



SAVE
OUR STRAND

SAVE
BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

BURRELL | FOLEY | FISCHER
ARCHITECTS AND URBAN DESIGNERS

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The original terrace & King's College entrance archway which was replaced by the Strand Building in 1972



INTRODUCTION



SAVE Britain's Heritage

70 Cowcross Street
London EC1M 6EJ
Tel: 020 7253 3500
office@savebritainsheritage.org
www.savebritainsheritage.org
@SAVEBrit

SAVE has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. SAVE is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic environment.

BURRELL FOLEY FISCHER LLP ARCHITECTS AND URBAN DESIGNERS

tel: 020 7620 6114
mail@bff-architects.co.uk

selectaglaze

The public furore over the proposed demolition of 154-158 the Strand and façading of 152-153, opens an opportunity to create a magnificent new piece of public realm for the capital half way along the great processional route to and from Westminster and Buckingham Palace to St Paul's Cathedral and the City.

SAVE considers that wherever these narrow frontages survive, in the City or streets leading up to it such as the Strand, it is vital that they are preserved. In this case they form an essential part of the townscape of one of London's best known streets. This is one of the most historic streets in the City of Westminster.

This streetscape has already been damaged by King's College's Brutalist building to the east of Somerset House. This is built on the site of at least a dozen similar buildings that were demolished for the new development. No further encroachment of this kind should be allowed. The character of central London depends on a balance between large institutional and commercial buildings and smaller scale buildings on narrow plots. These buildings are in an important conservation area; they contribute significantly to its special character and must be retained.

Historic buildings can be upgraded in order to improve their environmental performance, and make them more easily accessible. Research has shown that the demolition of buildings represents a significant loss to the environment - of the embodied energy required to construct the building, and the materials from which it is made.

Retention of entire historic buildings as opposed to just façades is not down to whether internal details survive or not - these can be replaced. It is about layout, interior spaces, and the preservation of a historic building as a whole. Thanks to their variety and narrow plots, these buildings provide an excellent setting to the surrounding listed buildings: they manage to be distinctive without being overbearing.

In this publication, created with architect John Burrell of Burrell Foley Fischer, SAVE proposes to turn the whole of the south of the Aldwych into a pedestrian precinct, as suggested by Lucy Musgrave's Publica, rerouting traffic to the north. This will create a pedestrian precinct even more impressive and startling than that created by the closing of the road in front of the National Gallery. That created new and wonderful views of the National Gallery and St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Pedestrianising this part of the Strand will mean that Gibbs's wonderful church, St Mary-le-Strand is no longer marooned on a traffic island, but becomes the focal point of a splendid new public space. Both Somerset House and King's College will gain a spacious new setting - the most beautiful piece of new public realm in the capital for years.

Creating a new entrance aligned on the portico of St Mary-le-Strand will open up one of the great lost views of London through to one of the arched bridges over the Thames designed by Sir William Chambers. The vista will be a delight in both directions and the once threatened buildings will enjoy a new lease of life embellishing the Strand, the nation's main processional route.

*Marcus Binney, Executive President,
Clementine Cecil, Director
SAVE Britain's Heritage*

SAVE OUR STRAND - THE BACKGROUND TO SAVE'S PROPOSALS

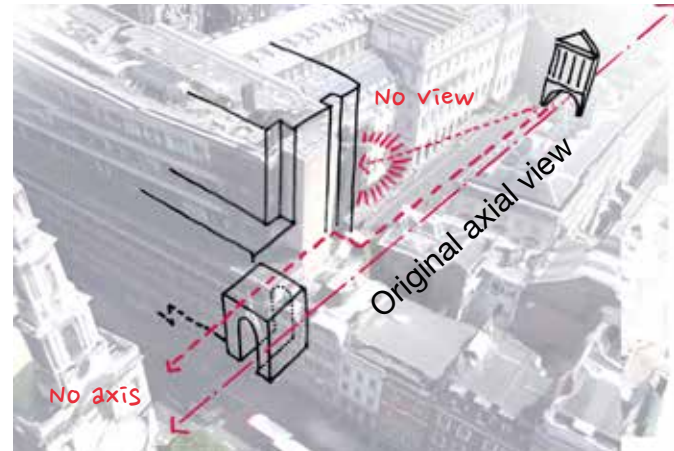
In March this year King's College London put forward proposals for re-configuring part of their campus that included the demolition of 154-158 Strand, leaving only the façade of 152-3, which is Grade II listed. This short terrace of charming 19th century buildings, on their original narrow

