

Welcome

We are very pleased to welcome you to this consultation event today

The History of Science Museum is home to an unrivalled collection of scientific inventions, devices, and instruments from different cultures, places, and times in human history. It is located at the heart of historic Oxford in the world's oldest surviving purpose-built public museum building.

The Museum has embarked on a journey to improve its existing facilities for visitors, staff and the collections. The Vision 24 project aims to safeguard the future of the building, reinterpret the Museum's world-class collections and enable them to reach more diverse audiences.

This consultation event will show you:

- The project vision
- The building's heritage
- The proposals for improving accessibility and inclusivity
- The proposals for improving safety and welfare
- The vision for reimagining the exhibition spaces
- The architectural vision
- The proposed sustainability strategy

Members of the team will be available to answer questions during these times:

- Wednesday 10th July - 12:00-14:00
- Saturday 13th July - 11:00-14:00
- Tuesday 16th July - 17:00-19:00
- Thursday 18th July - 12:00-14:00

Your views

There is a feedback form which we would be grateful if you would complete and submit to us either in hard copy or online by scanning the QR code. The deadline for submitting your feedback is 26 July. You can also share your views and get in touch with us directly by emailing V24@hsm.ox.ac.uk



Next steps

July

8th - 21st
Public consultation at the Weston Library

Mid-July
Further consultation with Oxford City Council, Historic England, and other key stakeholders

August - September

Final design development and coordination following review of consultation feedback

October

Planning and Listed Building Consent submission



Vision 24 - Accessibility for All:

Our Vision is to:

Reveal Beauty - Highlight Ingenuity - Inspire Curiosity

Our Mission is to:

- Explore the connections between people, science, art and belief
- Give voice to the histories that our collections can tell
- Share the stories of science in Oxford

Vision 24 will deliver our aspiration to be one of the world's leading small museums. The 'museum as a meeting point' is at the heart of everything we do – our collection embodies a dialogue between art, science and belief, our building unites historic collections and cutting-edge research under one roof, our programme ties together local residents and global communities.

Visibility, accessibility and inclusion are essential to fulfil the Museum's Vision and Mission. To bring cultures and communities together, our building must become more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive.

Without the physical transformation of the building and adaptations enabling digital upgrades, we will miss opportunities to forge connections (where there is currently division), to enhance the science capital and wellbeing of local and global communities and provide a fitting platform for Oxford science.

Key Project Goals:

01. Address the building's currently inaccessible entrance

All must currently enter via a steep and slippery flight of stone steps directly into the Central Gallery. Those who cannot do so must use an exposed platform lift from Sheldonian Yard which only provides access for one person to the basement gallery, with no means of reaching other floors.



Existing Broad Street steps



Existing lift



Artist's impression of the proposed aerial view

02. Provide suitable visitor facilities

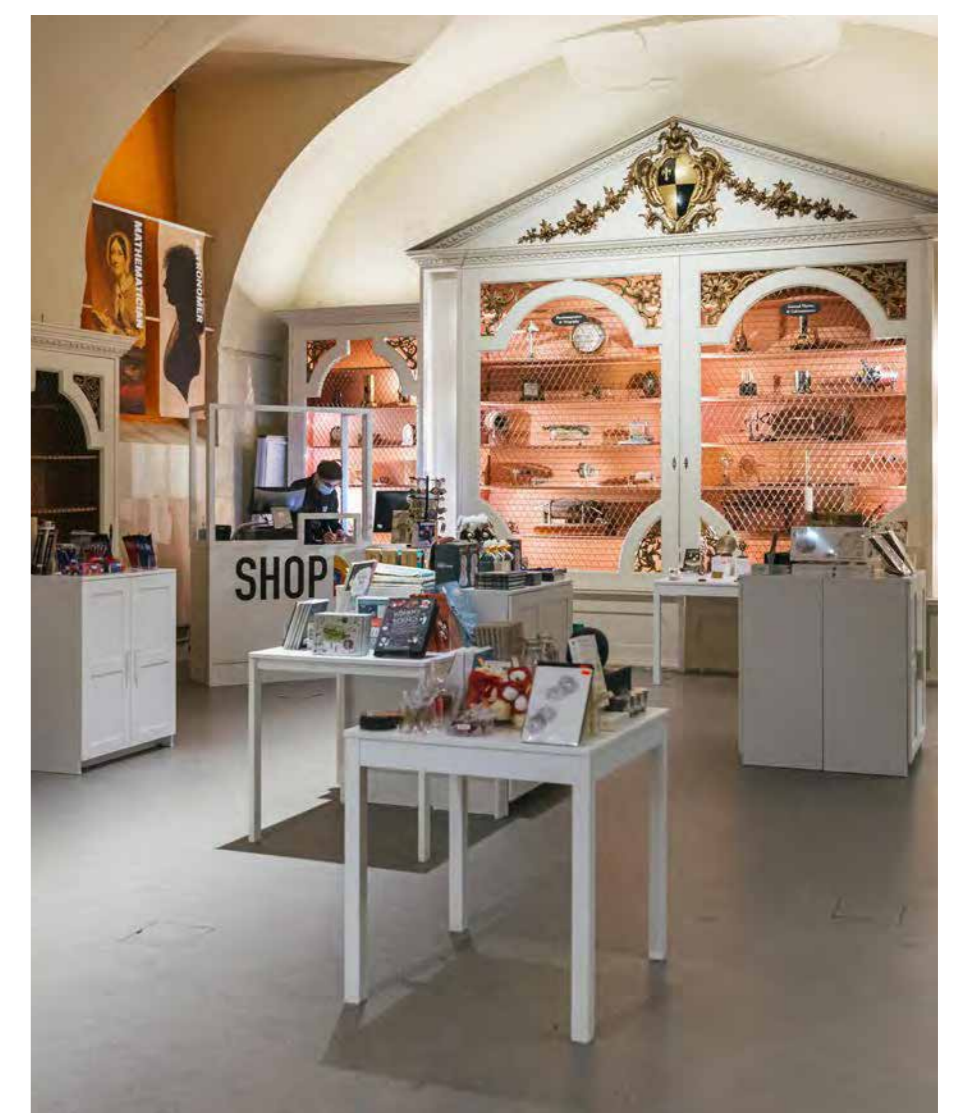
The museum lacks many of the facilities that visitors expect nowadays, including toilets and baby changing, a welcome area with lockers and information point, and a shop.

The current arrangements discourage or prevent young families, wheelchair users and those with mobility or visual impairments from visiting the Museum.

The lack of facilities also restricts the Museum's ability to host groups, provide learning opportunities and organise events.



Existing welcome desk



Existing shop in basement gallery

03. Create accessibility throughout the building

Accessibility is an issue for the whole Museum, with the Basement Gallery being the only exhibition space which benefits from level access via an exposed platform lift that is restricted to one visitor. The Central and Upper Galleries are inaccessible to many visitors with mobility issues.

As well as preventing equal access, the lack of an internal lift also prevents the Museum as an employer from accommodating staff with any mobility impairments. Staff also have to regularly transport items of the collection up and down the stairs, which are steep and hazardous.



Historic staircase



Existing external staircase

04. Provide suitable staff facilities

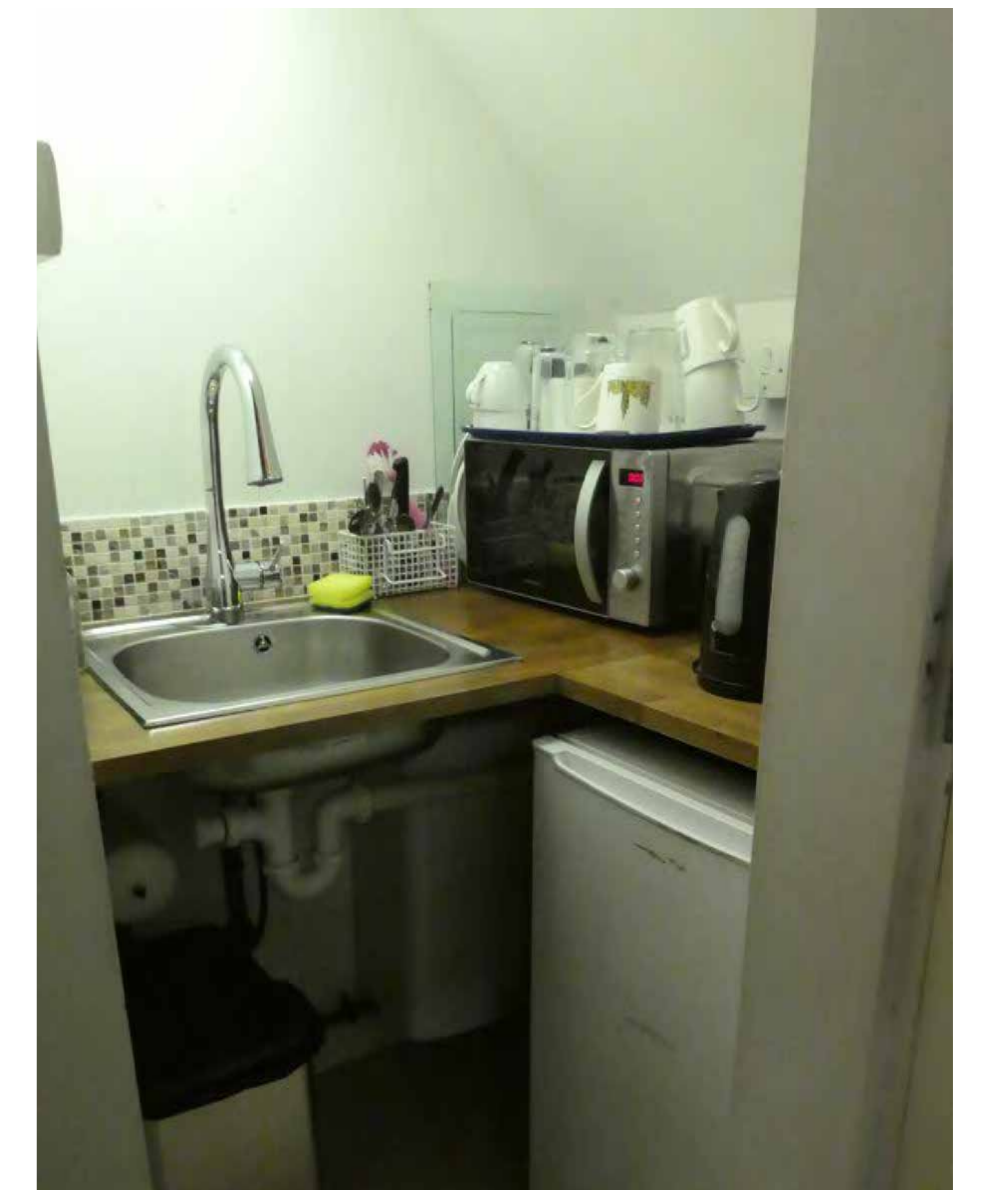
Staff facilities, including working areas and space for curating and managing the collections, are limited by their condition, location and size.

A building project from the early 2000s which created additional workspace has left a legacy of issues, including significant water ingress.

The Museum's existing staff areas are all within rooms on half landings from the main staircase, which makes them inaccessible to members of staff with mobility impairments.



Existing basement extension roof



Existing staff kitchenette

05. Reimagine the gallery spaces

Exhibition space is limited in the Basement and Central Galleries. Currently, the Gallery spaces themselves are in dire need of an overhaul to make the world-class collection fully accessible physically, intellectually and emotionally. Lighting, ventilation and temperature control must also be improved to protect the collection from damage.



