

**45-51 Whitehall,
London, SW1A 2BX**

October 2021





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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to describe the design process from development of the brief and the site assessment stages, through design evolution to the final proposals, and to assist determination of the planning application by the local authority.

1.2 Scope

This document:

- Assesses the site and context
- Considers the constraints and opportunities presented by the site
- Describes the design evolution and the visual impact of the proposals
- Outlines the involvement of others in the process
- Addresses accessibility

1.3 Background

The proposals follow on from a wider scheme to refurbish and improve the existing offices on the upper floors, including a rear extension and new rooftop plant enclosure, granted planning consent in August 2018 (ref. 18/03927/FULL). This scheme is currently under construction and due to complete in April 2022.

The bureau de change tenant vacated the retail unit on the southern portion of the site in 2020, presenting the opportunity to extend the cramped existing office entrance into a small bay of the retail unit in front of the lift shaft serving the offices. The larger entrance lobby would accommodate a reception desk or waiting area, which will help attract higher quality tenants and facilitate letting the building to a single larger company or organisation.

This change of use from retail to office to a small portion of the retail unit no longer constitutes development since the creation of land Use Class E.

This application is for minor modifications and enhancements to the existing shopfront in order to accommodate the extended office entrance lobby.

1.4 The Brief

The key elements of the brief are to:

- Provide a more attractive and extended entrance lobby for the upper floor offices to increase their attractiveness to higher quality larger companies or organisations who may wish to occupy the whole office development.
- Provide a more regular shaped plan for the retail unit on the southern portion of the site.
- Enhance the appearance of the front elevation of the building, and particularly of the shopfront, raising the design quality similar to that of the adjacent Clarence pub and better respecting the well proportioned traditional architecture of the adjacent elevations.

2. ASSESSMENT

2.1 The Site

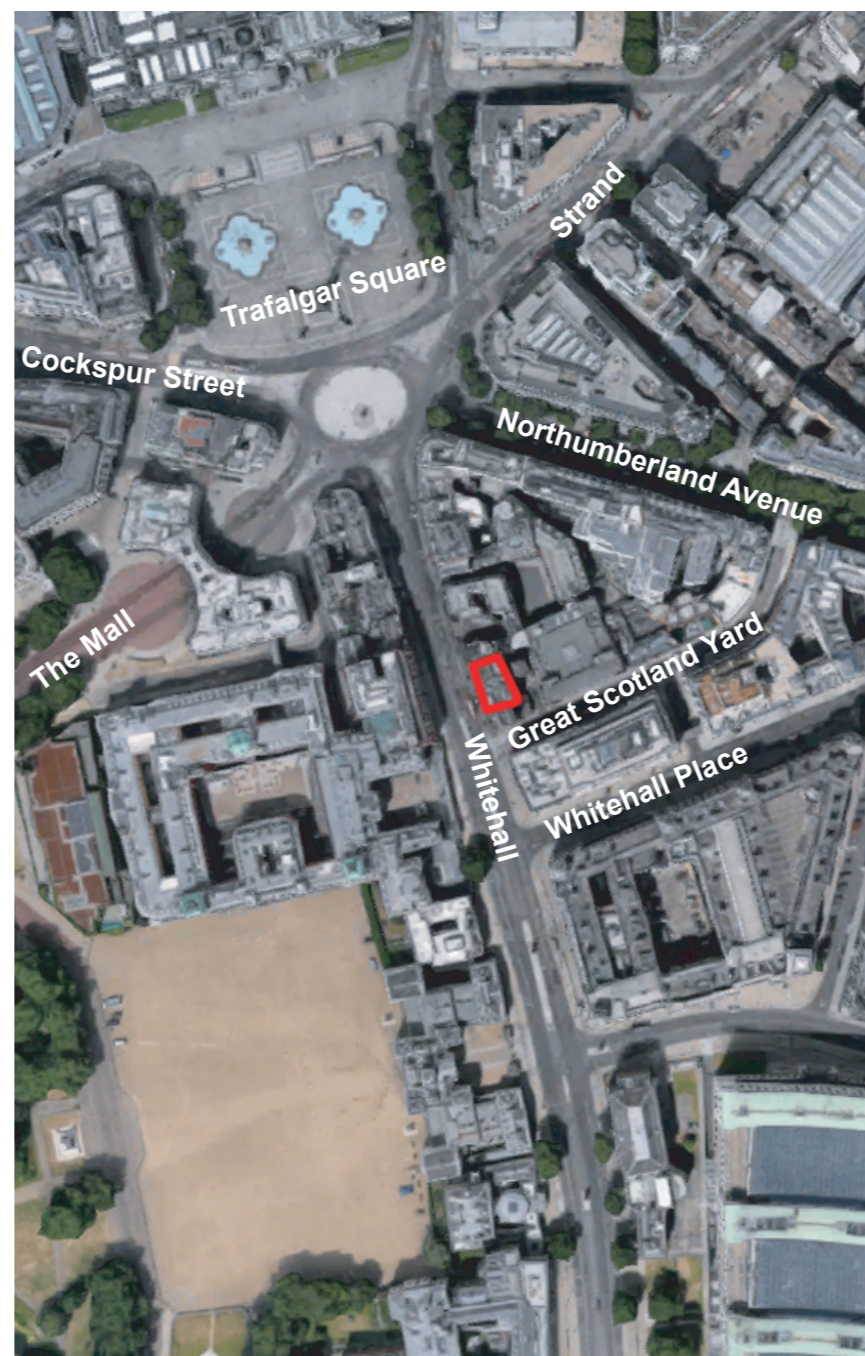
The site is located at 45-51 Whitehall, close to the southern edge of Trafalgar Square, on the east side of Whitehall. Whitehall is the main thoroughfare running south from Trafalgar Square towards Parliament Square. The street is recognised as the centre for the UK Government and is lined with numerous departments and ministries housed in grand buildings. The site is located in a row of smaller buildings of varying architectural styles at the northern end of the street, housing pubs, restaurants and shops serving the tourist market.

