

Humanities Building & Library

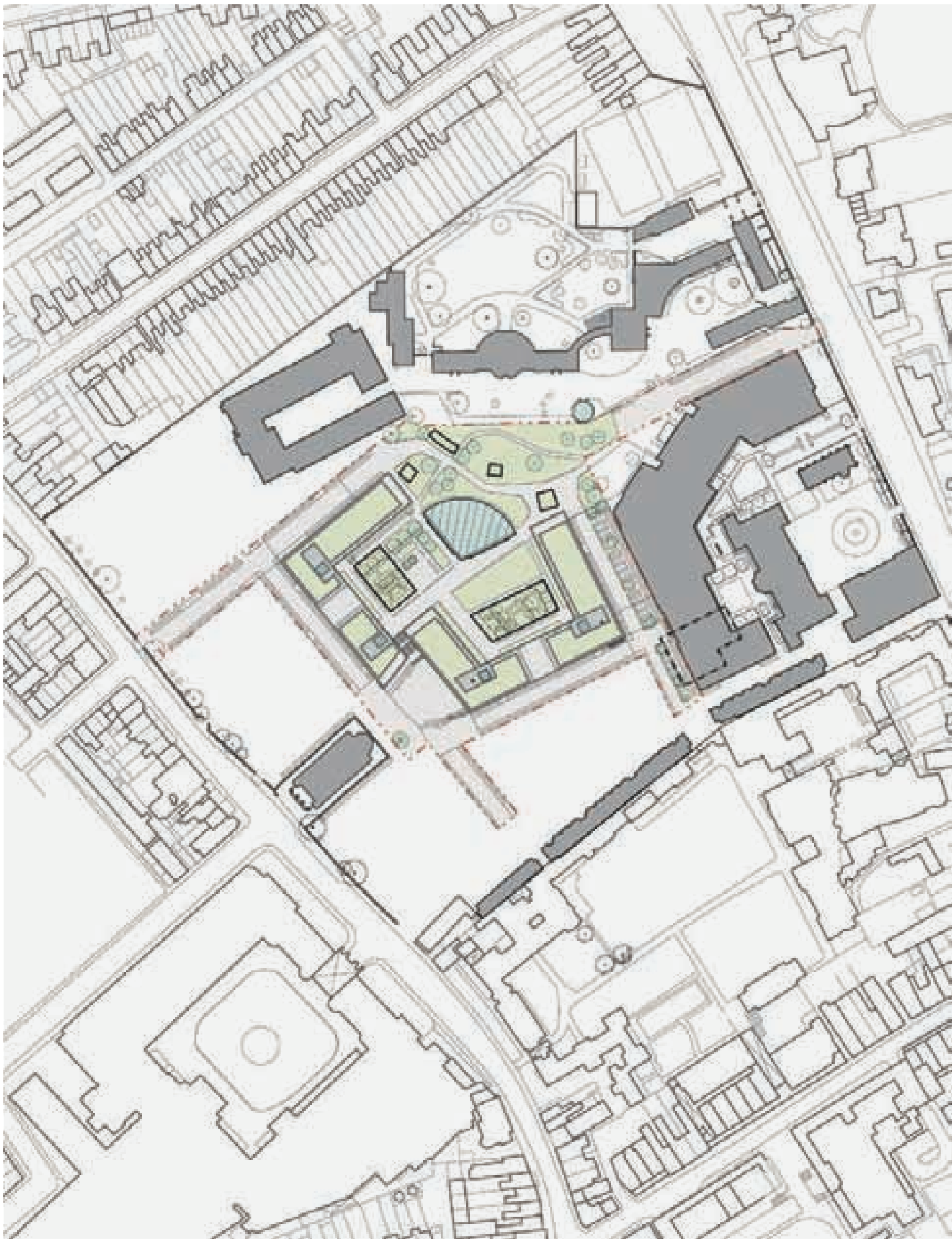
The University of Oxford is committed to maintaining its position as a world-leader in humanities: in recent years it has invested heavily in its academic base, recruiting top scholars from across the globe, and developing new areas of teaching and research. It now aims to create an environment which will facilitate and enhance its academic vision for humanities in the twenty-first century and beyond.

The University seeks to establish a set of buildings for the humanities which will complement, both academically and architecturally, the provision offered in the surrounding colleges. New challenges and opportunities are opening up in the humanities as changing patterns of research offer new possibilities for interdisciplinary and collaborative work.

The campus itself will create a vibrant social, cultural and academic centre for the University as a whole. There will be cafés, and space for art exhibitions, films and musical performances, as well as lectures, seminars and conferences.

Objectives

- To consolidate individual humanities faculties (currently housed in buildings dispersed across Oxford) into one complex.
- To provide high quality modern facilities and offer the possibility of interdisciplinary collaborative work more suited to the academic vision for the Humanities.
- To provide a main research resource for graduates and staff in the form of a unified Humanities Library, and a wide range of up-to-date teaching facilities.