medieval plots, are all that are left of the original terrace, following the demolition of a substantial number of them in the 1960s to make way for the Brutalist concrete building constructed in the 1970s. These buildings form a buffer between that building and Somerset House.

King's College wished to replace the four buildings Nos. 154-158 Strand with a single New Academic Building and leave only the listed façades of Nos. 152/153 Strand. The buildings, with their rich variety of individual frontages, were to have been replaced with one new seven storey monolithic structure and one architectural language with a single motif of grey bricks with pierced openings of 27 identical windows and set back screen walls.



Nos. 152-158 The Strand as existing. Formerly known as the 'Old Law Building', this row of houses on their original narrow medieval plots encompass a wide range of styles, from a characteristic London stock brick façade, to a playful re-rendering of a Georgian house, to Arts and Crafts flamboyance and early 20th-century interpretations of the Dutch style. To the left is the Brutalist building.



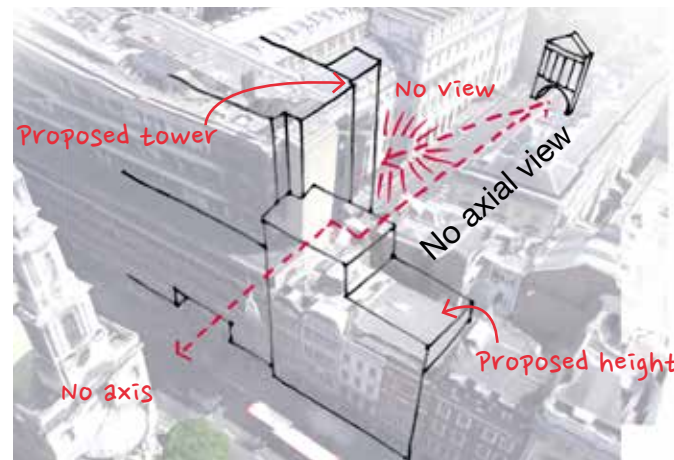
The original Kings' entrance arch was on a main axis but more recent buildings destroy the original logic of the Quad

SAVE argued that the existing buildings are of merit and are worthy of being preserved, and that King's needs can be met with an imaginative and sensitive design solution.

Those who supported SAVE's objections to the proposals included: the Ancient Monuments Society, the Victorian Society, the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, the Council for British Archaeology, the Somerset House Trust, the Courtauld Institute, and over 64 other major organisations. The Somerset House Trust and Courtauld Institute's objections centred on an additional proposed new tower extension to the King's Strand building and the impact it will have on the setting of Somerset House.



The proposed replacement by architects Hall McKnight was to replace a varied, historically rich townscape with a new monolithic structure with a single architectural language.



SAVE launched a petition that picked up 10,000 signatures in a matter of weeks. It was the fastest growing petition we had ever held, reflecting the strong public sense of outrage on the matter. The strong interest of The Times and its editor John Witherow, reflected in a stream of letters, raised the profile of the campaign nationwide.

