

**APPLICATION IN TERMS OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL AMAFA AND RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE ACT (5/2018) FOR THE DAMAGE, ALTERATION, REDOCORATION,  
REMOVAL, SUBDIVISION OR AMENDMENT OF ANY PLAN OF SITES  
PERMANENTLY PROTECTED UNDER SECTIONS 44, 45, 46, 47 AND 49 OF  
CHAPTERS 9 (INCLUDING ANY SITE IN RESPECT OF WHICH A NOTICE HAS  
BEEN GIVEN OF THE INTENTION TO CONFER SUCH STATUS THEREON)**

By Prof W Peters and Chantal Pieterse

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022

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## Project Details

<b>Owner of property</b>	Ubuntu housing association for eThekini municipality
<b>Name of property</b>	Oldham Building
<b>Title deed number</b>	n/a
<b>Cadastral description</b>	Portion 2 of ERF 6154 Durban
<b>Street address</b>	44 Lancers Road, Durban
<b>Local municipality</b>	eThekini Municipality
<b>District municipality</b>	eThekini Municipality
<b>Current zoning</b>	General Business (Central)
<b>Present use</b>	Illegally hijacked and derelict
<b>Original date of construction</b>	1936
<b>Design Architect</b>	Ebrahim Kazee Architects
<b>Postal Address</b>	Suite 10, 4 The Crescent, Westway Office Park, 3610
<b>Telephone Number</b>	031 275 5250
<b>SACAP Reg No.</b>	TBC
<b>Heritage Architect</b>	Architecture Fabrik (Chantal Pieterse) in association with Prof. W Peters
<b>Postal Address</b>	7 Dover Road, Westville, 3629
<b>Telephone Number</b>	031 266 2816
<b>Cell phone number</b>	083 366 3478
<b>SACAP Reg No.</b>	PR6943 (Chantal Pieterse)

## Location

The property is bound by Lancers Road, University Avenue, Wills Road and an unnamed laneway, in central Warwick, Durban.



Figure 1. Location of property (A). Source: eThekweni GIS

## Significance

### 1. STATUS OF THE SITE

The building is listed on the Heritage Register, level Grade 3

### 2. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

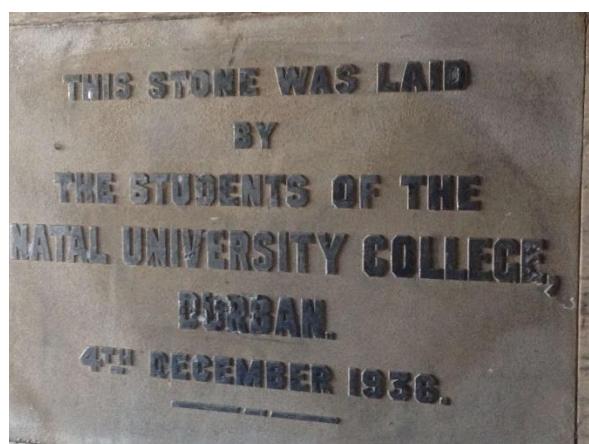
#### Context for the CITY/ OLDHAM BUILDING

The following is extracted from the book: Brookes, E, 1966. *A History of Natal University*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

“During the years 1912 to 1914 ...three men were appointed to the staff of the [Durban Technical] Institute [Durban Technical College in 1915 & Natal Technical College in 1922], who were to become virtually original professors of Natal University College in Durban in 1922 ...”. These three, including **Orlando Oldham** “stand out with particular prominence” as they were the “founders of the Faculties of Engineering and Commerce in the later University....” (Brookes, 1966: 20)

“Howard College [building] was built 1929-31, and as soon as it was ready the Engineering and Commerce classes were transferred to it from the Natal Technical College” (p41). The Commerce Faculty under **Oldham** attracted, not unnaturally, numbers of part-time students, for whom, under the conditions of the 1930s, Howard College was inconveniently distant. **In 1936, therefore, what came to be known as City Building was erected on Warwick Avenue**, and in the same year the non-European classes began in premises made available at Sastri College” (Brookes, 1966: 41).

The completed City Building bore the name Natal University College over the entrance, but at some stage this was changed to Oldham House, clearly in memory of the pioneering academic, Orlando Oldham.



