

# CABE HQ

**Ben Stagg** MCABE RIBA views the Lutyens House refurbishment project as a meeting of minds

Former CABE President Edwin Lutyens once said: "There will never be great architects or great architecture without great patrons." This undoubtedly still holds true – clients set the tone, pace and define the structure within which all building projects are realised and have a crucial role in determining success or failure.

Even the simplest project requires a high level of client engagement to ensure good outcomes for all involved. Having decided to undertake a much-needed refurbishment of the CABE HQ building in Northampton, it is clear that the Association, Board and Executive are committed to extracting best value for the membership while addressing sustainability, accessibility and the need to provide an excellent working environment for CABE staff and visitors.

Stagg Architects was appointed to lead the design team for the project, following a competitive selection process. That process was in itself notable, with CABE focusing on value rather than on minimum cost by conducting design team interviews before opening sealed fee bids. This is an unusual approach, but one we feel helps build a positive client-team dynamic.

## Decisions and plans

Though Stagg Architects knew from the outset that it would be working to a tight budget, it's a genuinely interesting project. One of its most attractive aspects is, in many respects, its normalness.

Lutyens House is a two-storey, L-shaped office building with a ground-bearing slab, precast concrete plank upper floor, brick and block cavity walls, UPVC windows and a concrete tiled roof. It is typical of many thousands of similar medium-grade provincial office buildings up and down the country. In construction terms, it is nothing special; in architectural terms, Mr Lutyens may still be spinning in his grave.

Built in 1976, the existing building is arguably approaching the end of its anticipated lifespan. Most of the fabric remains in relatively sound condition, but the doors and windows are in need of urgent replacement, the appearance is tired and uninspiring, and the internal working environment is in desperate need of updating. Lighting, acoustic and heating systems need to be replaced or overhauled, and the office accommodation is prone to overheating (a problem that is only likely to get worse as a result of climate change).

The CABE board considered a number of options, including demolition and rebuild or sale of the property and a move to new premises. Ultimately, it was decided that the building should be retained and upgraded to meet CABE's future needs.

## Future facing

The decision to refurbish has created the opportunity to show how thoughtful design and engineering can revitalise a common building type and sustain its use long into the future. This isn't just financially wise, but also makes the best of the embodied carbon that has already been sequestered in the building fabric that will be retained.

The brief is to achieve four key outcomes:

- To provide CABE with a modernised headquarters building that delivers an accessible, high-quality learning and working environment
- To improve sustainability and building performance in a progressive manner, ultimately leading to zero carbon performance
- To create a building that is a destination and that is an asset in promoting building engineering to current and new members
- To share learning and good practice.