The effect of adding a tower & additional height to the terrace was to further interrupt the link between the Quad and the Strand

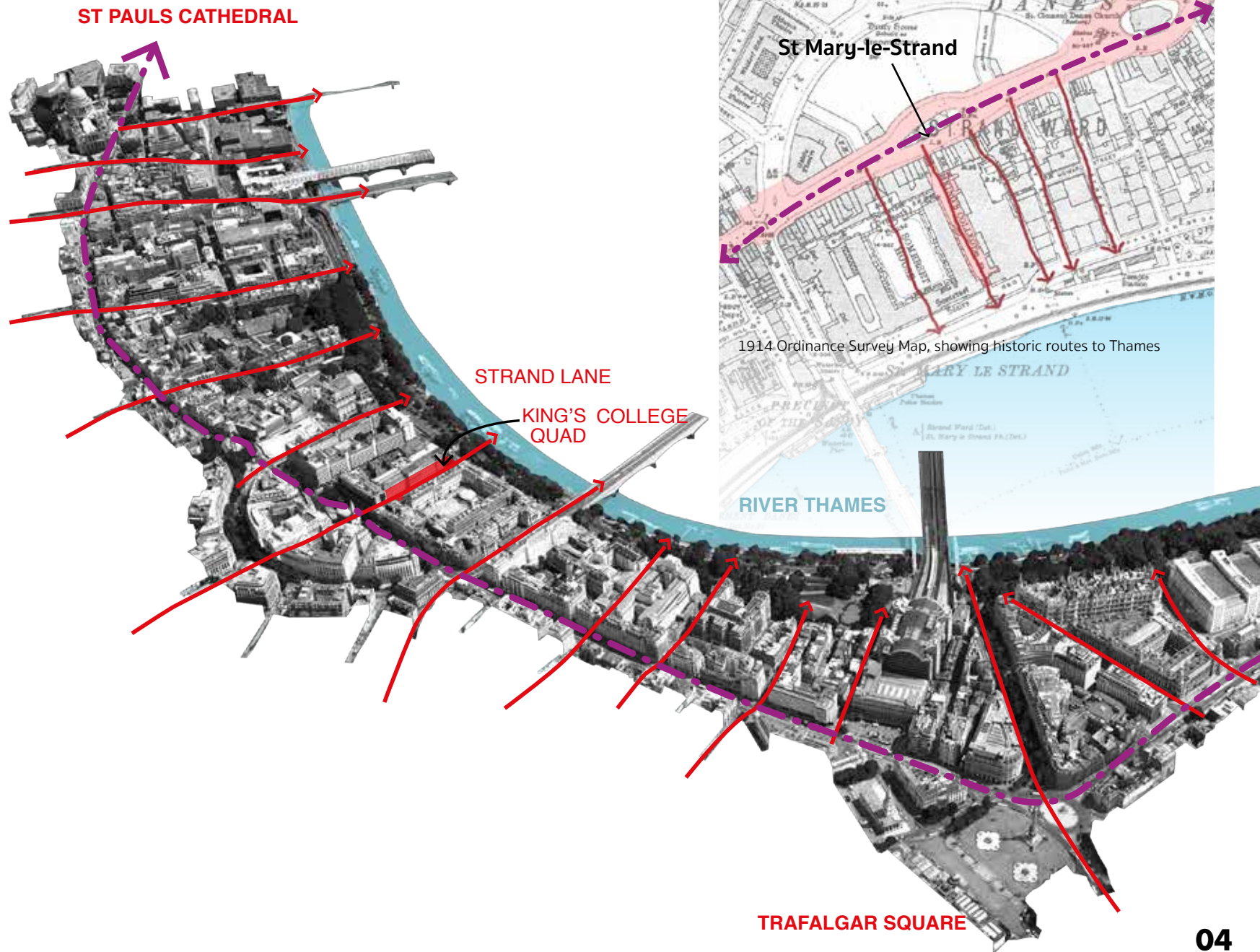


Imagine this without the traffic. In the centre is the James Gibbs Church, St Mary-le-Strand. On the far right the Strand Front of Somerset House by Sir William Chambers

THE NATION'S PROCESSIONAL ROUTE

The Processional Route

The buildings are on London's main processional route between Westminster and St Paul's Cathedral. They are in the Strand conservation area and are picked out as of special interest in the conservation area.

