have confirmed this.

11.4 Reflecting on this situation has confirmed our view that the acquisition of an additional property to support our immediate teaching needs, but also with the flexibility to provide future viable decanting space, is an important next step, not least because in the context of supporting teaching it also provides an recurrent income earning/cost reducing asset as well. We have confirmed with Governors an appropriate structure for the College to respond effectively and rapidly to such opportunities if they arise. A group is being convened, involving the Chair and Deputy of Governors, the Master and College Secretary, together with any additional Governor and management representation relevant necessary to assess and consider property opportunities up to the point of the College being in a position to make agreed offers.
Appendix A: the current Bloomsbury site

2.0 THE SITE / BIRKBECK COMPLEX / ESTATE

2.3 CAMPUS OVERVIEW

Sketch view of existing university buildings from East
Sketch view of existing university buildings from North

Sketch view of existing university buildings from South
Sketch view of existing university buildings from West
Appendix B: developments identified in the masterplanning exercise (see table 8.1),

THE PROPOSED SITES 4.0

4.3 SIMPLE 3D SITE MASSING MODEL

Overview of campus looking from East
4.0 THE PROPOSED SITES

4.3 SIMPLE 3D SITE MASSING MODEL