26 June 2024

Reading Borough Council
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Title	**PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT**
Ward	Caversham
Planning Application Reference:	240068/FUL
Site Address:	2-4 Church Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7AE
Proposed Development	Change of use and works of conversion from former bank (Class E) to 2 ground floor commercial units (Class E (a-f only)) and 3 upper floor dwellings (Class C3), including a part second floor extension and separate rear dormer roof extension, shopfront alterations and associated works.
Applicant	Caversham Solicitors Ltd
Report author	Jonathan Markwell, Principal Planning Officer
Deadline:	Originally 21/03/2024, but an extension of time for the determination of the application has been agreed with the agent until 17/07/2024
Recommendation	Delegate to the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection Services (AD PTPPS) to (i) GRANT full planning permission subject to the satisfactory completion of a Section 106 legal agreement and delegate to the AD PTPPS to make such minor changes to the conditions, Heads of Terms and details of the legal agreement as may be reasonably required to issue the permission or (ii) to REFUSE permission should the Section 106 legal agreement not be completed by the 17th July 2024 (unless officers on behalf of the AD PTPPS agree to a later date for completion of the legal agreement).
S106 Terms	- A payment-in-lieu commuted sum financial contribution towards Affordable Housing of £38,750, payable prior to the first occupation of any residential unit (but not before 8 weeks of first occupation). - Indexation - Any financial contribution to be index-linked from date of permission unless expressly stated otherwise.
Conditions	1. Time Limit – 3 years 2. Approved plans 3. Materials to match existing unless where otherwise stated (compliance condition) 4. Details, including manufacturer specifications, of any brick slip system, prior to installation (if proposed) and subsequent implementation prior to first occupation of any residential unit. 5. No flat roof area to be used as a balcony or roof garden unless where stated (compliance condition) 6. Provision and maintenance of active window displays along Church Road at ground floor level (compliance condition) 7. Ground floor commercial units to be used solely for Class E (a), E (b), E (c), E (d), E (e) or E (f) uses only (compliance condition)

	8. Hours of use of commercial units (compliance condition) 9. Mix of units restricted to 1 x 1-bedroom unit and 2 x 2-bedroom units (compliance condition) 10. Provision of biodiversity enhancement mechanisms prior to first occupation of any residential unit and retained as such thereafter (compliance condition). 11. Development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment (compliance condition) 12. Pre-occupation of the relevant part of the development (a) residential units; b) commercial unit 1; c) commercial unit 2) waste collection, servicing and delivery management plan. Approved measures retained as such thereafter 13. *Construction Method Statement (pre-commencement) (also including Environmental Protection based measures too) 14. Cycle Parking (compliance condition) 15. Parking Permits 1 (pre-occupation) 16. Parking Permits 2 (compliance condition) 17. *Pre-commencement SAP assessment (energy – minimum 19% improvement) – design stage 18. Pre-occupation of Flat C SAP assessment (energy – minimum 19% improvement) – as built 19. *Pre-commencement submission and approval of an interim BREEAM Certificate demonstrating a minimum BREEAM Very Good rating in relation to the non-residential and converted to residential components 20. Pre-occupation submission and approval of a final BREEAM Certificate demonstrating a minimum BREEAM Very Good rating in relation to the non-residential and converted to residential components 21. Flood protection measures provided prior to first occupation and maintained as such thereafter (compliance condition) 22. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of the mechanical ventilation details for the dwellings and approved measures provided prior to first occupation and retained as such thereafter 23. * Pre-commencement submission and approval of details to protect the dwellings from noise from the commercial use, with approved measures provided prior to first occupation and retained as such thereafter 24. Pre-occupation submission and approval of pest and vermin control measures associated with the refuse and recycling bin stores 25. No mechanical plant installed until noise assessment submitted and approved 26. Noise Assessment approved prior to first occupation of any Class E (d) gym use 27. Odour Assessment approved prior to first occupation of any Class E (b) use
Informatives	1. Positive and Proactive Working – approval 2. Pre-commencement conditions 3. Highways 4. S106 Legal Agreement 5. Terms and conditions 6. Building Control 7. Complaints about construction 8. Encroachment 9. Noise between residential properties – sound insulation 10. Community Infrastructure Levy

	11. Parking Permits 12. Advice about trees in Conservation Areas 13. No advertisement consent granted – separate consent may be required in the future 14. Noisy construction hours 15. No burning of waste on site during construction

1. Executive summary

1.1 Planning permission is sought for the change of use and works of conversion of the former Barclays Bank on the prominent Church Road junction in Caversham. The proposals seek to create 2 ground floor commercial units and 3 upper floor dwellings. The proposed works include a partial second floor extension on the western side of the site and separate rear dormer roof extension to the primary building, together with shopfront alterations to facilitate the residential use. The proposals represent a sensitive and high quality design response to the building of townscape merit, benefitting the wider streetscene, conservation area and setting of nearby listed buildings too. Following negotiations with the applicant, a policy compliant contribution towards affordable housing is being secured and the impacts of the proposals will be carefully managed through a series of conditions. Planning permission is recommended for approval by officers, subject to conditions and the completion of a S106 Legal Agreement.

2. Introduction and site description

2.1. This triangular site is located on the south side of Church Road, at the junction with Church Street and Bridge Street in Caversham. The interwar building is constructed in a Neo-Georgian style and is two-storey in height, with an existing later two-storey addition on the western boundary. The building is presently vacant, having most recently been occupied by Barclays Bank. Documents submitted with the application state the building was last occupied on 04/06/2020. The location of the site is shown below in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Site Location Plan, as submitted by the applicant

2.2. The site is within Flood Zone 2, an air quality management area and the defined Caversham District Centre, with the site a designated key frontage within the district centre. The site is also in the Article 4 area (as modified on 10 October 2023) which remove permitted development rights in relation to Class MA (change of use of Class E to residential), Class AA (construction of up to two additional storeys of new dwllinghouses on detached buildings in certain uses) and Class AB (construction of up to two new dwellinghouses on terrace buildings in specified commercial or sui generis uses).

2.3. Furthermore, the site is within St Peter's Conservation Area. Whilst not a statutory listed building, the main building is identified as a building of townscape merit within the November 2018 Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA). Paragraph 5.4.2 states:

> *Barclays Bank, 2 Church Road, circa 1928, 2 storey, red and rubbed red brick with stone dressings, central dressed stone pediment and balustrading at roof level, symmetrical façade*

2.4. The later addition on the western building is, importantly, not identified as part of the building of townscape merit. Although it is joined internally, externally it has its own appearance and, therefore, has been separately considered in the appraisal. More generally, the site is within the 'Junction Area' character area, with the following noted:

> *The south side of the junction has a consistent scale and range of materials. It features three well-detailed older bank buildings and some well-detailed shop buildings now used as estate agents and a restaurant.*

2.5. There are a number of other passages within the CAA which are specifically relevant, summarised as follows:

- The Conservation Area Appraisal has a number of key characteristics (as identified at the outset of the appraisal – section SS2), with the following of particular relevance in the context of the proposals:
    - The early village is overlaid with mainly late Victorian and Edwardian buildings, constructed over a short time period. While the commercial buildings raise the predominant scale to three storeys, there is a harmony of scale and materials between these buildings and the earlier ones. Early red brick and timber framed domestic buildings with plain roof tiles combine with well-detailed later brick buildings with slate roofs to form a coherent whole and an attractive and consistent roofscape.
    - The junction of Church Road and Bridge Street includes some distinguished banks and similar commercial premises. The importance of Bridge Street as the visual corridor linking the village core with the bridge outweighs the poor treatment of some of its buildings, which nevertheless have a consistent scale and style.
- A number of issues and vulnerabilities are also referenced (section SS3 of the CAA), with the following considered to be of particular relevance in the context of the proposals:
    - The loss of original architectural details, particularly front elevation and boundary wall features, is a cumulative and damaging problem.
    - The shop fronts along Church Road and Church Street, including those on the otherwise less successful Caversham House development, are consistent and well-detailed. Any changes will need careful attention. The varied treatment of some of their upper floors is regrettable.
    - Situated around the junction of Church Road, Church Street, and Bridge Street are three well-detailed banks. One has already closed as a bank and evolving banking practice may continue to threaten their future. Care will be needed with design details, with ground floors being especially vulnerable to changes of use.

    - Close to the junction of Church Road, Church Street and Bridge Street there are four key gap sites which provide both threats and opportunities: adjoining the Priory Avenue corner; adjoining the telephone exchange; the tyre workshop in Bridge Street; and the advertising hoarding site on the Bridge Street and Church Road junction. Redevelopment or improvement of these would be welcome but would need a sensitive approach.

- It is also relevant to note that in extending the conservation area to include the application site (as part of a wider boundary change) the building is identified as having group value alongside other bank / former bank buildings and is part of an important visual axis (section SS5 of the CAA):

    - There are several unlisted buildings of townscape merit within the proposed extension. These include the three early 20th century bank buildings at the junction of Church Road, Church Street and Bridge Street, which have group value: the former Lloyds Bank building in particular stops the vista down Church Road.

    - The bridge and the Church Road and Bridge Street junction form an important visual axis which is key to the proposed extension. However, while the buildings which link them, along the western side of Bridge Street, have a consistent age, scale and style, many have suffered unsuitable alterations, for example in clashing shop front details and in the changes to the former Thames Valley Hotel adjoining the bridge. Designation will help resist further deterioration.

2.6. Other sections of the CAA also confirm the following:

- The rear of the site is part of a view cone from the south side of the Thames (Thames Promenade) looking north

- The site is within two identified important views in the CA (Map 3)

    - View west down Church Street stopped by the former Lloyds Bank building on axis with the street.

    - View north from Caversham Bridge and Bridge Street towards the group of listed buildings on Church Street

- Group of trees to rear of site are identified in Map 4 of the CAA as trees in the streetscene.

2.7. There are also a number of relevant notes within the ‘7. Negative features, issues and opportunities for enhancement’ section of the CAA. Within the ‘loss of original architectural details and features’ sub-section of the appraisal (section 7.1) it is stated that small scale changes have a cumulative impact which progressively damages a small conservation area such as St Peter’s.

2.8. Section 7.9 specifically refers to ‘The banks’, for which the application site is one, and states:

> *The closure of the one of the banks at the junction of Bridge Street and Church Road, and the planned closure of a second, is of considerable concern, because of their prominent location, important character and historical significance in the heart of the area. Any work to existing or former bank premises should respect the architectural character of their elevations, including those at ground floor.*

2.9. Table 2 of the Action Plan for the Conservation area specifies:

ISSUE	ACTION	WHO	TIME SCALE
Any work to existing or former bank premises should respect the architectural character of their elevations, including those at ground floor	**Development Control:** Owners and applicants to be made aware.	RBC	Ongoing

2.10. It is therefore within this context that any proposal at this site is considered. Views of the application site building and surrounding area are shown below at Figures 2 and 3, with a variety of uses in the district centre location, together with some upper floor residential uses. The key characteristics of the site and surrounding area, including the identification of four Grade II listed buildings (1-5 Church Road [Late 17th century], 2 and 4 Church Street [19th century], 6 and 8 Church Street [17th century] and 10 Church Street [mid-late 17th century]), those of townscape merit, view cones and views is shown below in Figure 4 (an extract of Map 3 within the CAA).



Figure 2 – The application site from the junction of Church Road, Church Street and Bridge Street



Figure 3 – Aerial view looking south-west, showing the front elevation of the application site.

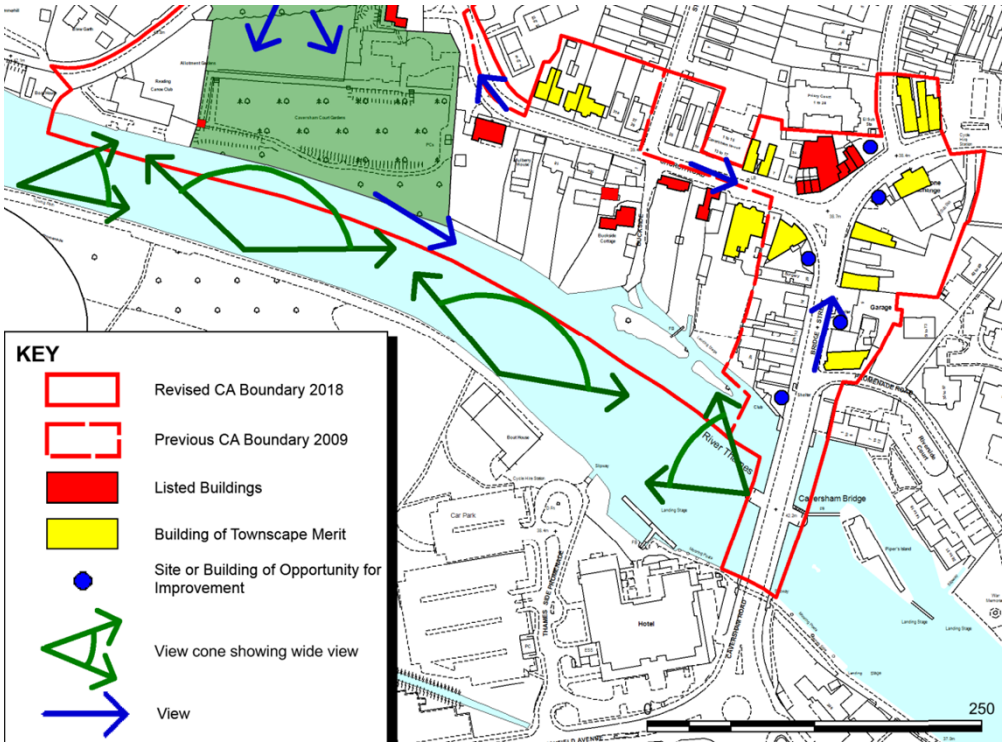


Figure 4 - An extract of Map 3 ('Features of Conservation Area') within the CAA

2.11 The application is being considered at Planning Applications Committee having been called in by Councillor Yeo on 15/02/2024 because the application raised concerns about management of waste collection, deliveries etc given recent issues in the Conservation area just round the corner from this site. Also concerns about how and when deliveries will be made to the site during the construction as this junction, probably the busiest in Caversham.

