



Application for Planning Permission

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Reference	PA/23/01179
Site	Tower Hamlets Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel Road, E1 1BJ
Ward	Whitechapel
Proposal	Listed building consent for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alterations to the first floor refectory area and second floor executive office and meeting space within the Grade II listed portico extension.• Introduction of partitioning to create an additional meeting room at second floor (mezzanine level).• Removal of kitchenette at first floor level within the refectory.• Addition of doors within new partitioning associated with corridors leading to the above spaces.• Internal amendments to fourth floor of historical building with addition of lightweight partitions and doors, closing off open plan spaces from corridor.
Summary Recommendation	Grant Listed Building Consent with conditions
Applicant	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Agent	None.
Case Officer	Adam Hussain
Key dates	- Application registered as valid on 20 th June 2023 - Public consultation finished on 20 th July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The application site is the Tower Hamlets Town Hall. The application is for Listed Building Consent and relates to 3 parts of the building. Those parts of the building are the Chapel, first floor and second floor corridors, and meeting rooms on the fourth floor.

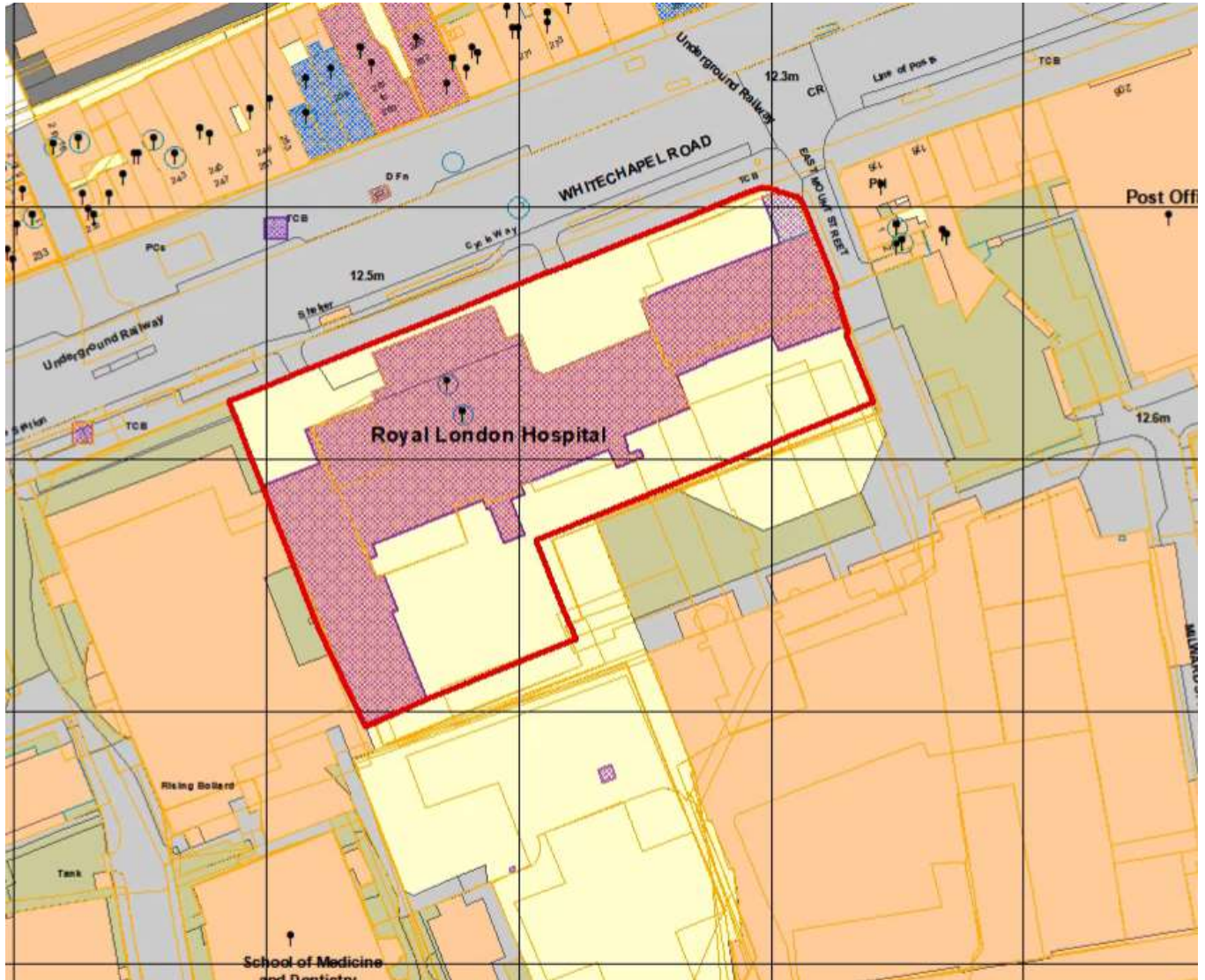
The proposal relates to physical works to install a new partition at mezzanine level in the Chapel. In addition, the installation of new partitions and doors in corridors at first and second floor level and to meeting rooms at fourth floor.

