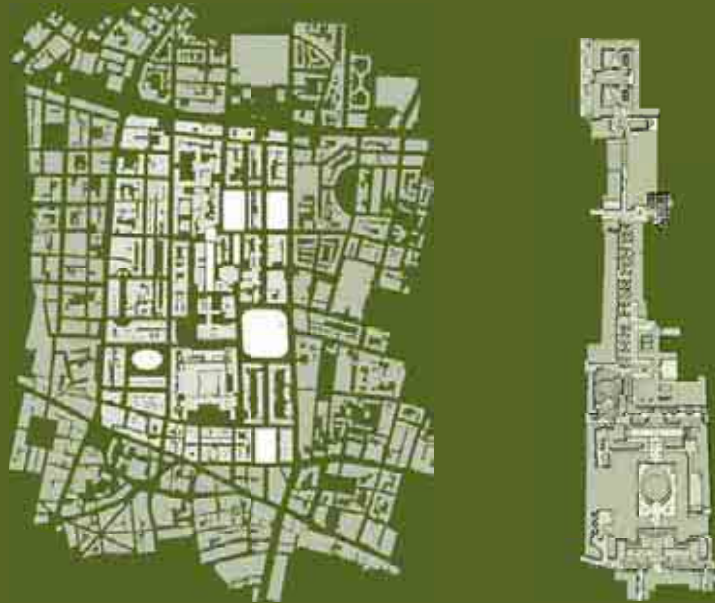


# BLOOMSBURY

A Strategic Vision



FARRELLS



# FOREWORD





Bloomsbury is a distinctive and memorable place. It lies at the heart of London's intellectual and cultural life, and it contains some of its finest buildings, squares and street furniture.

In recent years, the area's landscape and public realm has deteriorated, and much of Bloomsbury is dominated by heavy traffic flows which create severance and discontinuity.

On behalf of our client group - the London Borough of Camden, University College London and the London Development Agency - we have put forward a series of 'mini masterplans' which aim to create an urban environment which respects Bloomsbury's rich history and its character as an oasis within the West End.

At the same time we have put forward ideas which allow the area to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is reflected specifically in our ideas for Bloomsbury's famous squares and its streets, which we believe should be the best pedestrian environments in London. We have also thought very carefully about how the area's integration with Oxford Street, Fitzrovia, Covent Garden and Holborn can be improved.

We are convinced that a new University High Street focused on Malet Place is the best way to improve the relationship between the university campus, the hospital precinct and the museum quarter.

We have consulted widely with the people, institutions and landowners of Bloomsbury, and we are confident that our proposals, developed in collaboration with the client steering group consultants Hyder, EDCO and M3, offer a long term vision for Bloomsbury which does justice to the area's significance.

Sir Terry Farrell





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# 1 | INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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## LEARNING FROM HISTORY



Above Right: Endsleigh Street, 1893 showing the Bedford Estate's gates

Below: Bloomsbury Square, looking north, c. 1787

Bloomsbury is named after a Norman landowner William de Blemund who acquired the land in 1201. It remained largely rural until the 1660s when the Earl of Southampton built what was to become Bloomsbury Square. By the 18th Century Bloomsbury was established as a fashionable residential district within the Bedford Estate. At this time, Bloomsbury was what might be called a 'semi-gated community'. Access to the squares was reserved for the residents of adjacent houses, and through-traffic was strictly controlled by gates which closed off all of the major north-south streets to through traffic.





Institutional uses that now predominate in the area started appearing in Bloomsbury in the early nineteenth century. The rebuilding and expansion of the British Museum began in 1823; the main building of University College London was erected in 1827-29; and the first University College Hospital building, which replaced a dispensary of 1828, dates to 1833-34.

Metropolitan improvements of the same period included the opening in 1837 of Euston Station – London's first terminus – and the 1847 opening of the slum-clearance and road improvement scheme of New Oxford Street.

Between 1888 and 1910 major apartment buildings and hotels appeared – the Russell Hotel dates to 1900 and the Marlborough Hotel to 1910 but even more significantly the fundamental shift away from residential uses was recognised in

1893 when the squares were opened to the public and the surviving gates which had barred through traffic from the north-south streets were cleared away.