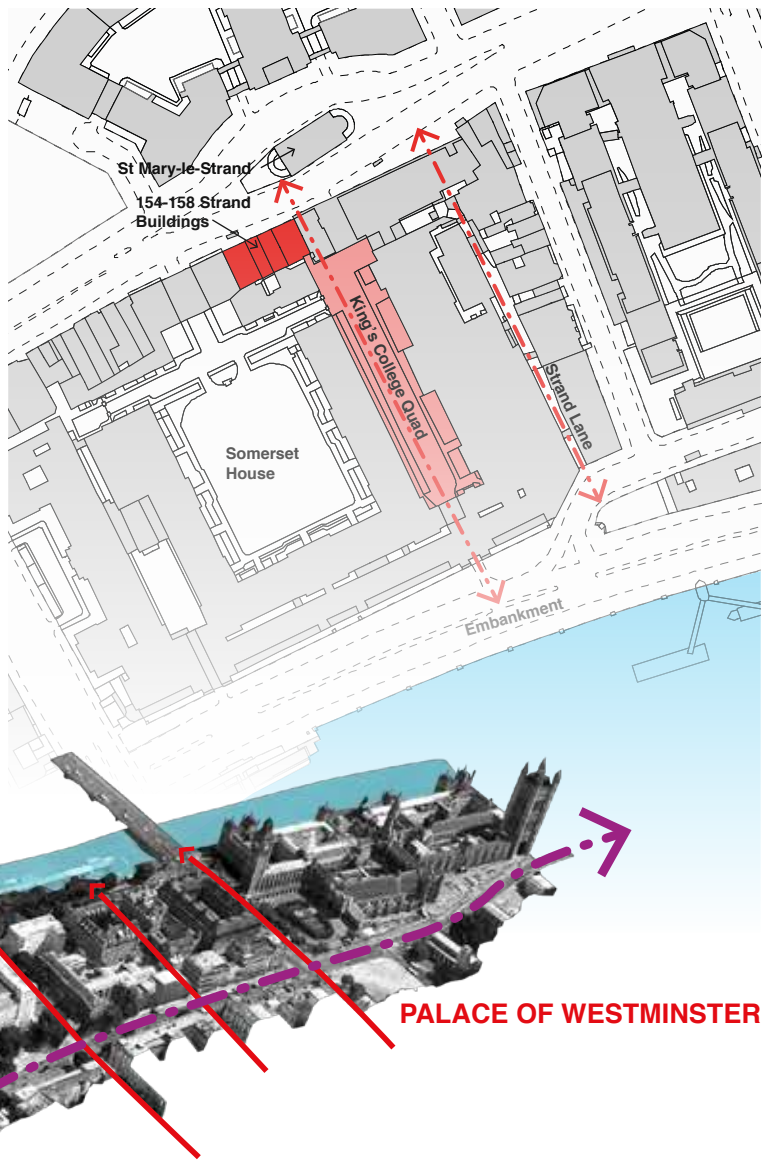


Historic Routes from the Strand to the Thames

“Within this conservation area there are areas of distinct character; the two main routes of the Strand and the Victoria Embankment holding the area together. There are significant contrasts in scale between the remaining smaller grain areas and the formal redevelopment around Kingsway and the Aldwych, the substantial complexes of Somerset House and King’s College, the Royal Courts of Justice and the London School of Economics.”

City of Westminster conservation area description

TRAFALGAR SQUARE



Photograph of the original Regency entrance to King's College. Designed in the form of a Roman triumphal arch, it perfectly framed a view of the classical bridge on the riverfront of Somerset House



Looking through the triumphal arch perfectly aligned on the portico of St Mary-le-Strand

The effect of creating the Strand building (1972) has been to obscure the view of the spire and the direct route that formally aligned the two arched gateways.



