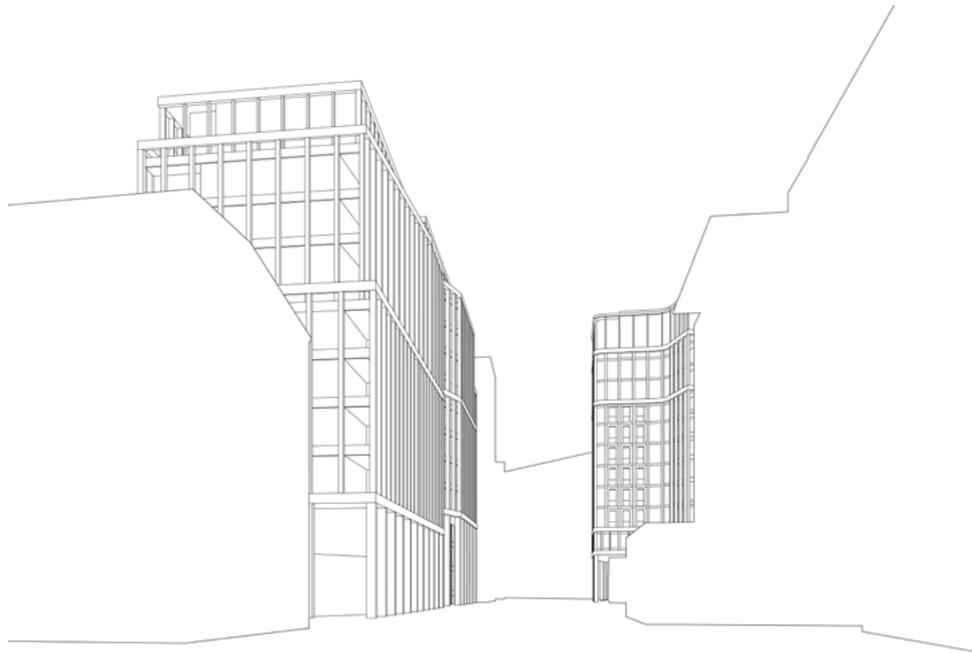


Abell & Cleland Westminster





“Some enlightened urban moves have been made, and what was a claustrophobic corner of town has now got more of a sense of light and space to it. The high-density mansion block typology has clicked forward.”

Hugh Pearman, *RIBA Journal*, March 2018

“Achieving high density is often tricky, but doing it in a historic area only yards from the Westminster Unesco World Heritage Site and directly opposite the high-security MI5 headquarters – one of the most sensitive sites in the country – makes the attempt even more challenging.”

Ike Ijeh, *BD*, March 2018

Top
Townscape study looking north on John Islip Street.

Opposite
Aerial view with Abell on the left and Cleland on the right of John Islip Street.



Introduction

Working closely with Berkeley Homes, and with the input of local residents, DSDHA designed Abell & Cleland to provide a model for the sustainable densification of the city. The development comprises two 'tenure blind' blocks on either side of John Islip Street (close to Tate Britain) with a mix of 275 private and affordable homes arranged around generous landscaped courtyards and glazed lobbies, which offer uplifting views into and through shared gardens, animating a previously unremarkable street.