- emeritus Prof Walter Peters

Architect & Heritage Practitioner

### 3. ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

#### The Architect of the Oldham Building

But for the concluding paragraph, the source of the following is the departmental report, 1970: University of Natal, School of Architecture 1949-1970.

D. Calvert McDonald (b. Durban 1905) trained at Durban Technical College from 1921, and on landing a scholarship continued at the AA in London from 1928, before commencing practice in Durban from 1931. His work was pioneering, influenced by the modern masters, Dudok, Oud, Gropius, Aalto and especially Mendelsohn. Among his surviving buildings are the Point Yacht Club, 1935, and Oldham Building (cornerstone 4 December 1936) (Figure 2).

"When courses in Architecture were first offered by Natal University College in 1933, McDonald became the principal lecturer, and from that time until the establishment of the Chair in 1949, he was effectively head of the school for the first 16 years ." His services to the profession were recognised by his election as President of the Natal Provincial Institute in 1939, and to the cause of architectural education, by the presentation of an illuminated address by the Institute in 1964."

Consistently, the Institute gave his name to the prize for the 'best all-round student in 3<sup>rd</sup> year' at UKZN: the Calvert McDonald Prize.



Figure 2. Original building. Source: UKZN Biermann Architecture Library

### Oldham House

As the building was to provide for teaching of students who worked in the city centre and came to study after hours, the acute angle of the triangulated site which faced the direction of access, appropriately along University Ave (& Warwick Ave), was chosen as the point of entry, and consistently architecturally elaborated (Figure 3).

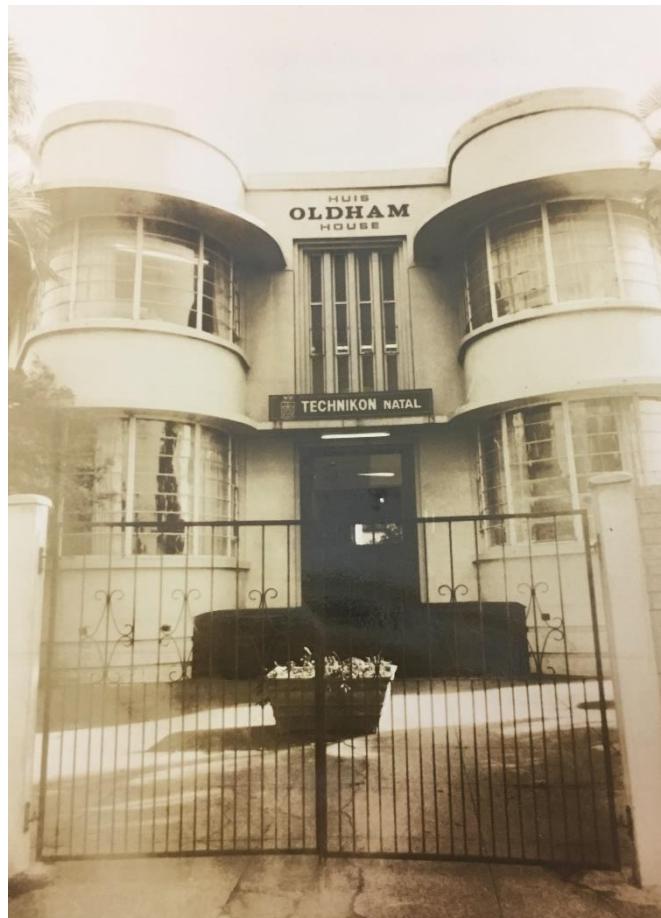


Figure 3. View of the entryway. Source: Brian Kearney, Revised Listing, 1986, held in the Killie Campbell Library, UKZN, Durban

Architect Calvert McDonald lined each of the two sides to the acute angle with single-loaded teaching spaces of double storey, symmetrically, with as a termination to the wing running northward, a 3-storeyed block, wider, breaking-forward and of hipped roof. Unlike the immediate wings, the exterior of the 3-storeyed building has regularly spaced windows between plastered striations, and this band is effectively recessed from the continuous hood and cill, i.e. a conscious surface design to front regular teaching rooms (Fig. 2). But, the decision to line the boundaries of the acute-angled site with two wings of the building left the inside as a courtyard or quadrangle, in the scholastic sense (Figure 7).