3. The proposal

3.1. Full planning permission is sought for the change of use and works of conversion from a former bank (Class E) building to create two separate ground floor commercial units (Class E (a-f only)) and 3 upper floor residential dwellings (Class C3). To facilitate these uses a part second floor extension is proposed on the western side of the site, in a mansard form with three dormer windows on the front roofslope and two conservation style rooflights on the rear roofslope. Separately, on the main building on the eastern side of the site, two dormer windows and a single conservation style rooflight is proposed on the rear roofslope. Furthermore, a number of shopfront and façade alterations are proposed:

- All existing windows to original Neo-Georgian building element to be replaced with new double glazed timber sash windows to match the existing style
- The existing double glazed door closest to the eastern boundary on the front elevation to be replaced with a new single leaf double glazed timber flood resistant door painted in dark grey. The existing fanlight above will be retained.
- The existing glazed door and side panel in the middle of the building is proposed to be replaced with a new solid 6 panel timber flood resistant door decorated in dark grey to match the shopfronts. The existing fanlight above will be retained.
- A new opaque glazed dark grey painted timber framed window and louvred flood resistant door to the bin store is proposed, together with a similar shopfront with brick stall riser and fascia area for future signage above.
- The existing hanging tiles at first floor level will be removed and if the existing brickwork behind this matches the existing exposed brickwork then this will be retained. If the existing brickwork does not match the intention will be to install a brick slip system to seek to match the existing (as confirmed in an email from the agent on

22/05/2024). At this part of the building it is also proposed to replace the windows with double glazed timber sash windows and add new moulding between the ground and first floors.

3.2. More specifically, at ground floor level, two separate commercial units are proposed. The main unit is 115sqm in size and largely follows the footprint of the building of townscape merit. A smaller 27sqm unit is proposed within the more modern part of the site, towards the western boundary. In-between the two units is the residential entrance lobby and a separate residential bin store entrance now proposed. Residential cycle parking is proposed internally at ground floor level, accessed via the lobby leading to the staircase to the upper floor flats. Flats A and B are located at first floor level, providing 1x2-bedroom unit and 1x1-bedroom unit. Flat C is located at newly created second floor level, with the living/dining/kitchen space within the proposed mansard on the western side of the building and both bedrooms of this 2-bedroom unit within the roofslope of the building of townscape merit, with outlook provided through the rear dormer windows.

3.3. The proposals also seek a number of other associated works, such as the removal of the external staircase outside of the red-line boundary to the east of the site (where the neighbouring site is vacant), which presently provides an emergency means of escape from rear first floor level. The door at this first floor point is proposed to be removed and the opening reduced with matching brickwork to create a timber sash window. A section of the flat roof area to the rear of the building is proposed to include a sedum blanket green roof system on part of the roof, with access from the rear with a first floor window being altered to a door to allow access solely for maintenance purposes.

3.4. During the course of the application, the form of the proposed second floor addition on the front elevation was altered, with three dormer windows incorporated within a front roofslope mansard, rather than the originally proposed sheer storey with conventional windows at this point. Revisions were also made to the materials associated with the shopfronts, removing originally proposed metal finishes with painted timber instead. Further information and revised details in respect of a variety of other matters, such as for example the noise from the nearby public house and waste collections being confirmed as being carried out by a private contractor . In addition, responses to original transport and viability feedback was provided by the applicant. No element of the further/revised information was considered to warrant formal re-consultation being undertaken, although CADRA was informally notified owing to initial comments being received from the local group.

3.5. In terms of the Reading Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the applicant has submitted relevant CIL based information at application stage, such as a completed CIL form and plans illustrating the methodology behind the floorspace figures. The proposals are likely to be CIL liable as they seek to create residential units, no exemptions or relief are specified within the information submitted and the existing building is stated to have been last occupied in 2020. On the basis of the applicant's stated 248sqm of residential accommodation being proposed and the 2024 CIL residential rate being £179.29 per sqm, the total liability is estimated to be £44,463.92. Given the building will not have been occupied in 6 of the 36 months prior to a decision being issued (given vacancy since 2020), a deduction based on the existing floorspace will not be possible. The standard informative will be included on any future decision notice, with the separate CIL process commencing once any permission has been issued.

3.6. The following plans have been submitted for approval (only the latest versions submitted are referenced):

PP-12560347v1 Location Plan
503001-FCA-00-00-DR-A-P02 – Existing Site Block Plan
503001-FCA-00-00-DR-A-P04 – Existing Ground Floor Plan
503001-FCA-00-01-DR-A-P05 – Existing First Floor Plan
503001-FCA-00-02-DR-A-P06 – Existing Second Floor Plan
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P08 – Existing Elevations
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P09 – Existing Sections

503001-FCA-00-00-DR-A-P12 – Proposed Site Block Plan
503001-FCA-00-01-DR-A-P15 – Proposed First Floor Plan
As all received on 18/01/2024

503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P30 – Existing Ground and First CIL Evidence Plans
As received 25/01/2024

503001-FCA-00-00-DR-A-P14 Rev B – Proposed Ground Floor Plan
503001-FCA-00-00-DR-A-P25 Rev A – Proposed Ground Floor Drainage Plan
503001-FCA-00-02-DR-A-P16 Rev A – Proposed Second Floor Plan
503001-FCA-00-03-DR-A-P17 Rev A – Proposed Roof Plan
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P18 Rev A – Proposed Elevations
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P19 Rev A – Proposed Sections
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P20 Rev A – Existing & Proposed Front Street Scene
503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P31 Rev A – Proposed Ground, First and Second CIL Evidence Plans
As all received on 16/04/2024

503001-FCA-00-ZZ-DR-A-P21 Rev A – Existing & Proposed Rear Street Scenes
As received on 11/06/2024

3.7 Other Plans / Documents submitted:

Transport Statement by Glanville Issue 2 dated 07/11/2023
Air Quality Assessment by Air Quality Consultants Ref J10/14830A/10/1/F2 dated 03/11/2023
Arboricultural Impact Assessment by SJ Stephens Associates Ref 2159 dated 26/10/2023
Flood Risk Assessment for Planning by UNDA Ref 92892-TMPPIn-ChurchRd v1.1 140123
Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment by Arbtech Consulting Ltd Issue 2 dated 30/11/2023
Pre-Construction Sound Insulation Report by Environmental Equipment Corporation Ltd Ref EEC/EC20158-4 Version 1 dated 06/12/2023
BREEAM Pre-Assessment incorporating Energy Assessment by Envision Ref ESL 23-0380 Rev A dated 31/10/2023
Landscape and Ecology Management Plan by Arbtech Consulting Ltd Issue 2 dated 30/11/2023
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Preliminary Roost Assessment by Arbtech Consulting Ltd Issue 3 dated 29/11/2023
As all received on 18/01/2024

The Biodiversity Metric 4.0 – Calculation Tool by Jonathan Stuttard ref V2 dated 30/11/2023
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – Form 1: CIL Additional Information dated 25/01/2024
Email from Farrell & Clark Architects 'RE: 2-4 Church Road, Reading (240068)' dated 25/01/2024
As all received on 25/01/2024

Viability Assessment by ET Planning dated 09/02/2024
As received 14/02/2024

Revised Planning Application Form
Heritage Statement Rev A by Farrell & Clark Architects dated 16/04/2024
Design & Access Statement Rev A by Farrell & Clark Architects dated 16/04/2024
External Noise Ingress Assessment by Environmental Equipment Corporation Ltd Ref AO/EC20158-7 Version 2 Revision 1 dated 16/04/2024

Response to Reading Borough Council's Transport Development Control Comments – Application No. 240068 by Glanville Ref 004_8230511_AD_TDC_Response Issue 2 dated 27/03/2024
Re: Affordable Housing Viability Assessment at 2-4 Church Road Caversham Reading RG4 7AE Ref by ET Planning Ref ETP230741 dated 05/04/2024
As all received on 16/04/2024

Email from Farrell & Clark Architects 'RE: 2-4 Church Road, Reading (240068) – Viability', dated and received 23/04/2024

Email from Farrell & Clark Architects 'RE: 2-4 Church Road, Reading (240068)', dated and received 22/05/2024

Email from Environmental Equipment Corporation Ltd '2 - 4 Church Road - EF 4142 Assessment', dated and received 11/06/2024

Email from Farrell & Clark Architects 'RE: 2-4 Church Road, Reading (240068)', dated and received 13/06/2024

4. Planning history

4.1. There have been a series of planning applications at the site in the past quarter of a century, but all relate to the function of the site as a bank (for example, replacement signage and the replacement and subsequent removal of ATMs), so are not especially relevant to the consideration of this application.

5. Consultations

Internal / external

5.1. RBC Transport raised initial concerns about the justification provided by the applicant in terms of the proposed car-free housing and in relation to the parking requirements of the proposed commercial uses. In response, the applicant submitted further information during the course of the application, detailing that the proposals would not lead to a higher parking demand than the currently possible site usage. Furthermore, the applicant also demonstrated that should the residential units result in off-site parking demand, this would not result in a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network. Transport officers have carefully considered the additional justification provided and now accept that sufficient justification to support a car free development (both residential and commercial uses) is accepted.

5.2. More specifically, Chester Street public car park is within walking distance of the site, as well as short stay on-street parking bays located on Church Road. On street parking in the vicinity of the site is restricted by no waiting restrictions and a peak hour loading ban, as well as the operation of the Council's Residential Permit scheme in the surrounding streets. With regard to the commercial uses, there are a number of time restricted bays (maximum 30 minutes between 8am and 6.30pm Monday to Saturday) which can be utilised for patrons of the commercial units, but there are no dedicated loading bays in the immediate vicinity and double yellow lines are present across the frontage of the site preventing parking immediately adjacent to the site. These bays are extensively used by the public accessing the other businesses adjacent to the site and in the area. Subject to the standard restrictive parking permit conditions and a waste collection, servicing and delivery management plan be secured via condition, as per RBC Waste comments below, the proposals will not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network or be detrimental to the safety of users either.

5.3. With regard to cycle parking, the proposals were amended during the course of the application to provide a suitable number (space for 4 cycles), layout and design of Sheffield stands, located internally at ground floor level for use by future residential occupiers. The provision is deemed acceptable and will therefore be secured via planning condition.

5.4. In terms of transport based impacts during the construction stage of development, given the location of the site close to a busy junction, a construction method statement should be secured via condition. It is acknowledged that the site is located within a sensitive location in terms of the transport network. Whilst the level of works are not in themselves considered to be particularly extensive, the sensitivities of the location of the site and the lack of off-street parking / servicing within the site is such that the proposed arrangements to facilitate the proposed development will be required to be carefully managed. The provision of the vacant neighbouring site, together with the nearby parking bays means the buildability of the project is not in question, but full details of the intended approach are required via condition to protect highway safety, as well as for wider amenity and character reasons too.

5.5. With the five transport-based conditions secured, as referenced above, there are no RBC Transport objections to this application.

5.6. The RBC Conservation Officer objected to the originally proposed scheme. Having explained the legislative and policy context (as detailed below at section 6) and the pertinent elements of the conservation area appraisal (as also summarised at section 2 above) substantive comments are made regarding the impact of the proposals upon heritage assets

5.7. The proposed change of use, namely the conversion from former bank to residential units on the upper floors and commercial units on the ground floor, would be acceptable in principle due to the viable use and sustainability of the building of townscape merit.

5.8. Proposed works include the removal of the existing metal stairs attached to the southeastern elevation of the building, which would be beneficial. Replacing the existing fenestration with new double-glazed timber sash windows would cause the loss of the original windows; however, no objection would be raised if it was shown that the proposed design and joinery would match the existing. The proposed new solid 6-panel timber door is also acceptable.

5.9. However, concerns were raised in relation to the proposed metal-framed door and matching metal-framed shopfront windows and doors to the linked modern building. As proposed, these would differ from the existing traditional timber-framed shopfronts of the area. As such, the large use of metal on the ground floor would negatively impact the setting of the nearby listed buildings and appearance of the conservation area. Similarly, the proposed fascia would not integrate with the historical character of Church Road and the conservation area. The altered ground floor design would be reasonable, but the overuse of the metal would make it look dissimilar.

5.10. The erection of the second storey to this modern building would not dominate the street scene, as it is already set back, would have a flat roof lower than the ridge level of the building, and would be without any ornaments/decorative elements. Therefore, it would have a plain façade with windows, reflecting the contemporary design/addition to the area, which would be considered to blend in with the conservation area. However, the eastern elevational design, the roof form in particular, would block the view of the original roof of the building of townscape merit, which requires revision. It was advised that a mansard roof design, as proposed for the rear, could also be suitable for the front.

5.11. The proposed works to the rear would be supportable, whilst the traditional roof form for the flat-roofed dormers would be preferable. This elevation is acknowledged to only be partially visible from the public realm, but this does not mean it would not impact the conservation area's character. There would be very little harm to the character of the building of townscape merit and the conservation area.

5.12. Overall, the Conservation Officer originally considered that the initially proposed development would result in less than substantial harm at the low level to the settings of listed buildings on Church Road and Church Street, the character and appearance of the St Peter’s Conservation Area and the character of the building of townscape merit by reason of flat roof form and excessive use of metal for the fenestration on the ground floor of the main façade. The officer recommended that minor amendments could outweigh

this harm. As such, the proposal had the potential to meet Policies CC7, EN1, EN3 and EN6 of the Reading Borough Local Plan, but as originally submitted was contrary to these policies and Paragraph 208 of the NPPF.

5.13. Upon submission of revised plans by the applicant, the Conservation Officer duly considered the altered proposals. In summary, the amendments to the proposals followed the original officer comments, meaning no objections are now raised, with the roof form, use of natural materials and proportionate design all being considered acceptable, possibly barring the potential inclusion of a brick slip system to replace the hanging files on the first floor of the later addition building. At this point the applicant has clarified that the quality / appearance of the brickwork beneath the existing tiles will dictate whether the original brickwork behind the tiles are maintained, or whether a replacement brick slip system is proposed. Accordingly, a condition is recommended to specify that should a brick slip system subsequently be proposed, full details of any such system would need to be submitted and approved prior to being installed, in order to ensure that this element of the new development responds positively to the local context and character. In all other regards, given the unusually high (but welcome) level of detail specified on the proposed plans, it is not necessary to secure any other material details via planning condition. Instead, a compliance condition is recommended which states that the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development shall match those used on the existing building, unless where otherwise stated on the plans. This will ensure that the development responds positively to the local context and character, demonstrating compliance with the local policies and NPPF referenced in the previous paragraph.