University expansion not only continued in the opening years of the 20th century, but began to change the basic configuration as well as the face of Bloomsbury.

In 1907 Malet Street was created by clearing and widening Keppel Mews North, and by the 1914 Ordnance Survey almost all of the buildings between Torrington Square and the British Museum had been demolished and replaced by a formal, tree-lined approach to the recently-built north wing of the museum.

The expiry of leases and the willingness of estates to dispose of some freeholds in the early 20th century led to expansion of the university in the heart of Bloomsbury.

A major sale of land was made to the University of London in 1927, when the whole of the area between the British Museum and University College – the 'Central Site' – was obtained for new headquarters buildings. Buildings began to be erected shortly afterwards, and in 1932 a masterplan for the precinct was prepared by Charles Holden, with its centrepiece of Holden's Senate House and Library.

A notable aspect of the post-war development was the extent to which the existing fabric of a residential suburb – seen merely as old rather than historic – was replaced with large structures which inevitably changed the grain of the area.

This continued throughout the 1960s, and in spite of conservation battles such as the demolition of Euston Arch in 1962, terraces such as those in Woburn Square were still being demolished as late as 1969.



1745 Rocque



1813 Horwood







Above (from facing page left): Early engraving of the British Museum; Nineteenth century view of the quadrangle at UCL; An unrealised masterplan proposal showing Senate House extending to Torrington Place

Whilst the 1960s' programme continued for some years, however, major institutional redevelopment ended with the completion in the mid 1970s of Wates House in Gordon Street and Denys Lasdun's buildings in Bedford Way. Subsequent building programmes have taken a more incremental approach.

A similar adaptation of existing buildings can be seen in the late 1990s' re-use of University College Hospital after the main building was deemed surplus to NHS requirements.

Although new hospital buildings were approved facing Euston Road, the late Edwardian complex was acquired in 1996 by University College London to expand teaching facilities, and its subsequent refurbishment and adaptation was different to the approach of the first three quarters of the 20th century – a time when the building would almost certainly have been demolished and replaced by new structures.



Above: Portraits of University College London founder Jeremy Bentham, and literary figure Virginia Woolfe

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1843 Davies



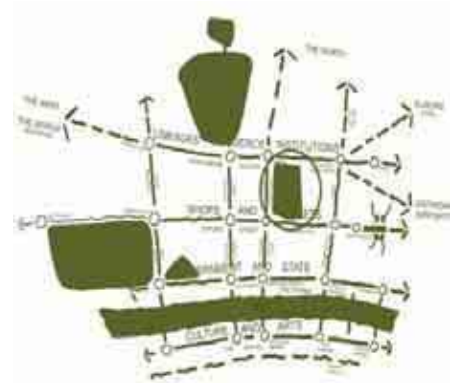
1960 Ordnance Survey



## BLOOMSBURY TODAY

### *Bloomsbury has*

- 30% of Camden's workforce, with 70,000 people working in the area
  - Four million hotel visitors per annum
  - A student population of 40,000
  - A substantial quantity of its land held between 5 landowners - University of London/UCLH, DCMS, Crown Estates, Bedford Estates & the Wellcome Foundation
- UCL has*
- An area of 52 hectares
  - 18,300 students
- The British Museum has*
- 1 million ft<sup>2</sup> of floor area within a Grade 1 listed building
  - 1,000 employees in Bloomsbury
  - One million objects on display
  - 4.5 million visitors per annum



*This Page clockwise from top: Key statistics; Bloomsbury in the context of London's 'Big Grid'; main activity patterns; Plan showing the area as a green enclave within London's West End*

*Opposite Page: Aerial view of the site - the soft landscape in Bloomsbury contrasts strongly with the more urban character of the West End in general*



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Listed Buildings



Above Clockwise (from top left): Key buildings within Bloomsbury - University Church of Christ the King; University College London; Senate House; St George's Church and the British Museum

Below Left: Bloomsbury conservation area

Below: The character of Bloomsbury's finest public realm, much of it recently improved

Bloomsbury Conservation Area





## THE KEY ISSUES

The facing page shows some of the buildings and spaces that give Bloomsbury its reputation for gracious and dignified public realm. Some of Britain's leading architects are responsible for the many fine buildings created here through the ages. Bedford Square is the best and most complete Georgian square in London. The project brief and subsequent consultation work we have undertaken reveal some key issues that need to be addressed if Bloomsbury is to retain its reputation as London's cultural and intellectual heart however:

### Squares and Landscape

- Many of the public spaces do not have a clear identity and planting is inconsistent with the aim to provide 'defensible' space.