Figure 4. The 3-storey wing is lined up with boundary. Source: Prof Walter Peters

The elaborate entrance referred to already consists of two streamlined cylindrical terminations (Figs. 5 & 6), between which was recessed the entry up a short flight of stairs (Fig. 3). Once inside, two symmetrical angled stairs lead to the upper floor (Fig. 7). These are aligned with the triangulated geometry yet sit amid the space and aside the passage, the central of which gives access to the courtyard astride public ablutions. This passage is superimposed as a bridge on the upper floor and the whole of the staircase space is unroofed.



Figures 5&6. The streamlined cylindrical terminations in May 2019. Source: Prof Walter Peters

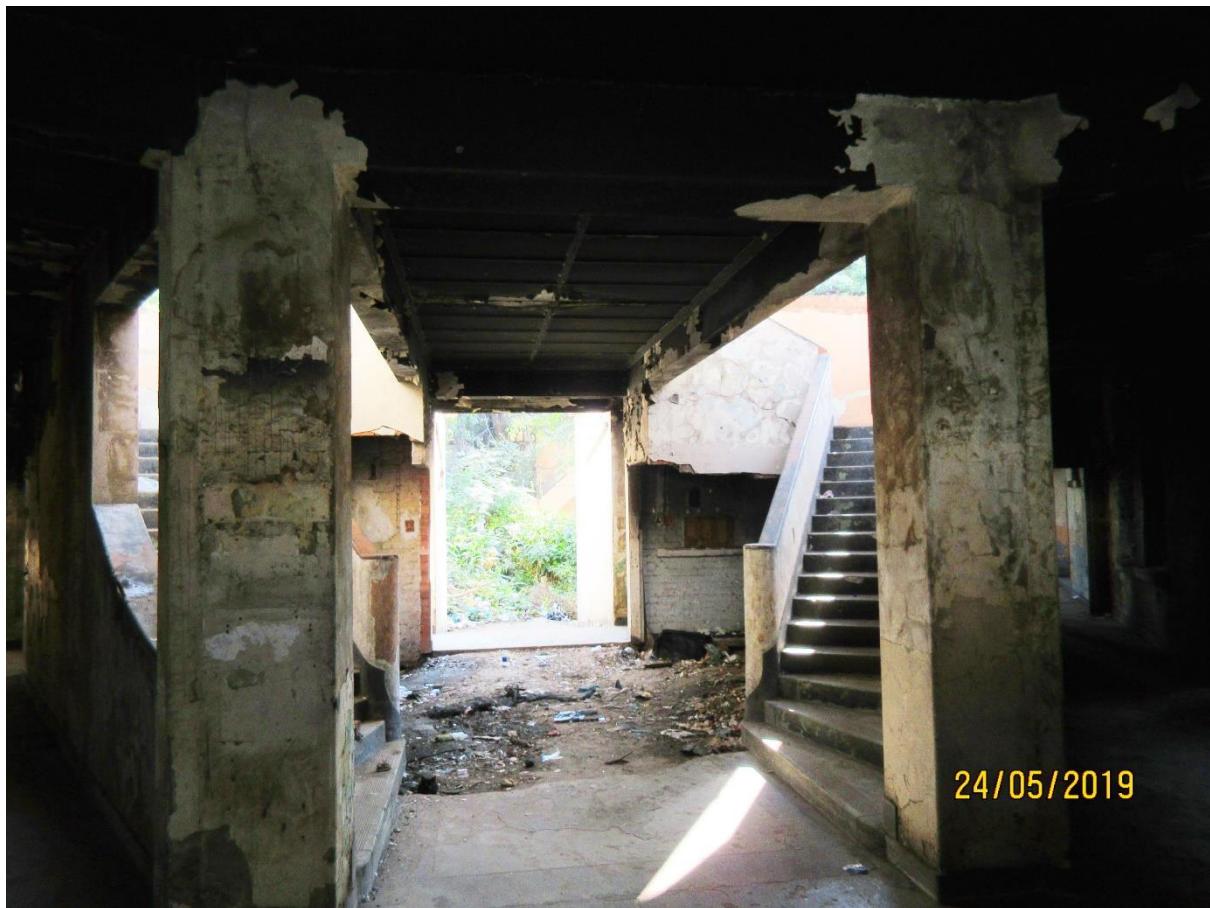


Figure 7. Unroofed staircase internal view in May 2019. Source: Prof Walter Peters

City Building / Oldham House is of the International Style, Art Moderne, and in the entrance, one detects the Expressionism of early modernist German architect, Erich Mendelsohn. The exterior is marked by the flat roof, the streamlining as indicated by the smooth wall finish, the continuous hood at the head of the fenestration on both floors, and the band of windows in steel frames following the curvature of each of the two cylinders, typically Mendelsohnian (Figs. 2 & 3). This rarity in Durban architecture calls for restoration and integration into any redevelopment.