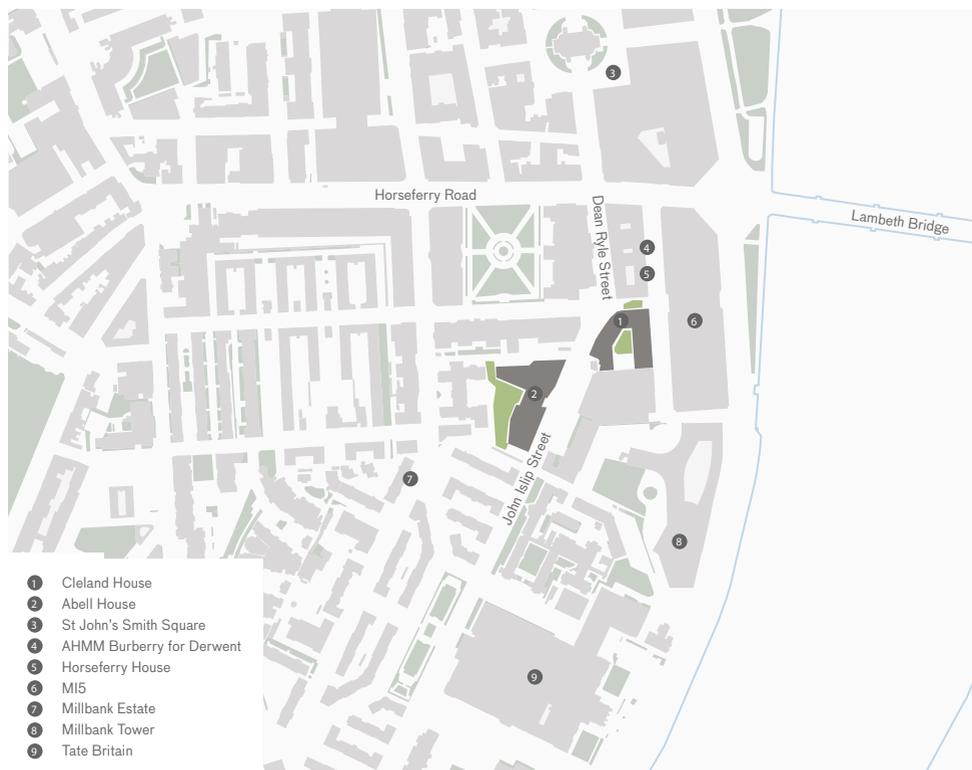
Despite its central location – only a few minutes walk from The Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, Lambeth Bridge and Tate Britain – when passing through the back-water neighbourhood of Millbank in Westminster, one feels a sense of being apart from the contemporary city; Modernist monolithic blocks from the 1930s and 60s, more akin to mid-town Manhattan than Central London, jostle closely with each other, are juxtaposed against the tight historic urban grain of part of the earlier 18th century neighbourhood.

Below

Site plan of Millbank.

Opposite

Entrance to Cleland, with Abell in the background, on the opposite side of John Islip Street.



- 1 Cleland House
- 2 Abell House
- 3 St John's Smith Square
- 4 AHMM Burberry for Derwent
- 5 Horseferry House
- 6 M15
- 7 Millbank Estate
- 8 Millbank Tower
- 9 Tate Britain



Contextual Response

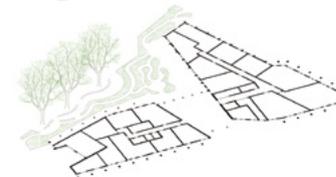
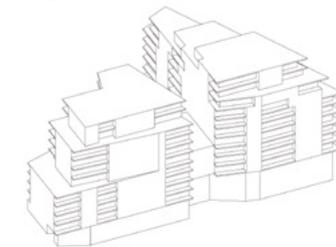
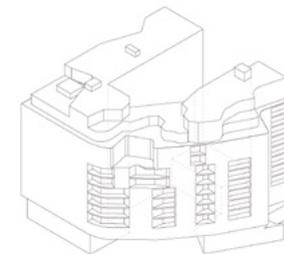
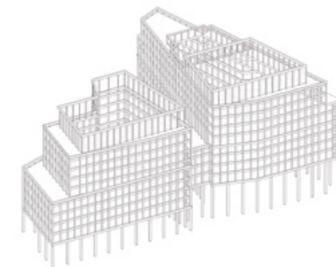
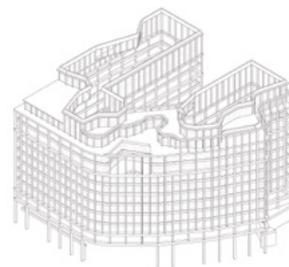
Abell & Cleland unravel the area's historic conundrum by replacing two formidable, dark, 1930s ministerial buildings and successfully mediating between the monumental scale of modernist blocks, including Lutyens (Page Street, 1928–30) and Ward (Millbank Tower 1963), as well as 1930s Horseferry House (recently restored by AHMM) and the formality of Great Peter Street to the north.