The works are related to the intended change of function of these rooms. The Chapel is currently used as a staff canteen. This would be moved to the fourth floor. The Chapel will then become an executive office. All of the space will continue to be working parts of the Town Hall. The function of these spaces cannot be controlled by this application.

The application has received 66 letters of objections. The matters raised in the objection letters include the reduced ability to appreciate the historic Chapel room because it will no longer be available as the canteen space for staff.

The proposed physical works would be modest in scale. The works would be reversible and would not harm the historic fabric of the building.

The application is recommended for approval subject to conditions.



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-  Planning Application Site Boundary
-  Other Planning Applications
-  Consultation Area
-  Land Parcel Address Point
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Statutory Listed Buildings

Planning Applications Site Map

PA/23/01179

This site map displays the Planning Application Site Boundary.



London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Scale: 50m grid squares

Date: 01 August 2023

1. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 1.1 Tower Hamlets Town Hall was opened in Whitechapel in the early part of 2023. The Town Hall occupies the old Royal London Hospital (RLH) building. The RLH is a Grade II Listed building.
- 1.2 The Listed building consent application, subject of this report, relates to 3 parts of the RLH:
 - The former Chapel, located on the first floor.
 - Corridors on the first and second floor that lead to the former Chapel
 - Rooms on the fourth floor
- 1.3 The oldest parts of the RLH date from the 1750s. The hospital has been subject to many alterations over its history. In the late 19th century the main façade facing Whitechapel Road was transformed. These changes included the addition of the entrance portico with a first floor Chapel in 1890.
- 1.4 The Chapel is located in the main projecting element of the RLH directly above the main entrance. When it was first built the Chapel occupied the full length of the projecting element and was a double-height space.



Fig.1 Photograph of the Town Hall. The Chapel is located at first and second floors immediately above the main entrance.

- 1.5 In 1900 the Chapel was subdivided. Most of the space was used for a lecture theatre. A floor was also installed between the two rows of windows (see Fig.1 above). The Chancel, at the east end (where one can see the decorative double-height window) was retained as a small, double-height Chapel space.
- 1.6 At the time of the submission of the New Town Hall redevelopment the Chapel remained subdivided. The lower part was occupied by shower rooms and the upper part subdivided into other individual rooms. The small Chapel area around the Chancel remained.
- 1.7 The Town Hall redevelopment opened up the space. The lower part is open plan and the upper part has a mezzanine floor. The whole area has a direct connection with the Chancel space.



Fig. 2 The Chapel, looking towards the Chancel.



Fig. 3 The Chapel, looking towards the Chancel.



Fig. 4. The Chapel, looking from the Chancel showing the mezzanine level.

- 1.8 The lower part of the Chapel is the canteen for staff of the Council. The upper part has an office. The wall to the office is set back from the edge of the mezzanine.

- 1.9 The lower part of the Chapel is accessed from first floor corridors at opposite ends, to the east and west. The upper part of the Chapel (the mezzanine) is accessed from a second floor corridor to the western end.



Fig. 5 First floor, west corridor.

- 1.10 At the fourth floor of the RLH there are a number of meeting rooms. These include rooms that are currently open to the corridor.



Fig. 6 Fourth floor meeting rooms

2. PROPOSAL

2.1 The proposal is as follows:

Chapel

- Removal of the kitchenette
- Introduction of a new partition at mezzanine level. The partition would be located approximately 6.10m forward of the existing partition. This would be set back from the edge of the mezzanine by approximately 3m. The partition would be dry-lined plasterboard to match the existing walls with a central glazed element.