### The Universities Area

- Piecemeal growth has resulted in an universities area lacking in functional clarity, coherent wayfinding, and confused circulation.

### The Museums Area

- Wayfinding to both the north and south entrances of the British Museum is difficult.

### Traffic

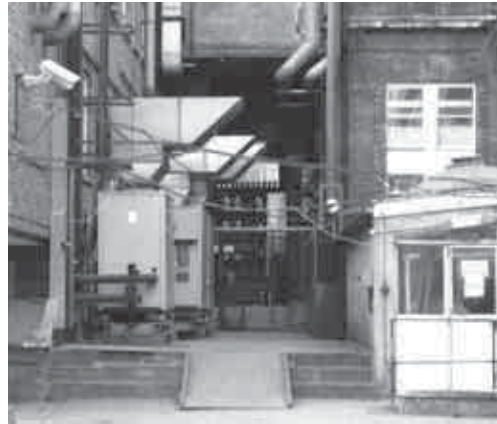
- Traffic has a divisive impact and there is heavy congestion on Torrington Place.

### Pedestrian & Cycle Movement

- Connections to tube stations are poor, institutional uses pose obstacles to permeability.

### Street furniture and signage

- Poorly co-ordinated signage and street furniture do little to aid pedestrian navigation.



*This Page from top:* Potential route from Gower Street into UCL obscured by building services; poorly coordinated streetscape and thoughtlessly implemented 'traffic calming'; street clutter

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## OUR APPROACH

The Project Brief sets out the objectives of the Strategic Vision, which are to:

- enhance the quality of public realm;
- improve identity of place;
- integrate the university, museum and hospital precincts with the rest of the area as well as improve links with the West End;
- propose improvements to pedestrian and vehicular circulation;
- produce a Bloomsbury Supplement to the Camden Streetscape Design Manual. This has been informed by work recently carried out in Russell, Bloomsbury and Bedford Squares.

The design team has met with representatives of the major institutions, the highway authorities, planning authorities, community groups, residents and major land owners to seek understanding of their aspirations for the area. This together with discussion in a series of design workshops has resulted in the idea of six 'mini-masterplans', each with a clear focus and set of objectives. The extent of these is clarified on the diagram opposite and described in the remainder of this report.

We have not tried to 'solve' all the area's problems. What this document does is to identify specific projects and prioritise actions within each mini-masterplan. Together, and in part, these will have a fundamentally positive impact on Bloomsbury over a period of time.