### Hall

Halfway along the Lancers Rd portion of the site is a building of the 1960s marked by a dark face brick wall with protruding and recessed brick patterning, diapering. This is a decorative resort, sometimes applied to the architecture of the 1950s and '60s, and here chosen to relieve the large unadorned wall surface area with texture and shadows (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Lancers Road façade in May 2019. Source: Prof Walter Peters

The north-eastern return is characterised by a similarly solid wall, and free-standing staircase. The wall is punctured asymmetrically by angled fins over 2 storeys set in a frame, which is the focus to the wall. It is terminated vertically by a concrete shell roof of vaulted profile with canted eaves, yet distanced from the wall by way of strip windows following the profile of the roof (Figure 9).



Figure 9: North-eastern façade in May 2019. Source: Prof Walter Peters

### Heritage summary & possibilities

In December 2019 an application was made to AMAFA to demolish parts of this site. The photographs taken in May 2019 (above) demonstrate that Oldham Building was already in a shocking state. The suspended timber floors had been stripped as had all windows, with only the structure remaining. A proposal was made for the part demolition and redevelopment of the site, for Social Housing. The application was not approved as full detailed drawings were not available.

While the wings of Oldham Building are continuous and differ only in window coupling, the 3-storey termination with hipped roof is ordinary by comparison. But, to save the distinctive entrance, the question of an appropriate context for the palimpsest arises. It is respectfully submitted that lateral cuts in the line of the ends of the ablutions will conserve the integrity of the original while allowing the retained portion a functional purpose, hopefully of entrance and control.

However, despite the interesting aspects of the exterior of the hall, unless the building can be repurposed for a use requiring a large internal volume, it will be very difficult to conserve the structure for residential purposes while observing the international charters for conservation.

## Status Quo

In an attempt to support this much needed inner city social infrastructure, AMAFA issued a demolition permit for all buildings except the full extent of the double storey wings and central stair. See permit attached dated May 2020. A demolition certificate was thus issued by the Local Municipality, for the parts approved in the AMAFA demolition permit.

The property is owned by EThekweni Municipality, who endeavoured to proceed with the demolition as approved. The works went out to tender in compliance with the PFMA (Public Finance Management Act). Simultaneously, in 2020, the country was placed under various levels of Covid-19 lockdowns, slowing down all administrative structures for a number of months. The result was that it took nearly a year to appoint a demolition contractor.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 an article in the IOL news website (attached) reports that eThekweni Municipality Human Settlements had tabled a report before the executive committee (Exco) to demolish (parts of) the building and develop the property for Social Housing. In the same article, an anonymous businesswoman commented that the building had been invaded 15 years ago.

The state of the economy, lack of job opportunities, reduction in informal trading and poor general oversight due to the Covid-19 lockdowns led some opportunistic 'land lords' to take up what they deemed a profitable opportunity. That was to provide for the demand of inner city; inexpensive, centrally located accommodation. Located in the centre of Warwick, Durban's busiest public transport hub, the Oldham building was neglected, and vacant.

During the following year illegal alterations took place to the buildings to provide accommodation. Brickwork was built inside window openings, and windows installed. Lockable doors were installed, and room numbers spray painted on to organise the offering. Illegal electrical supplies were fitted, but there is no running water in the building. The central courtyard became the solid waste dump. A ground floor wall was demolished to make way for the storage of informal traders' goods, and in parts roofs installed.

In December 2021, EThekweni Municipality made an attempt to evict these illegal occupants, including the shebeen now operating on the Wills Road side of the courtyard. The eviction attempt was met with a High Court Interdict instructing EThekweni to consult with the occupants and find them alternative accommodation.