Corridors leading to the Chapel

- Installation of new doors with partition surround to the corridors to the Chapel. This would be at 2 x first floor corridors (east and west) and 1 x second floor corridor (west). At first floor the doors would be wooden and at second floor the door would be glazed.

Rooms on the fourth floor

- Installation of solid partitions separating the rooms from the corridor, including two timber doors. Installation of partition separating the two rooms.

2.2 The purpose of the works, as set out in the application submission documents, is for the staff canteen to be moved from the lower level of the Chapel. This will be relocated

to the fourth-floor rooms. The lower floor of the Chapel will be used as a formal executive room.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

- 3.1 8th May 2018 - PA/17/02825 - Planning permission granted for partial demolition, including removal of the remaining west wing and the grocer's wing (behind retained facade), alteration and refurbishment of the former Royal London Hospital and erection of a part four-storey and part seven-storey extension (including partial basement) to provide a new Tower Hamlets Council Civic Centre, comprising; office space (Use Class B1) on upper floors; a library and other customer facing functions (Use Class D1), council chamber, conference, exhibition and/or function space (Sui Generis) and an ancillary café on the ground floor; bicycle-parking spaces, refuse store and associated facilities within the basement; blue badge car-parking spaces, a new sub-station, landscaping and associated works.
- 3.2 8th May 2018 - PA/17/02828 - Listed building consent granted for Part-demolition, alterations and refurbishment of the former Royal London Hospital building including: retention and repair of the front and rear facades (including 1895 Portico and front Chapel extension); Removal of existing redundant pipework and wiring from facades; Demolition of existing south-west wing; Demolition of Grocer's Wing (behind retained façade at first, second and third floor level) and facsimile reconstruction of mansard roof, dormer windows and chimneys; repair and replacement of all existing windows; Internal reconfiguration and refurbishment works including opening up and removal of internal walls and partitions; and the installation of connecting 'bridge' links to a part four-storey and part seven-storey extension (including partial basement) at the rear of the building. All in connection with the proposed redevelopment and change of use of the building to provide new Tower Hamlets Civic Centre.

4. PUBLICITY AND ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 A site notice was displayed and a press advert was published in a local newspaper.
- 4.2 A total of 66 representations were received. All representations are in objection to the proposals.
- 4.3 The matters raised in the objections are summarised as follows:
- The Chapel is a significant feature of the Grade II listed building. A character of the space is its openness. It would be detrimental to the heritage asset to add additional partitions.
 - A characteristic of the Chapel would have been its openness to everyone. The current use as a canteen reflects this openness and allows everyone to appreciate the heritage asset. The proposals to become an executive room is detrimental to the quality and appreciation of the heritage asset.
 - Local Plan policy S.DH3 states that proposals affecting heritage assets will only be permitted where they, "enhance or better reveal the significance of assets or their settings." The proposal would be contrary to this policy.

- Staff do not want to be removed from a space which adds to the quality of their work environment, to be relegated to a smaller substandard location within the building.
- There was no prior consultation with staff over this proposed change.

5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Tower Hamlets Borough Conservation Officer

- 5.1 Tower Hamlets Town Hall is located within the former Royal London Hospital which is listed at Grade II. The oldest parts of the building date from the 1750's and over its long history as a hospital it was subject to many alterations. The appearance of the main facade facing Whitechapel Road was transformed in the later nineteenth century by a series of additions including the Chapel (added in 1890) under which was located the main entrance to the hospital.
- 5.2 The Chapel which originally occupied the entire length of the projecting central section was an impressive double height space. In 1900 most of it the Chapel was converted into a lecture theatre with the exception of the chancel at the eastern end and the first bay within the main space which remained as a small, double height chapel. This Chapel space was separated from the other spaces by a wall running up through two storeys. A floor was inserted above the new lecture theatre at the height of the springing of the arches of the large windows overlooking Whitechapel Road. After WWII, the lecture theatre was subdivided, the early twentieth century floor was removed a new floor inserted at a lower level along with new windows at two levels.
- 5.3 As part of the conversion to the new Tower Hamlets Town Hall the various first floor level subdivisions which had been built within the former lecture theatre were removed. The inserted floor was retained with a glass balustrade to the double height space. Overall the changes significantly increased the ability of the viewer to appreciate the original proportions of the Chapel.
- 5.4 Below are the main elements of the proposed changes with my comments:
- Removal of the kitchenette from level 01*
- 5.5 The free-standing kitchenette within the staff refectory was added during the recent conversion works. The removal of this non-original feature would not harm the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building.
- The introduction of a partly glazed partition at level 02 (mezzanine) to create an additional meeting room.*
- 5.6 The proposed partition is closer to the glazed balustrade than the existing wall and despite the inclusion of glazing is slightly more intrusive in internal views looking west from the chancel area of the former Chapel.
- The addition of doors to the east and west corridors connecting the former chapel to the main corridor at first floor level.*
- 5.7 The doors would be located within existing openings which were formed from original window openings when the Chapel was added in 1890 and thus involve no loss of original fabric.