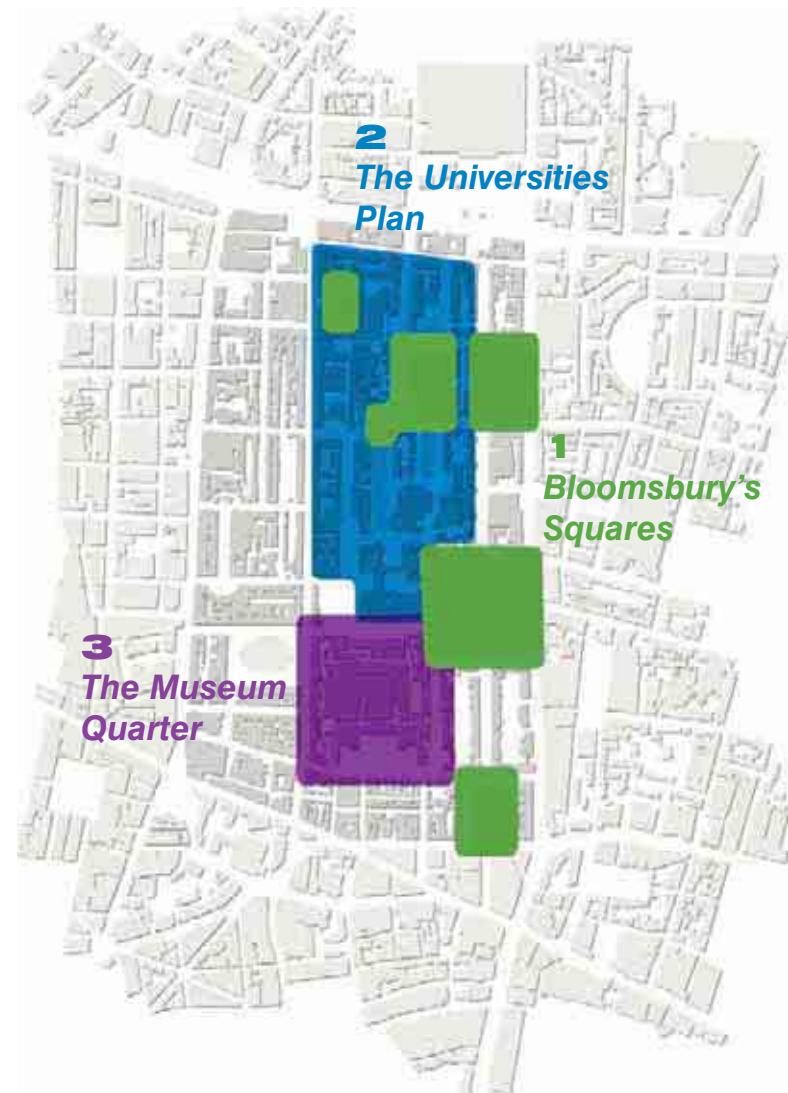
The document is intended as an ongoing reference document for improvements to public realm as opportunities arise.

Each intervention has been conceived as a project which can be implemented incrementally and as a stand-alone in its own right. This approach provides the flexibility that we believe is necessary in an area of this size and complexity.

### List of CONSULTTEES

- Bedford Estate
- Wellcome Trust
- Crown Estate
- The British Museum
- English Heritage (informal)
- Bloomsbury Improvement Group
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Group (correspondence)
- Bloomsbury Association
- Fitzrovia Association affiliates (Charlotte Street Assoc., Gordon Mansions Assoc., Ridgemount Gardens Assoc.)
- University Of London
- University College London
- University College Hospital
- School of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine
- Birkbeck College
- School of Oriental and African Studies
- Imperial Hotel Group
- Metropolitan Police, Holborn
- Bloomsbury Hoteliers (contact)
- Transport for London
- London Development Agency
- London Borough of Camden



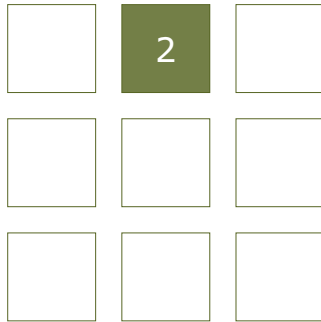


This Page: A series of 'mini-masterplans' are used as a means of identifying potential projects and areas of focus  
 Below: Material from an early workshop exploring and presenting initial ideas and first thoughts





## 2 | REINVENTING BLOOMSBURY'S SQUARES







Russell, Bloomsbury, Torrington and Bedford Squares have all benefited from recent investment, and Gordon Square and Woburn Square are in the process of being upgraded by the University of London.

Much remains to be done to bring identity to each of Bloomsbury's main spaces and to apply a landscape strategy that recognises the fact that these are no longer 19<sup>th</sup> century residential squares, but an integral part of a 21<sup>st</sup> century mixed urban environment.

This section sets out principles which will define an approach to Bloomsbury's landscape. It also makes specific proposals for individual spaces, building on work that has already been done by others.



Above: Degraded landscape with no civic virtue; railing stubs on Malet Street; dying grass and muddy footpaths under dense canopy in Tavistock Square

Left: A Georgian love of display contrasts with a more secretive Victorian attitude to the design of the garden square





## SQUARES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY Design Principles

These pages describe the overriding principles that should inform the design of Bloomsbury's squares.