Abell, fully facing on to John Islip street, provides a transition between the monolithic prospects of the newer buildings and the more human scale of the listed Millbank estate to the south, while the curved forms of Cleland's facade engage in a dialogue with the Baroque architecture of St John's on Smith Square.

Below
Before and after views of Cleland, facing north to Smith Square.

Opposite top
Exploded axonometric drawings showing courtyard formations.

Opposite bottom
Before and after views of Abell, and the Millbank Estate from John Islip Street.



Super Density

As a model for super density, both buildings create courtyard forms that focus on connecting with nature and amenity along with gymnasium and pool. Abell offers 143 homes set around a garden, and Cleland provides 132 homes, over half of which are affordable wrapping around a south-facing landscaped courtyard. The affordable apartments are located along Thorney Street, due to constraints imposed by MI5, which is housed in Thames House directly opposite. With a generous high quality double-height entrance lobby and views towards the river, the design aims for a ‘tenure blind’ language whilst the cores have been positioned to maximise the number of dual aspect apartments and to minimise the potential for overlooking across the internal courtyard space, maintaining privacy and resident amenity.

All accommodation has been designed to and exceeds London Housing Design Guide standards, with a mix of apartment types, resulting in a range of high-quality, accessible, adaptable and sustainable new homes.

Left
View of Abell, looking south on John Islip Street.

Opposite top
View of Cleland’s façade from Page Street, with MI5 in the background.

Bottom
From left to right: ground floor, typical floor and top floor plans.



Amenity

The same qualities of the interior landscapes around which Abell & Cleland are arranged have been extended to the surrounding public realm, with new tree planting and street-wide paving to re-establish pedestrian priority and create a more convivial landscape setting. Underground car parks and cycling storage facilities have been discretely integrated within the two buildings, without interruption to the street scene.