Above: Humanities site plan

Brief

The new Humanities building will accommodate the following functions:

Faculties

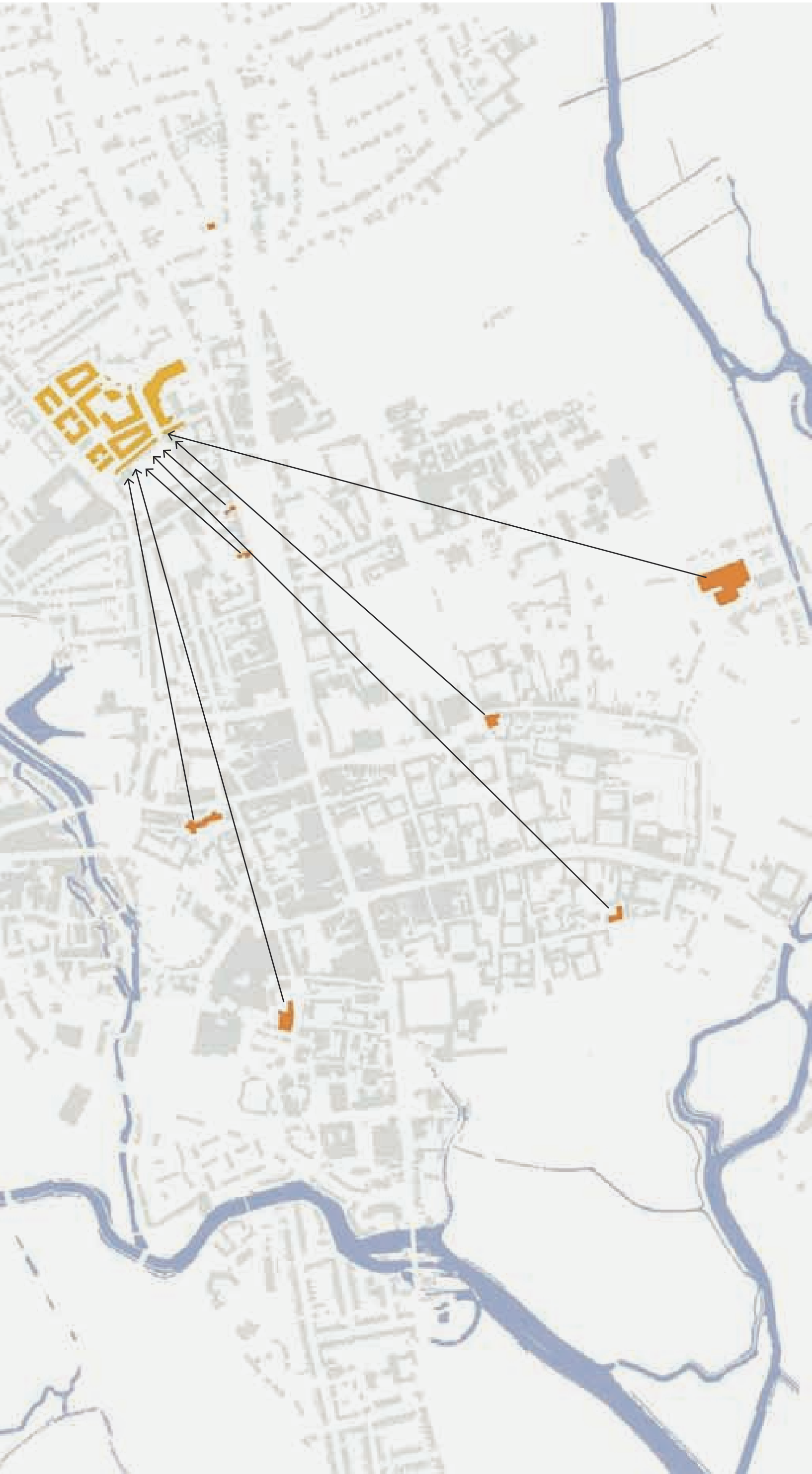
Phase One will house the Humanities Divisional Offices as well as the English, History, Theology and Philosophy faculties. Each faculty will have an allocation of rooms for administrative staff along with research centres, social spaces, common rooms, seminar rooms and kitchenettes.

Library

The library will constitute one of OULS' major facilities and is seen as an important new resource for students and staff of all faculties relocating to the ROQ. As stated in the University's corporate plan, its aim is "to provide the most effective university library possible, in response to current and future users' needs; and to maintain and develop access to Oxford's collections as a national and international resource".

Teaching

There will also be extensive shared teaching resources on site, including three large lecture rooms, fourteen seminar rooms of different sizes, a screening room and social spaces.