The connection between the different spaces, as well as the preservation of Bloomsbury's character as an oasis is of principal importance.

It is proposed to 'green' parts of Bloomsbury that are relatively hard, for instance in the north east part of the study area in the vicinity of the hospitals precinct. This forms part of the overall masterplan or Strategic Vision for the area.

Some of Bloomsbury's squares are heavily shaded and it is suggested that a carefully conceived plan to improve light levels is considered, both in terms of canopy management and edge planting approach. This will help to improve sightlines into the spaces as well, which has clear benefits in terms of public safety and the enjoyment of the squares by as many people as possible.

Landscape architects EDCO have submitted a separate document which puts forward detail illustrative concepts for principal squares and spaces in Bloomsbury.

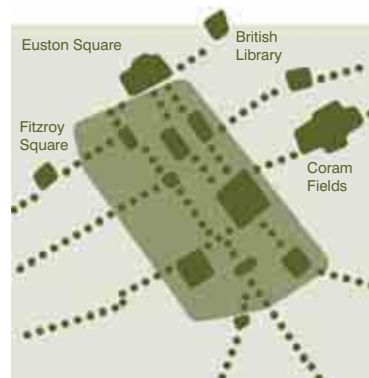


Above: Sketch showing recent improvements to Torrington Square, looking towards Senate House

Preserve Bloomsbury's character as a green oasis within the West End



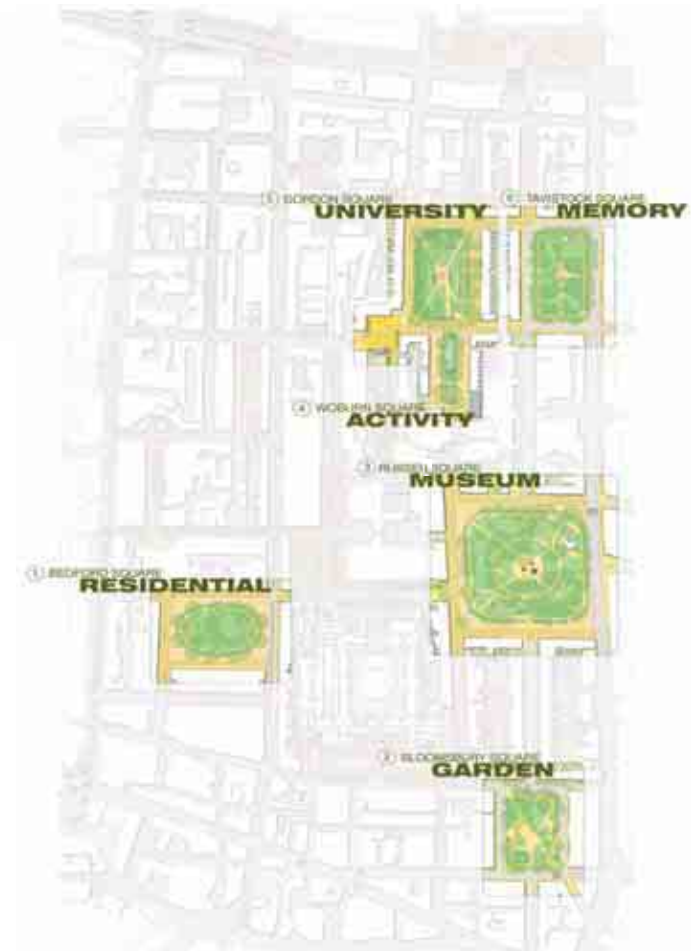
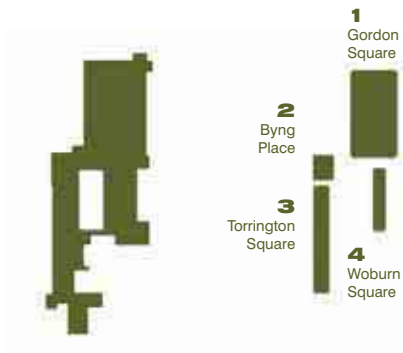
Create an integrated landscape network focused on Bloomsbury's squares and major places in the surrounding area