5.14. RBC Environmental Protection has considered the proposals in terms of noise and air quality impacts, the construction stage and also from the perspective of possible future pest and vermin impacts arising from the proposed bin storage areas.

5.15. In terms of noise matters, the submitted noise assessment proposes glazing to protect the occupants from the overall external noise levels. The precise details of the associated ventilation strategy has not yet been confirmed, beyond confirmation that a mechanical ventilation system is proposed for residential occupiers. Details will be secured via a pre-commencement condition agreed with the applicant, with the expectation for the intended inlets situated away from the polluted road facades. As closed windows are being relied upon to achieve suitable noise levels, the precise ventilation strategy needs to be confirmed to ensure that the internal living environment will be acceptable in terms of temperature.

5.16. The noise impact on future residents from existing nearby commercial premises (e.g. the kitchen extraction from the neighbouring restaurant and noise from the outdoor area of the Griffin Public House) has also been considered, with suitable details being provided during the course of the application by the applicant to satisfy officers that future residential amenity will be suitably protected.

5.17. Given the mixed use nature of the scheme, there are also potential concerns about noise from the proposed commercial uses affecting the future residents. The noise assessment submitted shows that the building regulations level of insulation will be met. However, officers consider it necessary to secure a pre-commencement condition whereby a detailed scheme for protecting the dwellings from noise emissions from the commercial use is provided. A series of further conditions are also recommended given the wide nature of the parts of Class E use applied for. These comprise a noise assessment prior to the future installation of any possible mechanical plant associated with the future commercial uses, a specific noise assessment detailing structure borne noise prevention measures should a Class E (d) gym use be provided and an odour assessment being approved prior to the first occupation of any Class E (b) use.

5.18. The air quality assessment concludes that the levels of pollutants will be below the objective limit value at the façade of the new dwellings. As the levels of pollutants are still likely to be elevated, the already mentioned ventilation strategy condition will ensure the required ventilation inlets for the residential units will be situated away from the

polluted road facades, meaning in practice they will either be on the rear façade or at roof level.

5.19. In terms of the construction phase of development, details of measures to manage airborne pollutants (e.g. dust and dirt), noise and pest control (e.g. capping of drains/sewers and baiting arrangements) shall be secured within the pre-commencement construction method statement condition, as already referenced in the RBC Transport response. Informatives relating to limiting noisy construction hours and preventing the burning of any waste on site during construction are also recommended.

5.20. Finally, a separate condition is proposed to ensure the proposed bin stores are pest and vermin proof, given a shared bin storage area is proposed in this instance. With each of the above referenced conditions secured, the proposals are acceptable from an Environmental Protection perspective.

5.21. RBC Natural Environment has assessed the Arboricultural Impact Assessment submitted and has no objections to the proposals, subject to a compliance condition for the measures within the statement submitted being followed. In terms of landscaping, scope for this is limited, but a green roof is proposed, which is welcomed in principle. GS Ecology has separately confirmed satisfaction with the level of detail provided in terms of the green roof, so no further comments are made.

5.22. GS Ecology (ecology consultants for RBC): The Ecology Report (Arbtech, December 2023) has been undertaken to the appropriate standard and concludes that the works are unlikely to affect protected species. As such, there would be no ecological objections to the application.

5.23. The applicant has also submitted a Biodiversity Net Gain calculation and accompanying report (Arbtech, November 2023) which states that the proposals will lead to net gain in biodiversity habitat unit of 100%. The net gain is entirely though the addition of a green roof over an area of roof to the rear of the building. The Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) (Arbtech Consulting td 2023) provides details of the green sedum roof, with recommendation on management and installation. The LEMP also includes details (proposed location and elevations) of a single bat and single bird box – both of which will be installed on the outside of the building and a condition to ensure that the measures in the LEMP are followed should be put in place.

5.24. Subject to a compliance condition for the enhancement mechanisms detailed in the LEMP (green roof, bat box and bird box) to be provided prior to the first occupation of any residential unit, and retained as such thereafter, there would be no ecological objections to the application.

5.25. RBC Valuations appointed external valuation consultants to undertake a viability review of the financial viability assessment by the applicant's valuation consultants, as submitted with the application. The applicant's original viability submission concluded that the scheme delivered a deficit of -£282,221 based on a wholly private scheme, meaning that no affordable housing could viably be provided. The Council's consultants original assessment concluded that the project deficit had been overstated for a variety of reasons. In particular, issues were raised with cost and value inputs and the methodology in calculating the Benchmark Land Value, together with separate concerns relating to construction costs and fee allowance for the commercial component of the scheme. As such, the Council's consultants confirmed that the proposed scheme would actually be fully viable and capable of providing the full financial contribution towards affordable housing of £38,750, as required by Policy H3 (Affordable Housing). On this basis, officers advised that the nil contribution towards affordable housing was not accepted and that the policy compliant financial contribution was required from the applicant.

5.26. The applicant's viability consultant submitted a rebuttal viability assessment, responding to the Council's consultants. This concluded that the scheme would still deliver a deficit of -£166,032, meaning the applicant's agents maintained that there was no allowance to provide an affordable housing contribution. Again, the Council's consultants reviewed the further information submitted by the applicant. This review concluded that the applicant

had now suitably justified that at present the scheme is not viable to provide a contribution towards affordable housing. However, the Council's consultants raised two valid points about the extent of the deficit and reality of delivery, together with and the need for a deferred payment mechanism. With input from RBC Valuations, the applicant was provided with the option of still choosing to provide an upfront financial contribution towards affordable housing (despite the viability evidence, in the context that the review demonstrated that the development cannot deliver on any number of viability inputs, including the affordable housing contribution) and alternative forms of Deferred Affordable Housing Contribution Mechanisms.

5.27. The applicant considered the options suggested, choosing to make a policy compliant upfront financial contribution of £38,750 towards affordable housing, with this required to be secured via S106 Legal Agreement. This negotiated outcome is pleasing in the context of the independently reviewed viability position and therefore means the proposals are fully supported from an RBC Valuations perspective.

5.28. RBC Waste Operations raised initial queries regarding a proposal for bins to be collected from a parking bay outside the Griffin Public House, rather than a loading bay, thereby calling into question whether collections would be able to be completed. Clarifications were also sought in relation to pulling distances involved and whether this would be within permitted distances for collections.

5.29. Responding to this the applicant outlined that although the future residential occupiers would be eligible to use the Council's waste collection service, the applicant intends to assign the collection to a private contractor as there is no suitable location to leave bins for collection without blocking the pavement. Instead, the applicant intends for a private contractor to wheel the bins (stored within the site at ground floor level) to parking bays on the south side of Church Road (a distance of 18m), where loading can take place outside the parking hours of 8am-6.30pm. The applicant understands this is how the building was serviced previously.

5.30. In the circumstances of this specific case, RBC Waste Operations are content with the private contractor arrangement. Practically, there does not appear to be a suitable means for the Council to collect residential waste from this site, owing to the site constraints (specifically the collection distances being beyond the 10m distance service provided), meaning the private arrangement the applicant is seeking for both residential and commercial uses is appropriate in this instance. However, to ensure highway safety, amenity and suitable arrangements are provided, a waste collection, servicing and delivery management plan is recommended to be secured via condition, to confirm precise arrangements. Thereafter, those details will be adhered to. The condition will be worded flexibly so that the applicant can potentially submit different strategies for the residential and commercial elements of the scheme. With this condition secured, the proposals are considered acceptable from a waste perspective.

5.31. The Environment Agency confirmed that they did not wish to be consulted because Flood Risk Standing Advice applies. It is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority to apply Flood Risk Standing Advice to applications where appropriate.

Public consultation

5.32. Two site notices were erected at the site on 02/02/2024, seeking any comments by 23/02/2024. A press notices was published on 08/02/2024, expiring on 29/02/2024. Adjoining neighbouring addresses were also consulted via letter on 01/02/2024, expiring on 22/02/2024. No responses have been received.

Local Groups

5.33. Caversham and District Residents Association (CADRA) provided comments at the outset of the application and subsequent comments following the submission of revised plans by the applicant. The original comments referencing much of the context referenced at section 2 above from the Conservation Area Appraisal, before specifically commenting on the proposals as summarised as follows:

- Viable commercial purposes will be important to secure the important group of currently vacant bank buildings.
- CADRA welcome the re-use of this key building and strongly support residential use of upper floors in this Conservation Area.
- CADRA welcome the care which has been taken to safeguard the Neo Georgian building but have a number of concerns to raise:
    - Second floor extension is the weak point in its impact on the conservation area, with the proposed windows dominating the streetscene and detracting from the Neo Georgian Building; suggestion that a slated mansard could be a solution.
    - Further information is required to ensure that, when the shared bins for 3 flats are out for collection, these large bins do not block the pavement or obscure the new shop front.
    - Living conditions – concerns about noise from the busy junction and noise and noxious smells from the extraction fan of the neighbouring restaurant
    - Considerable difficulties for deliveries and construction vehicles. Given the significance of the junction for traffic flow, we submit that no application should be approved without a satisfactory CMS.

5.34. While supporting the main premise of the application, CADRA originally object on the basis of the four issues above.

5.35. CADRA was informally advised of revised plans being submitted by the applicant, which resulted in the following comments being made:

- The mansard roof with a ridge line slightly below the ridge line of the Neo Georgian building is a welcome improvement. (Officer note: see Figure 5 below for a comparison between the original and revised elevation)
- Pleased to see further details regarding bin collection and an assurance that bins will not be left out on the pavement.
- Given traffic noise and pollution CADRA support the use of mechanical ventilation.
- CADRA remain concerned about arrangements for delivery of materials, removal of waste and parking for contractors. Consider the CMS should form part of the application, not left to condition, as the junction is extremely busy. Suggestion for the applicant to agree with the Council for temporary use of the adjacent green space, providing the green space is refurbished on completion and trees are protection. Businesses should also be protected from undue noise disturbance.
- Similarly, the vent from the neighbouring restaurant could present fundamental difficulties and should form part of the main application and not left to condition.



Figure 5 - Comparison of the originally proposed front elevation (left), later superseded by the revised proposed front elevation (right), showing changes incorporated at second floor level.

5.36. CADRA conclude by stating they hope that these issues can be satisfactorily resolved and this Building of Townscape Merit brought back into use.

5.37. Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) was formally consulted, but no response has been received.

6. Legal context

6.1. Section 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special interest which it possesses.

6.2. Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the local planning authority in the exercise of its functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

6.3. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

6.4. In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

6.5. Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

NPPF 2023

2. Achieving sustainable development
4. Decision-making
5. Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
6. Building a strong, competitive economy
8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
9. Promoting sustainable transport
11. Making effective use of land
12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

National Planning Policy Guidance (2014 onwards)

Reading Borough Local Plan 2019

CC1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
CC3: Adaptation to Climate Change
CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
CC6: Accessibility and the Intensity of Development
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
CC9: Securing Infrastructure
EN1: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment

EN3: Enhancement of Conservation Areas
EN5: Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest
EN6: New Development in a Historic Context
EN9: Provision of Open Space
EN12: Biodiversity and the Green Network
EN14: Trees, Hedges and Woodland
EN15: Air Quality
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
EN17: Noise Generating Equipment
EN18: Flooding and Drainage
H1: Provision of Housing
H2: Density and Mix
H3: Affordable Housing
H5: Standards for New Build Housing
H10: Private and Communal Outdoor Space
TR1: Achieving the Transport Strategy
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR4: Cycle Routes and Facilities
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging
RL1: Network and Hierarchy of Centres
RL3: Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres
OU5: Shopfronts and Cash Machines
Chapter 8: Caversham and Emmer Green

Reading Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents
Topics
Affordable Housing (2021)
Design Guide to Shopfronts (2022)
Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)
Planning Obligations under Section 106 (2015)
Sustainable Design and Construction (2019)

Other relevant documentation
St Peter's Conservation Area Appraisal (2018)
Reading Borough Council Tree Strategy (2021)
Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (March 2021)
Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking (Historic England, 2015)
Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance (Historic England 2008)

7. Appraisal

7.1. The main considerations are:

i. Land use matters

ii. Affordable housing and mix

iii. Design, including impacts on heritage assets

iv. Quality of accommodation for future occupiers

v. Amenity impacts on nearby occupiers

vi. Transport

vii. Other matters - flood risk, landscaping, ecology, sustainability and energy, legal agreement, pre-commencement conditions

i. <u>Land use matters</u>

7.2. The starting point for the consideration of the application is to acknowledge that, as existing, the building is lawfully in Class E use. It is also noted that the site is located

within a Key Frontage within the Caversham District Centre, with Policy RL3 (Vitality and Viability of Smaller Centres) seeking to retain a strong retail character within the ground floor of the centre. Given the September 2020 changes to the Use Class Order (which created the wider Class E use and superseded previous Class A1 retail / A2 and related uses, as referenced in Policy RL3), the application and operation of parts of Policy RL3 are now considered to be more challenging.

7.3. With this context in mind, it is generally welcomed that the proposals seek to retain Class E uses at ground floor level, with the only alteration along the frontage being to create access to the proposed residential units and associated bin/bike stores. Whilst it is recognised that there is an overall reduction in commercial floorspace at the site (from 330sqm as existing, to the separate 115sqm & 27sqm units as now proposed), this is predominantly limited to the upper floors.

7.4. Moreover, the applicant has specifically proposed for the proposed Class E uses to be limited to Class E (a) retail, E (b) restaurant, E (c) financial and professional services , E (d) indoor sport, recreation or fitness, E (e) medical or health facilities or E (f) creche, day nursery or day centre uses only. This consequently means that the application is not seeking for a Class E (g) (more specifically Class E (g)(i) Offices to carry out any operational or administrative functions, E (g) (ii) Research and development of products or processes & E (g) (iii) industrial processes) use at the site. The proposed approach is welcomed, with the proposed uses all considered to be 'centre uses' as paragraph 4.6.16 of the supporting text to Policy RL3 references, with the only 'non-centre use' (Class E (g) precluded from the proposals. Accordingly, the proposals are considered to align with the remaining relevant component parts of Policy RL3, with it recommended that a compliance condition secures the ground floor commercial units to be used solely for Class E (a), E (b), E (c), E (d), E (e) or E (f) uses. The ground floor uses are therefore supported in principle land use terms, assisting the vitality and viability of the District Centre and potentially re-introducing active uses on the frontage, noting the current building has been vacant for the past four years.