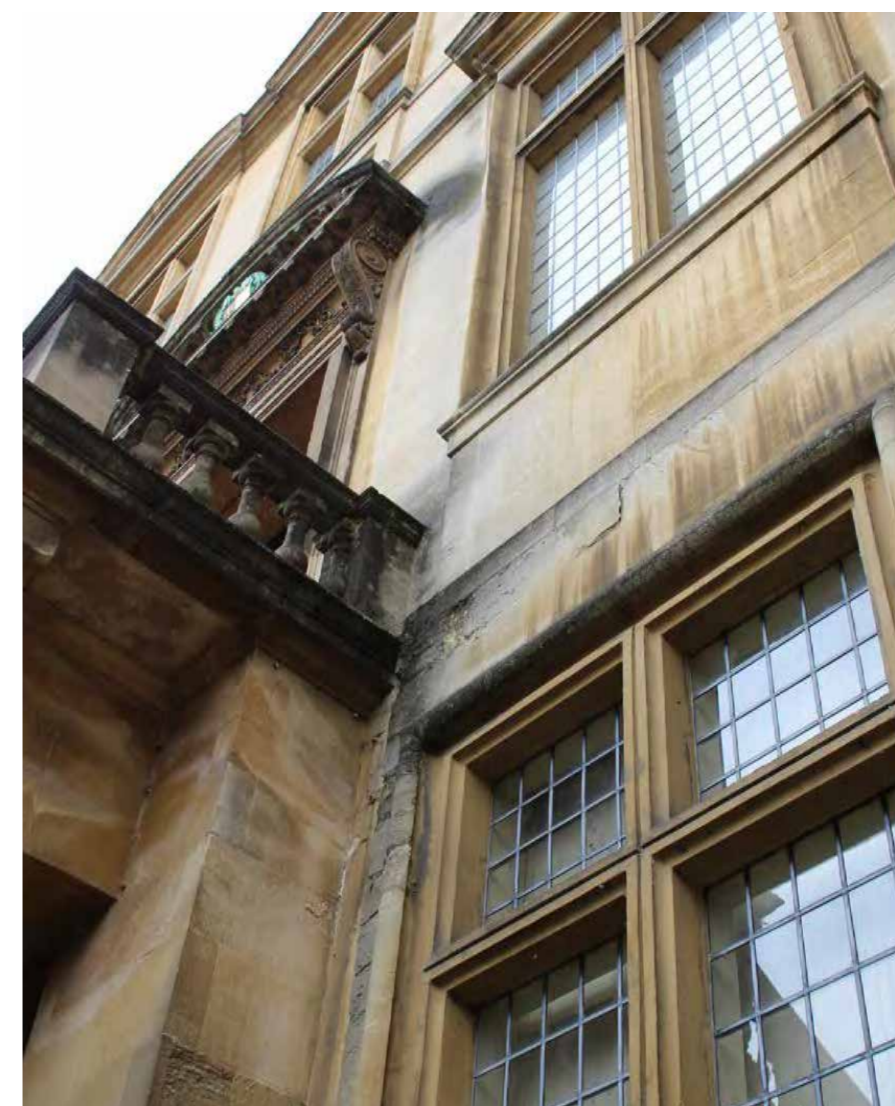
Existing Upper Gallery



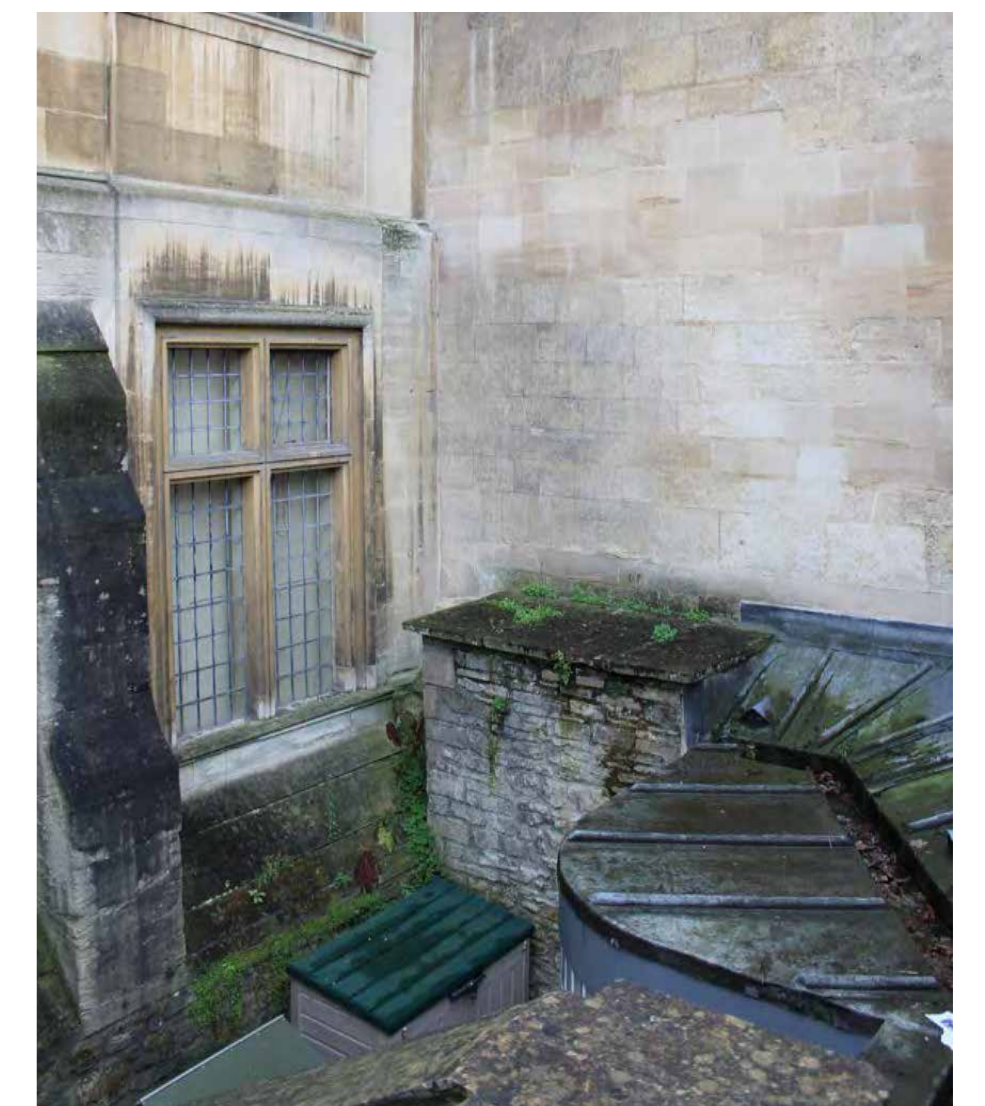
Existing Central Gallery

06. Improve the building's environmental performance

Like many historic structures, the environmental performance of the building is poor. Building temperature can exceed 30°C in summer and drop below 13°C in winter, impacting on staff and visitor comfort. High humidity puts the collections at risk, while systemic damp also affects staff welfare and interferes with day-to-day building operations such as the electrics.



Existing elevation



Existing lightwell

Celebrating the heritage of the world's oldest surviving purpose-built public museum building

The building occupied by the History of Science Museum is especially significant for its original function as a public museum. Since 1683, when it opened to the public, the building has enabled the exchange of knowledge through teaching, research and engagement with collections at the heart.

In 1677, Elias Ashmole, a former student at Oxford, gifted his collection of curiosities – antiquities, natural history specimens and ethnographical objects – to the University on the condition that it was provided with a suitable home where it could be visited by anyone wishing to do so.

From its conception, the three-storey building was multi-functional. The vaulted basement contained a chemical laboratory; the ground floor provided a lecture room for the School of Natural History; and the top floor contained an exhibition gallery for the Museum with an adjoining library. Ashmole's remaining collection was transferred to the new Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont Street in the 1890s. In 1924, Lewis Evans gifted his collection of scientific instruments to the University and in 1935, the History of Science Museum was formally established in the building, thereby continuing its original purpose as a public museum.

Key Dates

- 1667
Elias Ashmole gifts his collection to the University
- 1683
The foundation stone is laid
- 1890s
The much expanded collection is divided over various institutions
- 1895
Decree to allocate the basement as book storage for the Bodleian
- 1901-1939
The Oxford English Dictionary is based in the Central Gallery
- 1924
The History of Science Museum is founded
- 2024
The Museum celebrates its centenary

The Grade I listed building is highly significant for its age and relative integrity – this having been facilitated by its almost continuous occupation and use as a museum with co-located schools. The front wall, railings and “emperors’ heads” sculptures are listed separately to the building, also at Grade I.

The architectural detailing on the exterior is especially distinguished, and the survival of the original principal rooms and internal staircase is also significant.



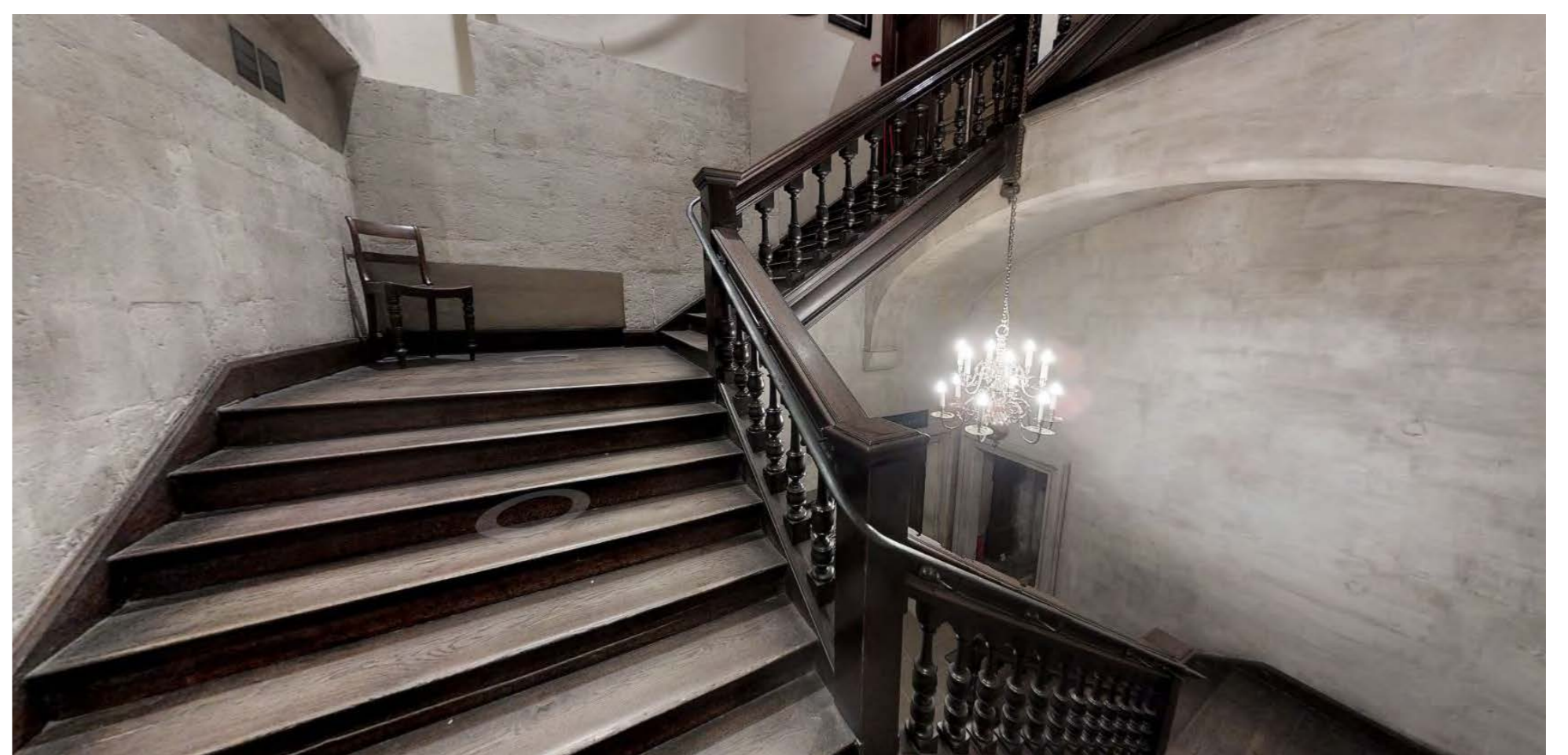
View Broad Street, 1793



Architectural detail of the Sheldonian Yard ceremonial entrance



View of Broad Street, 1939



Existing main staircase

Heritage

Safeguarding the future of this important heritage asset

This historic building is the Museum's greatest asset, as well as its most pressing constraint. Refurbishing and updating the building will unlock its potential to thrive for generations to come. If the building is not upgraded to make it fit for 21st century visitors and staff, then its use as museum and much of its associated heritage significance will be lost.

The building's physical closeness to the administrative core of the University of Oxford positions it within a highly significant architectural and historical group. It sits on the south side of Broad Street between Exeter College and the Sheldonian Theatre, near the Old Bodleian and Duke Humfrey's library to the south and the Weston Library across the road.

Whilst on its own it is an impressive classically fronted building, within this setting it is somewhat overshadowed by its neighbours, and is not easily recognisable as a public building.

This historic core of the University is one of the principal attractions for tourists in the City. The Museum's location gives excellent potential to increase its visitor numbers and generate revenue to support its operation and management of the collections.

One of the principal challenges the Museum faces is the actual and perceived inaccessibility of the building. Its gated access and steep stone steps create a perception of impenetrability and difficult access. Improving this is a key objective of the Vision 24 project.



- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. History of Science Museum | 5. Clarendon Building | 9. Radcliffe Camera |
| 2. Exeter College | 6. Convocation House | 10. University Church |
| 3. Sheldonian Theatre | 7. Divinity School | 11. All Souls College |
| 4. Weston Library | 8. Old Bodleian | 12. Hertford College |



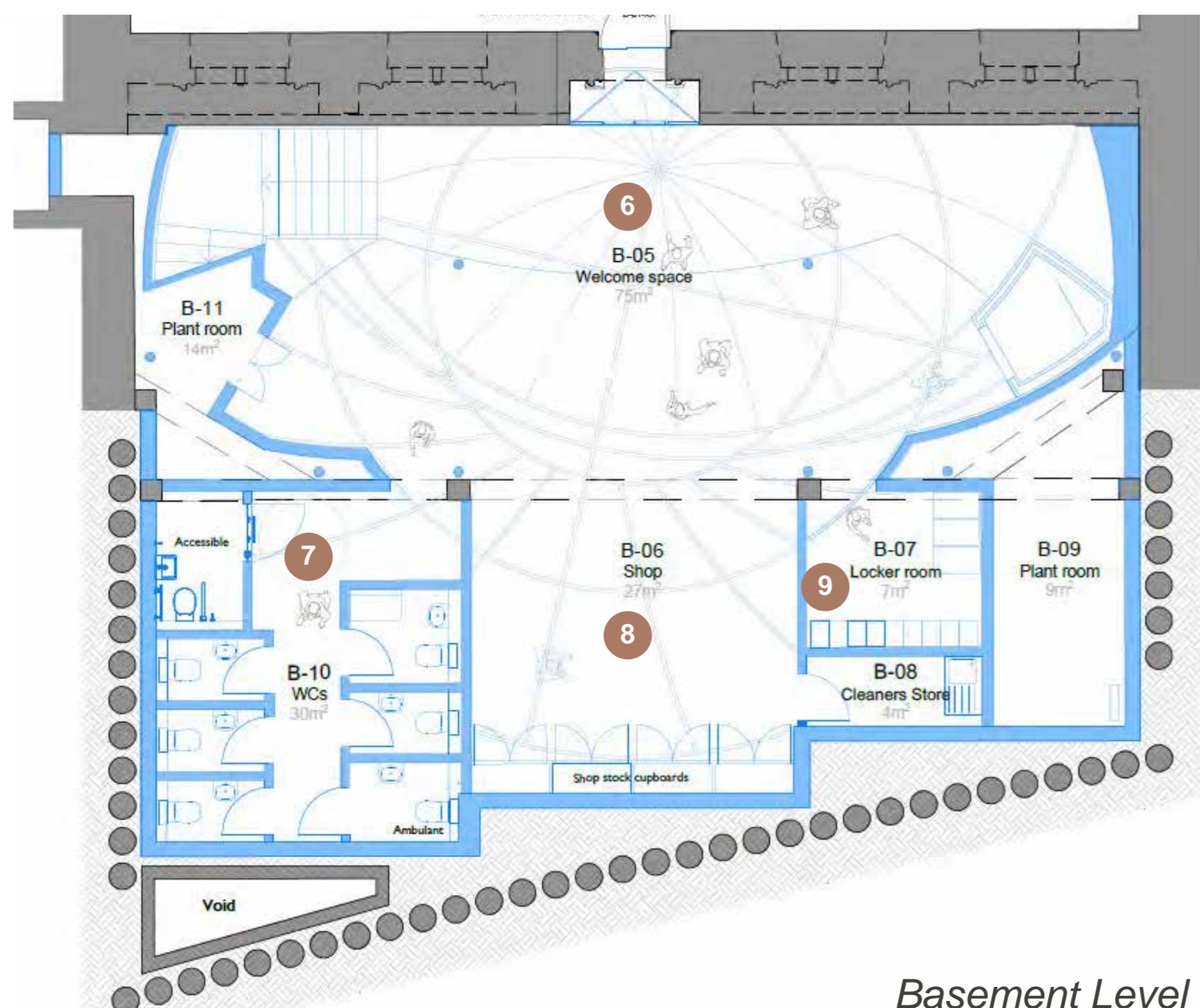
Accessibility

Creating a new accessible and inclusive arrival experience

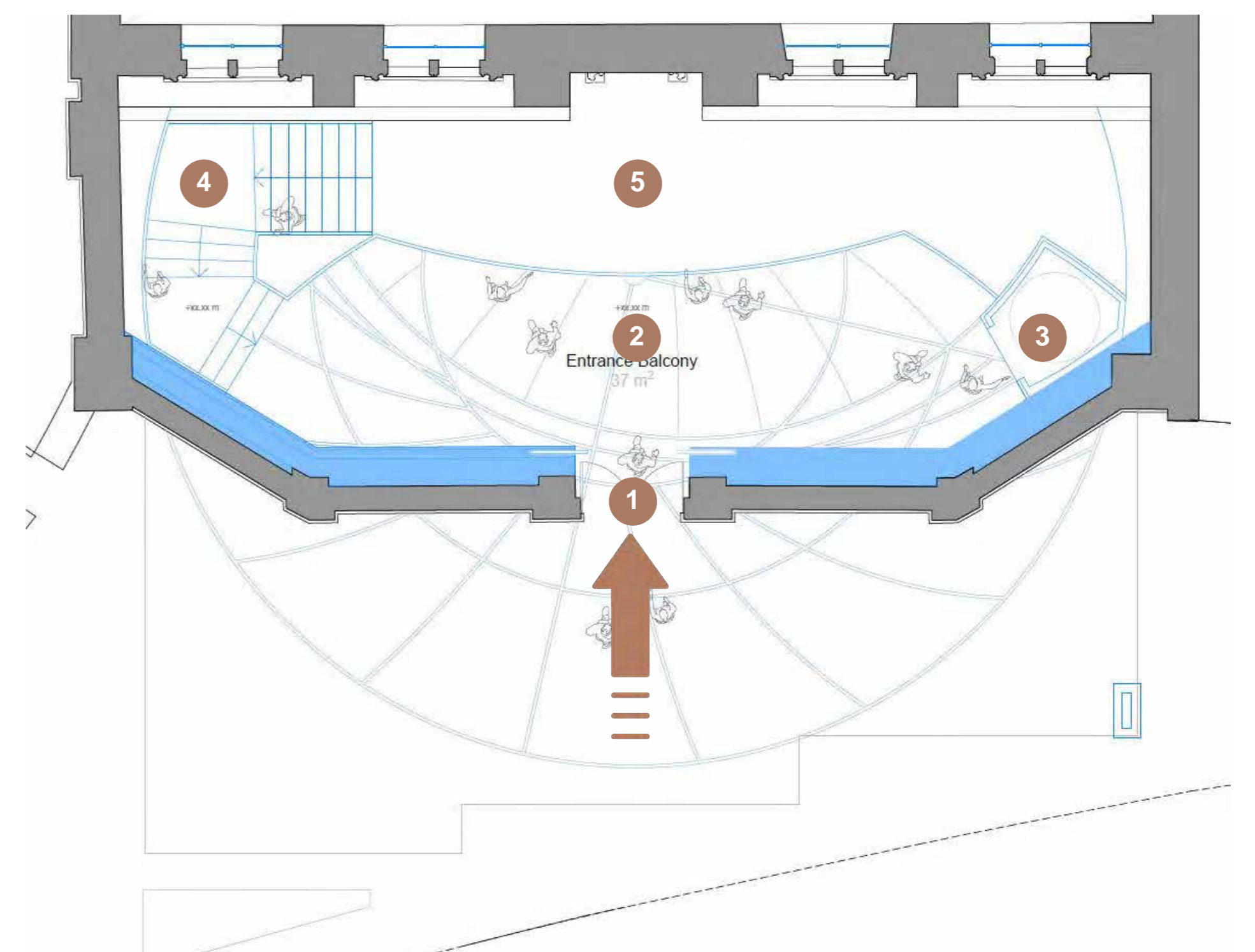
The proposals include the provision of a new front extension to replace the 2001 basement extension and provide level access into the Museum, as well as new and improved visitor facilities at basement level. The external stairs on Broad Street, installed in only 1957, will be removed to create a new accessible entrance. The aim is to provide equal quality of experience for all visitors without compromise, as well as a welcoming, high-quality and airy orientation space, equipped with all necessary visitor support facilities.



Existing access via a steep flight of stairs



Basement Level



Street Level



1. New accessible main entrance on Broad Street
2. Entrance balcony
3. Lift down to welcome space
4. Stair down to welcome space
5. Lightwell providing uninterrupted view of the front of the building
6. Welcome space at basement level
7. Accessible visitor toilet facilities
8. Shop
9. Visitor lockers and pram storage