Top

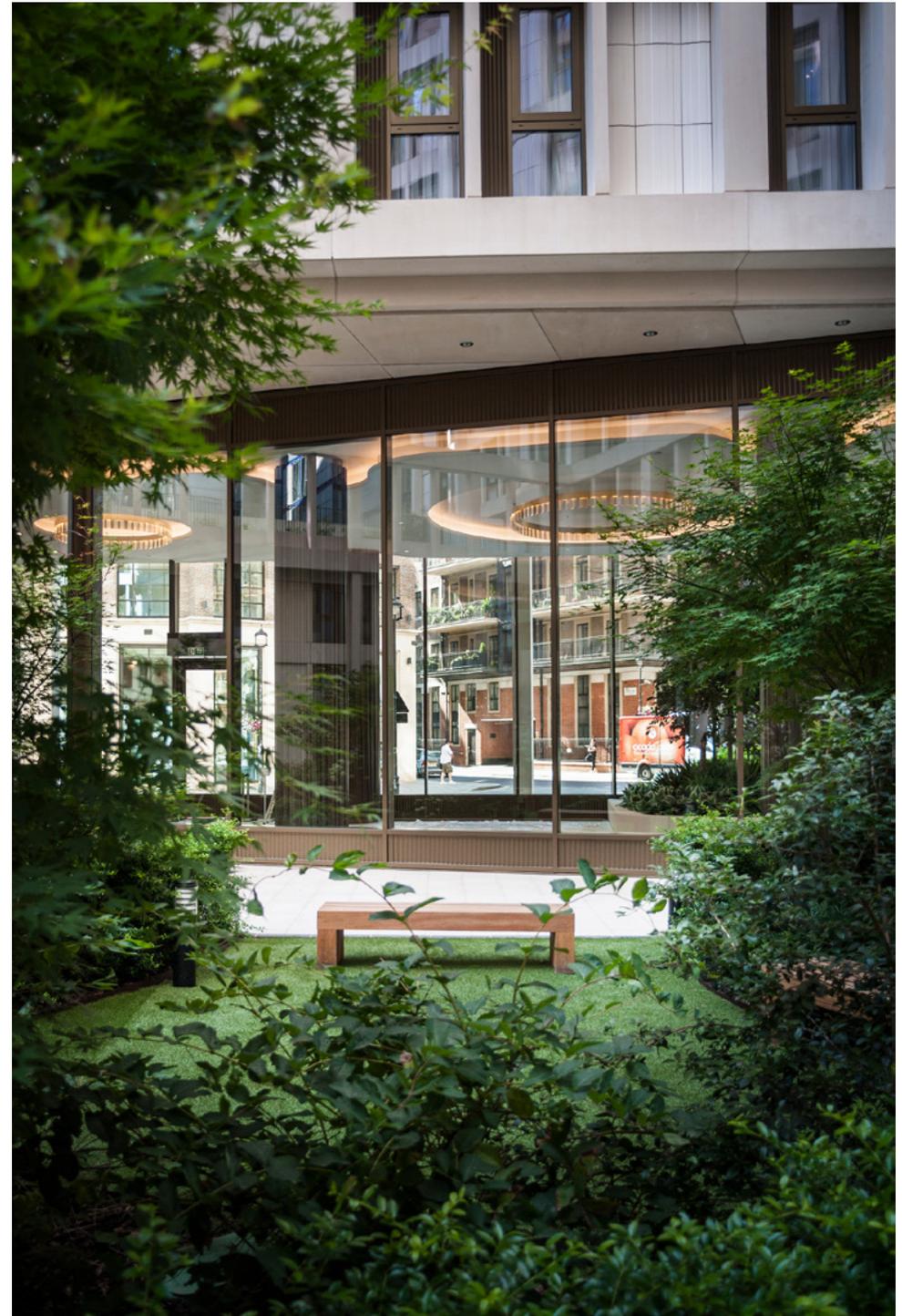
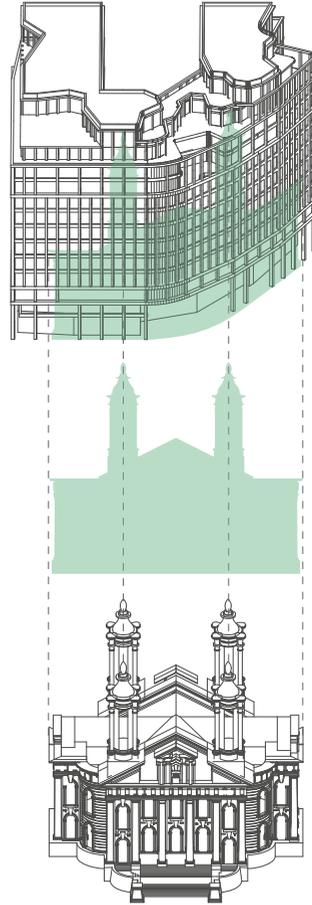
View through Cleland's lobby towards Thomas Archer's 18th century Baroque St John's on Smith Square church.

Right

Urban research diagram illustrating how the curved forms of Cleland's facade recall the grand porticos and towers of St John's on Smith Square church, with which Cleland has an axial relationship.

Opposite

Cleland's internal courtyard brings new views of nature to the street.





Opposite

Abell's central entrance and triple-height lobby, which offers passers-by clear views to the internal courtyard from the street.

Top

View of Abell's courtyard through the lobby, enabling urban legibility.

Right

View of Abell's courtyard.