7.5. In relation to the principle of the proposed residential use (Class C3) at the site, this is broadly welcomed in line with Policy H1, assisting the Borough in meeting its housing targets over the plan period. In addition, Policy RL3b) specifically confirms that "on upper floors, other uses including residential ('living over the shops') will be acceptable", while Policy RL1 (Network and Hierarchy of Centres) confirms that the residential use of upper floors will be acceptable in all centres and constitutes an improvement. The principle of residential uses on the upper floors of the building is therefore established.

ii. <u>Affordable housing and mix</u>

7.6. In terms of affordable housing, Policy H3 requires sites of 1-4 dwellings (in this case 3 units are proposed) to make a financial contribution to enable the equivalent of 10% of the housing to be provided as affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. In practice, the policy compliant contribution equates to £38,750 in this instance. As detailed at paragraphs 5.25 – 5.27 above, the applicant originally sought to justify a nil contribution towards affordable housing on viability grounds. The consideration of this involved independent review on behalf of the Council by Carter Jonas, in conjunction with input from RBC Valuations.

7.7. The ultimately negotiated position from those discussions resulted in the applicant altering its approach and agreeing to make the fully policy compliant financial contribution of £38,750, despite the challenging viability position (a scheme deficit) having been evidenced. Set against this backdrop, the negotiated policy compliant financial contribution towards affordable housing is strongly supported and considered to be a tangible planning benefit of the proposed development. The financial contribution, together with associated clauses related to indexation and preventing early payment, will be secured via S106 Legal Agreement, as detailed in the recommendation at the outset of this report. Given that a fully policy compliant financial contribution is being secured, there is no requirement for any late-stage review in this instance.

7.8. Turning to consider mix matters, the proposals seek to create 2x2-bedroom units and 1x1-bedroom flat. Given the relatively small number of units involved and the constraints of the site, the proposed mix is considered to be welcomed and, importantly, does incorporate a variety of unit size. In light of the district centre location and fewer than ten units being proposed, there is no policy requirement to provide larger 3 bedroom units in this specific instance. In short, the proposals are considered to comply with Policy H2 (Density and Mix).

iii. Design, including impacts on heritage assets

7.9. The application site building is located within a highly prominent location within the St Peter's Conservation Area, visible from a number of public vantage points. Although not listed, the original building is identified as a building of townscape merit in the Conservation Area Appraisal and is also opposite a series of Grade II listed buildings. As section 2 of this report has summarised, the building is referenced at various points within the Conservation Area Appraisal, indicating the sensitivities associated with any proposal at the site. Following revisions during the application, officers (including the Conservation Officer, as per summarised observations at paragraphs 5.6 – 5.13 above) strongly support the proposed design approach, which represents a genuine heritage-led scheme, responding positively to and enhancing the character of the host building, the streetscene, the wider conservation area and the setting of nearby listed buildings.

7.10. On the Church Road frontage, the most obviously visible alteration is the addition of a second floor to the more modern building on the western side of the site. During the course of the application the form of this addition has been altered, with a dormer incorporating three characterful dormer windows (akin to the fenestration below and found on other buildings in the 'Junction Area') now proposed. Being stepped back and down from the main building at the site means the new addition will not be dominant in form. The changes made during the course of the application are considered to be positive responses, as shown below in Figure 6. When compared with the existing context, it is acknowledged that the additional floor will represent a noticeable addition, but not one which is harmful owing to its sensitive design and detailing. At first floor level, it is proposed to remove the currently unsightly hanging tiles, with the applicant presently undecided as to whether the existing brickwork behind the tiles will form the façade treatment at this point (which will be ascertained at the time of removal – if the brickwork matches then it will be retained), or whether a brick slip system (which the applicant states will seek to match the brickwork) will be required. Accordingly, in this regard, a specific condition will secure details of any brick slip system should this later option be proposed.



Figure 6 - As existing (left), as originally proposed, but now superseded (middle) and as proposed (right) front elevations to demonstrate the evolution of the scheme

7.11. Furthermore, in streetscene terms the applicant has helpfully provided illustrative existing and proposed viewpoints, as per Figure 7 below. This assists in demonstrating that the proposal would both conserve and enhance the character of the conservation area at this point. Aside from the extended part of the building, a series of detailed alterations (as summarised within the bullet points at paragraph 3.1 above) are also welcomed. In particular, the replacement of windows with timber sash windows to match the existing style is a positive change. In addition, the removal of existing negative features, such as the metal staircase to the side of the building is also welcomed.



Existing Bridge St/Church Rd Street Scene



Proposed Bridge St/Church Rd Street Scene

Figure 7 – Existing and proposed streetscene elevations

** Larger versions of the plans are provided at the end of this report*

7.12. At ground floor level a new shopfront design is proposed to align with the ground floor commercial units and residential entrance. Originally this was dominated by metal doors and framing, but following officer feedback revisions for these to now comprise dark grey painted timber doors and timber framed windows are now proposed, sufficiently aligning within the principles of the Shopfronts SPD (e.g. a timber fascia panel for any future signage) and the character of the conservation area. The applicant has intentionally not incorporated all of the traditional shopfront features in the area of the later addition building, so as to not compete with the primacy of the building of townscape merit. Such an approach is considered appropriate in this regard and representing an improvement in the context of the current ground floor arrangement at this point.

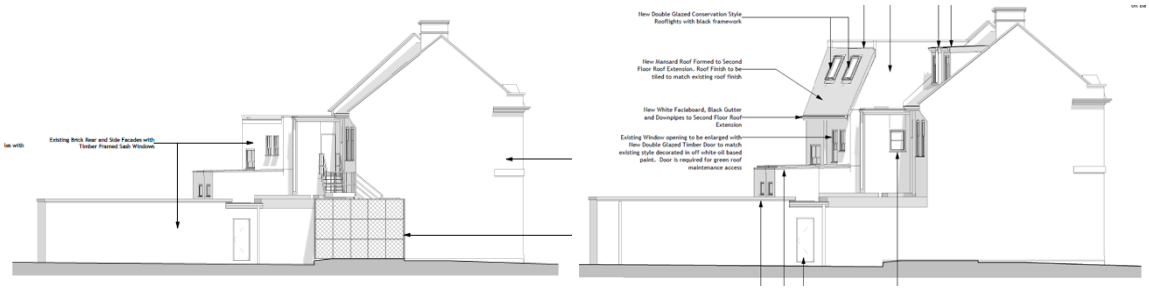


Figure 8 - East side elevation, as existing (left) and proposed (right)

7.13. As already referenced, the building is also prominent in other viewpoints, meaning the side and rear elevations of the building need to be carefully considered too. The viewpoint from the east looking west from Church Street means the proposed rear dormer windows on the original building would be visible (see Figure 8 above). The characterful nature of the dormers mean they would sit comfortably in the roofslope and respond positively to others which already exist in close vicinity to the site. The mansard addition is also evident at this point, but is not considered to be overly dominant in the context of the surrounding context. On the west elevation (see Figure 9 below) the set-back front mansard addition means that the original roof of the building of townscape merit would continue to be sufficiently viewed and not blocked through the proposals, therefore respecting the primacy of the main building and preserving the long view identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal (see Figure 4).

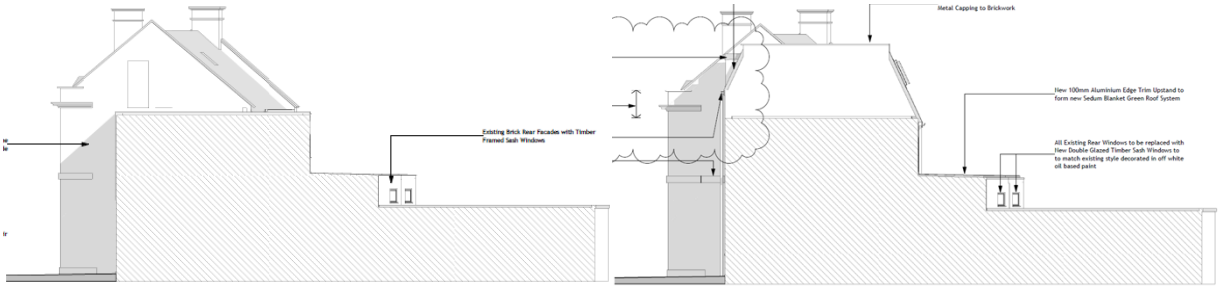


Figure 9 - West side elevation, as existing (left) and proposed (right)

7.14. On the rear elevation, which is visible from the Griffin Public House car park and possibly, at certain points of the year, from the Thames Path (in times of low tree canopy cover, see Figure 10 below), the proposed mansard would effectively provide an infill extension to the later building to make it appear similar (but slightly lower) than the main building at the site. This is not considered to jar with the surroundings and instead is considered to have been sympathetically designed. In streetscene terms, as demonstrated in Figure 11 below, the surrounding context as existing is of a variety of two and three storey buildings, with the application site continuing this pattern and not appearing unduly dominant. The other fenestration and related changes (e.g. removal of the external fire escape) are minor works for which no concerns are raised.



Figure 10 – Photographs of the rear of the site from The Griffin & the Thames Path



Existing Rear Street Scene



Proposed Rear Street Scene

Figure 11 – Existing and proposed rear streetscene elevations

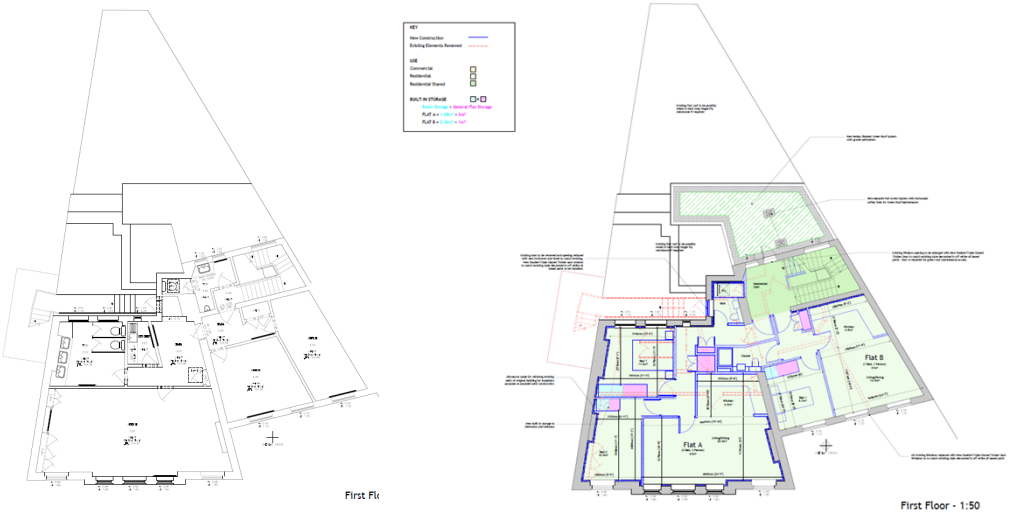
7.15. In summary, following revisions during the application, the proposals are considered appropriate in design and heritage terms, complying with Policies CC7 (Design and the Public Realm), EN1 (Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment), EN3 (Enhancement of Conservation Areas), EN5 (Protection of Significant Views with Heritage Interest) and EN6 (New Development in a Historic Context). In addition to the already referenced brick-slip system condition, aside from this matter the submission includes a high level of detail in respect of the proposed material finishes, as annotated on the proposed plans and seen via the streetscene elevations. Accordingly, in this instance a compliance condition stipulating matching materials unless where otherwise stated is recommended, rather than securing further material details via condition. The proposals have been formed in a sensitive manner which responds positively to the character of the existing building, resulting in enhancements which benefit the wider streetscene and conservation area too, whilst simultaneously protecting and enhancing the setting of nearby listed buildings.

iv. Quality of accommodation for future occupiers

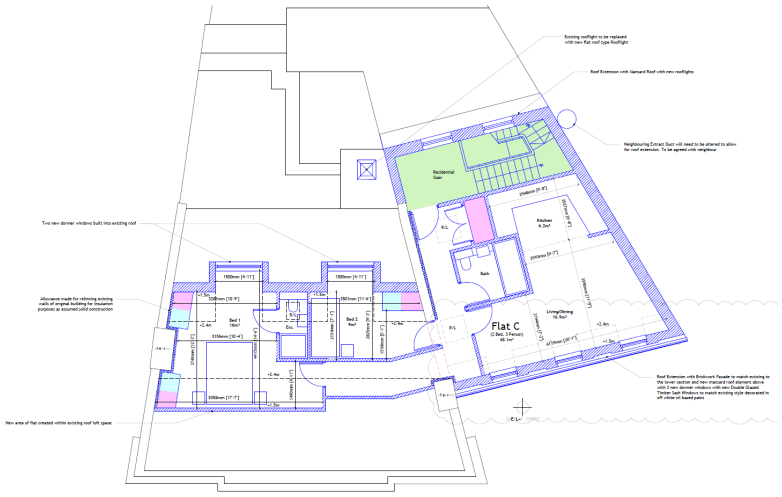
Future residential occupiers

7.16. Policy CC8 requires development not to create unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties. In this instance the living accommodation for each of the three flats will be on the upper floors of the building (two units at first floor level and a single unit in the second floor roofspace), providing dual aspect units with suitable levels of outlook (no future occupier would suffer overbearing from existing nearby buildings) and access to daylight and sunlight. Each unit complies with the minimum gross internal floor area and storage standard referenced in Policy H5 (Standards for New Housing) and the rooms are as regularly shaped as possible within the context of the existing building (as shown in the floorplans below at Figure 12). Sufficient floor to ceiling heights (2.4m) are provided within the roofspace and at first floor level too. The proposed residential units will not be significantly overlooked by any existing nearby building, thereby providing a suitable amount of privacy for future occupiers.