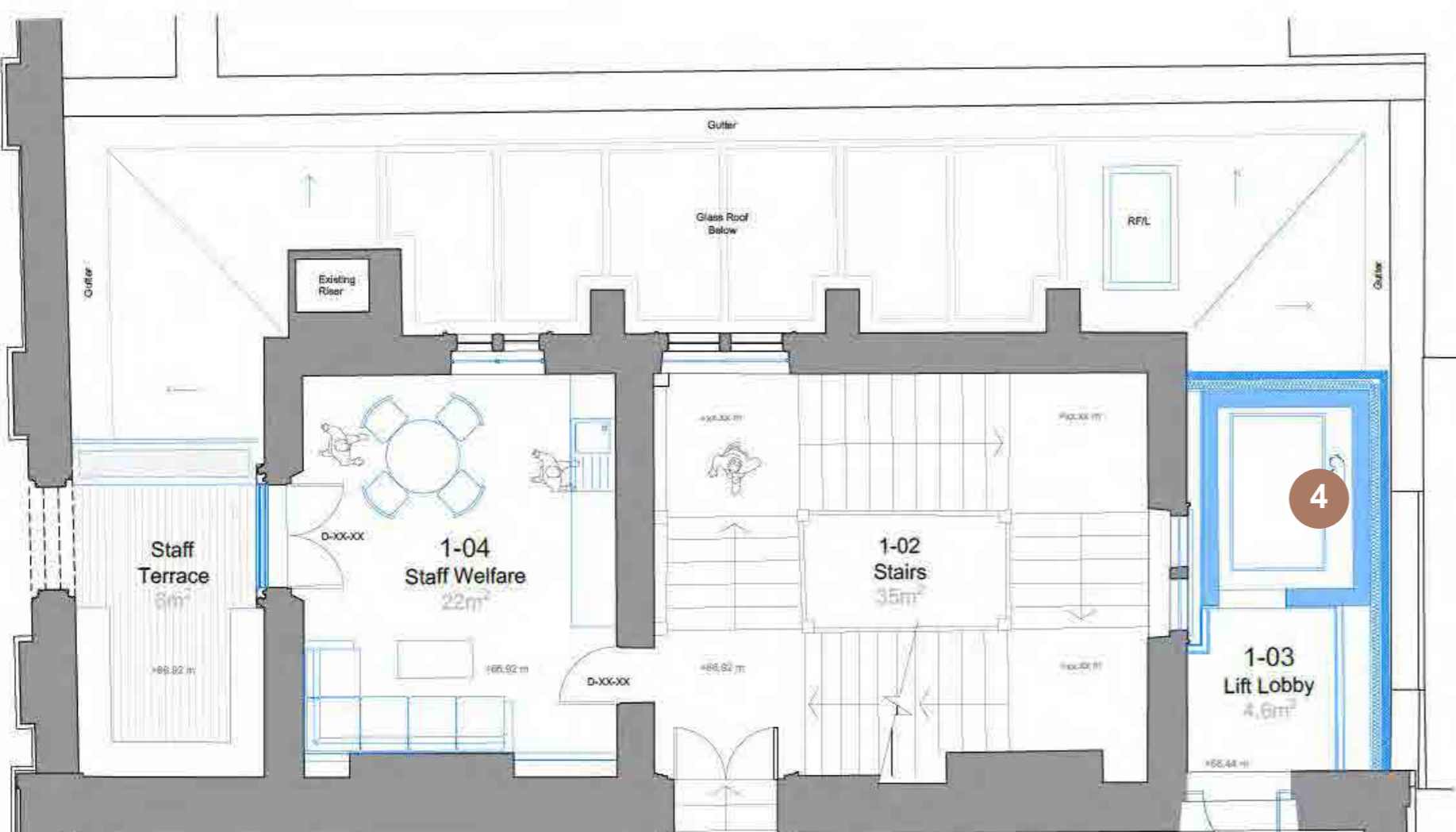
Accessibility

Prioritising physical, intellectual, and emotional access within the building

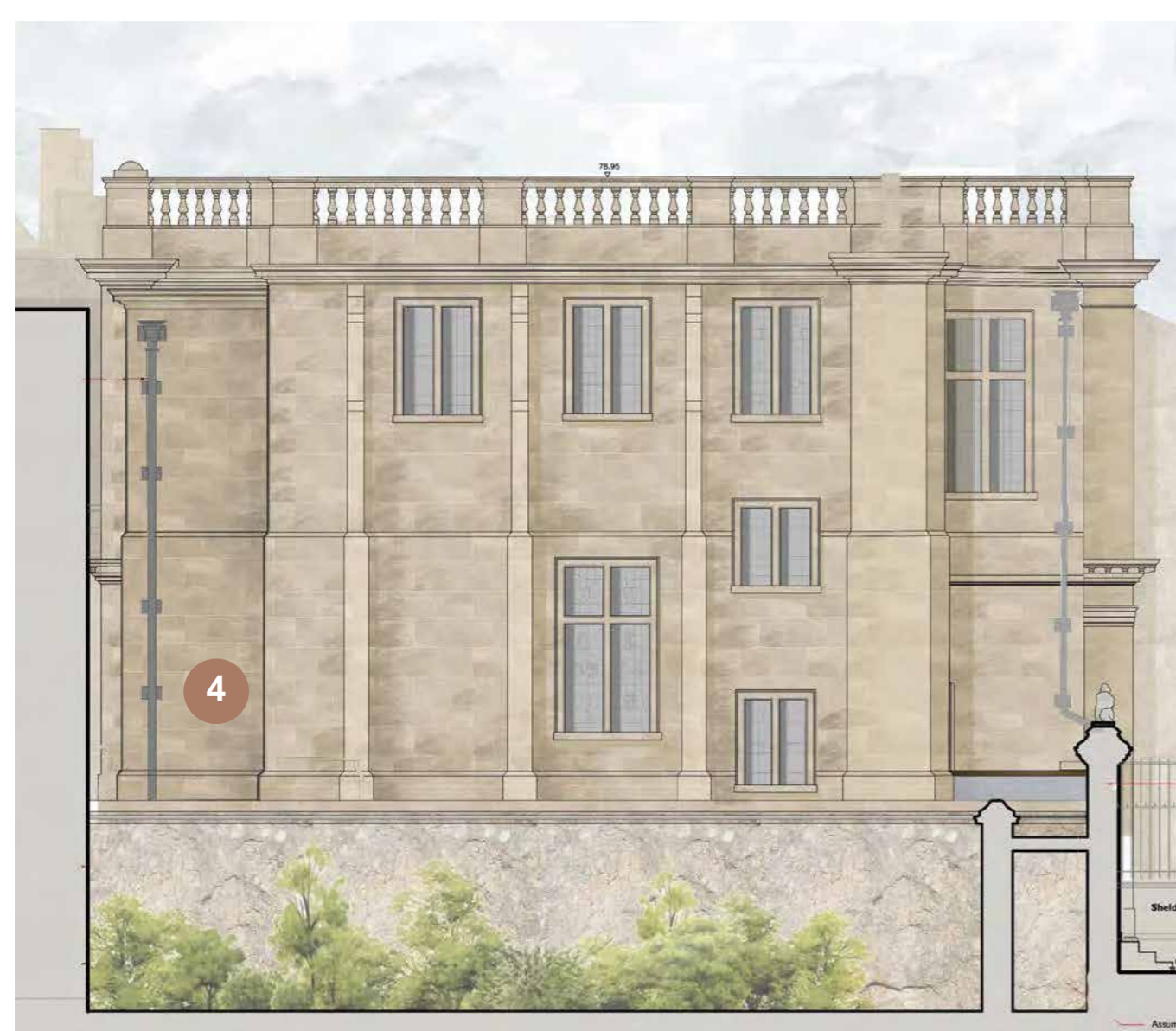
The proposal aims to deliver an easy route through the building for all. Therefore, a new lift will be available within the building so that all visitors can follow the same route through the Museum to access the gallery spaces on every floor. The lift will also allow staff to move objects around the building much more easily, and enable the Museum to meet its duties under the Equality Act and the University's own policies on accessibility and inclusivity.

The lift will be housed within a new extension located in the rear south-west corner of the building. This aims to be sympathetic and understated, with its proportions, architectural detailing and palette of materials informed by the existing building. Its overall footprint has been dictated by the capacity of the lift itself which will be big enough to accommodate both visitors and collection objects.

The new lift will be visible from the grounds of Exeter College, with whom the project team are in close communication, to ensure a satisfactory solution. The lift extension will also be partially visible from the southern edge of the Sheldonian Yard.

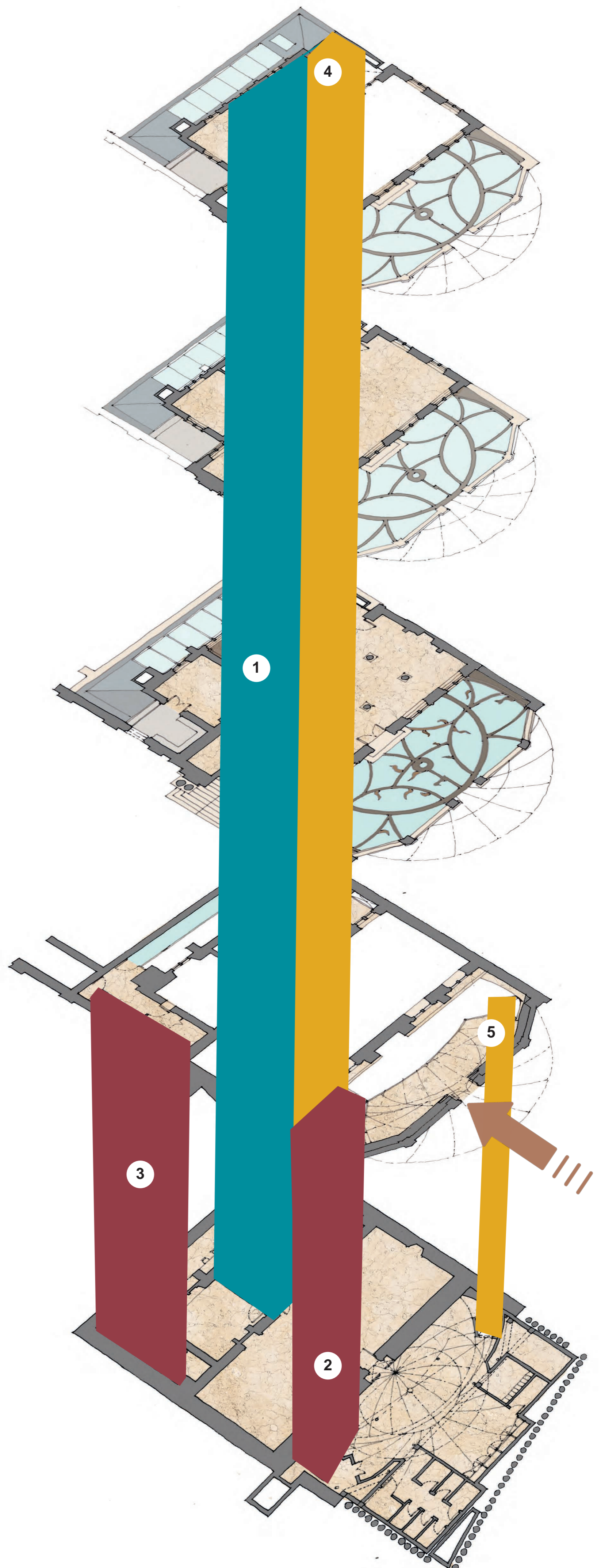


Proposed lift location



View of proposed lift extension from Exeter College

- Blue** - Existing Stairs
 1. Main staircase
- Red** - New Stairs
 2. Front extension stair
 3. Rear escape stair
- Yellow** - New Lifts
 4. Rear lift
 5. Front lift



Safety and Welfare

Providing a high-quality inclusive working environment for the Museum's staff

The project aims to improve staff welfare and inclusivity, as well as to provide adequate facilities for important conservation work for the collections.

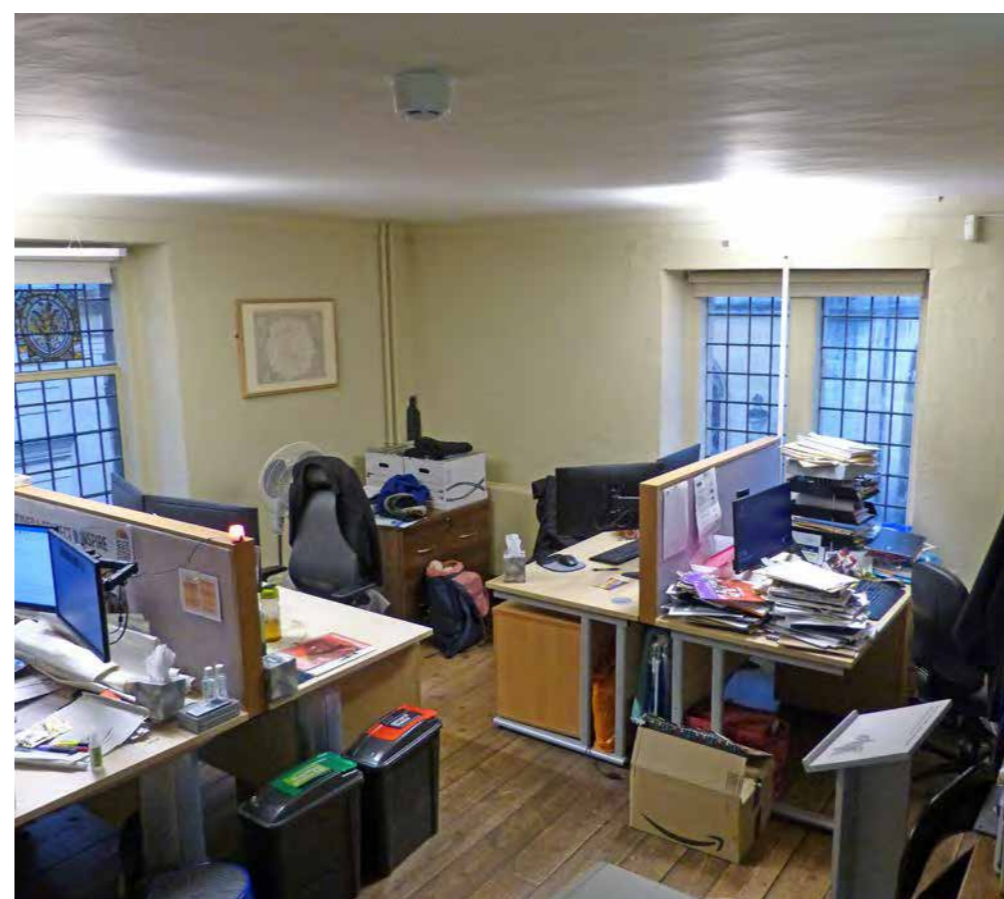
The Museum's existing work spaces are all within rooms off the half landings from the main staircase, which cannot be made accessible without major impact on the historic building fabric. Therefore, the proposals will reconfigure the existing 2001 extension located at the back of the building, to create a new accessible and inclusive work space known as the "City Wall Studio". The name references the location of this room, which occupies the space between the Museum and the adjacent medieval City Wall.

This is an opportunity to expose the currently concealed historic masonry of the City Wall and celebrate part of the site's history. The City Wall Studio will provide a much-needed comfortable and collaborative working environment for the Museum's staff.

The proposals also include improved staff welfare facilities, as well as flexible areas for conservation work and object preparation.

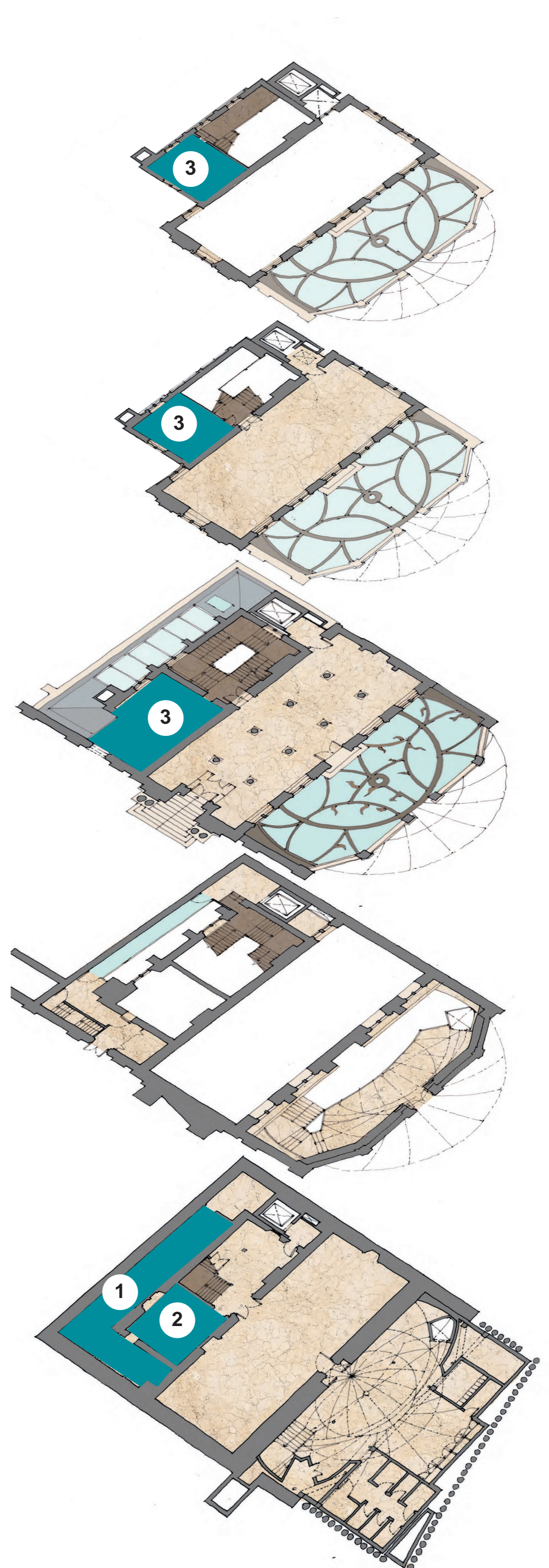


View of existing staff area



View of existing staff area

- 1. City Wall Studio
- 2. Collections' Research Room
- 3. Staff Areas
- 4. New level means of escape