The buildings along Whitehall vary considerably in height, ranging from two to seven storeys, although the majority are at least 5 storeys with many of the 2-3 storey buildings of a grand scale. The building immediately to the left of the site is the 7-storey Whitehall House, and to the right is the 5-storey Clarence public house. To the right of The Clarence is 55 Whitehall (the Department of International Trade), built in the early 20th Century in a grand Classical style, which is the first of the grand historically Government buildings going south along Whitehall.

To the rear of the site is Great Scotland Yard, a narrow street characterised by large buildings on either side - 55 Whitehall to the south and the old Army Recruiting Office, which lies behind the site and has recently undergone conversion into a six-storey luxury hotel.

The site presents two distinct facades on Whitehall, previously two separate buildings that were largely rebuilt and joined together around 1980. The northern facade is Georgian in character with the classical order evident in the hierarchy of the facade. The southern facade is of typical Late Victorian design, similar to the Clarence at no. 53. The rear facade and roof are of modern construction, dating from the 1980 rebuild, in a traditional style.

The buildings around the site are generally in office use on the upper levels, with some restaurant use at first floor and residential apartments on the upper floors above the Clarence pub.



Aerial view



Aerial view from the west



Aerial view from the south

2. ASSESSMENT

2.2 The Context

Notable buildings in the immediate vicinity include Admiralty Arch, The Old War Office and Admiralty House. There are numerous Grade II listed buildings including the adjacent Whitehall House completed in 1904 and designed in a distinctive free style Jacobethan with prominent octagonal lanterns to each side of the main building facade.

The site lies just within the southern boundary of the Trafalgar Square Conservation Area, close to the border with the adjoining Whitehall Conservation Area. The buildings on the map opposite indicate the listed buildings shaded in blue. The building is not specifically described in the Character Appraisal although the row of buildings are noted as unlisted buildings of merit. The buildings are of interest due to their traditional appearance as part of a varied streetscape along Whitehall.

Further details of the building and the heritage context can be found in the Heritage Appraisal by KM Heritage submitted with the original planning application (consent ref. 18/03927/FULL).

The site also lies within the viewing cone of important views in Westminster, highlighted in Westminster Council's Metropolitan Views Draft SPD and shown in the images opposite.