Urban Research

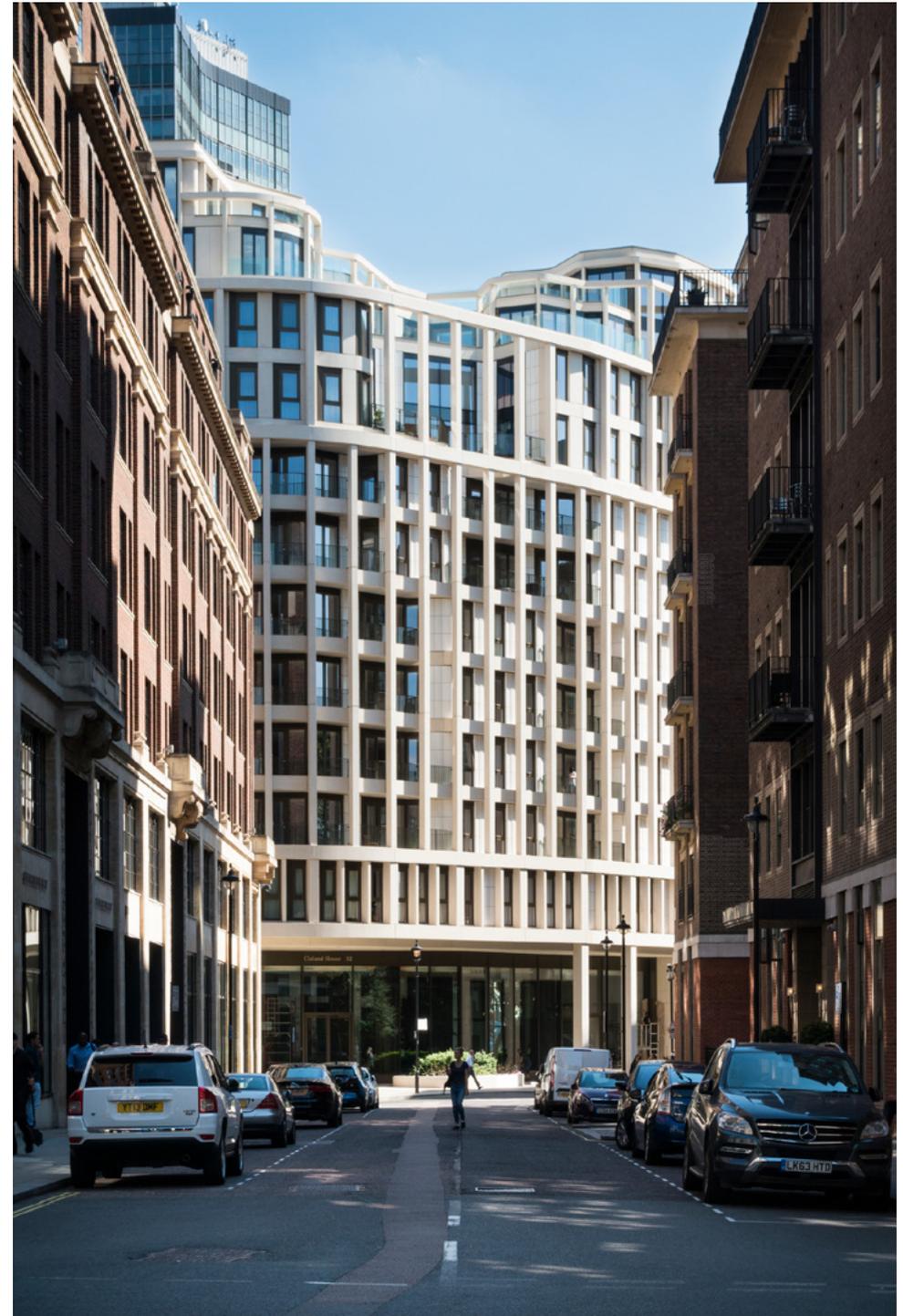
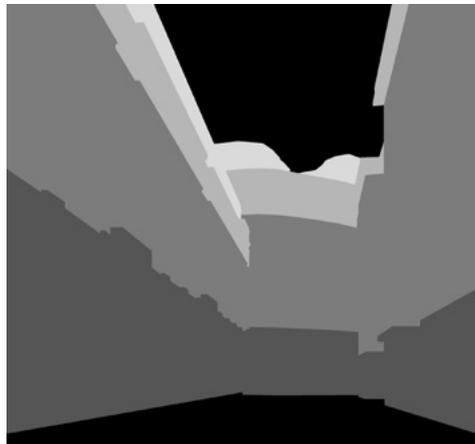
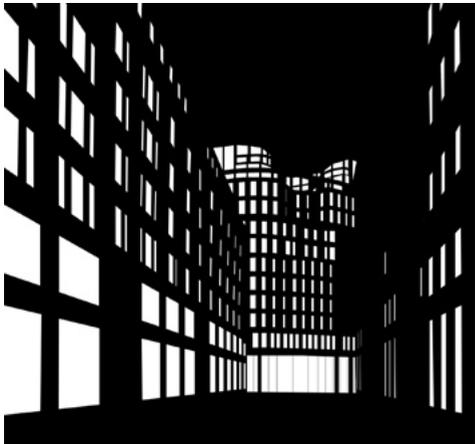
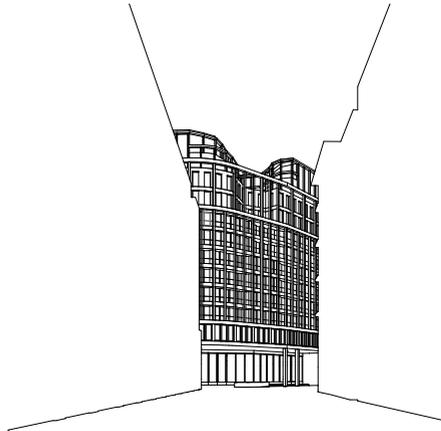
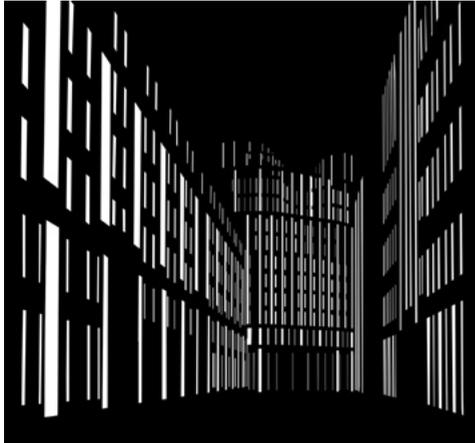
Utilising analytical diagrams, which highlight the composition and articulation of the existing streetscape, our design makes reference to the proportions of the neighbouring buildings, with the massing successfully negotiating a number of complex constraints determined by the site's historic setting; the challenging rights of light/sunlight envelopes determined by the neighbouring buildings; and by its proximity to security-sensitive MI5.