Above: Existing Faculty Buildings relocating to Phase I of the Humanities project



1. North Facade of St Paul's Church
2. Radcliffe Observatory from the Harkness and Gibson Building
3. English Faculty Library
4. History Faculty
5. Philosophy Faculty Library
6. Theology Faculty Library
7. History Faculty Common Room

Design Principles

The new Humanities building consists of five floors of faculty accommodation above two floors of library and teaching space.

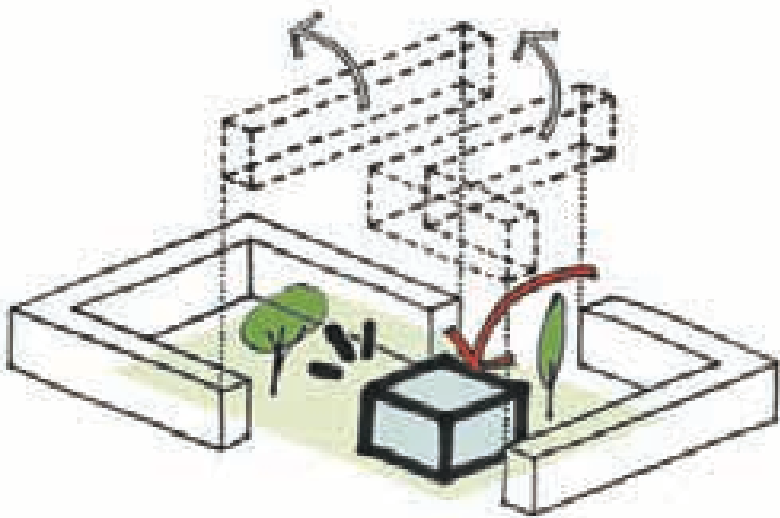
By manipulating the 2.75m slope across the site between Walton Street and Woodstock Road, two natural ground planes have been created - a lower ground level entered from the south and an upper ground level around the Observatory to the north. This change in level allows the upper basement to read as a conventional ground floor and gives the library a direct entrance off a main public square. By introducing a series of sunken courtyards into the upper ground plane, the 'mezzanine' level will benefit from substantially more natural light and views towards the Observatory.

The centrepiece of the library, and indeed the Observatory Garden, is a two storey high glass and copper pavilion that forms a striking contemporary counterpoint to the Observatory itself. This is the symbolic heart of the scheme, a 24-hour beacon or lantern for a place of learning and a point of orientation for visitors and users alike.

The above ground buildings have taken their cue from a traditional collegiate quadrangle typology which affords all academic rooms daylight and natural ventilation. By opening one side of the landscaped courtyard to the Observatory, views are maximised while a sense of privacy and enclosure is retained. The accommodation within is composed of different faculties, arranged vertically around shared staircases which can be entered from the quads or via the teaching atria below.

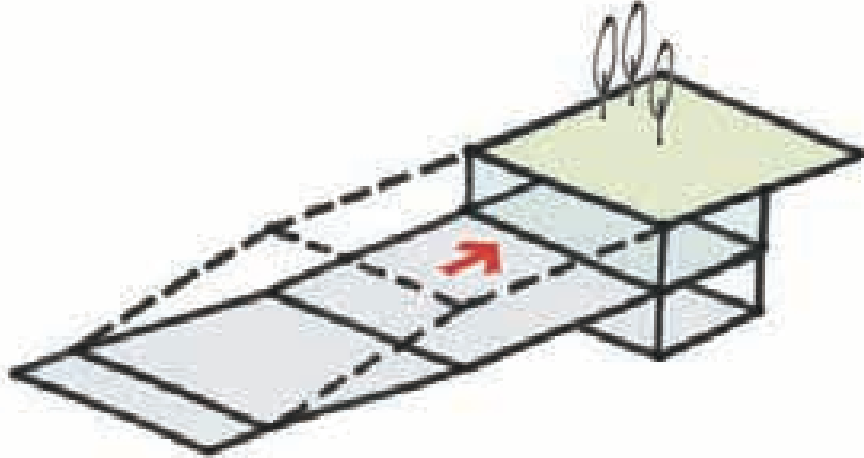
Courtyards and Gardens

Creating courtyards, more in the manner of Oxford quadrangles rather than internal atria, allows all sides of the upper buildings to be naturally ventilated. A large central space then allows the placement of a lantern to give presence to the library beneath.