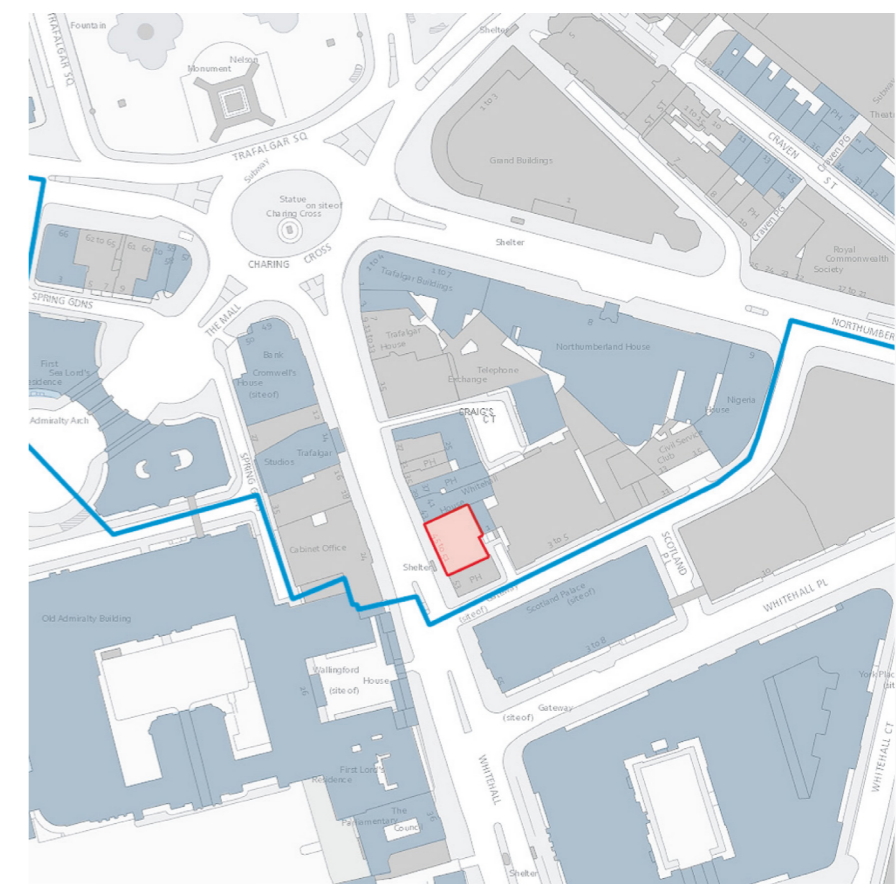
The view from St James Park is completely screened by Horse Guards Palace and the building is not visible from here. The view from Trafalgar Square is from the viewing area immediately outside of the National Gallery looking down Whitehall. The building is barely visible as a number of taller adjoining buildings obscure the view and the buildings are at such an acute angle that they cannot be read in the context of other buildings along Whitehall from Trafalgar Square.



Metropolitan view from Trafalgar Square



Metropolitan view from St James Park



Conservation Area Boundary and Listed Buildings map



View looking north along Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square



View looking south from Trafalgar Square

2. ASSESSMENT

2.3 Site Photographs



View looking south along Whitehall



View of site from north on Whitehall



View of front facade



View looking north along Whitehall



View of site from south on Whitehall



Rear of site viewed from Great Scotland Yard

2. ASSESSMENT



Existing shopfront is a poor relation to its neighbours either side



Existing shopfront - when bureau de change was trading



The existing office entrance is narrow and cramped



There is little opportunity for a reception desk or 'welcome experience'

2.4 Constraints and Opportunities

Constraints

- Existing configuration of building plan and elevations reflecting site's pre-1980 history as separate buildings

Opportunities

- Providing a higher quality office development with a more attractive entrance experience to assist Westminster's economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic
- To raise design quality and enhance the appearance of the poor quality existing shopfront
- To reinforce the buildings' heritage value by accentuating the shopfront's identity as a stronger part of the Victorian portion of the front elevation

3. EVALUATION & DESIGN

3.1 Principles of the Proposals

- To extend the office entrance lobby into a projecting bay of the retail unit to provide the opportunity for a reception desk or waiting area with ample natural light, enhancing the 'welcome experience' and attractiveness of the office redevelopment as a whole
- To enhance the appearance of the existing poor quality shopfront by raising its height to match the adjacent Clarence pub front, covering the existing unattractive rendered band and providing a timber fascia for the future retail tenant's signage, aligning with the elegant Victorian proportions of the Clarence's fascia box. The retail signage would be subject to a separate advertisement application by the future retail tenant.
- The enhanced shopfront would strengthen the definition of the Victorian portion of the facade