The tender for a Social Facilitator to profile the occupants was cancelled due to irregularities, and the process had to start afresh. The contract was not yet awarded in August 2022. In the meantime, the degradation and damage has continued.

Photographs taken in 2021 follow:



Figure 10: A door inserted into the University Ave façade, May 2021.

Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 11: An internal view showing decay of steel in overhead slabs and a tree growing into the building, May 2021. Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 12: Infill brickwork inserted into the main entrance, May 2021.

Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 13: Infill brickwork and openings in the University Ave facade, May 2021. Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 14: Marble on the entrance wall has been stripped off, May 2021.

Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 15: A makeshift roof has been installed on the upper floor with a temporary wall division, May 2021. Source: Chantal Pieterse

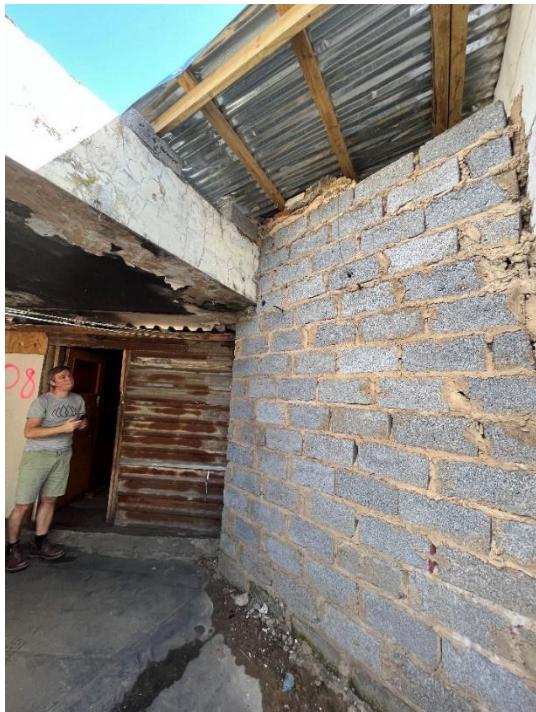


Figure 16: A makeshift roof and concrete block wall has been installed on the upper floor with a temporary wall division, May 2021. Source: Chantal Pieterse



Figure 17: The internal stairs have been damaged and the upper floor is occupied, May 2021. Source: Chantal Pieterse

## A timeline : 1936 to 2022

Various administrative impediments have plagued this site for the past 20 years. A timeline follows to attempt to come to an understanding of what happened to this building, and how we got to this.

**1936**- Construction for Natal University College

**1986**- Name changed to Technikon Natal as seen in Prof Brian Kearney's photograph in the Revised Listing

**1989**- Plan submission for minor alterations for 'Accommodation for Ambulance Services'

**2015**- Feasibility Study by Architecture Fabrik for Housing- the buildings were derelict at this point

**c2018**- Ubuntu Social Housing Institute appointed as SHI for the site

**2019**- AMAFA refused initial application to demolish (decision notice attached)

**2019** – Architecture Fabrik submitted AMAFA application.

**2020** - Demolition permit issued by AMAFA for all except the full extent of the double-storey wings.

**2021** – eThekweni Municipality agrees in a Council meeting that the property can be transferred for Social Housing purposes for a period of 50 years under a lease agreement.

**2022** – Further degradation and occupation

It is not documented what happened between the early 90's and 2015. Over these 25 years, the Ambulance Services vacated the building, and it was stripped of windows, roofs, floors and so on. It is understood from anecdotal evidence that during the delay in the transfer of assets from Province to eThekweni Municipality, the building was neglected. The building belonged to Province and took some time (around 15 years) to transfer ownership to eThekweni Municipality.



Figure 18: The building had been stripped when first visited in 2015.

Source: Chantal Pieterse

## Social Housing

A background of the Social Housing structure is seen as an important addition to this report.

The National Department of Human Settlements provides for various subsidised housing programmes. One such program is called Social Housing. This programme allows for subsidised rental accommodation for individuals who earn between R1,500 and R15,000 per month. The programme subsides both the capital cost of building the units, and the monthly rental through the Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA) and the Social Housing Institute (SHI). The SHRA monitors the project preparation and the SHI. The SHI is accredited by the local municipality but submits the funding application to the SHRA. The role of the local municipality is to provide well located, serviced land parcels at minimal cost to the SHI for the purpose of Social Housing. The SHI must plan the project, undertake project feasibility in terms of the construction and the 50-year management of the project, they must build the project and maintain the building and collect rent for 50 years. In the case of Lancers Road, the feasibility must work within a 50 year period, as that is the agreed period of the lease. After that date the property is to be handed back to the municipality.