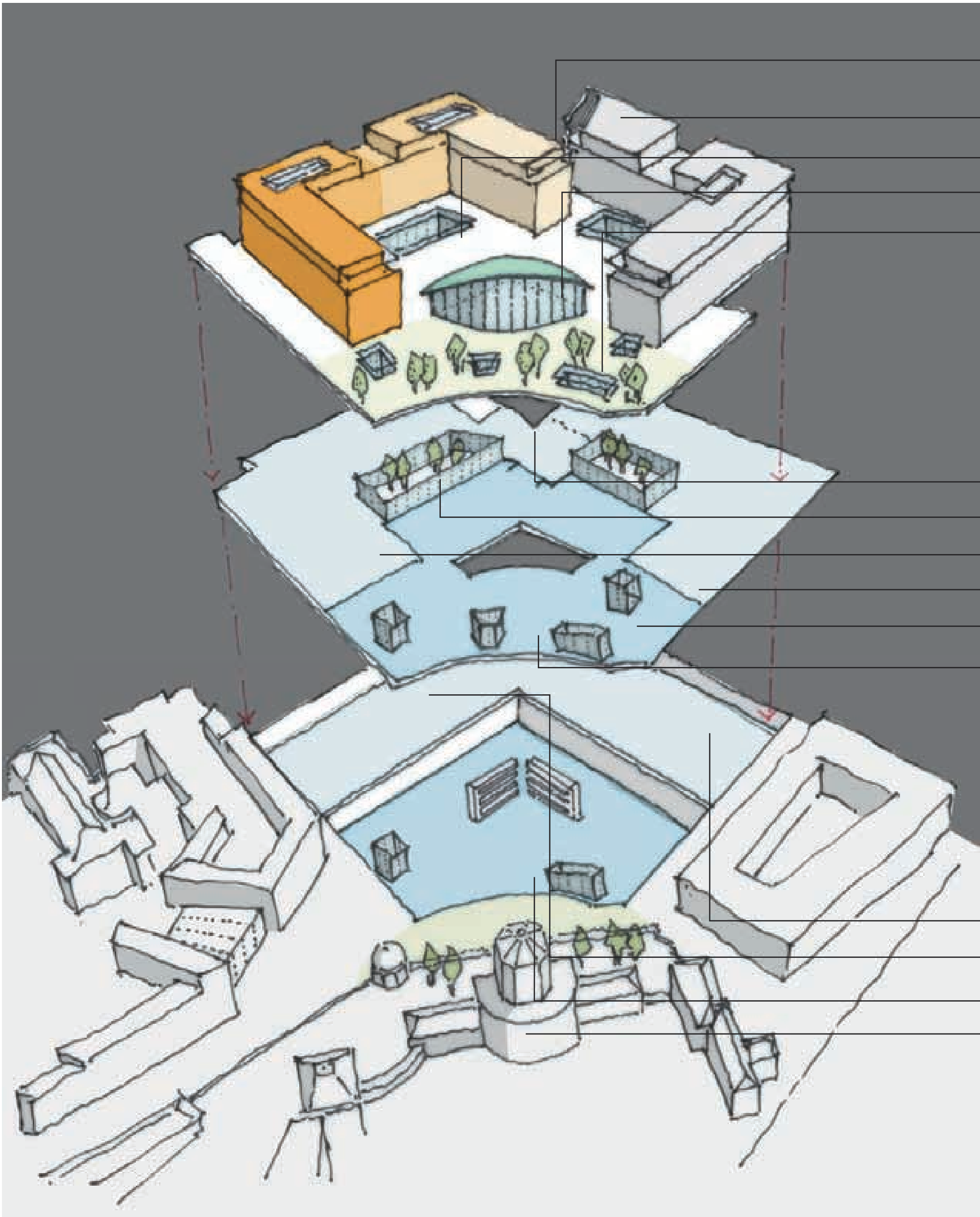
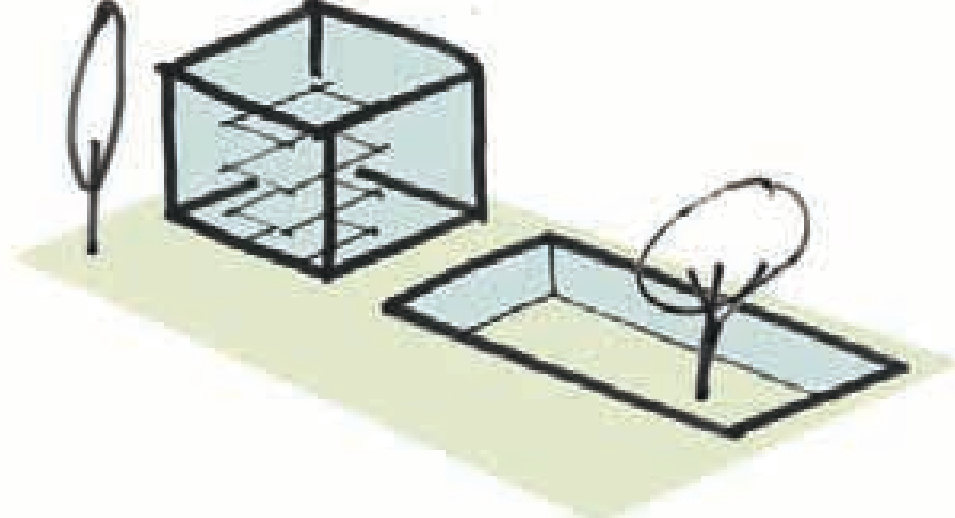
Entrances at Ground levels

Exploiting the slope across the site enables the library and teaching spaces to be entered at a lower ground floor level from the new square, while the faculty and divisions are entered from the courtyard level above.