The addition of a glazed screen to opening on second floor corridor

- 5.8 The proposed screen is located within an existing opening which was originally a doorway into one of the Georgian hospital rooms which had then been widened. The east side of the opening is of Georgian brickwork. The proposal involves the loss of no original fabric.

Changes to rooms on level 04 to form a staff refectory with kitchenette. Works to include separating two rooms from each other and separating both rooms from the corridor.

- 5.9 This level was added to the hospital in 1906. The existing spaces are rather incoherent as before the conversion works to form the new Town Hall, they were separated into many small rooms. The proposed infill works would be set back from the existing walls.
- 5.10 Overall the proposals would incur no harm to historic fabric. The new screen at mezzanine level within the former Chapel is unfortunate in that it blocks the partial view of two upper windows and thus slightly reduces the ability of the viewer to appreciate the original spatial volume (albeit only from former the extreme east of the former Chapel). Should the proposal be approved, any fixings in relation to Georgian brickwork should be into the mortar joints and not the bricks.

Statutory consultees

- 5.11 The nature of the proposed works is such that there is no statutory requirement to notify Historic England or the national amenity societies.

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

- 6.1 The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that in considering whether to grant listed building consent, the local planning shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 6.2 The assessment of the application considers:
- The London Plan (2021)
 - Tower Hamlets Local Plan 2031 (2020)
- 6.3 The key development plan policies relevant to the proposals are:

Heritage and Design

Local Plan –S.DH1 (Delivering High Quality Design) & S.DH3 (Heritage and the Historic Environment).

London Plan – HC1 (Heritage Conservation and Growth)

- 6.4 Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act.
- 6.5 Other policy and guidance documents relevant to the proposals are:
- National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
 - National Planning Practice Guidance (2021)

7. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Introduction

7.1 The application subject of this report is for Listed Building Consent and the local planning authority must consider the impact, if any, on the special architectural or historic interest of the Listed building. There is no development requiring planning permission.

7.2 The Tower Hamlets Town Hall is new to Whitechapel. The redevelopment of the Royal London Hospital (RLH) to deliver the Town Hall has transformed the building. Prior to the Town Hall redevelopment the RLH had been vacant, inaccessible and in a poor state of repair for many years.

7.3 The works to deliver the New Town Hall in this location were considered under planning and listed building consent applications. (See 'Relevant Planning History' above). These applications recognised the benefits of returning the RLH back into use. The Committee report from 2018 for those applications stated:

“Officers note that the building is a key part of the character and fabric of the London Hospital and the wider conservation area, thus contributing positively to the designated heritage asset. The retention of the key historic elements of the building and the internal historic features is viewed positively and will preserve the significance of the heritage asset as well as the character and appearance of the conservation area”. (paragraph 12.65)

7.4 The report also noted important benefits to the Chapel space, as stated:

“At first floor the later addition of partitioning and floors within the chapel space will be removed. This will create a free flowing space and provide a sense of the original proportions of the chapel. It is noted that the partitions to be removed are a later addition, the proposals will allow the original chapel space to be reinstated without harm to its special architectural and historic interest”. (paragraph 12.44)

“In terms of architectural features, the surviving chancel, associated panelling, original plasterwork and first floor eastern bay will be repaired, refurbished and reinstated”. (paragraph 12.45)

“The refurbished chapel will become the new staff refectory with a mezzanine floor for meeting space. The opening up of this space and intended regular use by staff allows this magnificent space and historic features to again be fully appreciated and the retention of the significant architectural elements”. (paragraph 12.46).