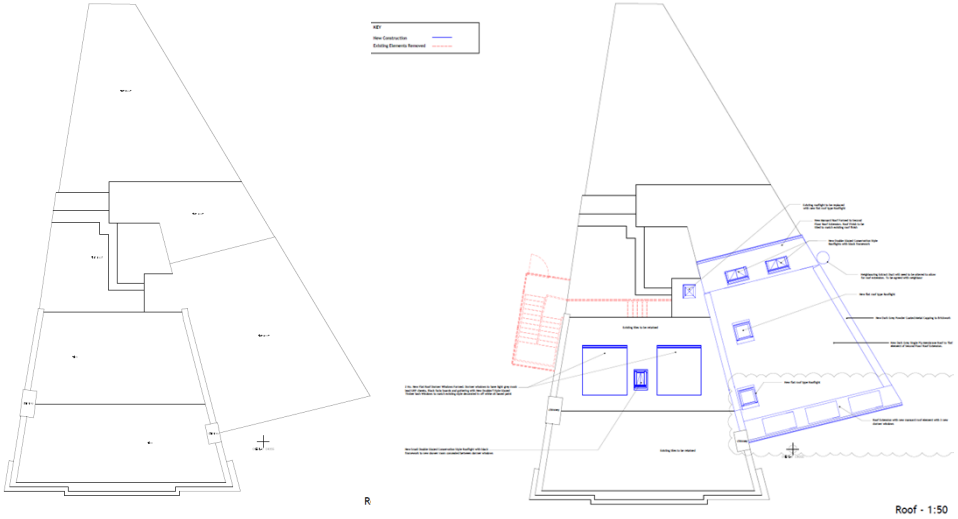
Figure 12 – Existing and proposed floorplans at first floor, second floor and roof level



Existing and Proposed First Floor Plan



Proposed Second Floor Plan



Existing and Proposed Roof Plan

7.17. It is acknowledged that the residential units include no external amenity space. There is considered to be limited scope for this to be provided on-site, given the existing site context. In this instance the provision of a green roof has been preferred in an area of flat roof, rather than exploring the provision of an external terrace. Given the absence of any existing open space at the site, the proximity of the building to existing neighbours and the existing building being identified as one of townscape merit within the conservation area, the non-provision of on-site amenity space is accepted in this instance. The existing nearby provision of public open space at Caversham Court Gardens, Christchurch Meadows and Rivermead is considered to provide sufficient outdoor amenity opportunities for future occupiers of these units.

7.18. In terms of access and related security matters, it is acknowledged that the residential units are located solely above ground floor level. As such, without the installation of a lift, it will not be possible for wheelchair users to access the residential units. Although this is acknowledged to be a shortcoming of the proposal, the applicant has explained that the inclusion of a lift to serve the upper floors of the building would require significant space and render the development unfeasible. It is also considered that the location of the site within Flood Zone 2 and a defined District Centre (where commercial units are actively encouraged) means the location of residential units solely on the upper floor of the building can be accepted in this instance. The applicant has also explained that whilst the residential units will not be wheelchair accessible, measures have been included to make them as spacious and easy to manoeuvre around as possible, with many of the Building Regulation recommendations for wheelchair accessible door sizes and spaces included. Set within this context the proposals are considered to be adequate in this regard. In terms of site security, the entrance includes an air lock lobby before access is possible to

the upper floor residential units. Accordingly, suitable security measures appropriate to the scale of development proposed, is considered to be included within the proposals.

7.19. Inside the building at ground floor level are separate spaces for cycle parking and waste storage (see figure 13 below). The amount of provision and layout of the spaces in each instance is acceptable, following input from specialist officers. With specific regard to waste management, as per the RBC Waste Services comments summarised at paragraphs 5.28 – 5.30 above, the applicant has confirmed that a private contractor will provide this service, as the site constraints mean it will not be possible for the scheme to utilise the Council's waste collection service. To ensure that these arrangements are suitably managed (and to provide a means of enforcing should this not be the case) a full waste collection, servicing and delivery management plan will be secured via condition. This has been discussed with the applicant, who has already outlined an intended approach utilising parking bays on the south side of Church Road, with the precise and full details secured via this condition. As well as protecting the amenity of future occupiers, this strategy will also help ensure highway safety at this sensitive location.

7.20. With regard to air quality and noise matters, as per the Environmental Protection comments summarised at paragraphs 5.14 – 5.20 above, following the submission of additional information during the application and subsequently recommended conditions, the proposals are suitable in these regards. In particular, a series of conditions are proposed to protect future occupiers from noise/disturbance from any future plant and the neighbouring restaurant / public house. Mechanical ventilation details are being secured via condition, with inlets on the rear or roof of the building rather than the street frontage for air quality reasons. In overall terms, a good standard of accommodation will be provided for future residential occupiers.

Non-residential accommodation

7.21. Turning to consider the quality of the ground floor non-residential units, it is considered that an overall suitable standard of accommodation would be provided. As shown below in the proposed ground floor plan at Figure 13, two separate units are proposed, with the primary unit being 115sqm in size and a secondary space 27sqm in area. Each unit is shown to include toilet facilities (for possible future use by customers) and storage space. In addition, an internally located ramped entrance space is shown, aligning with the existing arrangements and relationship with the pavement. The inclusion of ramped access is welcomed to ensure both the commercial units are accessible for customers/staff in wheelchairs and those with other access requirements.

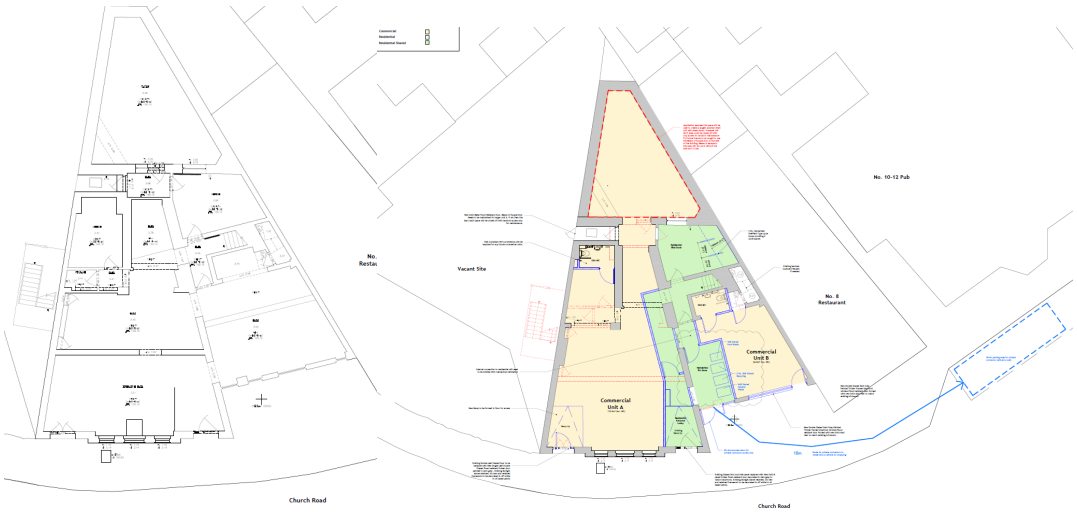


Figure 13 - Existing and Proposed* Ground Floor Plan

** Larger versions of the proposed floor plans are provided at the end of this report*

7.22. The shopfronts are suitably designed (see Figure 7 above for example) to assist in drawing passing trade to the units. With this in mind, it is considered necessary for the ground floor shopfront windows to retain 'active window displays', secured via a condition,

to maintain a vibrant and attractive streetscene and assisting active surveillance within this District Centre location. Given the wide possible uses within the parts of Class E applied for (see land use matters above) an hours of use condition has been discussed with the applicant and would permit operations between 07:00 hours to 23:00 hours on Mondays to Saturdays and 08:00 hours to 20:00 hours on Sundays, Bank Holidays and other statutory holidays. This is considered to strike an appropriate balance between providing flexibility for future occupiers whilst protecting nearby amenity.

7.23. In addition, servicing / waste management and cycle storage details associated with the commercial use are considered appropriate in principle, with full details being secured via condition. The waste management, servicing and delivery condition will work in a similar manner to that required for the residential use, with the condition explicitly referencing each commercial unit to enable a bespoke approach to be advanced for any future occupier. In overall terms, suitably attractive commercial units are therefore provided.

v. Amenity impacts on nearby occupiers

7.24. The corner location of the site and its footprint means that although there are a number of neighbouring and nearby uses, in most instances these are a significant distance away or at an acute angle, downplaying the impact on nearby occupiers and uses. For example, no significant overlooking or loss of privacy impacts are envisaged from the proposals, with the limited extension works proposed meaning that no significantly adverse outlook, sense of enclosure, overbearing, daylight or sunlight impacts are envisaged either.

7.25. In terms of disturbance, the applicant has recognised that the neighbouring restaurant at No. 8 Church Road includes an extraction vent with flue which may overhang the boundary of the application site, whereby meaning it is likely that it will need to be rerouted to facilitate the proposed second floor extension at the application site. The applicant has outlined that this *"would be agreed with the neighbouring owner when the project is scheduled to start on site".* Furthermore, the existing/proposed rear streetscene in Figure 11 above has indicatively shown how this could be undertaken. This is a matter to be formally agreed between the separate landowners, but should the duct be confirmed to be within the application site the applicant has indicated how this would be possible. Put another way, the proposed second floor extension is not considered to compromise the ability of the neighbouring restaurant from continuing to trade, for if the duct is required to be moved there are a range of solutions possible.

7.26. In terms of other matters, such as noise, dust, fumes and smells, a series of conditions will all serve to protect existing nearby amenity. In particular respect of the potential ground floor uses, the hours of use condition, the waste collection, servicing and delivery plan condition and the separate mechanical plant, noise and odour assessment conditions are all included with the protection of nearby amenity in mind. Furthermore, during the implementation stage the construction method statement will manage the impacts for nearby amenity too. Hence, in overall terms, the proposals are considered to comply with Policy CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity).

vi. Transport

7.27. With regard to transport matters, the summarised specialist officer comments at paragraphs 5.1 – 5.5 above conclude that the proposals are acceptable subject to conditions. More specifically, officers consider that car-free development is accepted and justified in this instance, with no materially detrimental impact on the function of the transport network or the safety of users being demonstrated. The Council's standard parking permit conditions will be included, with waste collection, servicing and deliveries also being secured via condition (as separately discussed in the quality of accommodation section). The provision of suitably designed cycle storage at ground floor level will also encourage travel by sustainable alternatives to driving a motorcar, with this secured via a compliance condition.

7.28. In terms of the construction stage of development, it is fully acknowledged that the site is located within a sensitive location, adjacent to a busy junction which, based on past experiences, can lead to congestion and delays throughout the borough if the regular flow

of vehicles through the area is not maintained. The red line boundary of the site does not include any parking areas and given the nature of the works, it is therefore essential that the construction phase is carefully planned and managed to protect the amenity of local land uses and residents, the character of the area, as well as highway traffic and safety. Accordingly, a construction method statement will be secured via a pre-commencement condition, with the wording having already been agreed with the applicant. With this condition secured, the proposals are considered acceptable. There are considered to be a variety of methods in which the scheme could be implemented in an effective and efficient manner, for example by making use of the vacant neighbouring site, utilising nearby parking bays and by ensuring deliveries only take place at certain times. Such details are typically advanced post planning application stage, once a contractor has been selected to carry out the works. Accordingly, it is entirely appropriate and reasonable for details to be secured via condition, but with this being at the pre-commencement stage in order to manage transport and amenity impacts.

vii. Other matters

Flood Risk

7.29. The application site is located within Flood Zone 2, 62m from the River Thames to the south-west of the site. Therefore a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted with the application, with officers following the Environment Agency (EA) Flood Risk Standing Advice (FRSA) in this instance (as recommended in the EA consultation response). It is initially clarified that in this instance the proposals are exempt from the sequential test and exception test, given the change of use nature of the proposals and the 'less vulnerable' commercial uses and 'more vulnerable' residential uses proposed.

7.30. The submitted FRA comprehensively considers and assesses the flood risk posed (from all sources of flooding) and the various flood risk mitigation measures specifically proposed in this case to protect the site from future flood risk, following the FRSA. The introduction of residential units at the site means the vulnerability of the site as a whole will be increased post-development, given residential is a 'more vulnerable' use in comparison with the existing 'less vulnerable' sole commercial use. In this case the proposal is not seeking to raise the floor levels to 600/300mm above the estimated flood level, owing to the change of use nature of the proposals. Instead, the 'more vulnerable' residential uses are limited to the upper floors of the building (as the FRSA advises) and a series of extra flood resistance and resilience measures are proposed. These include the flood proofing of the building (e.g. electrical, boiler and gas elements all installed at least 600mm the finished ground floor level), the provision of a safe escape and flood action plan for future residents and occupiers and also including signing up to the EA Floodline Alert Direct service.

7.31. The combination of these measures means that the proposals are considered to comply with Policy EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems). A compliance condition is recommended, to secure the measures specified within the submitted FRA being implemented prior to first occupation and being maintained as such thereafter.

Impacts on nearby trees and landscaping

7.32. Given the proximity of the site to a number of mature and prominent trees, the applicant submitted an Arboricultural Impact Assessment with the proposals. The Council's Natural Environment Officer considers that the protective measures proposed will sufficiently safeguard these trees during the construction period and beyond, demonstrating that the proposals align with Policy EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands). In practice, a compliance based condition will ensure the measures stated are provided. With regard to proposed landscaping, the 100% site coverage of existing built form reduces opportunities for soft landscaping. Despite this, the inclusion of a green roof is provided, which in the context of the site constraints is considered to be a reasonable and supported response in this instance.

Ecology

7.33. As per the summarised observations from the Council's ecology consultants GS Ecology, as per section 5 above, the proposals raise no concerns in this regard. The provision of a section of the flat roof area being utilised as a green sedum roof, together with the provision of both a bat and bird box, are welcomed in providing biodiversity enhancements on site. This will be secured in practice via a compliance based condition, ensuring the proposals comply with Policy EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network) and paragraph 186 of the NPPF.