3.2 Use

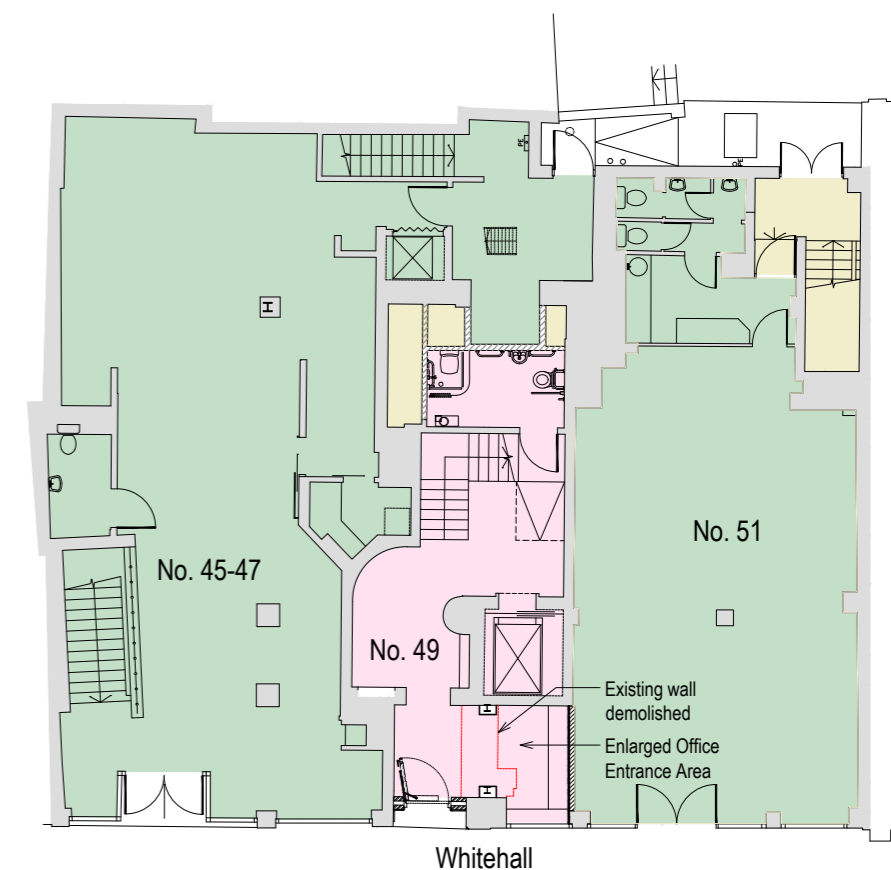
The extended entrance lobby would be for use of the offices on the upper floors, it is anticipated the retail unit will remain in retail use once a new tenant is found.

3.3 Layout

The extended lobby allows space for either a reception desk or waiting area, taking advantage of the irregular shape of the existing retail unit, utilising the small projecting bay in front of the lift shaft serving the offices above. The resultant retail unit is a more regular shaped rectangular plan that should appeal to a wider variety of retail tenants.

3.4 Amount

The extended office lobby will have a total floor area of six square metres and the area of retail lost is four square metres, the difference being the footprint of the demolished part of the party wall between the two originally separate buildings.



Proposed ground floor plan

3. EVALUATION & DESIGN

3.5 Scale & Massing

There are no massing implications arising from the proposals, which are confined within the existing mass of the building.

It is proposed to raise the height of the shopfront to better reflect the scale and proportions of the more ornate existing ground floor frontage to the Clarence pub, in the adjacent architecturally paired building at no. 53 Whitehall.

The height of the existing shopfront to no. 51 Whitehall was lowered following the 1980 rebuilding of no's 45-47, and behind the retained Victorian facade of no's 49-51. Prior to this the shopfront was taller, matching the height of the Clarence frontage. The photograph below, taken shortly before the rebuilding shows the shopfront divided between two retail units, with the division relating uncomfortably to the window pattern above. Following the conjoining of the two buildings in the rebuild, the shopfront was lowered to align with the top of the shopfront to the adjacent Georgian frontage (most recently McDonald's restaurant), with the band formerly occupied by the original Victorian signage fascia left in unattractive plain render.