A Lantern and Sunken Courtyards

As well as giving an identity to the library, the lantern allows reader space at ground and first floor levels, with views towards the Observatory. Sunken courtyards bring daylight into the library and teaching spaces at mezzanine and basement levels.



Above ground:

- Phase One Faculties (left to right)
Philosophy / Theology / History / English
- Phase Two Faculties
- Upper Faculty Courtyards
- Library Lantern with Reading Room below
- Observatory Garden with Informal
Landscape and Sunken Reader Courtyards

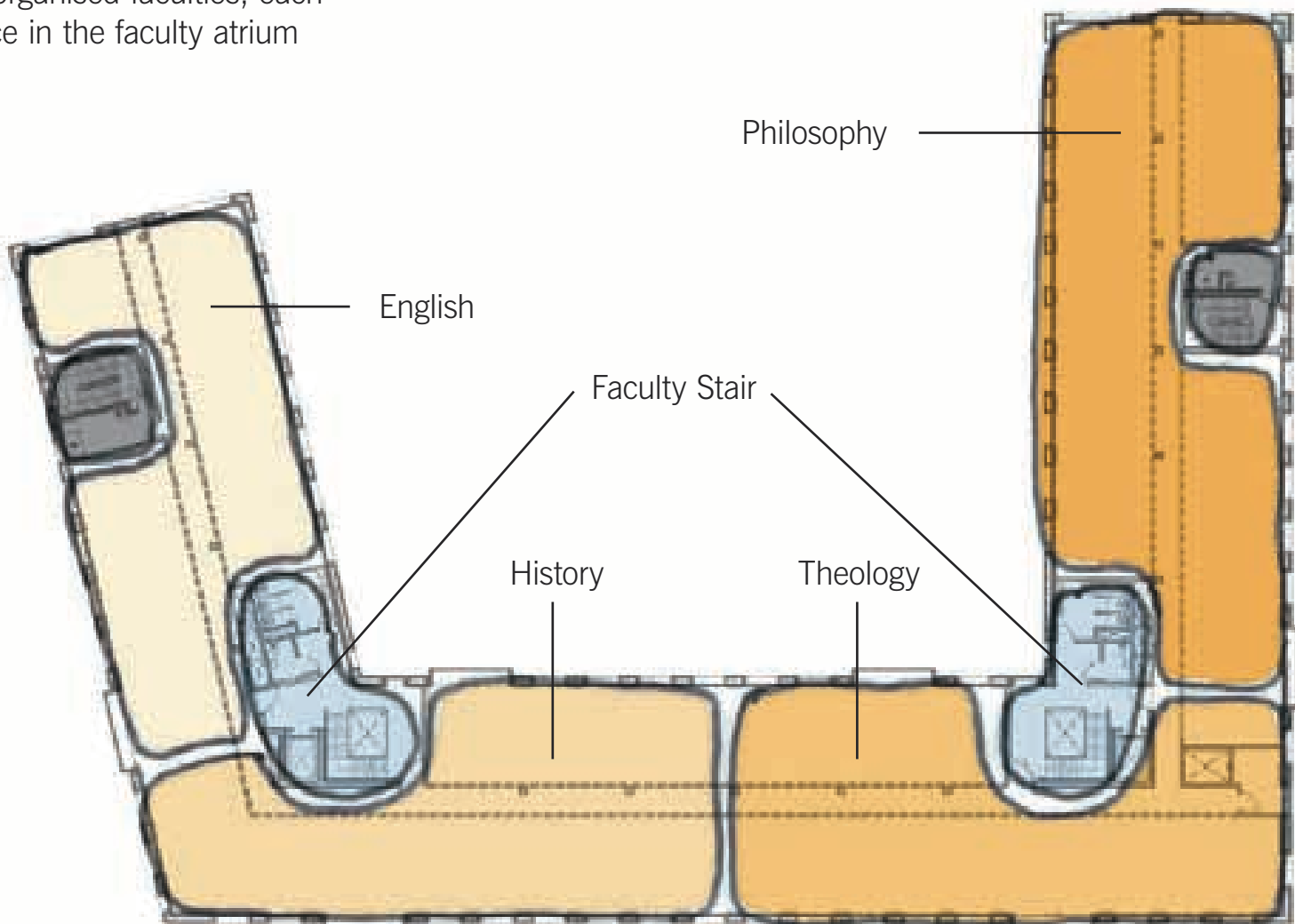
Mezzanine:

- Entrance from Library Square
- Sunken Faculty Courtyards
- Teaching (Phase One)
- Teaching (Phase Two)
- Library
- Sunken Reader Courtyards

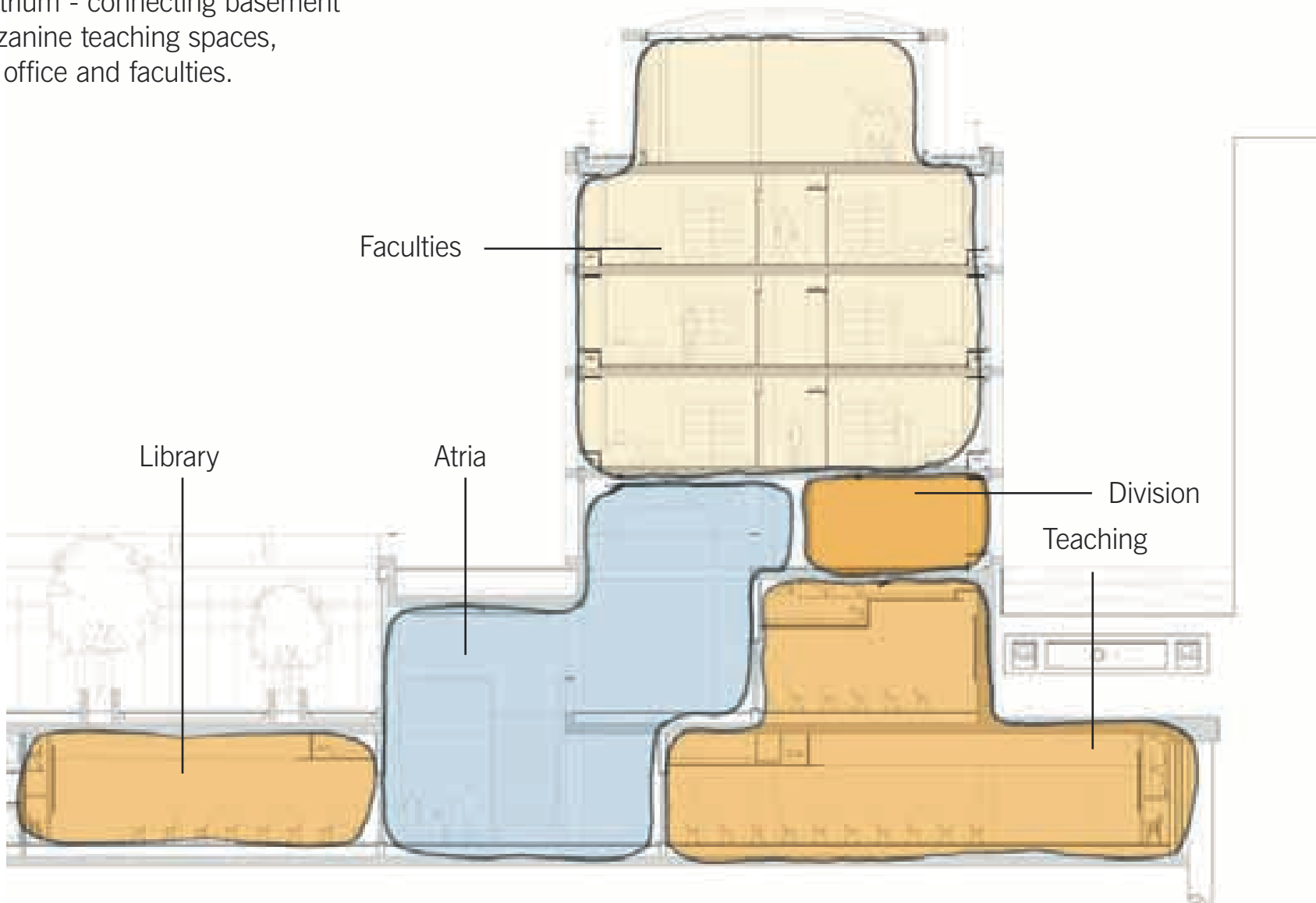
Basement:

- Teaching (Phase Two)
- Teaching (Phase One)
- Library
- Radcliffe Observatory

Two accommodation stairs and lifts - allowing four vertically organised faculties, each with a presence in the faculty atrium



Faculty atrium - connecting basement and mezzanine teaching spaces, divisional office and faculties.