7.5 The history of the Chapel is set out above in 'Site and Surroundings'. It is relevant to note that the Chapel space has been subdivided since 1900. The majority of the space has been used as a lecture theatre, as shower rooms, and as general rooms serving the Hospital. The new works part of the arrival of the Town Hall has successfully made this space more open and free-flowing than since when it was first built, in the late nineteenth century.

Assessment of the proposed works

Chapel

- 7.6 The works inside the Chapel consist primarily of creating more office space on the mezzanine level. This would be achieved by installing a new part solid (dry-lined plasterboard) and partially glazed partition. The works would mean that when standing at the Chancel and looking back, the mezzanine area will look less open than it does currently. At present the open balcony part of the mezzanine is approximately 3 window bays deep. The proposals would mean it would be approximately 1 window bay deep.
- 7.7 The change is illustrated with the following images:



Fig. 7 3D image of existing Chapel space, looking from the Chancel.

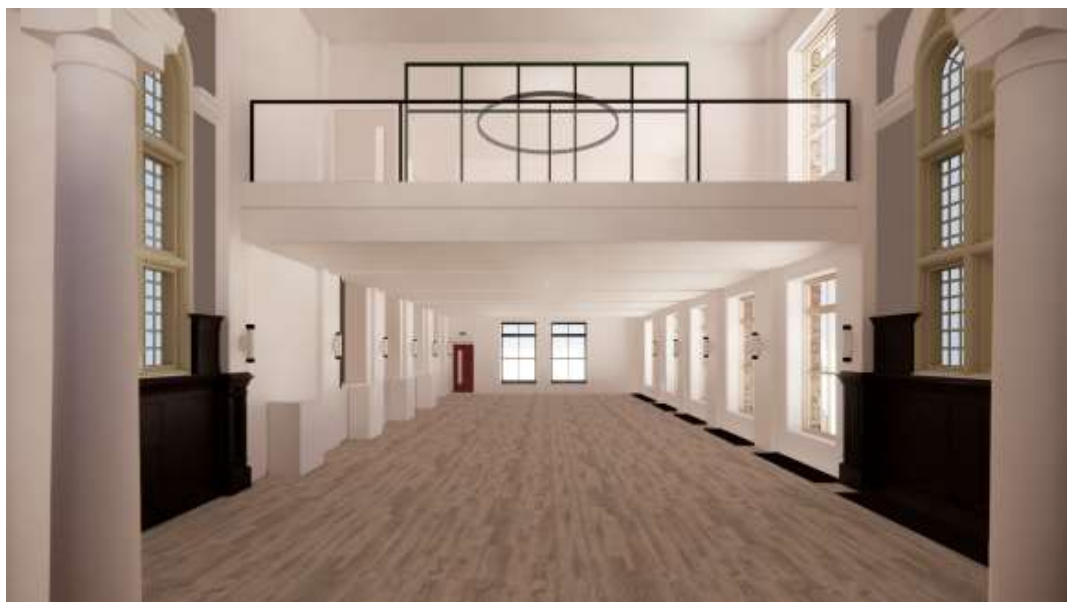


Fig. 8 3D image of proposed Chapel space, looking from the Chancel.

- 7.8 The images above are from the Chancel looking back towards the mezzanine. From this perspective the upper mezzanine area will appear less open than the existing arrangement. The Borough conservation officer commented that this change is unfortunate because it would block the partial view of two upper floor windows. However, it is noted this is from a specific position in the Chapel. There would be no impact of the appreciation of the space when elsewhere in the room and looking eastwards towards the Chancel.
- 7.9 The Chapel has been subdivided for most of its history. The changes associated with the New Town Hall have made this a much more open space. The proposed change to the mezzanine would not significantly affect the heritage benefits and experience of the space that have been delivered from the opening up of the Chapel.
- 7.10 The existing kitchenette was installed recently with the Town Hall works. The removal of this would have no impact on the special significance of the Chapel.