Sustainability and energy

7.34. In support of the proposals the applicant has submitted a BREEAM Pre-Assessment report, which also incorporates an energy assessment. Given the nature of the proposals, the new-build dwelling at proposed second floor level is required to make at least a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined in the 2013 Building Regulations. The two first floor converted residential units and two ground floor refurbished non-residential units are required to meet a BREEAM 'Very Good' standard. The submitted report demonstrates through a pre-assessment estimator that a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating can be achieved with an indicative building score of 65.56% for the converted residential units, while the building as a whole is anticipated to achieve a 46.5% reduction in carbon emissions, thereby meaning the new build dwelling will exceed the minimum 19% improvement required for minor developments.

7.35. Accordingly, the proposals are shown at application stage to adhere to the relevant policy targets, which is welcomed and supported. In practice, this will be secured via the two standard conditions in relation to both the new build residential components (a SAP assessment) and refurbished residential and commercial (BREEAM) elements, thereby ensuring that the sustainability/energy credentials indicated at application stage occur in reality.

Legal Agreement

7.36. It is confirmed that the affordable housing obligation referred to within this report would comply with the National Planning Policy Framework and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in that it would be: i) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, ii) directly related to the development and iii) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. The affordable housing financial contribution has been agreed by the applicant and a S106 Legal Agreement is in the process of being prepared to secure these matters, as also summarised at the outset of this report.

Pre-commencement conditions

7.37. Section 100ZA(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act requires the wording of pre-commencement conditions to be agreed with the applicant prior to any decision is issued. In this instance the recommended pre-commencement conditions in relation to 1) the Construction Method Statement 2) the design stage SAP assessment (energy – minimum 19% improvement) and 3) the interim BREEAM Certificate (minimum BREEAM Very Good rating) in relation to the non-residential and converted to residential components have been agreed via correspondence with the agent (on behalf of the applicant) prior to the determination of the application (emails from officer to agent on 15/05/2024 and 12/06/2024; replies from agent on 22/05/2024 and 13/06/2024).

8. Equality implications

8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular application

9. Conclusion & planning balance

9.1 As with all applications considered by the Local Planning Authority, the proposals are required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

9.2 Any harmful impacts of the proposed development are required to be weighed against the benefits in the context of national and local planning policies, as detailed in the appraisal above. In this instance, many of the harmful impacts identified by officers have been positively resolved by the applicant during the course of the application, such as the design/heritage changes, more information being provided about cycle and waste storage/management arrangements and the level of parking provision. Accordingly, the only identified sub-optimal element of the proposal remaining is that the residential units will be non-wheelchair accessible.

9.3 This is weighed against the significant and numerous planning benefits associated with the proposals. Notable benefits include the sensitive and high quality design approach to the building of townscape merit, which at the same time will also benefit the wider streetscene and conservation area, and protect and enhance the setting of nearby listed buildings. In addition, the provision of active ground floor commercial uses within the district centre and upper floor units will bring back into active use a prominent building which has been vacant for a number of years. The policy compliant financial contribution towards affordable housing, in the context of a challenging viability context, is another planning benefit of the scheme.

9.4 In overall terms, the totality of all benefits associated with the proposals are considered to outweigh all conflicts with the development plan. It is considered that officers have applied a suitable planning balance when reaching this conclusion. As such, the proposals are considered to be acceptable within the context of national and local planning policies. This application is therefore recommended for approval, subject to the conditions and the completion of the S106 Legal Agreement summarised at the outset of this report.

Plans & Appendices





Existing and Proposed Block Plans

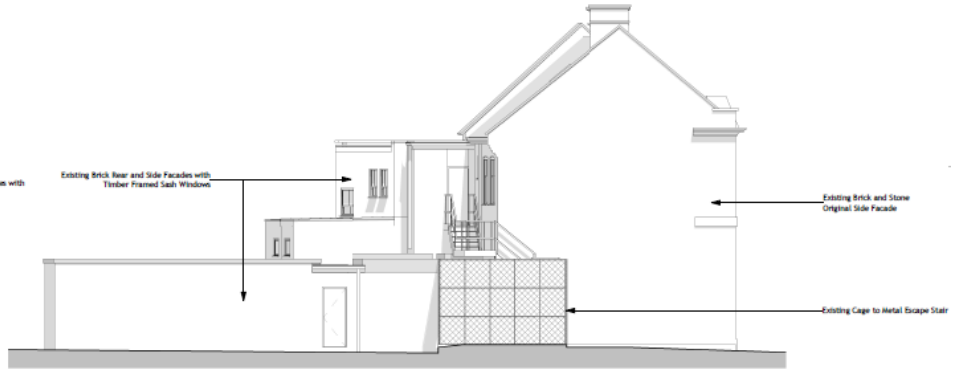
Existing Ground (top), First (middle) and Roof Plans (above)

Existing elevation plans

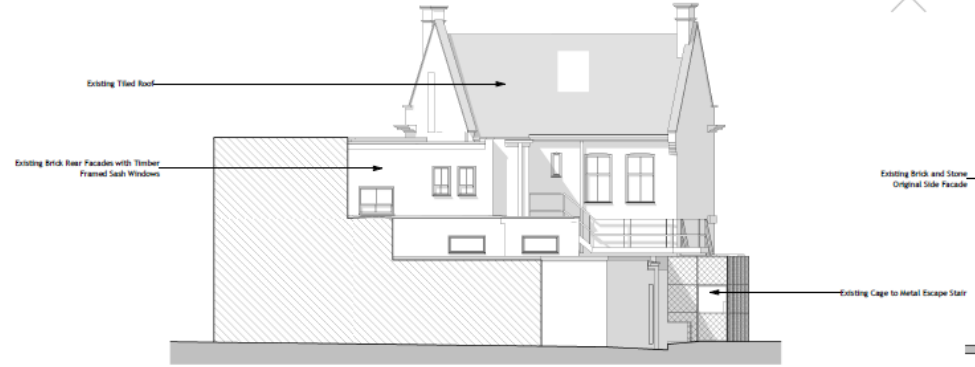


Existing North East (Front) Elevation
1 : 100

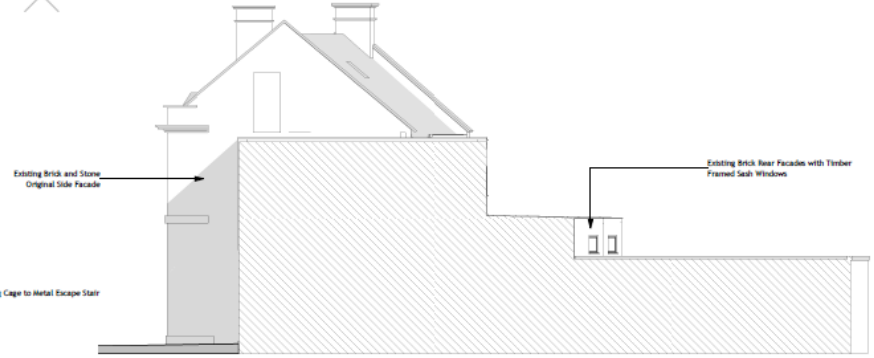
(Note: Not a true elevation as right infill section of building is slightly behind and hidden by the orginal left section, however this shows the two sections aligned for comparrison purposes)