Proposals

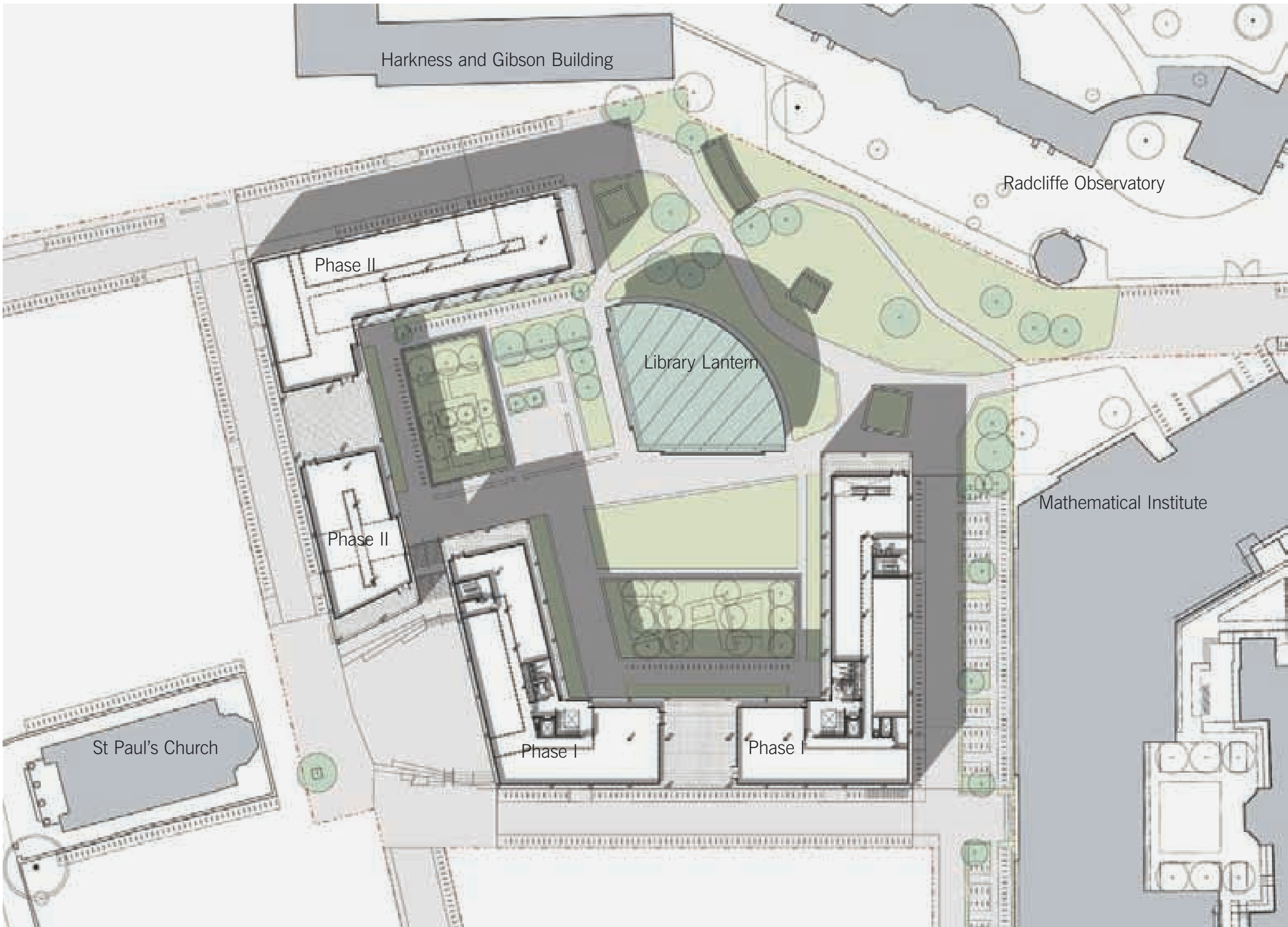
Routes and Spaces

Oxford’s historic core is experienced as a sequence of connected spaces, only some of which are major routes, with important buildings or institutions often encountered by chance as the pedestrian or cyclist moves from one college or district to another.

The ROQ site can be experienced in a similar manner with the journey from the Oxford University Press to the Observatory involving a sequence of major and minor streets, public squares, formal courtyards (both private and public) and an informal garden. Each space is discovered as part of a short journey, with glimpses of the Observatory tower guiding overall progress.

Open lawned areas in the centre of upper courtyards with occasional trees and a planted perimeter recall the traditional quadrangles of Oxford. Although these spaces have an open aspect to the Observatory, the back of the library lantern acts as a garden wall enclosing the

space and providing a degree of privacy. Beyond the thresholds formed by the lantern, the landscape becomes altogether less formal. This is in keeping with the original setting for the Observatory and it is appropriate that the garden is more natural and relaxed with meandering paths and random clumps of trees.