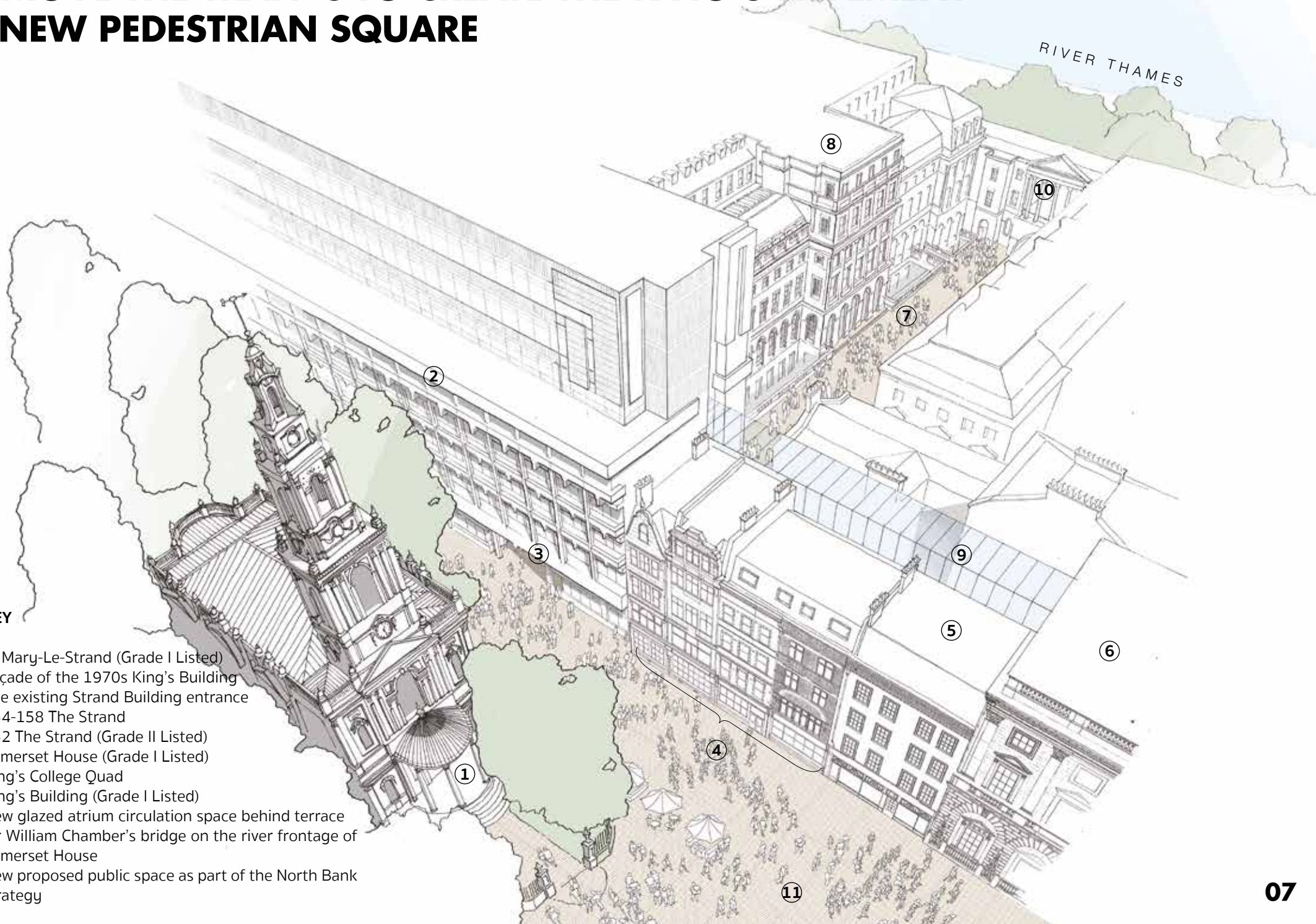
The 1970s Brutalist building entirely blocks the view of St Mary-le-Strand

THE FOUR THREATENED STRAND FRONTAGES BROUGHT BACK INTO USE



At present the shopfronts are boarded up. The narrow plots provide the perfect foil to the monumentality of Somerset House on the right. The narrow slip of glass visible above the parapets is the top of a glass atrium proposed for the back of the buildings to connect them to each other and to the Brutalist building.