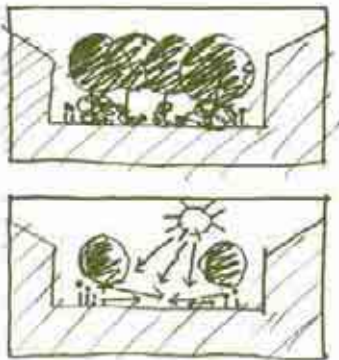


Bring coherence to the heart of Bloomsbury by defining edges

Each Square should have a unique identity



Improve sightlines and light levels in all Bloomsbury's squares





## GORDON SQUARE: A New University Green



Gordon Square has the potential to be a major University address. A number of academic departments are located here, the Bloomsbury Theatre is located at its north west corner, a major new University front door is proposed on its west side, and it is on several strong pedestrian routes leading to Euston Square and elsewhere.



A scheme is currently on site to restore railings and gates, upgrade paths and improve planting within this and Woburn Square, which will greatly improve the quality of these spaces. It is led by the University of London with support from English Heritage, the Wolfson Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund.



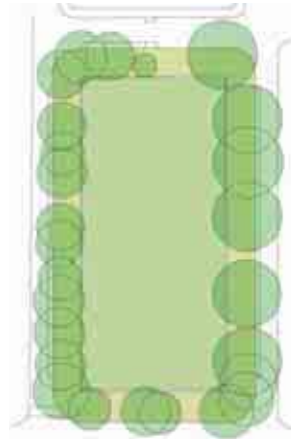
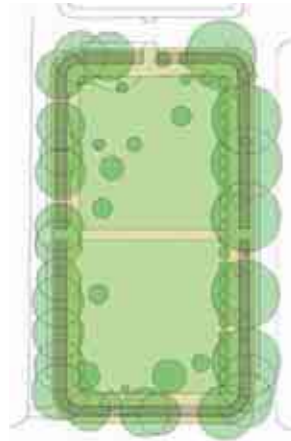
The Design Team has concluded that further work will be necessary in order for Gordon Square to function as part of the University campus. The Strategic Vision proposes improvements to adjacent roads as well as the reconfiguration of Gordon Square. It is proposed that the gates be moved to the corners in the medium term to improve the permeability of Gordon Square.



We have also put forward a more radical concept for the complete re-design of Gordon Square explicitly as a university green, as a longer term possibility for this space.

*This page: View of Gordon Square; 1870, a formal design for residential use by Thomas Cubitt, with gates positioned at centres rather than at the corners; in 1914 after changes to the pathways were made; University of London scheme currently on site*





Above: Diagonal pathways introduced to follow desire lines and then removed along with railings to provide more freedom of movement

Right: Illustrative view showing the possibility of creating a university green - this could become a place for key university functions, e.g graduation ceremonies





## BYNG PLACE: Taming the Traffic



Byng Place is at the heart of Bloomsbury yet it is one of its least successful spaces. It lacks enclosure, it has no clear function and its layout is very confusing.

It is proposed that the segregated cycle ways and road surface be replaced by a shared surface consisting of granite setts. A number of options for doing this are illustrated below. Each approach

would encourage vehicular traffic to move at less than 20mph.

Enclosure is required at the southern end. It is proposed to build a light low rise structure or structures here to provide this, as well as provide an activity focus for the space. This could consist of a small cafe or works of art and seating.

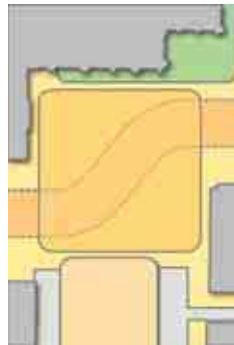
A number of landscape strategies for the space have been considered. The design team has concluded that soft landscape should be introduced in Byng Place, with due regard to the visual axis connecting the University Church and Senate House.