New main entrance door as consent ref. 18/03927/FULL

Proposed timber frame window.
2no. proposed timber pilasters in Dark Grey

Hatched area by retail tenant, subject to separate application. Signage fascia and pilasters to be identical to Landlord section.

Proposed elevation

The 1980s and 1990s saw a series of unsympathetic shopfronts below the Victorian facade of no. 51 as various retail tenants came and went, most recently the bureau de change, with its four timber Classically themed pilasters reflecting the structural supports behind, and curved corner windows.

The proportioning of the pilasters and windows is currently rather squat. It is proposed to raise the height of the new shopfront to that of its Victorian original, and reinstate a proper signage fascia box to line through with that on the Clarence.

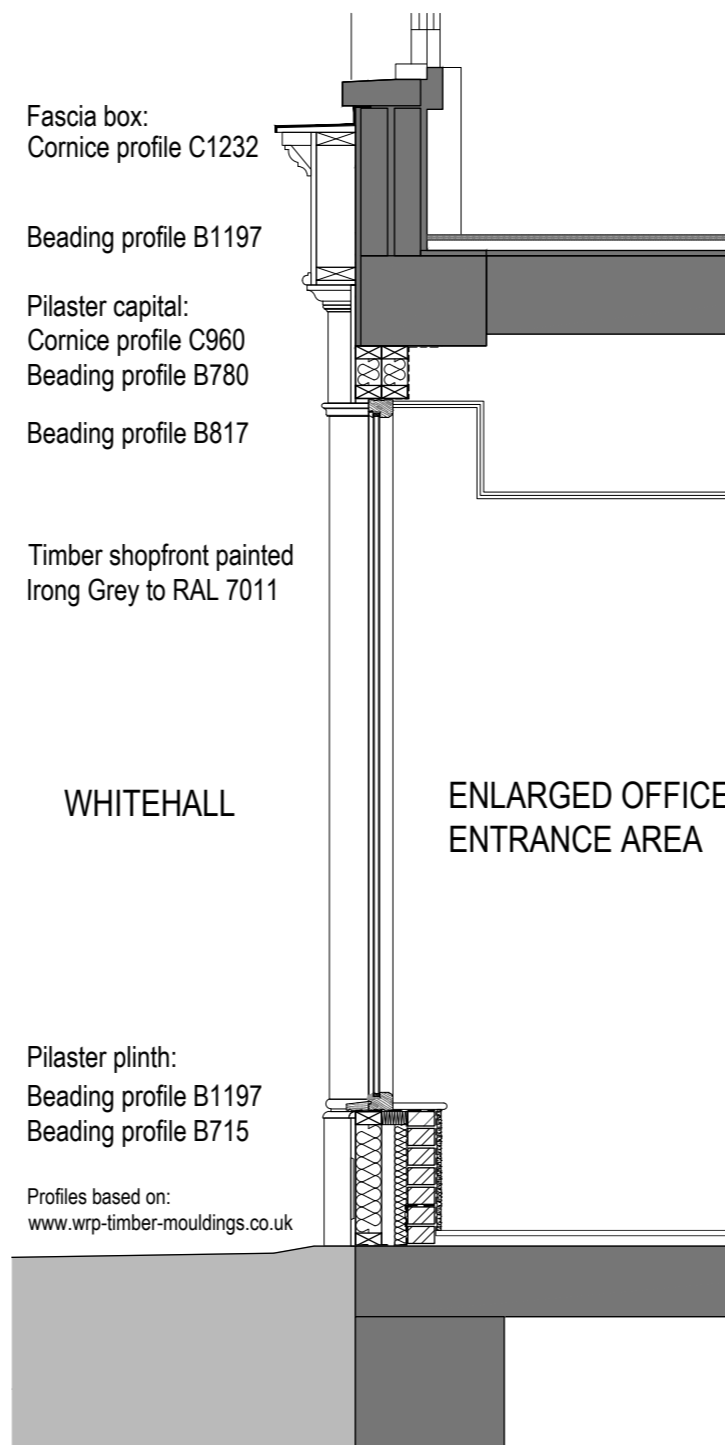
3. EVALUATION & DESIGN

3.6 Appearance & Materials

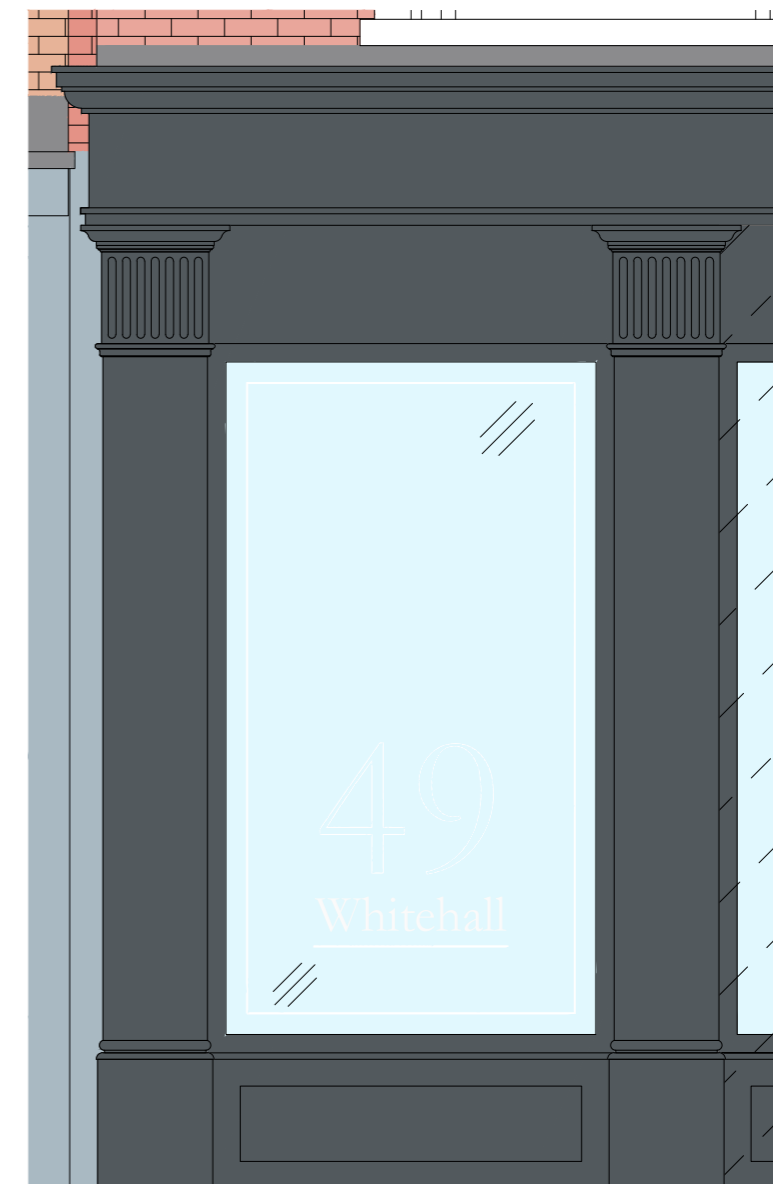
The proposals will greatly enhance the appearance of the existing shopfront. The original Victorian height and proportions will be reinstated, with the shopfront raised in height to match the adjacent Clarence pub as explained in the previous section, and a proper timber signage fascia box added.

The Landlord will control the future retail tenant's colour scheme for their shopfront through the lease agreement, to ensure it is consistent with the colour of the window to the office lobby and that the entire shopfront always appears coherent.

All shopfront materials will be timber with a painted finish, allowing flexibility for re-painting to different colour schemes, to assist ensuring the appearance is always consistent and unified. A dark grey colour scheme is proposed to mediate between the light grey office entrance recess and the black Clarence pub frontage. The Landlord will encourage future retail tenants to respect this design and the heritage value of Whitehall in their shopfront and signage designs, which would be subject to separate planning and advertisement applications.



Proposed cross section through shopfront



Proposed elevation of first bay



4. ACCESS

There are no access implications arising from the proposals.
The building would continue to be accessed and egressed in the existing ways.