Existing South East Elevation
1 : 100



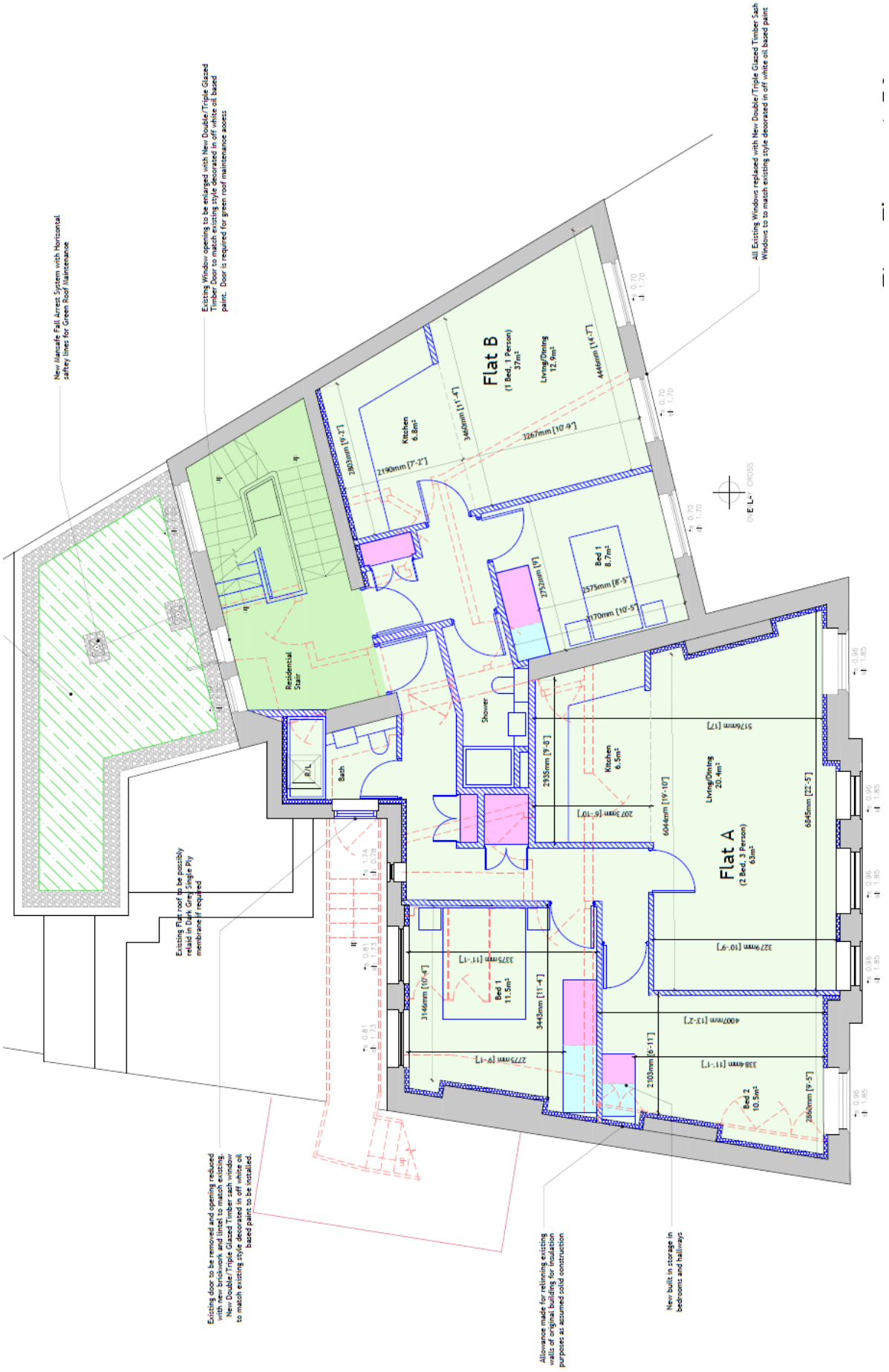
Existing South West Elevation
1 : 100



Existing North West Elevation
1 : 100

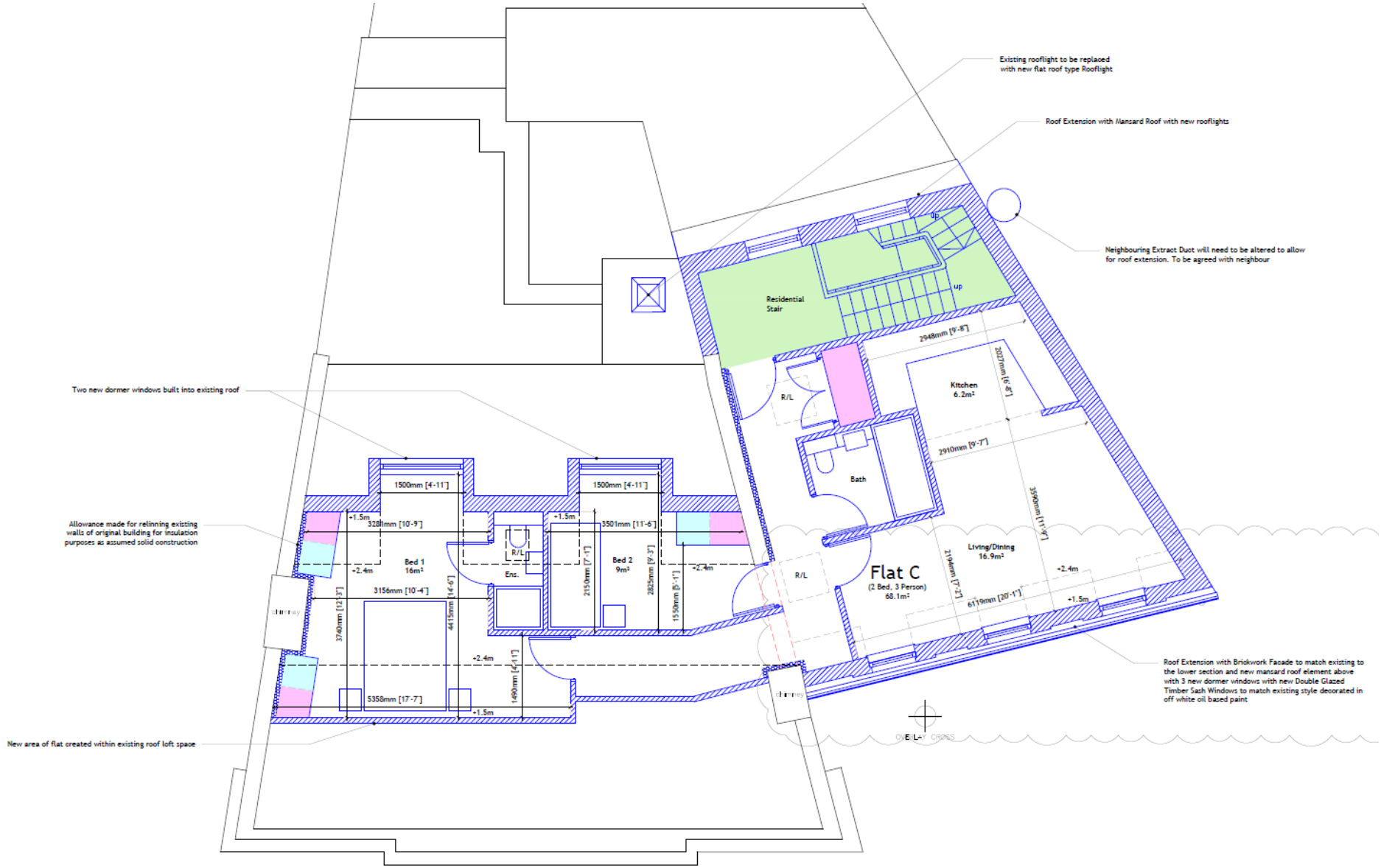
Proposed Ground Floor Plan



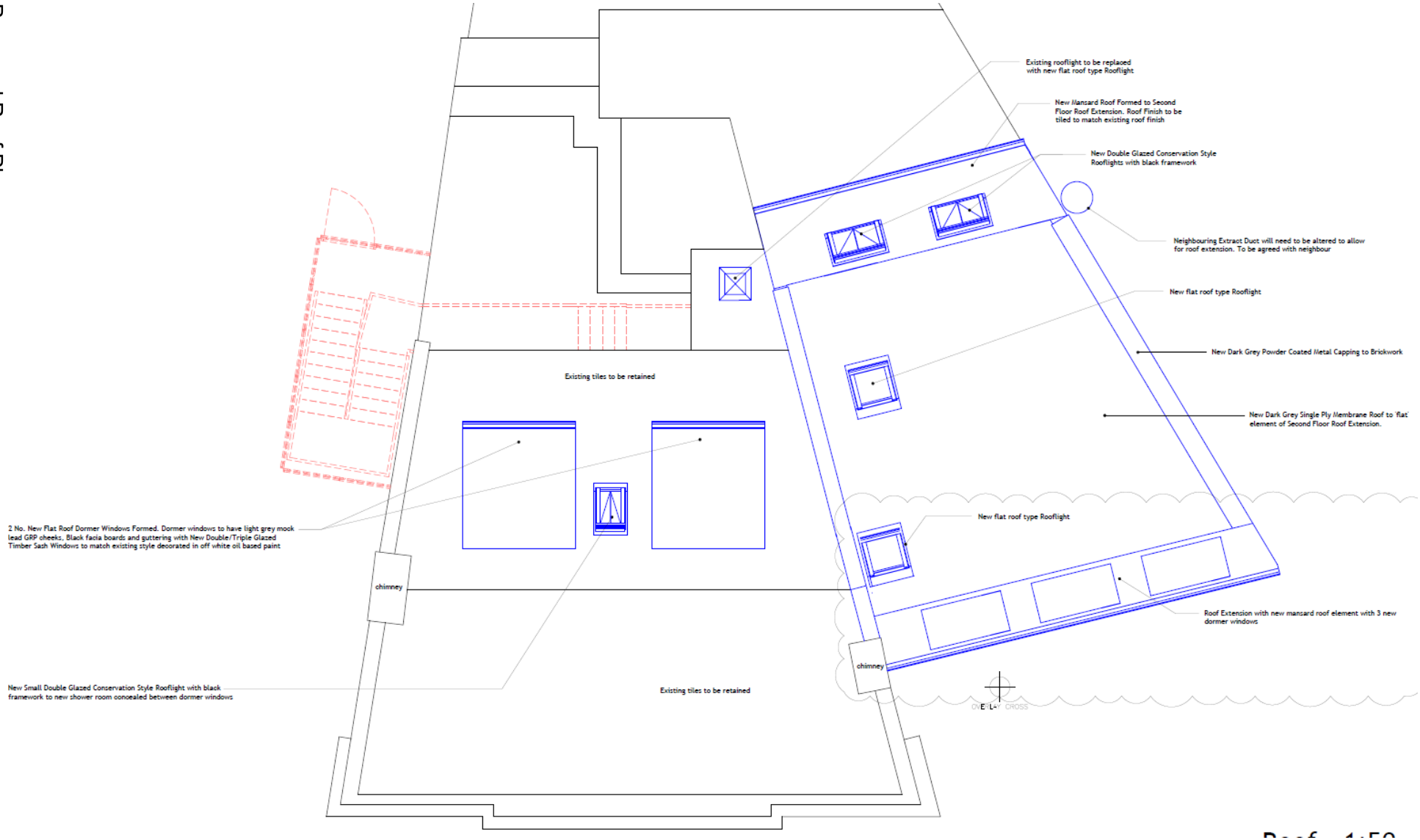


Proposed First Floor Plan

Proposed Second Floor Plan



Proposed Roof Plan



Proposed Front elevation

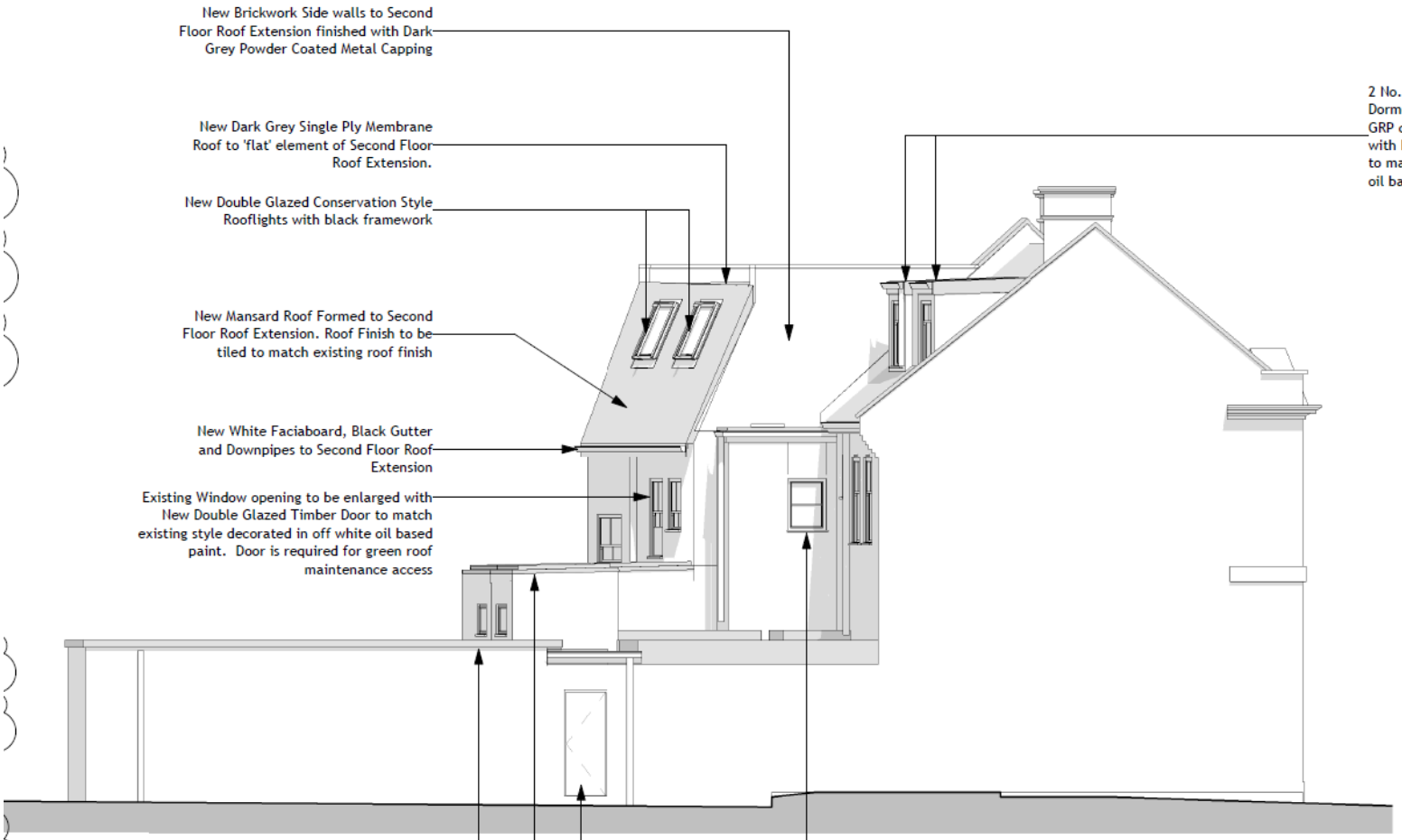


Proposed North East (Front) Elevation

1 : 100

(Note: Not a true elevation as right infill section of building is slightly behind and hidden by the orginal left section, however this shows the two sections aligned for comparrison purposes)