*Option 1:* No road markings to encourage caution and eye contact between motorists and pedestrians



*Option 2:* Layout with sculptures or other structures providing road termination event



*Option 3:* Minimal road markings guide motorists through the site whilst maintaining a cohesive pedestrian place



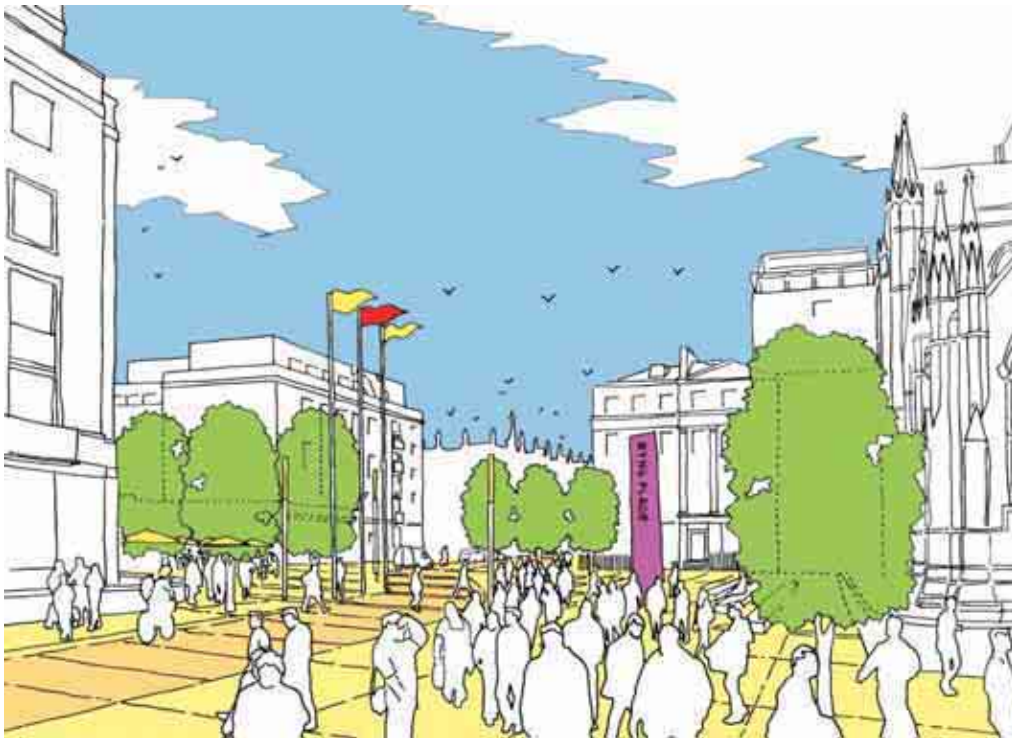
*Option 4:* A centre piece unites the space and provides a termination event in all directions



*Above:* Illustrative section showing tree planting in Byng Place

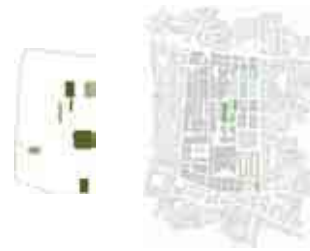
*Opposite (from top):* View of Byng Place as it is; as the lively pedestrian friendly space it should be







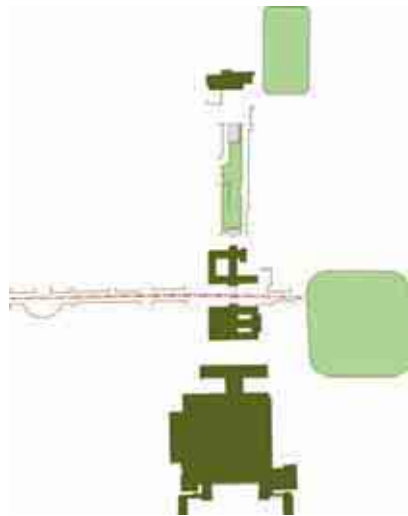
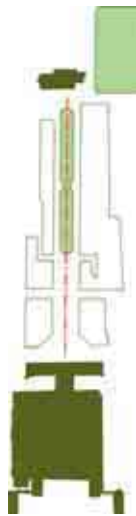
## THE UNIVERSITY SQUARES: Building on recent renewal



The university squares create addresses within Bloomsbury's campus area and provide a focus for social interaction and informal discourse within the area's intellectual community.