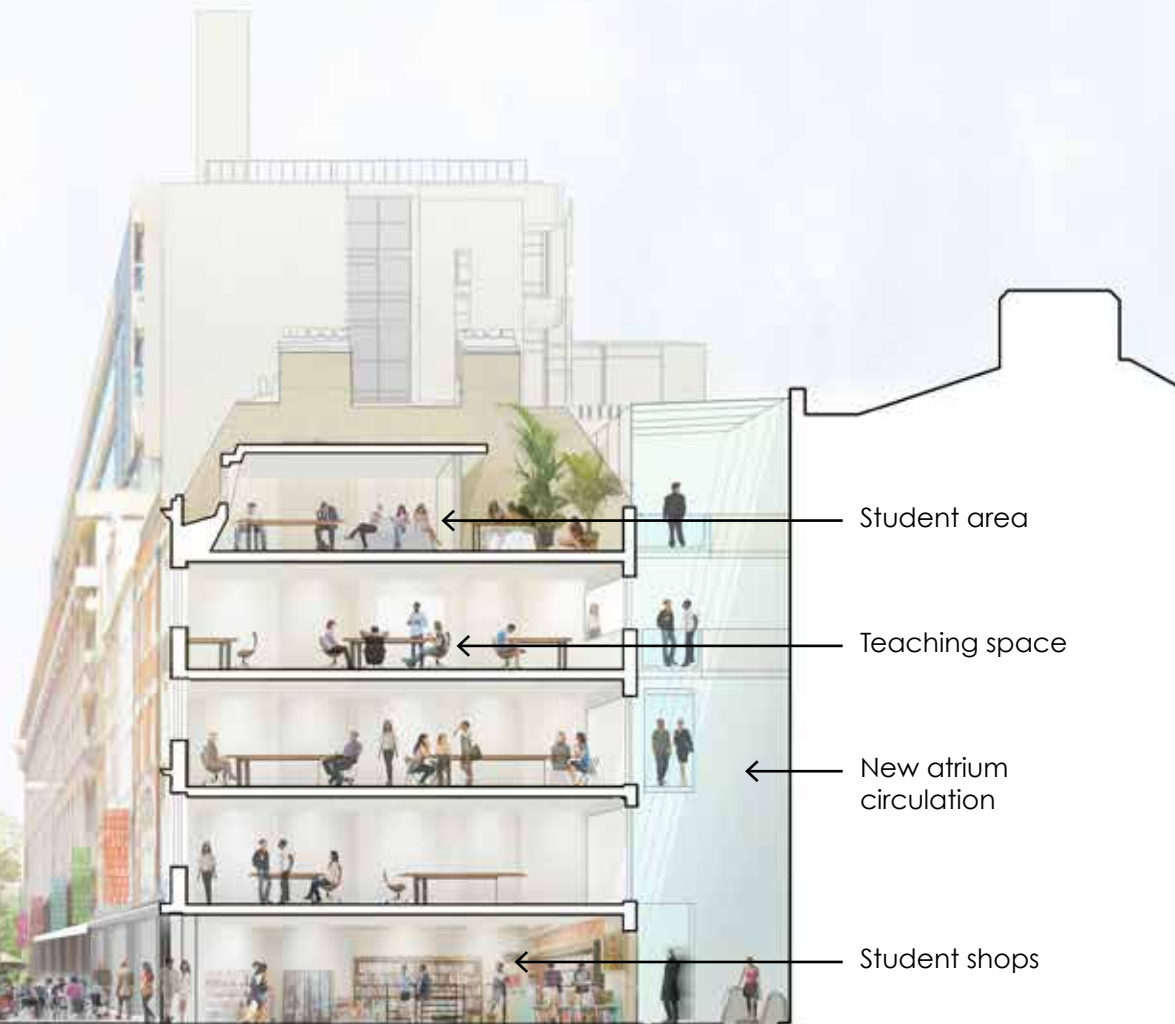
REMOVE THE TRAFFIC TO CREATE THE KING'S PAVEMENT A NEW PEDESTRIAN SQUARE



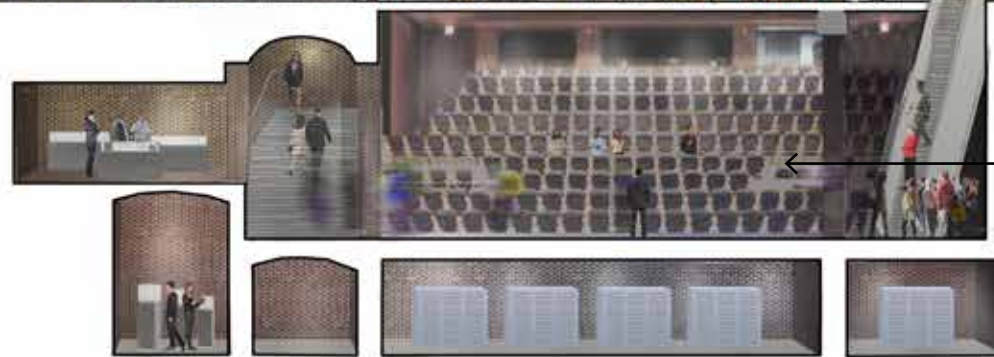
KEY

- 1 St Mary-Le-Strand (Grade I Listed)
- 2 Façade of the 1970s King's Building
- 3 The existing Strand Building entrance
- 4 154-158 The Strand
- 5 152 The Strand (Grade II Listed)
- 6 Somerset House (Grade I Listed)
- 7 King's College Quad
- 8 King's Building (Grade I Listed)
- 9 New glazed atrium circulation space behind terrace
- 10 Sir William Chamber's bridge on the river frontage of Somerset House
- 11 New proposed public space as part of the North Bank strategy