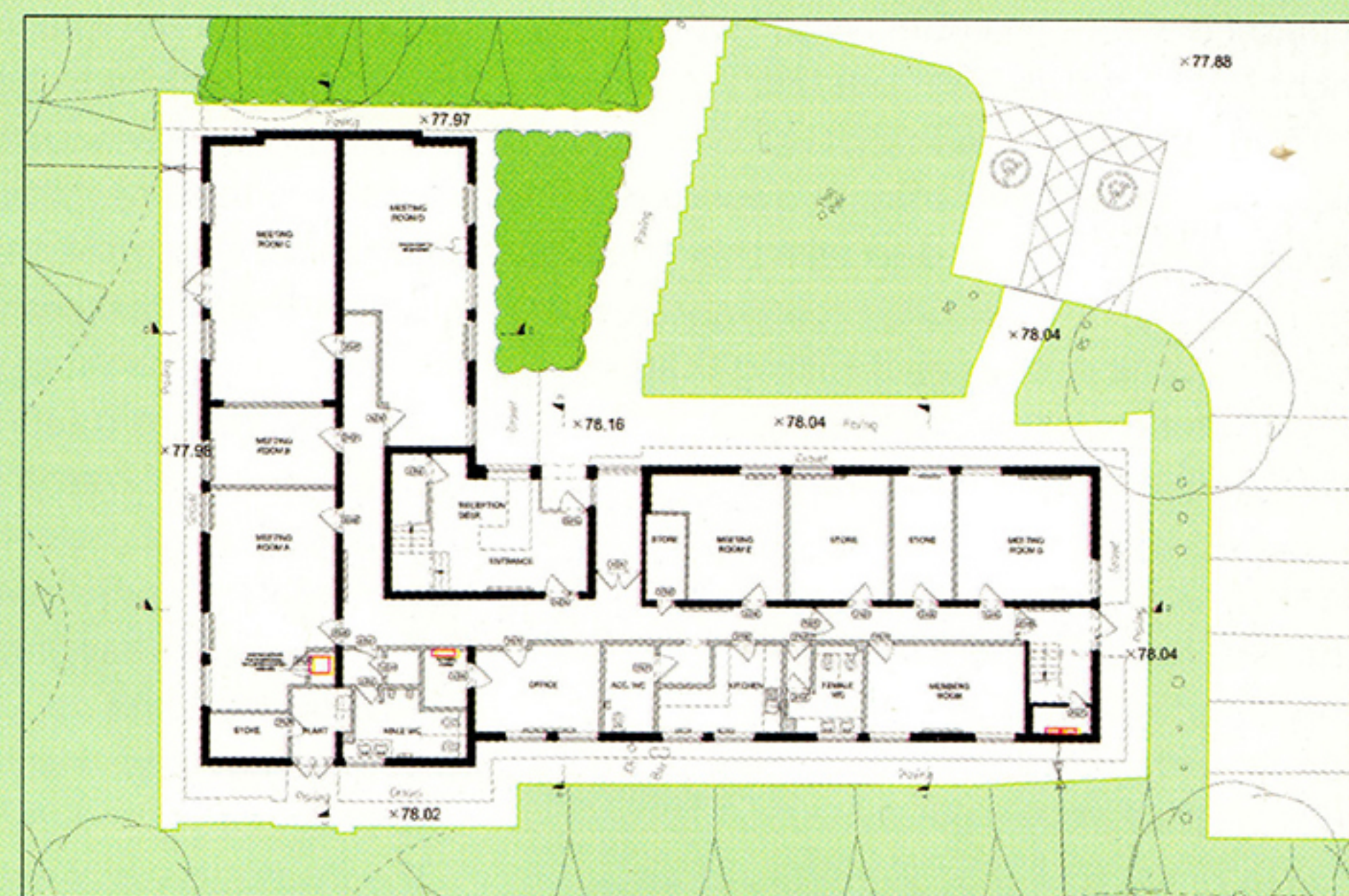
The tight budget means that it may not be possible to meet all of these aspirations immediately, and it was recognised early on that minimising carbon emissions from the building work would mean retaining as much as possible of the existing fabric. It is also the case that high-priority tasks such as installing a lift, replacing doors and windows and addressing overheating problems need to be tackled in the first stage of work.

MTT, the sustainability consultant for the project, writes on page 22 of this journal about the development of a zero carbon roadmap to help Lutyens House deliver net zero carbon performance as soon as is economically and practically possible. The approach and sequencing of work will have a

➤ The proposed site plan for the refurbished headquarters building



✓ The site plan for the existing building



significant impact on the phasing and progressive development of the building, and at the time of writing, Stagg Architects is looking to establish a cost plan with its cost consultant Jackson Coles.

A more developed proposal was presented at CABE conference in Manchester, but the overall shape of the refurbishment has come together quickly thanks to detailed briefing work with the client. There are a number of key features:

## Exterior

- Revised parking layout to increase available spaces
- Introduction of servicing for progressive installation of electric car charging points
- Intensified landscaping to site edges to improve biodiversity
- Use of localised tree planting to help reduce solar gain
- Introduction of a small garden area associated with the ground floor breakout areas.

## Interior

- Introduction of a lift to improve accessibility
- Reshaped reception and breakout seating areas
- Opening up of ground floor areas to create a members' lounge/coffee bar
- Refurbishment of ground floor storage, archive and meeting rooms to provide a boardroom, president's room and four meeting rooms/teaching spaces
- Improved toilet provision
- Refurbished first floor council chamber
- Conversion of the members' room into a dedicated AV and teleconferencing suite
- Improvement to main office accommodation.

## Reduce and re-use

Once works are completed, CABE will have a revitalised headquarters building that can offer members a range of facilities suited to teaching, learning, interviews and mini-conferences. These facilities will also enable improved income generation from external hire when not in use by CABE.

We will also see a massive step-change in sustainability, with a deliverable roadmap to reach zero carbon emissions at the earliest opportunity.

The tight budget (currently £500k for a 780 square-metre building) means that there will be some tough discussions about what is immediately possible. It will be necessary to do only what is imperative and retain what is sound wherever possible. For instance, we already know that the concrete tile roof, existing internal hardwood doors and screens will have to be retained and re-used. All other aspects will be subject to tough scrutiny in terms of value for money.

A reduce/re-use approach of this kind does bring sustainability benefits, but will also enable the available money to be focused on more important changes, including improvement to building fabric and service performance.

This may be a modest project with a modest budget on a modest building, but Stagg Architects is confident that the outcome will provide a launchpad for CABE's activities well beyond 2050 – by which time many others will have benefited from the lessons that CABE will share from activity over the next 18 months. That's something we should all support and be proud of as CABE members. 🌱