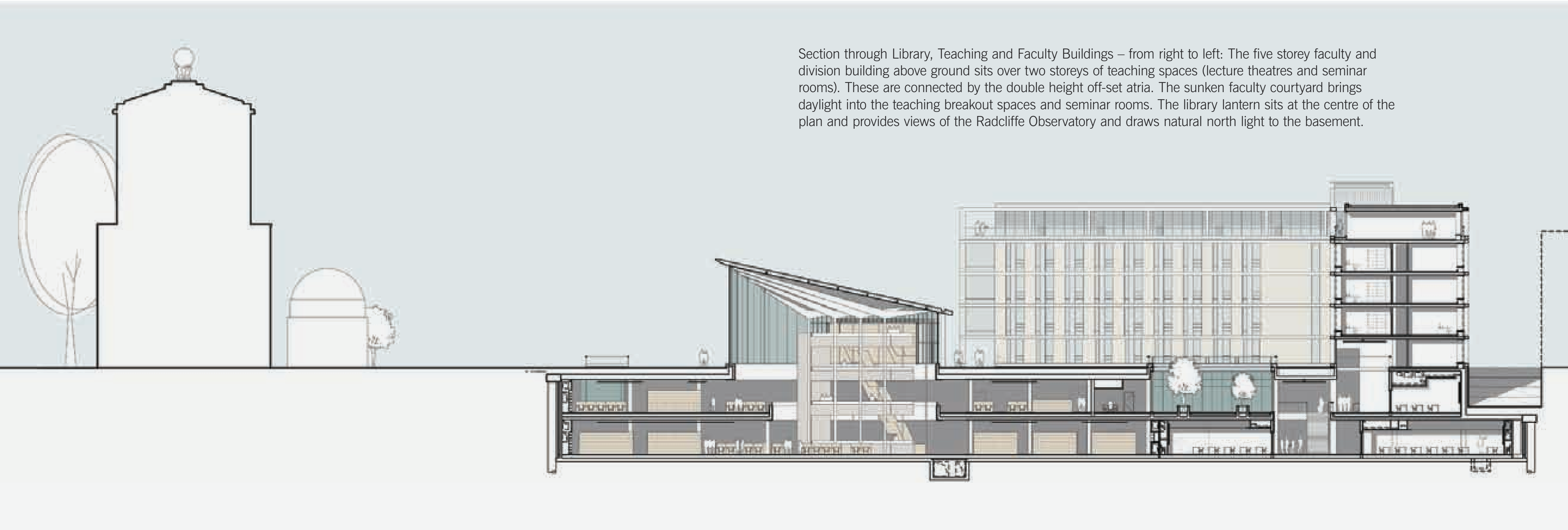
Above: Top Floor Level 4 Plan



Above: Main Entrance – View from the back of Library Square showing the entrance to the library and the café. The external steps lead to the upper faculty courtyards and Observatory Garden.



Above: Lower Teaching Atrium – The larger seminar rooms and lecture theatres are located on the basement level overlooked by the sunken faculty courtyard.



Section through Library, Teaching and Faculty Buildings – from right to left: The five storey faculty and division building above ground sits over two storeys of teaching spaces (lecture theatres and seminar rooms). These are connected by the double height off-set atria. The sunken faculty courtyard brings daylight into the teaching breakout spaces and seminar rooms. The library lantern sits at the centre of the plan and provides views of the Radcliffe Observatory and draws natural north light to the basement.

Proposals

Lantern

In contrast to the main elevations the lantern is conceived as a pure, geometric object that is more akin to the Observatory and Heliometer, than the simple faculty facades. Its shape is generated from the section of a cone that produces a clean form that floats above the landscape. Importantly the supporting structure originates in the base of the library which visually connects the large reading room with the Observatory and its garden.

The roof covering is to be copper sheet, referring to the Heliometer on the ROQ

site and other buildings visible on the Oxford skyline. Given that the main façade of the lantern is north facing, the glazing can be unencumbered with solar shading allowing a large panoramic view of the Observatory from within the library. The rear, courtyard facades of the lantern rise out of the landscape and are seen as garden walls that form the ‘fourth façade’ of the upper quadrangles.

The area below the lantern that benefits from the most daylight will be filled with students, while the majority of the bookcases and the cellular spaces will be housed in the areas with less natural light.



Above: Main reading room of the Library Lantern (Basement)



Above: Main reading room of the Library Lantern (Mezzanine)

Elevations

The main elevations are conceived as a subtle, understated backdrop to the Observatory, Heliometer and the library lantern. They are intended to be quiet yet confident in their design and are constructed of enduring contextual materials that will age with dignity and character. The overall composition of the main façade bays, with a play of vertical and horizontal elements recalls Georgian terraces, where the façade viewed in elevation has a vertical rhythm very different to that experienced when moving obliquely past it.



Above: Detailed elevation of Faculty Building



Above: Verified view from the Observatory



Above: Upper faculty courtyard



Above: Aerial View of the Humanities Building