CUTAWAY DRAWING

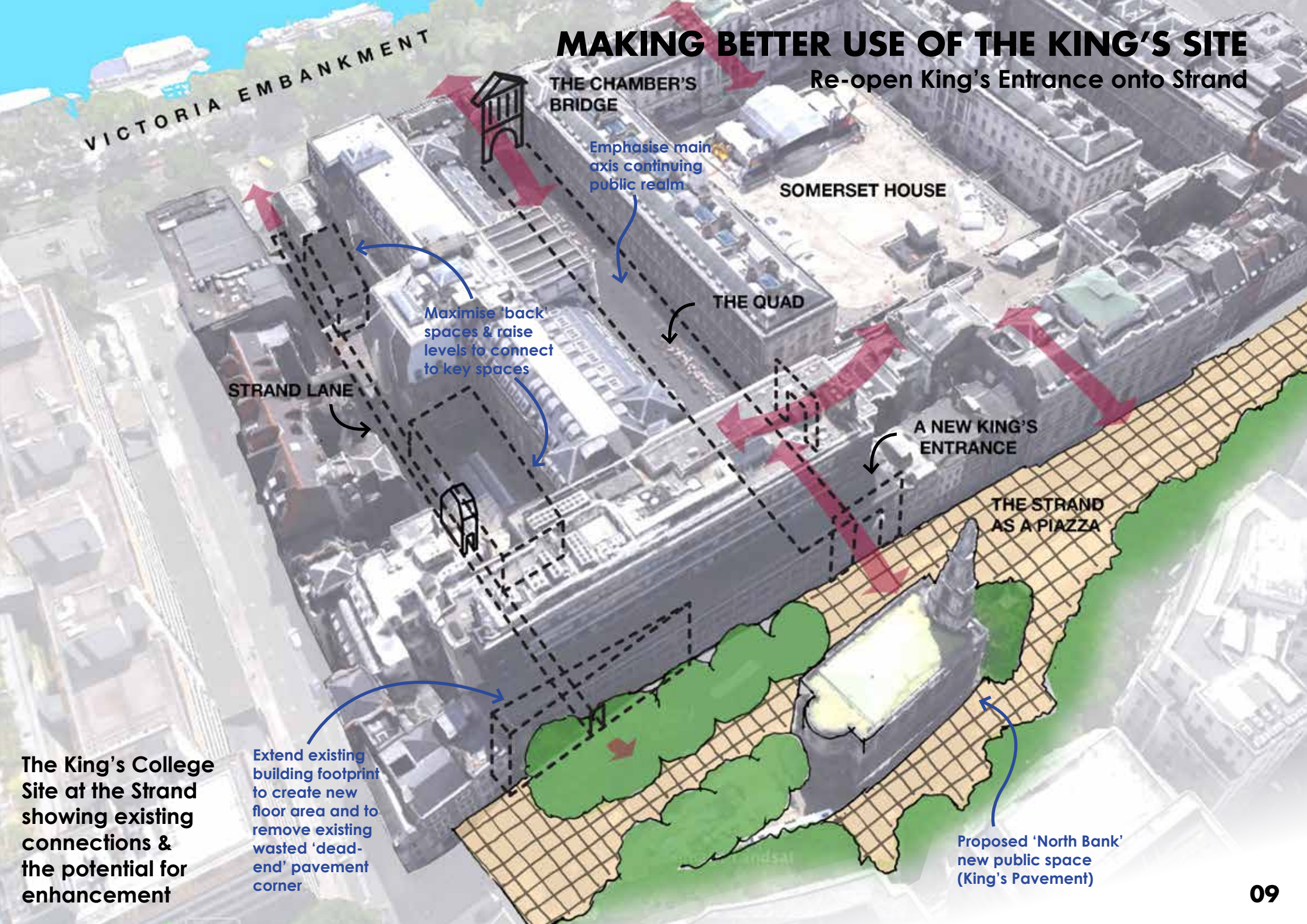


Showing cross-section of the Strand houses restored for university use. The deep basement accommodates a large new auditorium and links with adjoining basements under Somerset House used by King's College. A glass atrium at the back of the buildings addresses the issue of the varying floor levels of 152-158 the Strand: this allows them to be interconnected.



MAKING BETTER USE OF THE KING'S SITE

Re-open King's Entrance onto Strand



VICTORIA EMBANKMENT

THE CHAMBER'S BRIDGE

SOMERSET HOUSE

THE QUAD

STRAND LANE

A NEW KING'S ENTRANCE

THE STRAND AS A PIAZZA

The King's College Site at the Strand showing existing connections & the potential for enhancement

Extend existing building footprint to create new floor area and to remove existing wasted 'dead-end' pavement corner

Emphasise main axis continuing public realm

Maximise 'back' spaces & raise levels to connect to key spaces

Proposed 'North Bank' new public space (King's Pavement)

THE **SAVE** OUR STRAND SCHEME

- Demonstrates how Nos. 152-158 the Strand can be repaired and brought back into active use, securing their future
- Addresses the concerns of King's College about the possibility of connecting the buildings to each other and to the main University building
- Addresses the concerns of King's College regarding space by demonstrating that a lecture hall can be placed in a new basement underneath the terrace of houses and connected to nearby basements in active use
- Addresses King's College's concerns about noise pollution and pollution in 152-158 the Strand
- Preserves 152-158 the Strand in their entirety
- Opens the main King's campus to the Strand and reconnects the Thames with the Strand
- Shows the great potential of the King's site – both for the university itself and for those using the streets around it
- Creates a new King's pavement around St Mary-le-Strand purely for pedestrians.
- Shows the potential for a new entrance to King's College on the Strand
- Reopens the vistas through King's College from St Mary-le-Strand to the Thames and the great Somerset House arched bridge above the river
- Creates new public realm that will positively enhance the setting of Somerset House, St Mary-le-Strand as well as the terraced houses in question