Corridors to the Chapel at First and Second Floor

- 7.11 The original RLH part of the building has long corridors on each floor with meeting rooms. The Chapel is accessed by shorter corridors that branch off the main corridors. The proposal includes installation of new doors on these shorter corridors.
- 7.12 The proposed works would follow the expected approach for installation of new doors and partitions. The doors would be set back from the face of the walls they are adjoining. This means the original opening in the corridor can be seen and appreciated. The installation of the doors and partitions would be reversible and there would be no loss of original building fabric.

Fourth Floor Meeting Rooms

- 7.13 The existing rooms have openings onto the corridor. The proposals would close these openings and introduce two doors.
- 7.14 The partitions would be light-weight additions that will be reversible. The partitions and doors would be set back from the face of the walls they are adjoining. This means the original gaps can be seen and appreciated.
- 7.15 The Borough conservation officer has reviewed the proposals. They note that the proposed works would not harm the historic fabric of the building.

Change to how the spaces are intended to be used

- 7.16 The reason for the proposed works, as described in the application submission documents, is that the Chapel is no longer intended to be used as the staff canteen. This function is intended to be moved to fourth floor rooms. The lower floor of the Chapel will become an executive office space.
- 7.17 It is relevant to note that, subject to rooms being used as part of the overall functions of the Town Hall, there is no planning control over how the individual rooms are used.
- 7.18 The high volume of objections to the application highlight that as a canteen use the Chapel space is accessible to everyone who works in the Council building. In this

respect the appreciation of this heritage asset can be enjoyed by many people. The objections also refer to Local Plan policy S.DH3. This policy sets out a number of factors to be applied to applications that affect heritage assets. One of those factors is that applications will only be permitted where they, “*enhance or better reveal the significance of assets or their settings.*” (part 2.c).

- 7.19 The listed building consent application for the New Town Hall redevelopment addresses the use of the Chapel space. (see paragraph 7.8 above). The report states that the “*intended regular use by staff allows this magnificent space and historic features to again be fully appreciated*”.
- 7.20 The Listed Building Consent application cannot control what rooms are used for in the Town Hall. Prior to the Town Hall redevelopment the Chapel was wholly inaccessible. The redevelopment to provide the Town Hall has transformed that. The use as a staff canteen, accessible to all staff in the building, is an effective way of ensuring the space can be used, appreciated and enjoyed. The use as an executive office would mean less people will be able to freely access this space. However, the space would remain a working part of the Town Hall with regular users and visitors.
- 7.21 In this respect, it is noted that all of the spaces relevant to this application will remain as working parts of the Town Hall. In this context, and strictly in respect of the Listed Building Consent assessment, the intended change of the functions of the spaces would not have an impact on the appreciation of the listed building to an extent that would prejudice the outcome of this application. Subject to any associated physical works, the functions of the spaces cannot be controlled through this application.

Conclusion

- 7.22 The proposed physical works would be of a modest scale and affect very specific parts of the overall listed building. The works would preserve the building and would not harm its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. All of the works would be reversible and there would be no harm to historic fabric. In this respect it is considered that the application complies with Local Plan policies S.DH1 and S.DH3.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That **conditional Listed Building Consent is GRANTED**
- 8.2 That the acting Corporate Director of Place is delegated the power to impose conditions to address the following matters:
- 8.3 Planning Conditions:
1. 3 years deadline for commencement of development
 2. Development in accordance with approved plans
 3. Fixings shall be into mortar joints only, not brickwork.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF APPLICATION PLANS AND DRAWINGS FOR APPROVAL

Schedule of Drawings

Unnumbered	Site Location Plan dated 19 th June 2023
23030(01)P121 P01	Existing First Floor Plan
23030(01)P122 P01	Existing Second Floor Plan
23030(01)P124 P01	Existing Fourth Floor Plan
23030(01)P400 P01	Existing Chapel Plan
23030(01)P401 P01	Existing Chapel Plan
23030(01)P402 P01	Existing Chapel Plan
23030(00)P121 P01	Proposed First Floor Plan
23030(00)P122 P01	Proposed Second Floor Plan
23030(00)P124 P02	Proposed Fourth Floor Plan
23030(00)P400 P01	Proposed Chapel Plan
23030(00)P401 P01	Proposed Chapel Plan
23030(00)P402 P01	Proposed Chapel Plan
23030(00)P441 P01	First Floor Internal Elevation
23030(00)P442 P01	Second Floor Internal Elevation
23030(00)P440 P01	Fourth Floor Internal Elevation