



Design briefing



Creating a world-leading centre for medical science and innovation in London

UKCMRI



UKCMRI's striking new building, designed by architects HOK with PLP Architecture, creates a state of the art research facility that supports the scientific goals of the institute and promotes public engagement.

Legacy

The building's design responds to the architectural heritage of the local area. The proposed institute relates both to its large civic neighbours to its south – St Pancras and the British Library – and the smaller scale residential buildings of Somers Town to the north and west.

The distinctive vaulted roof recalls the form of the adjacent Barlow Shed at St Pancras International. As in the station, the delicate engineering of the roof is contrasted with the robust masonry of the building which creates richly textured elevations at street level. The vaulted roof is arranged into two shells which step down towards the north; where the lower northern side of the building reflects the smaller scale of Somers Town across Brill Place and steps back from the

west to frame a new community garden on Ossulston Street.

Different perspectives

The design distinguishes the laboratories, found in the main body of the institute, from the elegant vaulted roof which gently curves east to west to bring the scale of the building down at its edges.

This creates contrasting perceptions of the building according to point of view. At a distance, its silhouette and roofline create a strong identity. From close-by, the roof is hidden behind the parapet line of the laboratory floors making the building appropriate to the scale of its surroundings. A third of the building will be underground to reduce its mass.

Sustainable

The building is designed to be highly sustainable. The institute will reduce and recycle as much energy as possible. A Combined Heat and Power system will produce electricity on site which will be supplemented

by photovoltaic cells to generate solar power, and where appropriate there will be green roofs. The building materials will be selected for their minimal environmental impact and be from recycled sources wherever possible.

Encouraging interaction

Within the building, the laboratories themselves are arranged over four floors. A typical floor will be divided into four blocks or neighbourhoods which will bring together staff working in different fields. The laboratories are built to be adaptable to change as new scientific demands emerge in the future.

The design of the laboratory areas will break down barriers between different groups and scientists. The floors will be as open as possible both physically and visually so that people will be in close contact with their colleagues.

The design is intended to respond to the ways the scientists work rather than attempting to constrain or manage their activities. But it

will make their lives easier through simple and straightforward lay-outs. Where there are partitions between laboratory spaces, they will be transparent, if the science allows, to maintain the high levels of natural light throughout the building.

Office or write-up space will be adjacent to the laboratory areas to give scientists a visual connection to their work and colleagues.

To encourage people in different disciplines to work together, there will be break-out spaces which allow for chance meetings on each floor. To support collaboration between floors, people will be encouraged to use shared facilities which are strategically located to encourage interactions. The ground floor will play a big role in this process with its seminar and meeting rooms, lecture theatres and dining facilities.



Engaging the public

The architecture celebrates the public programme offered by UKCMRI. By setting the public entrance at ground level, it will be welcoming and accessible. The building will be open to the public for lectures, exhibitions, with a teaching laboratory for school children.

At the north east corner, the building faces a new public square on Midland Road at pavement level so that the ground flows into the building. It makes the base of the building easily accessible.

The way the building contributes to the local environment has also informed the ground floor planning. Social space – the meeting and dining areas at ground floor level – give the building a lively feel for passers-by

on Brill Place. Towards the west on Ossulston Street the end of the building has been reshaped to create a new courtyard garden – a lawn framed by trees and benches – that will get afternoon sunlight.

The staff entrance to the building will enliven the Ossulston Street side of the institute. Pulling the southern wing back to the building line on Ossulston Street has created room for a ground floor space that can be offered to the community as a neighbourhood facility.

Top right: Looking south down Ossulston Street.

Above left: Internal view of ground floor atrium from the Midland Road entrance.



Design in context

Architecturally, there are strong links to the historic buildings in the local area. The institute's masonry recalls the brickwork of the adjacent St Pancras. The body of the building will be a light sandstone terracotta with large delicate projecting cantilevered bay windows which will reveal patterns of movement by the people inside.

The roof by contrast is light metal. It will take the colour of the sky. It is intended to be a delicate foil to the more robust detail of the base. The four laboratory wings will be lit by a long atrium running east west crossed by a north south atrium. These will become grand windows into the building and offer glimpses of the social and break-out spaces within.

Top: Looking across Ossulston Street at the public garden.

The atria are very tall and light filled. They rise to the roof of the lower of the two curved shells so that the laboratories and ground floor are flooded with light. The vaulted roof with its gentle east west curve will not just be visible from a distance on the skyline, it will be enjoyed by people within the building as a soaring curve that draws them in. In contrast to a traditional building where people move into darker areas, light flooding into the heart of the institute will draw visitors in to the main circulation and social spaces.

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IMAGE CREDITS

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Cover images

Left: Aerial view of UKCMRI looking south-east.

Top right: Internal view of the ground floor atrium from the Midland Road entrance.

Bottom right: View across the Brill Place-Midland Road junction.