Bottom

Analytical diagrams illustrating how Cleland relates to the adjacent compositional themes and urban morphology of the neighbouring architecture.

Opposite

View of Cleland looking south on Dean Ryle Street.



Construction

Both Abell and Cleland have expressed dense 'exoskeletons' of precast concrete, formulated to resemble Portland stone, in reference to nearby buildings. Westminster City Council welcomed our proposal to utilise this bespoke concrete mix that DSDHA developed in collaboration with the contractor.

Behind the primary outer frames, inner layers comprise metal-framed windows (bronze-coloured at Cleland, and greeny-grey at Abell) and semi-glazed ceramic tiles. At Cleland these are fluted, adding a fine grain and apparent depth to the facade. A play of protrusion and recession in this inner face suggests animation, as do cranked and curving plans, cuts in the section and pronounced setbacks.

The extruded exoskeleton that encases the buildings acts as a bris-soleil that regulates the microclimate within the buildings, moreover it allows insertion of terraces and balconies between the two skins of the facade, extending the pattern of private and shared amenity vertically as well as horizontally in order to balance density and beauty.

The passive design and energy efficient measures to reduce the regulated CO2 emissions of the proposed development are: improved building fabric and envelope over Part L of the Building Regulations; energy efficient lighting and use of intelligent controls; mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery (MVHR); and shared central plant and heating systems.

Bottom
Off-site casting of the columns for the concrete 'exoskeleton'.

Opposite top
Models of the two buildings with mock ups of the glazed ceramic tiles that line the façades.

Opposite bottom
Samples of the ceramic tiles.