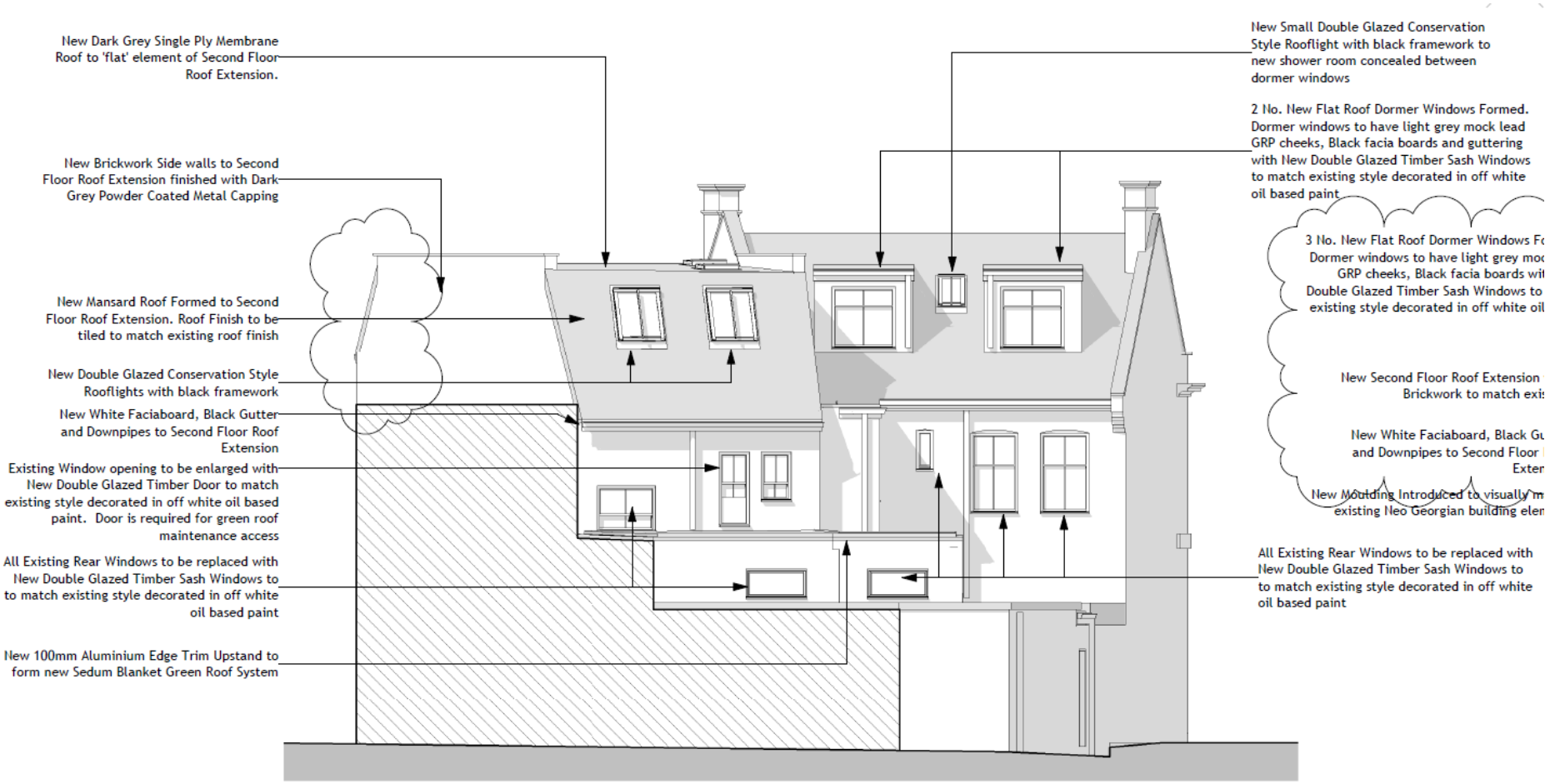
Proposed side (south-east) elevation



Proposed South East Elevation

1 : 100

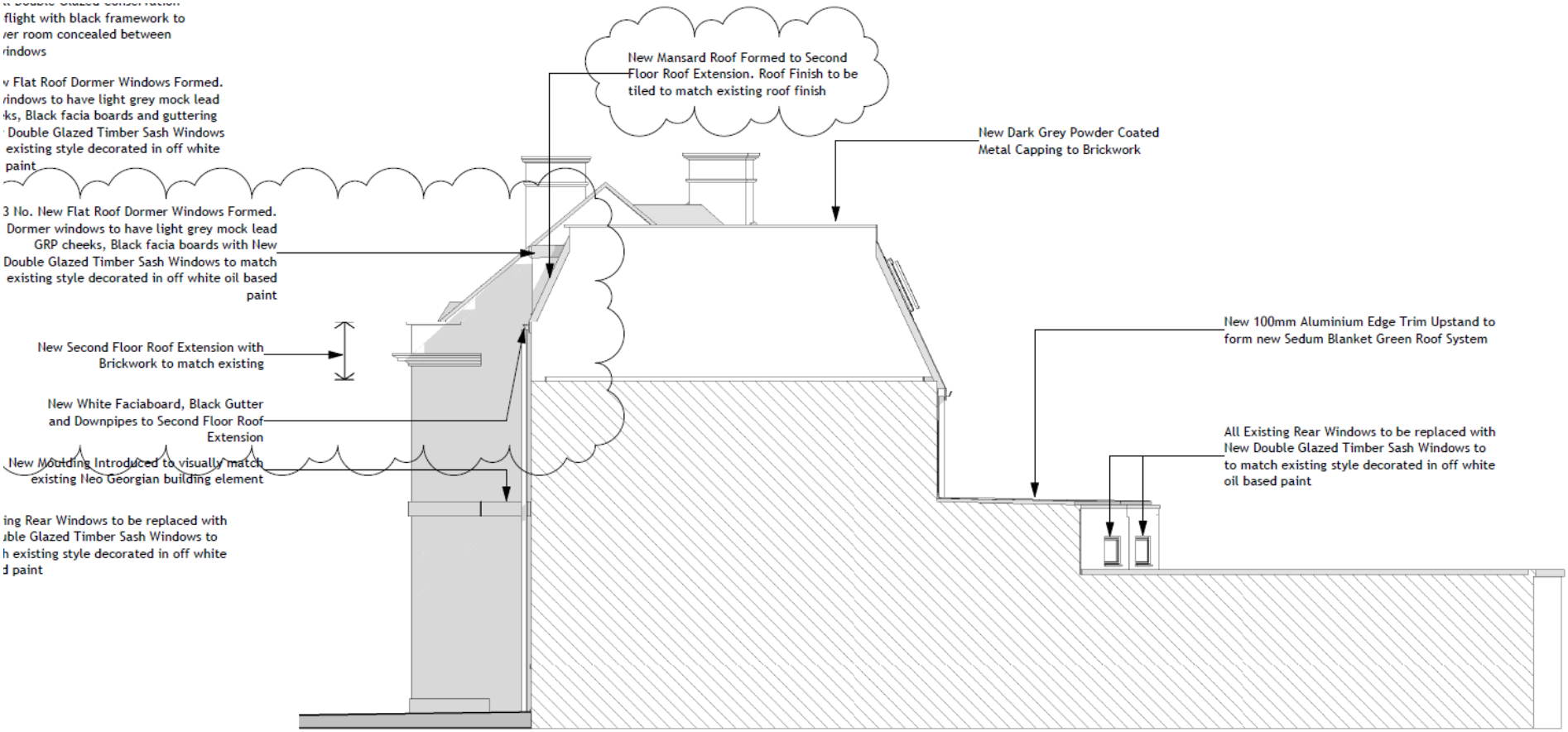
Proposed rear (south-west) elevation



Proposed South West Elevation

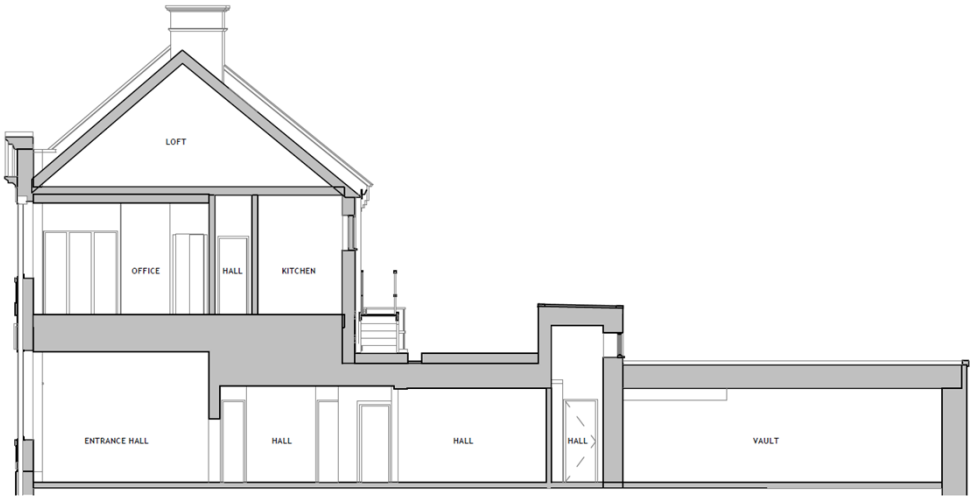
1 : 100

Proposed side (north-west) elevation



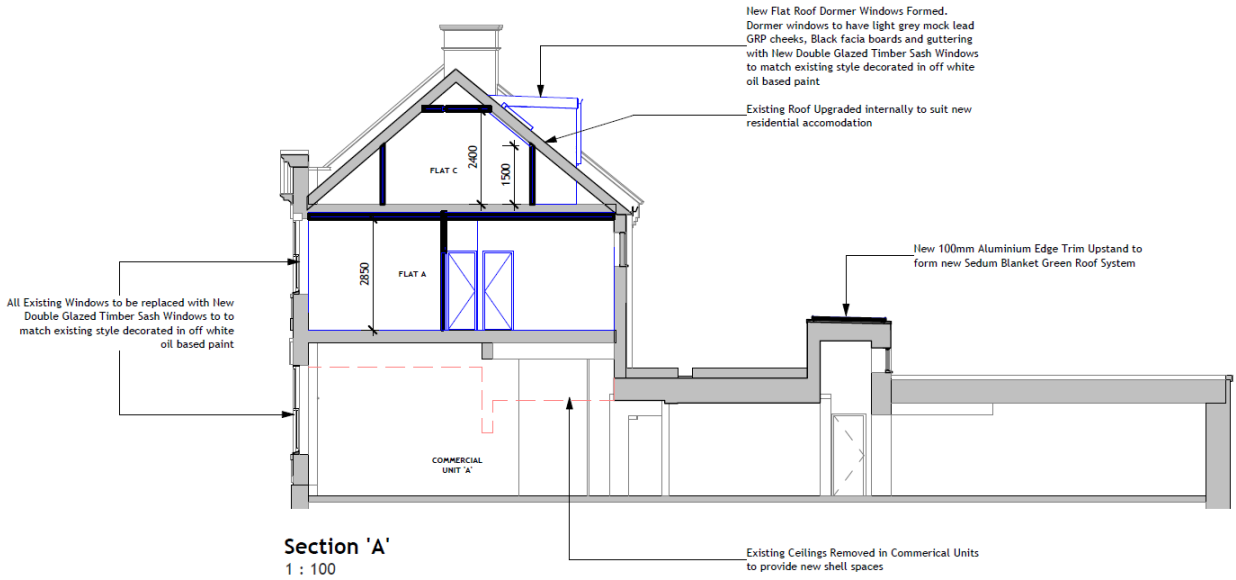
Proposed North West Elevation

1 : 100

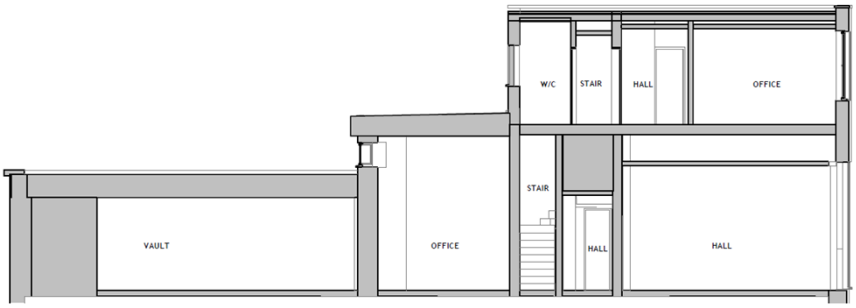


Section 'A'
1 : 100

Existing (above) and Proposed (below) Section A plans

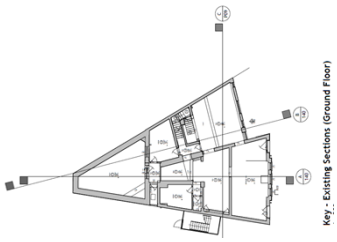


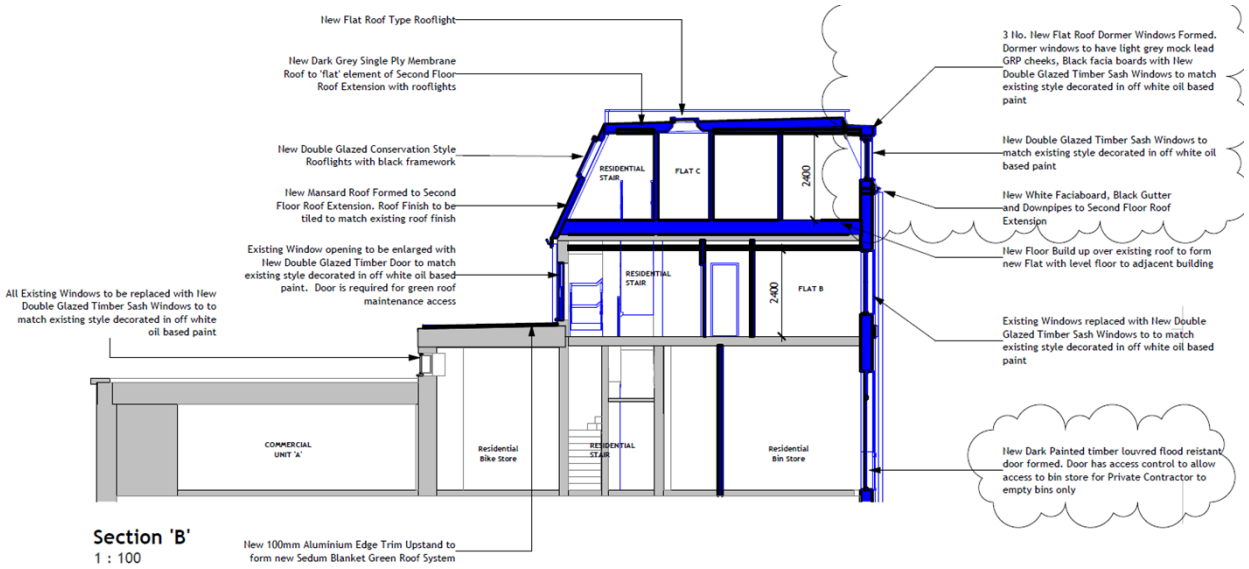
Section 'A'
1 : 100



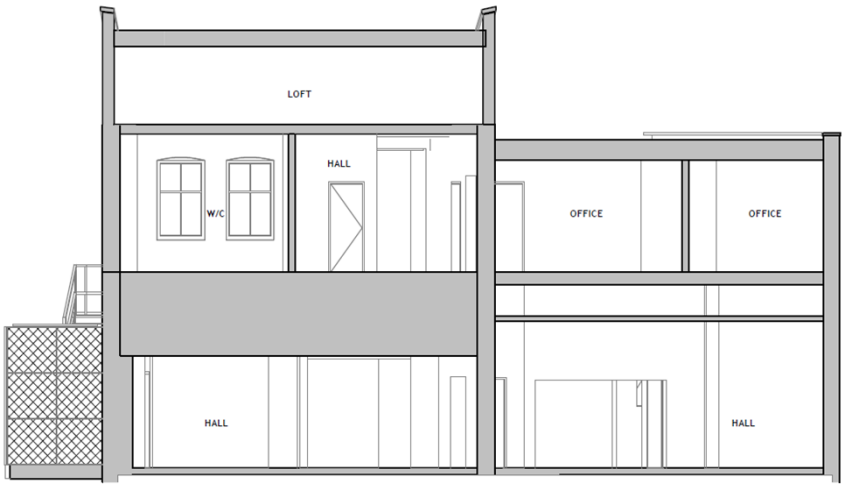
Section 'B'
1 : 100

Existing (above) and Proposed (below) Section B plans





Section 'B'
1 : 100



Section 'C'
1 : 100

Existing (above) and Proposed (below) Section C plans



Section 'C'
1 : 100

Existing (left) and Proposed (right) streetscene elevations



Existing Bridge St/Church Rd Street Scene



Proposed Bridge St/Church Rd Street Scene





Existing (left) and Proposed (right) rear elevation streetscenes




Interior photos at ground floor (above and below right) and first floor (below left)







The Church Road elevation (above) & rear elevation from The Griffin & the Thames Path (below)







Views from Church Road looking south-west





Long view from Church St (left) looking south-west & from Church Rd (right) looking south-east




Views from the junction looking south (left) and north-west (right)




Views from Bridge Street looking north-west







Buildings of townscape merit
The three banks at the junction of Bridge Street and Church Road form a group

Extracts from the St Peters Conservation Area Appraisal





The listed buildings at 1, 3 and 5 Church Road, and 4, 6, 8 and 10 Church Street together form an important group at the junction with Bridge Street.

Two 20th century public houses, the Griffin and the Crown, contribute to the character of the area.





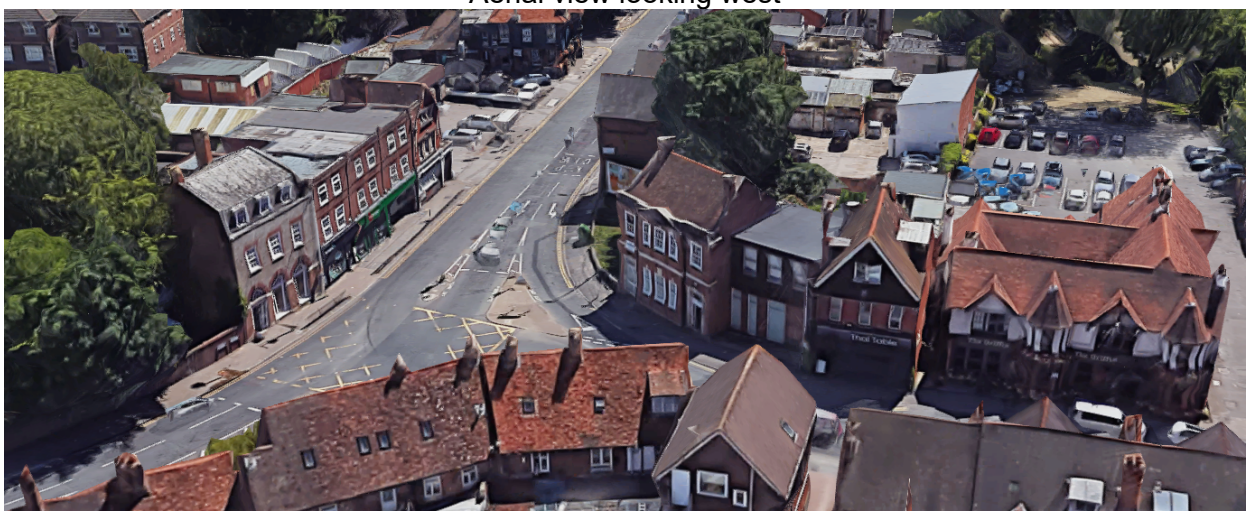




Aerial view looking north-east



Aerial view looking west



Aerial view looking south