View of proposed City Wall Studio



Existing staff areas only accessible via main stair

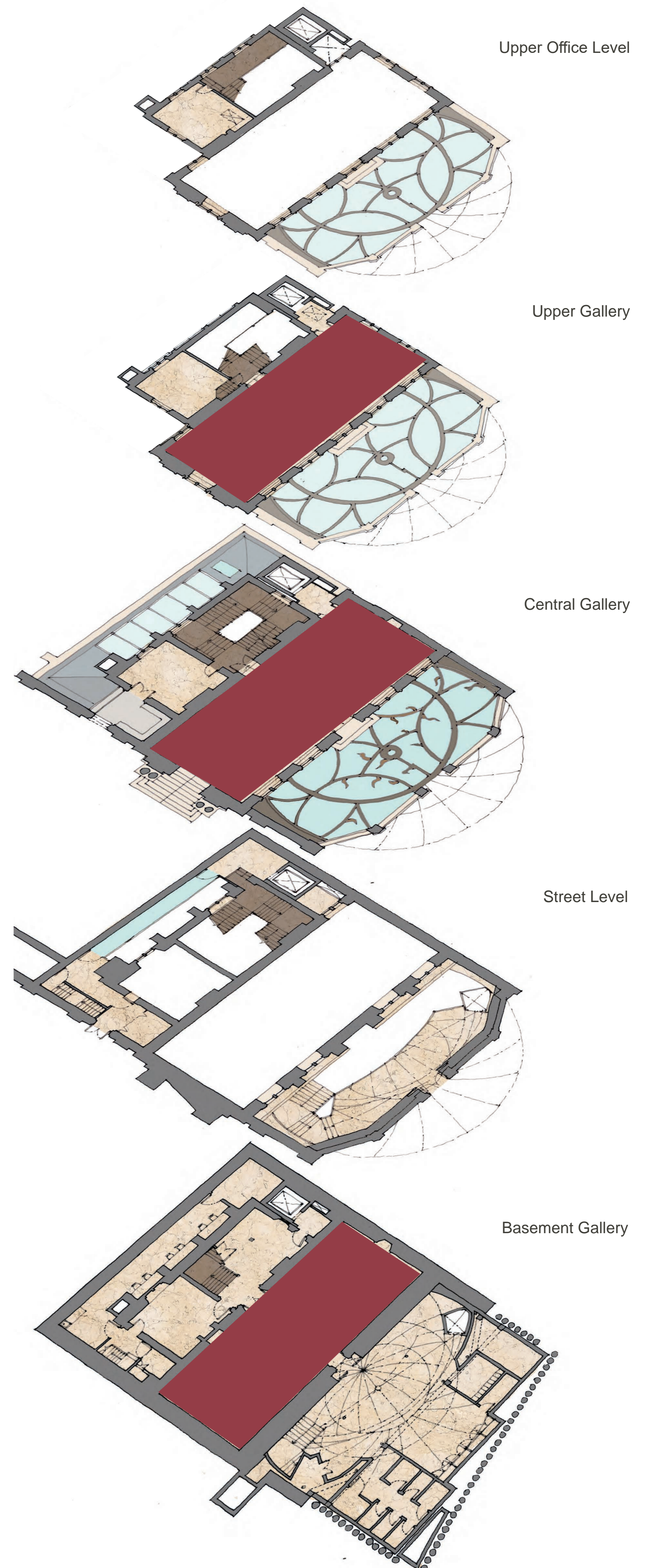
Exhibition Spaces

Reinterpreting our world-class collections

The building is the world's oldest surviving purpose-built public museum. The common usage of the term 'museum' is also first attributed to it, drawing from the Latin inscription *Musaeum Ashmoleanum* originally carved above its door. Today, the building continues to display a collection for engagement with the public.

The Museum's architectural and historical significance is intertwined with that of its current collection, as well as the one it was originally designed for: the building was always intended as a place for 'natural philosophy', i.e., science. Improving the way in which visitors engage with the collection will equip the History of Science Museum to remain relevant to its audiences and retain its original purpose of promoting science for generations to come.

Innovative displays will enable visitors to make sense of current issues through engagement with history. They will be redesigned so that they are accessible to a broad and diverse audience, facilitating a range of learning styles. The displays will have built-in flexibility to enable dynamic changes to respond to emerging questions, and to enable a dialogue between historic and contemporary art works.



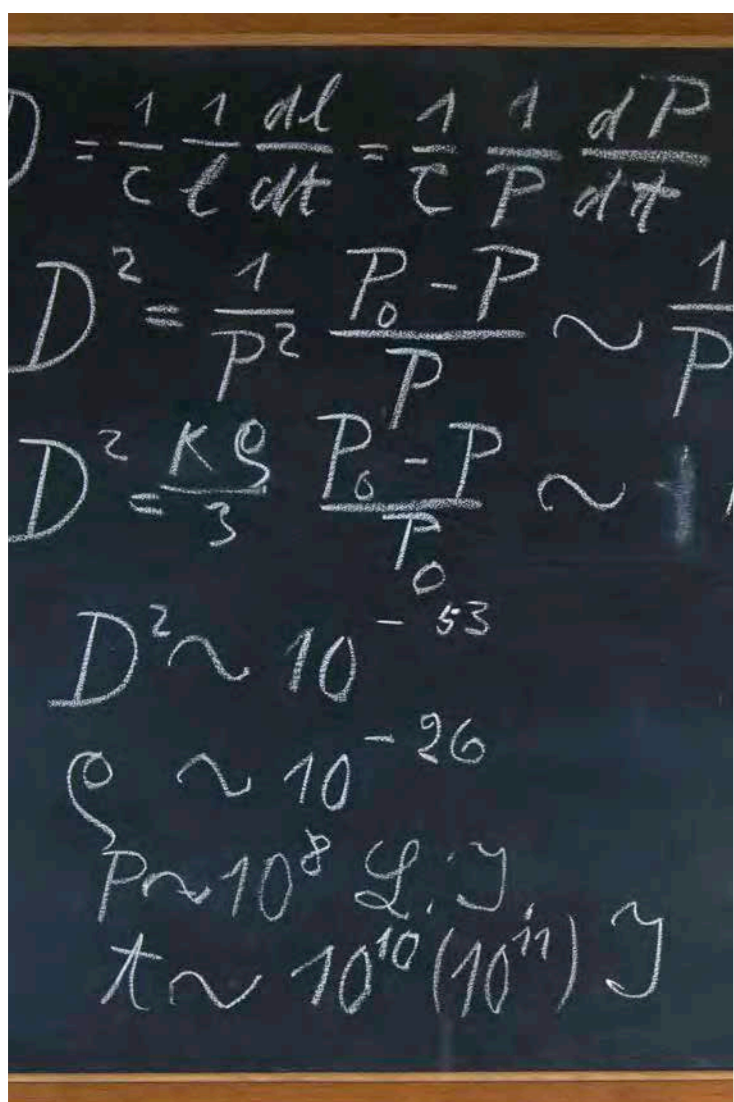
Knowledge Transfer



Innovative Maths



Science & Art



Migrating Science



About Time



Medicine and Society

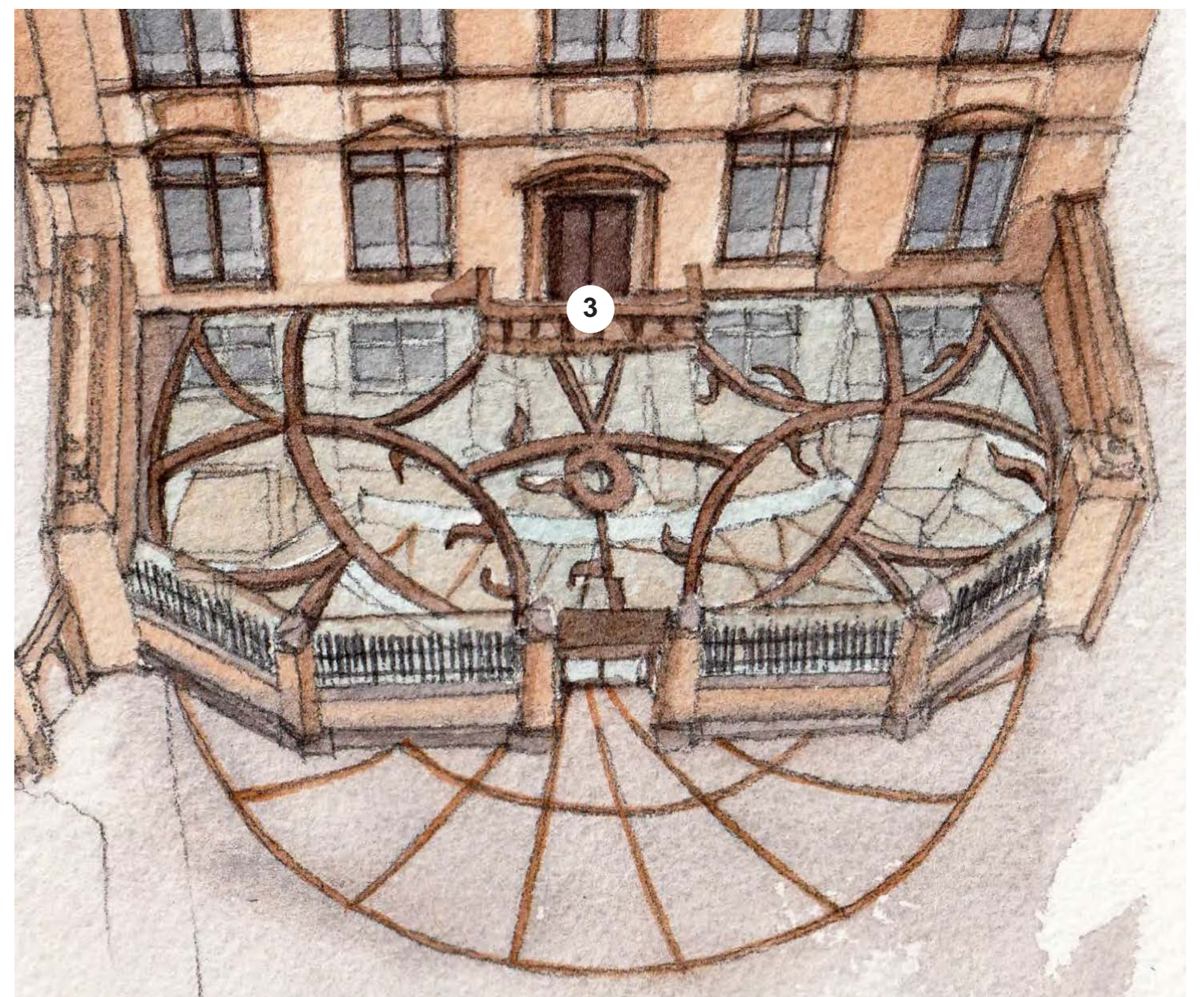
Exhibition Spaces

Reinterpreting our world-class collections

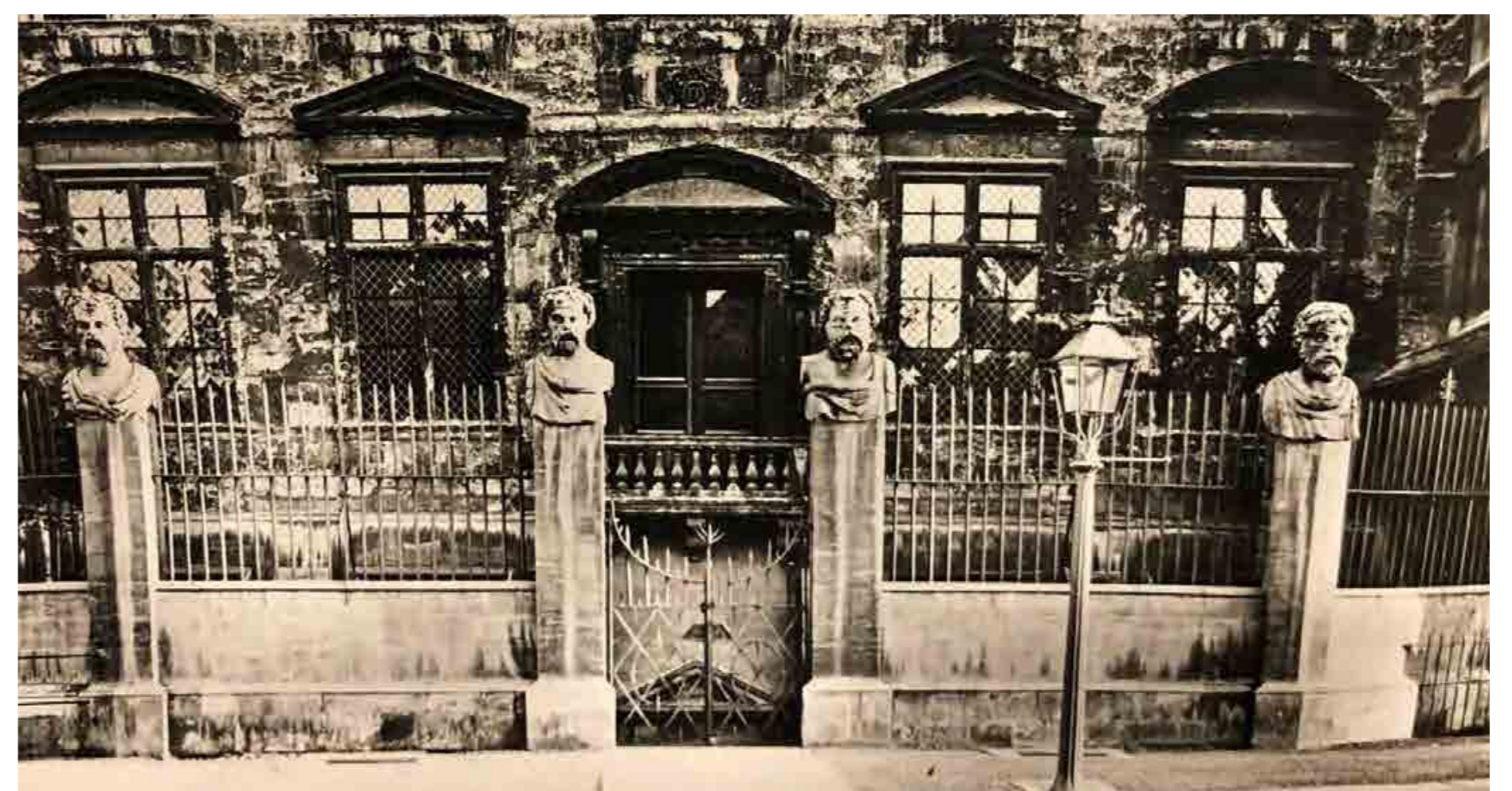
The project aims to provide a new dedicated entrance, welcome space and shop within the proposed front extension, and thus free up the galleries for showcasing the collection.