Facts and credits

Location	John Islip Street, SW1P 4LN
Gross internal area	330.000 sq ft
Density	1,033 habitable rooms per hectare/319 dwellings per hectare
Completion	2017
Client	Berkeley Homes
Architecture, Urban Design and Heritage Research	DSDHA
Interiors	Project Orange
Landscape Architect	Wirtz International
Enabling Architect	EPR Architects
Structure Engineer	Manhire Associates
Services Engineer	URS Scott Wilson
Planning Consultant	Gerald Eve
Townscape Consultant	Peter Stewart Consultancy
M&E Consultant	MTT Consulting
Photography	Luca Miserocchi



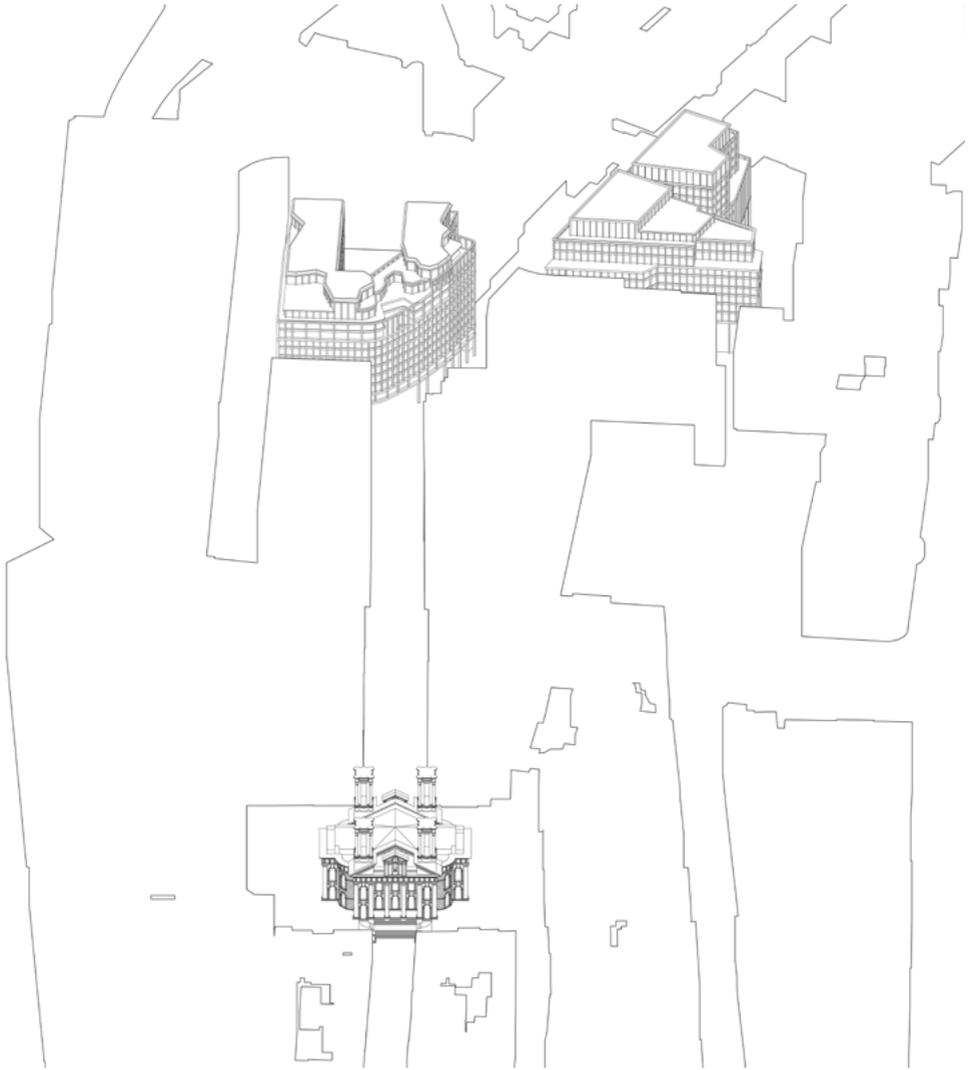
Opposite
Detail of Cleland's façade.

Left
Detail of Cleland's façade.

Bottom
Detail of Abell's façade.

Overleaf
Townscape drawing showing the relationship of Abell and Cleland to nearby St John's on Smith Square church.





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