The physical improvement of these spaces - Gordon Square, Woburn Square, Byng Place and Torrington Square - is the first step towards creating a campus worthy of the academic status enjoyed by the institutions.

It is suggested that further work be done to distinguish one space from another, so that each has a clear purpose, programme of activity and character that is distinctive. Focusing purely on physical improvement may result in places that are simply variations of one another.



*Above:* Diagrams describing how Senate House has altered the relationship between University College London and the British Museum

*Below:* Opportunities to invigorate Torrington Square, particularly along its western edge







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*This Page: Plan by EDCO showing an integrated approach to the university squares, and suggestions for activities which reinforce their separate identity*



## TAVISTOCK SQUARE: A Peace Garden

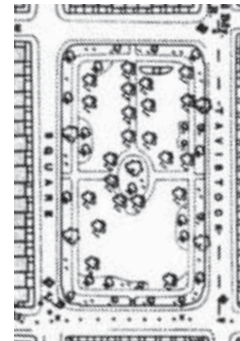
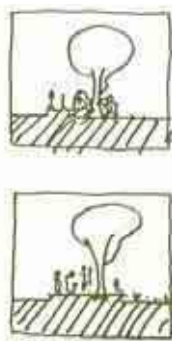


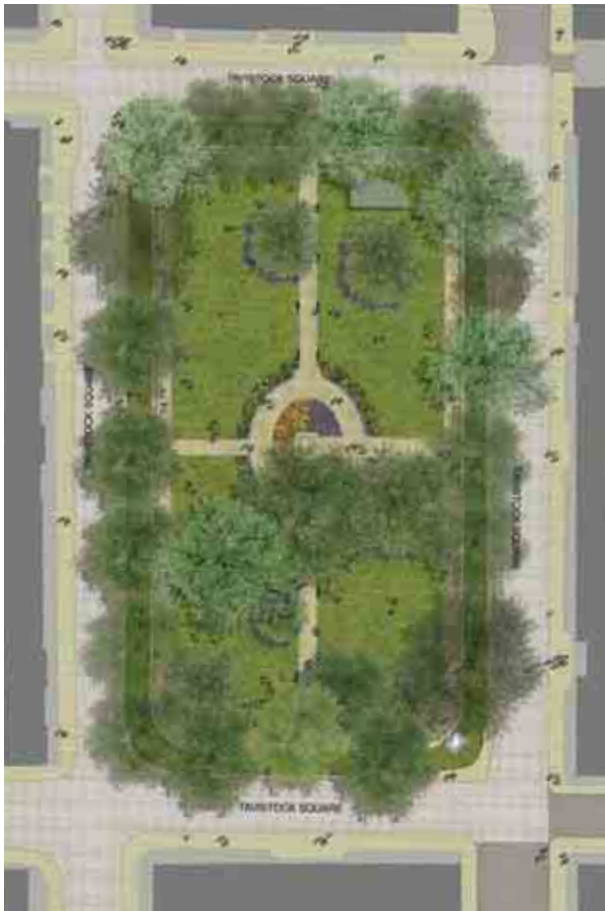
Tavistock Square was developed in the 1820s. Its centre-piece is a statue of Mahatma Gandhi. There is also a memorial to conscientious objectors and a cherry tree planted in memory of the victims of Hiroshima. The square has become a place of reflection. The simple original layout reinforces this and does not necessarily need to be changed, however it has been suggested that this could become London's principal memorial space, which could involve more substantial change. We propose at the least altering the edge treatment by removing railings in accordance with the sketch below, and introduction of a maintenance regime aimed at improving light levels and sight lines. The hard surfacing next to the Gandhi memorial should be increased in size.



Above: Existing view and plan of Tavistock Square

Below (from left): Existing View and plan of Tavistock Square; A 1914 plan shows how little the square has changed since it was first designed





Left: The illustrative plan and section shows minor interventions relating mainly to the treatment of soft landscape and the edge treatment

Above (from top): Memorials already in the square for Gandhi, conscientious objectors, and Virginia Woolfe