The building contains a core of three large exhibition spaces - the Basement, Central and Upper Gallery. The proposed exhibition design intends to create an immersive and creative visitor experience throughout the Museum. The galleries will be 'living and working', as they are intended to be used simultaneously for learning, teaching and research, and engagement with, and care for the collections. The new exhibition design will provide an immersive teaching and learning experience, with opportunities for hosting school and other visiting groups within the gallery spaces.

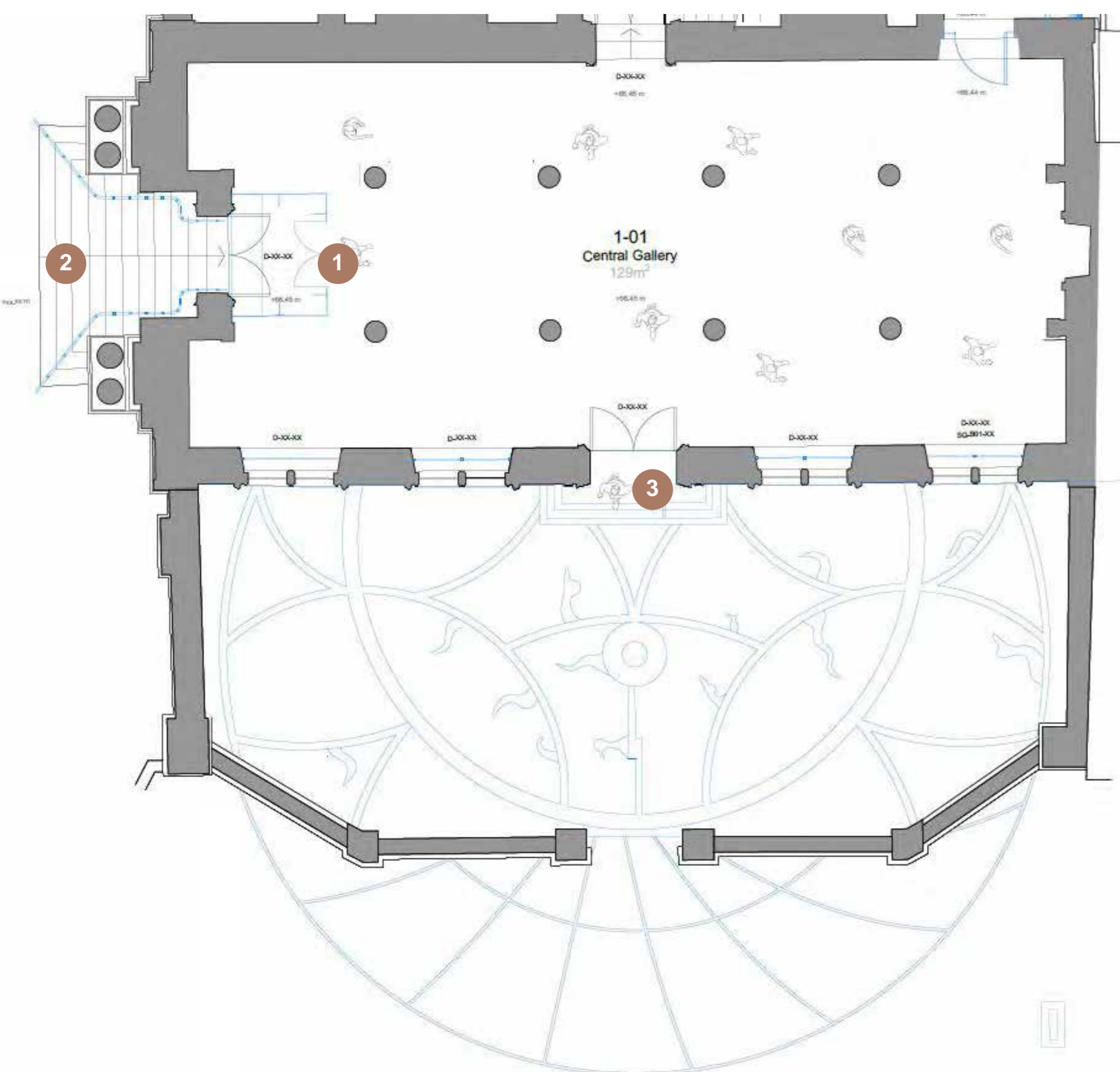
To enable the Museum to reach more diverse audiences, carefully thought-out fire upgrades will be delivered, which will make the building safer and enable it to welcome more people. These include improvements to access for the Central Gallery from the Sheldonian Yard, where a new glazed lobby will be installed, to create a safer and more secure means of escape. The existing 1957 stair to the Museum's current entrance will be replaced with a new Juliet balcony, reminiscent of the one visible in photos from the late 1800s.



Artist's impression of the proposed front extension

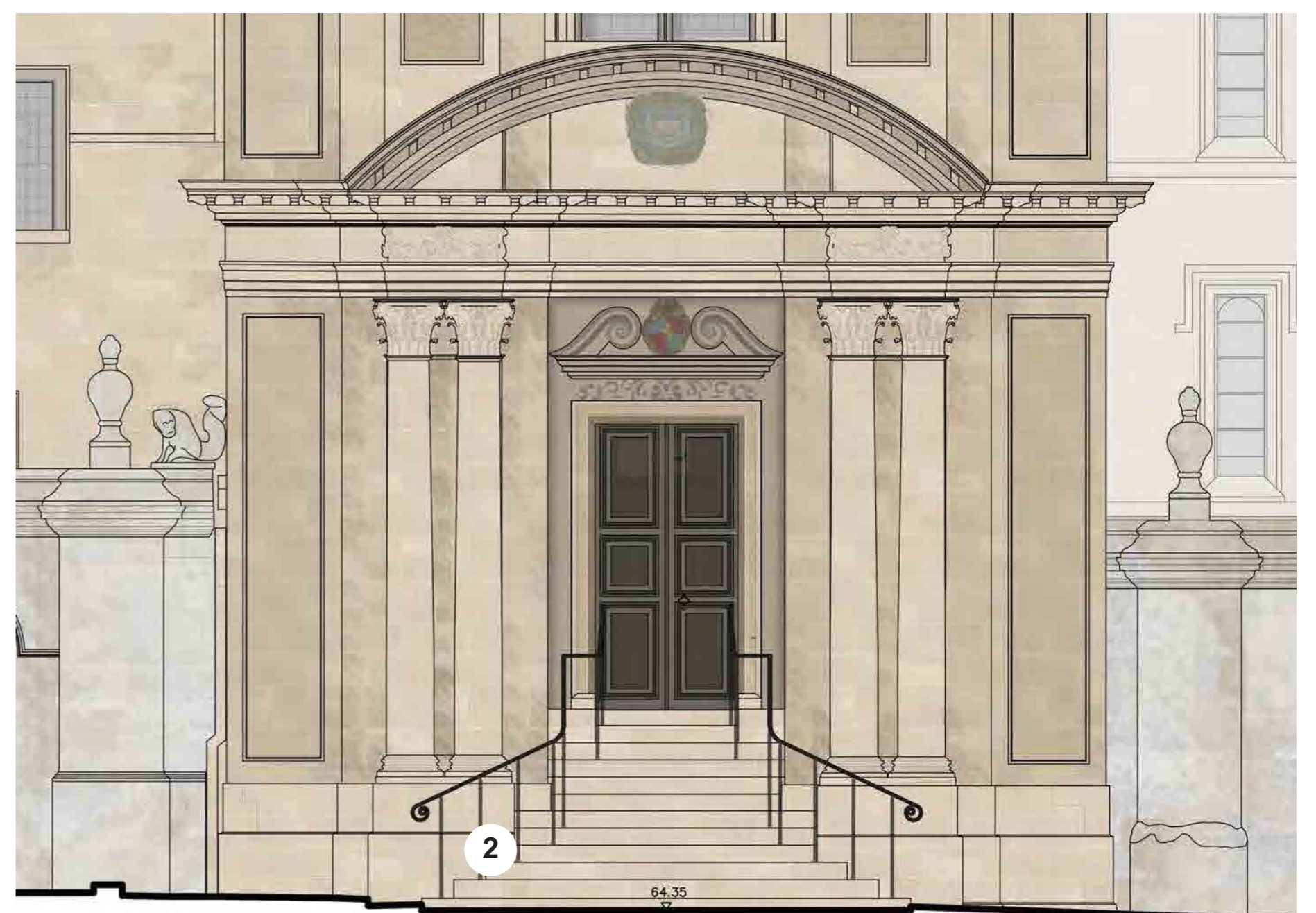


Previous balcony where the current entrance is located (1883-1896)



- 1. New lobby
- 2. New handrail
- 3. Reinstated Juliet balcony

Central Gallery Plan



Proposed handrail

Architectural Quality

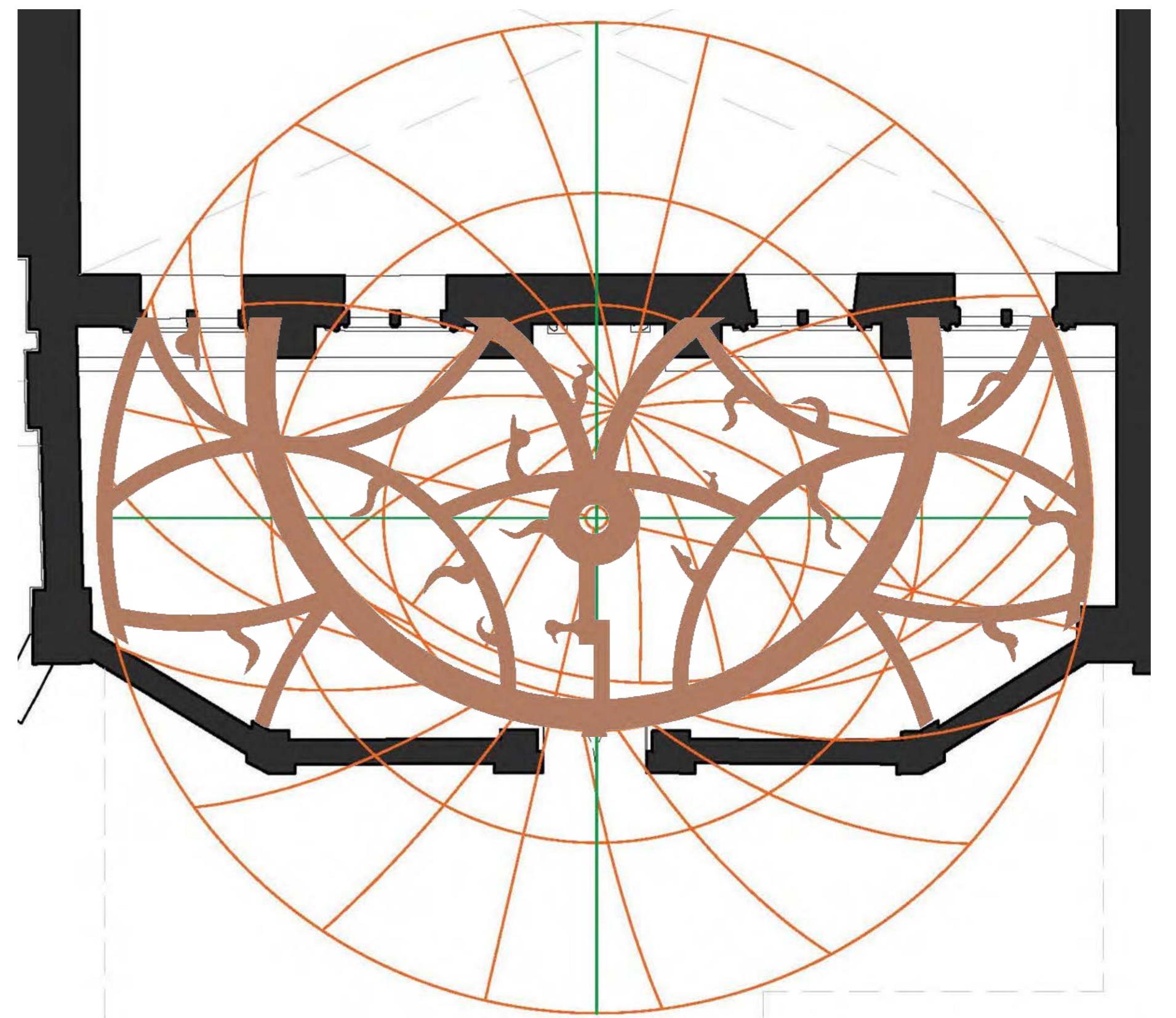
An astronomical roof celebrating the Museum's unique astrolabe collection

The History of Science Museum looks after the world's largest astrolabe collection (a sophisticated medieval computing device) which provides inspiration for the design of the glazed roof over the front extension. The entrance and basement level floor will feature the climate plate, i.e., the part of an astrolabe engraved for a specific location. This will extend into the pavement at street level, aiming to draw visitors in and improve the Museum's overall visual presence on Broad Street. Oxford's latitude was used for the design, thus tying the architecture to its setting.