Many of the SHI's are neither developers nor management agents. To obtain their first tranche of funding from the SHRA, they must have an approved project. This includes a full set of municipal submission ready plans before they can access funding. In reality, what this means is that built environment professionals work at little or no fee or 'at risk', which truly is a risky undertaking for all parties involved. The progress is often stalled for months while professionals work on fee paying work, and time spent on these projects is kept to a minimum. Many of these projects are valued in the region of R100 million.

It is for this reason, the applicant is reporting a delayed technical drawing output, and this application in 'concept' form. Should AMAFA find the proposed work that follows acceptable, the full 1:100 scale submission ready drawings will be prepared.

## Proposed Work

### 1. PURPOSE OF APPLICATION

Demolition of building except the indicated extent of the double-storey portion. Restoration and rejuvenation of the prow-shaped entrance portion and internal stairs, and additions. The ground floor may not be used for residential purposes in compliance with the Town Planning Scheme and will be reserved for retail. The upper floors will be 30-40sqm residential units.

### 2. MOTIVATION FOR PROPOSED WORK

The existing buildings on the site have been hijacked and are derelict. At the same time, the location is ideal for higher density residential accommodation. In the process of such redevelopment, the main portion of Oldham Building is to be restored to e.g. accommodate uses supportive to the resident community. It is proposed that in one of the existing rooms, the developer houses a small museum to be accessed by the community. The history of both the University in this building and the Warwick area is valuable and should be retained.

### 3. DETAILS OF THE ALTERATIONS, ADDITIONS AND RESTORATIONS PROPOSED

Oldham Building is to be restored but in respect of universal access a ramp is to be incorporated with the entrance stairs. The aesthetics of the new is informed by Oldham Building but defers there from. Though of a face brick finish, the scale is observed, as are the horizontal bands and the grouped vertical fenestration, and some corners are rounded.



Figure 19: Proposed East Elevation – 200



Figure 20: Proposed SW Elevation – 201



Figure 21: Proposed NW Elevation – 202

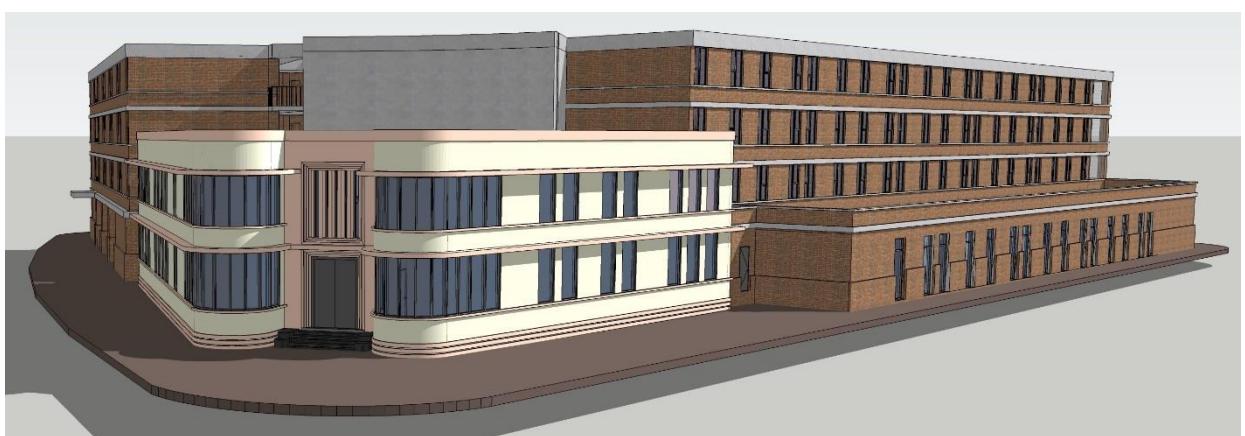


Figure 22: View 1- Looking North – 203



Figure 23: View 2 - Looking NE – 204



Figure 24: View 3- Looking East – 205



Figure 25: View 4- Looking South - 206