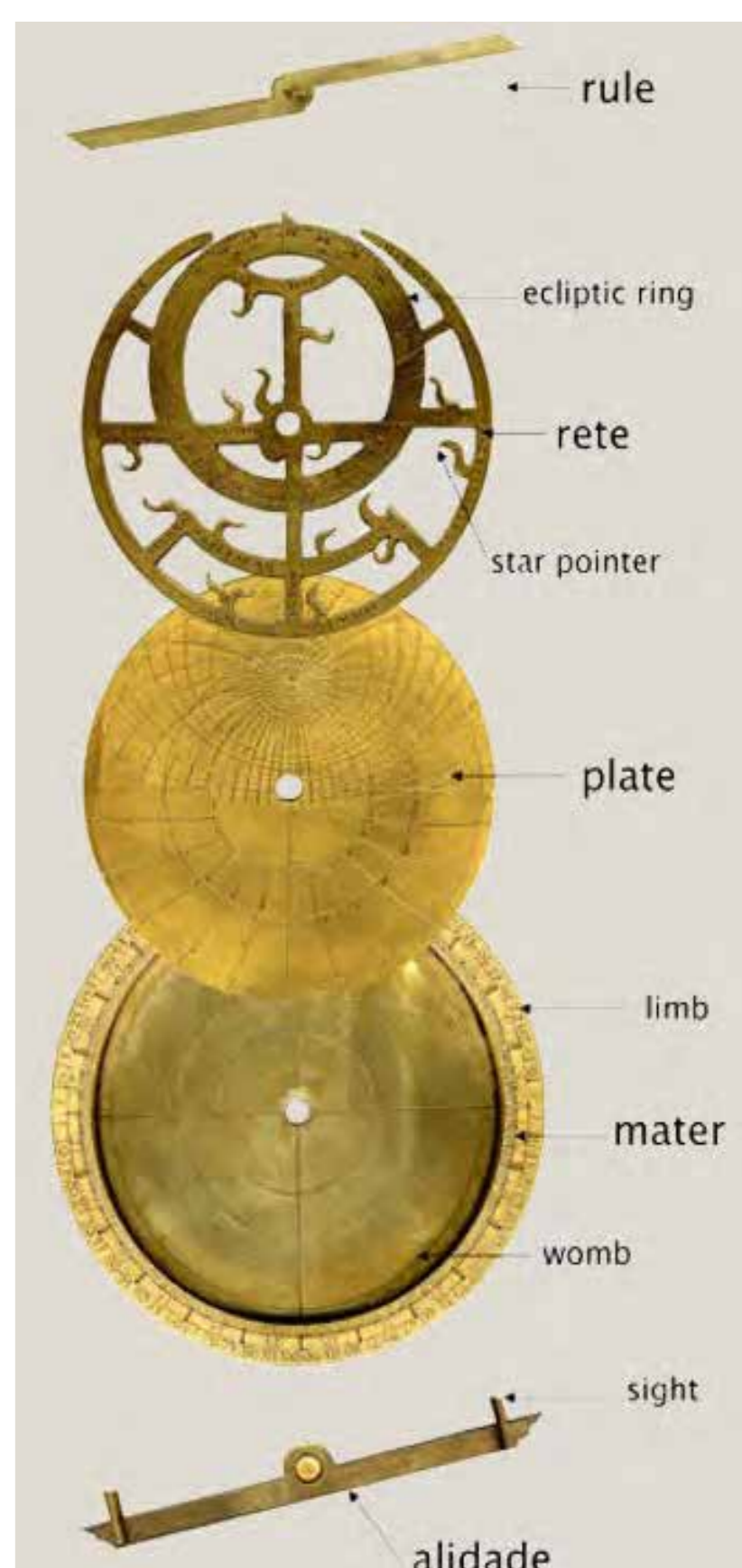
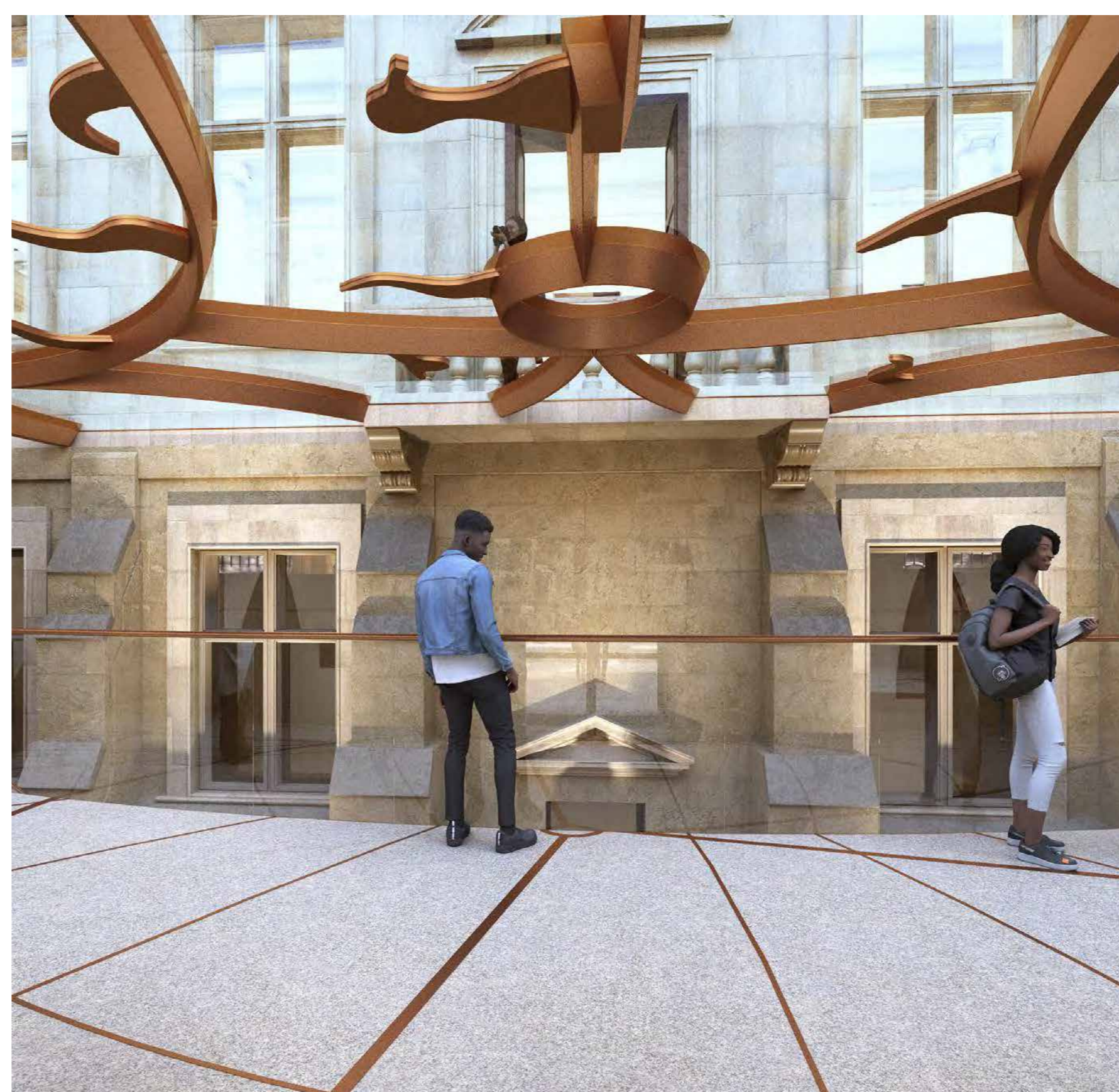
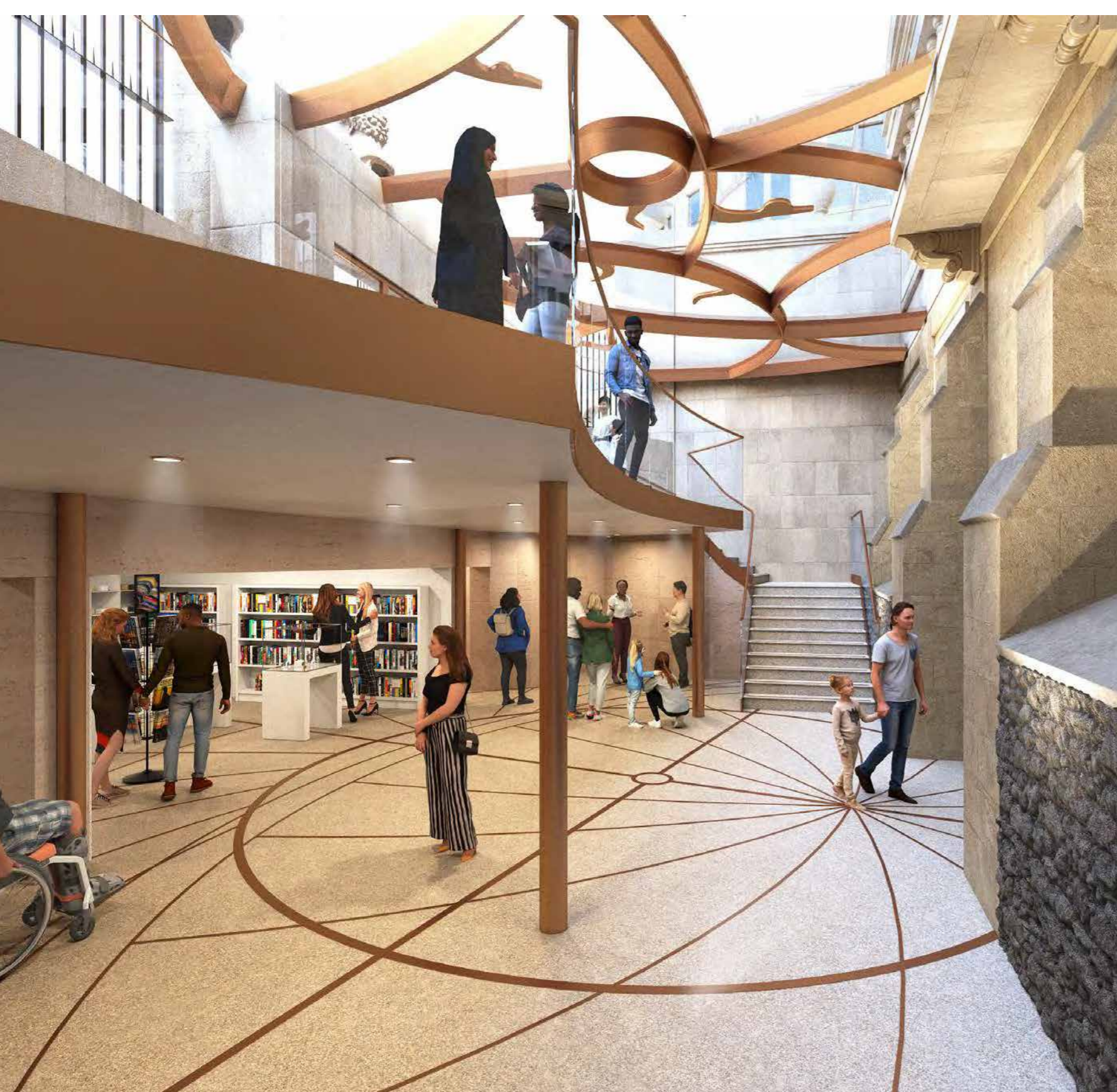
The glazed roof will feature a bespoke rete design, i.e. the celestial part of an astrolabe. To reference Oxford's history, this design is based on the astrolabe described by Geoffrey Chaucer in a book for his young son Lewis who was studying in Oxford at the time. Chaucer based his text on classical, Jewish and Muslim traditions, signifying the common threads of science.

These proposals represent an elegant way of deriving inspiration from science and expressing the importance of the building in the history of science in Oxford and across the globe.

The predominant use of glass in the roof recognises the fact that the new extension occupies a historical courtyard that has been used for many functions since 1683. The lightwell will remain a transitional space moving visitors from the open street into the enclosed building, while maintaining their awareness of the prominent Broad Street surroundings. The use of glass and the double-height configuration of the space will ensure visitors can see the Museum's front facade in its entirety, which has been obscured by the non-original stairs for decades. This new roof will add a new layer of significance to the building, drawing on its heritage.



Setting out of the bespoke astrolabe design within the building's lightwell



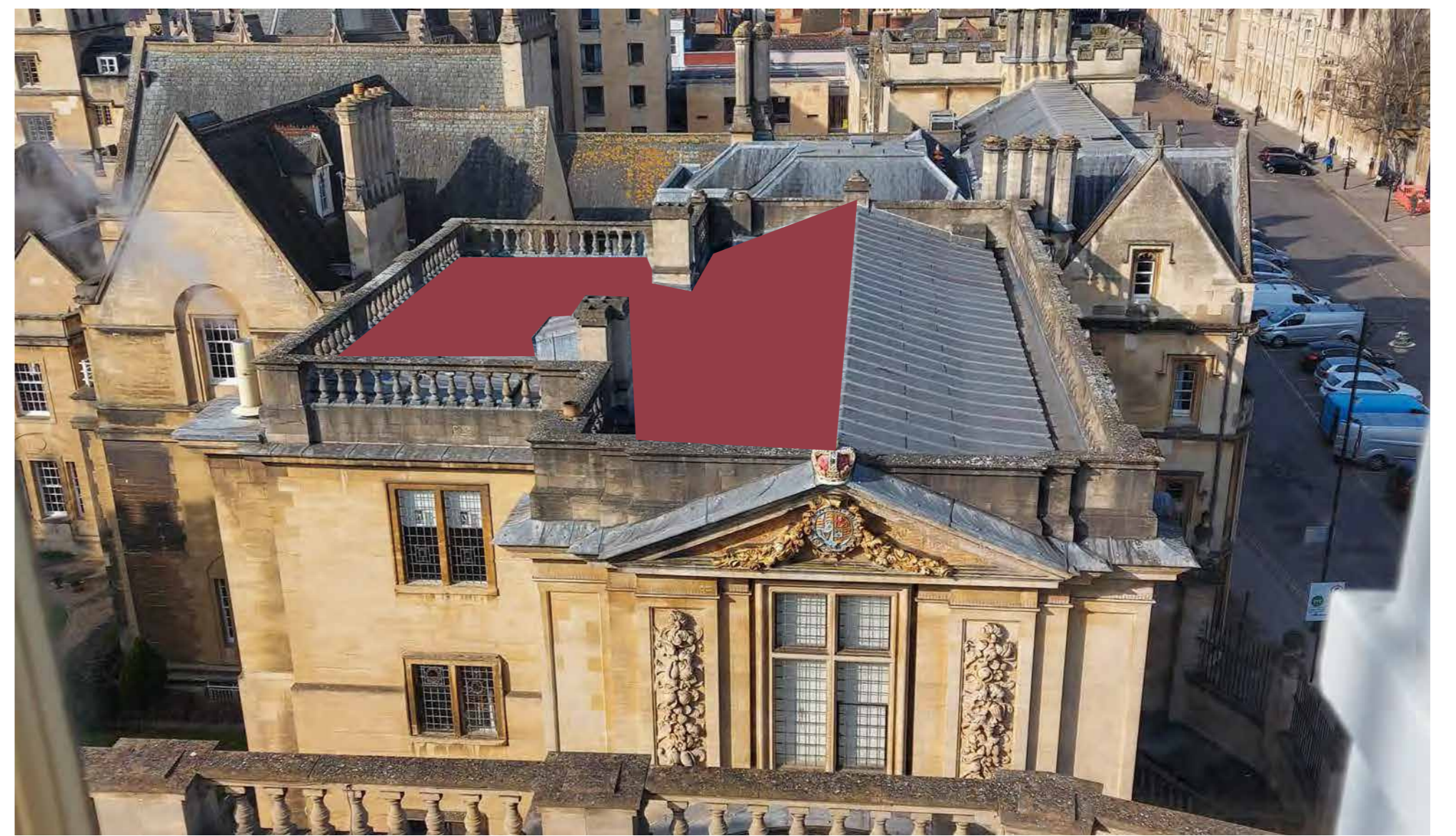
Creating a more sustainable future for the Museum

Early on in the project, the team considered a range of possible sustainable technologies including ground-source and air-source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels. It was concluded that only photovoltaic panels were feasible within the limitations of the building. We propose to install these on the south-facing areas of the building's existing roof, provided that their efficiency can be maximised without damaging the significance of the building, its fabric and its setting.

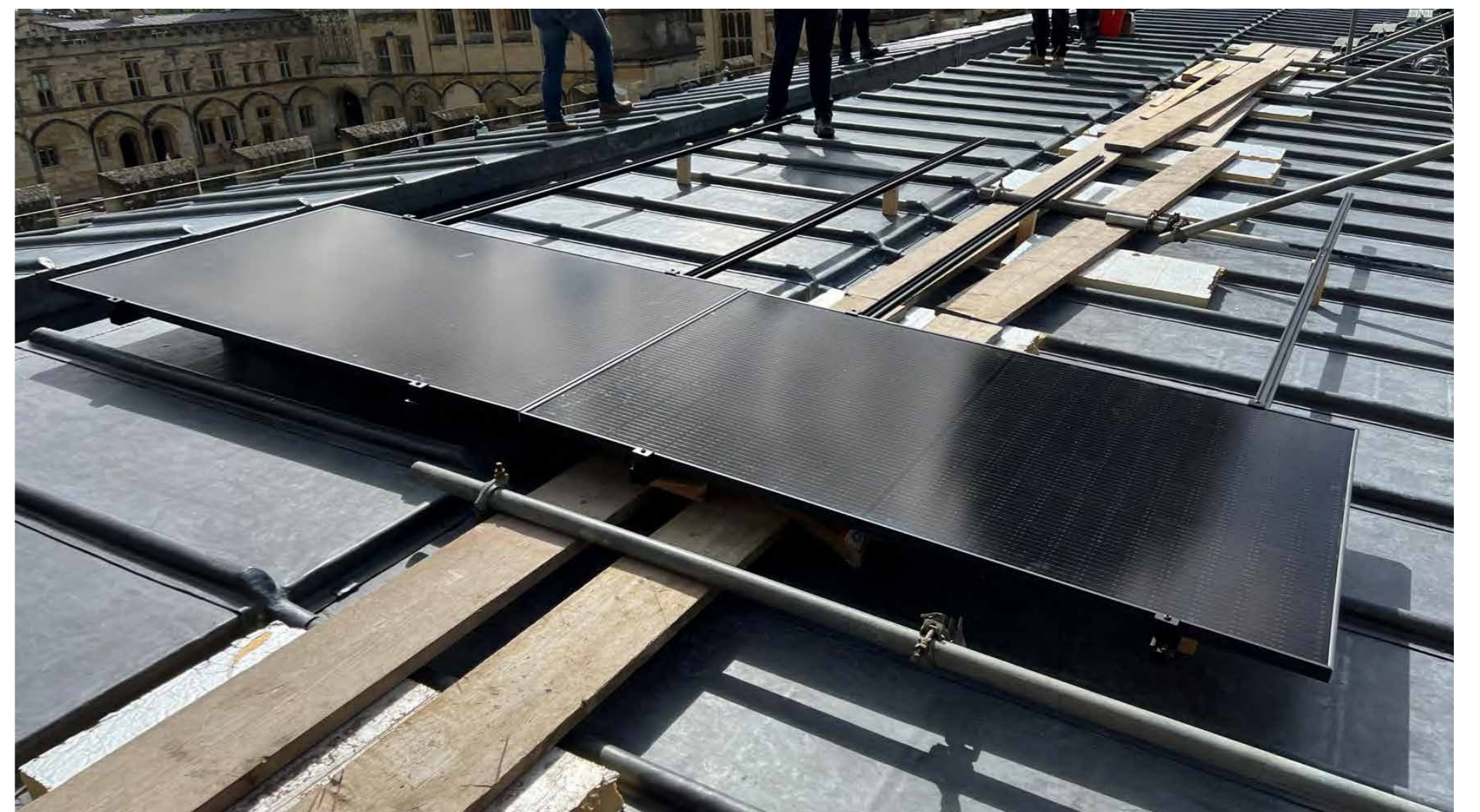
The current lack of environmental controls and air conditioning means that building temperatures can reach above 30°C in summer and below 13°C in winter, with corresponding implications for both staff and visitor welfare. The inability to control temperatures and relative humidity within the building also puts the existing collections (and the Museum's ability to host loaned collections) at risk.

Several opportunities for improving the existing building's sustainability and thermal performance have been explored, using a 'fabric first' approach. This involves bettering the building's energy performance primarily through upgrades to its physical fabric.

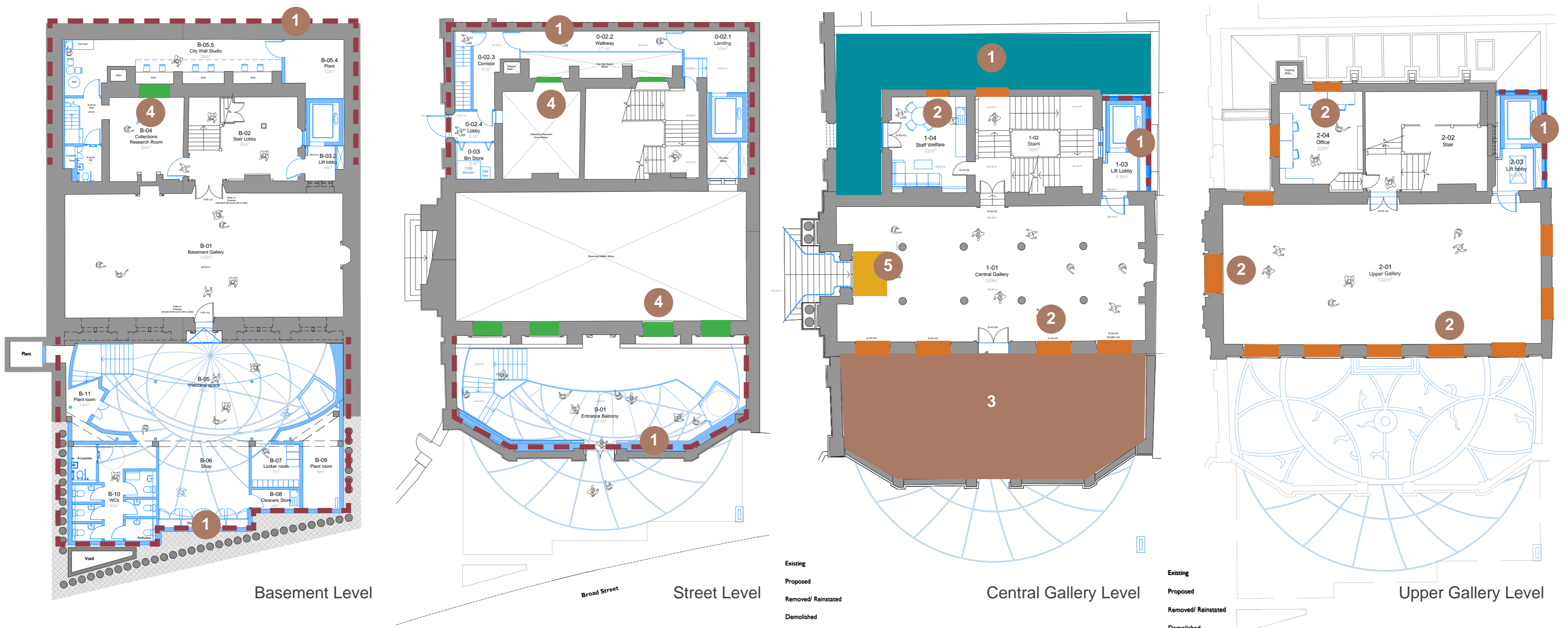
The proposed alterations to the building offer passive benefits, such as external uninsulated walls becoming internal where extensions are added, and south-facing windows being removed where the lift is installed. Furthermore, other sustainability improvements such as roof insulation, secondary glazing and door lobbies will be installed.



Photovoltaic panels considered for the south-facing area of the roof



Example of photovoltaic panels



- 1. Improved insulation to extensions
- 2. Secondary glazing
- 3. External lightwell enclosed
- 4. Fire-rated secondary glazing
- 5. Lobby - reduced heat loss

Thank you for engaging with our proposals!

Please scan the QR code to leave feedback

