

WARWICKSPACE COMMUNITY CENTRE PLANNING DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

FEBRUARY 2022



CONSERVATION

WARWICKSPACE is a volunteer run community centre in Coten End. The building was constructed in 1913 as a drill hall for troops preparing for the first world war. It included a shooting gallery along the western side and a large hall with a generous two storey building facing the road. The war department transferred it to Warwickshire County Council after the second world war and they own the building, but faced with cuts, gave a long lease to the social enterprise Warwickspace Ltd for it to be run on a not for profit basis at a peppercorn rent. Since taking over in 2014 the volunteers have built up a fund by operating the letting of the centre to various charities, council and school groups and community groups, doing most of the maintenance themselves.

This approach has allowed Warwickspace to accumulate funds and to seek grant aid to ensure the fabric of the building is uprated and refurbished so that the building is sustainable as a public asset. Keeping the building in appropriate use is the primary sustainability target. Leaking roofs and heat loss are the main risks to the continuance of community use, whilst safety works need to be addressed to minimise risks. A significant risk remaining is the first floor which has been home to groups of people with disabilities for many years, including wheelchair users following the introduction of a lift to serve the upper level some 25 years ago, during the WCC management. This was funded by grant aid from a local charity, The King Henry VIII Endowed Trust. The lift cannot be used in the event of fire and the use of an evacuation chair on the stair requires trained staff, whereas Warwickspace does not have and cannot afford staff.



The (former shooting) gallery is extensively used by Coten End Pre-school, yet the roof over this is rotten and this and the west facing hall roof suffers leaks. The construction of the roofs to the buildings at the rear of the centre is unusual in that there are no rafters only thick sarking boards that span the purlins. The gallery roof pitch is sixteen degrees and cannot be refurbished in slate. Water ingress over the years means that the condition of the sarking planking and the wall plate is such that replacement will be necessary.



Broken slates exacerbate the problem of a roof pitch which is well below the British Standard required for construction



Sarking board rotten due to leaks from damaged slates at low pitch



Fixed skylights with temporary flashing following theft accumulate debris and pool water behind the upstand

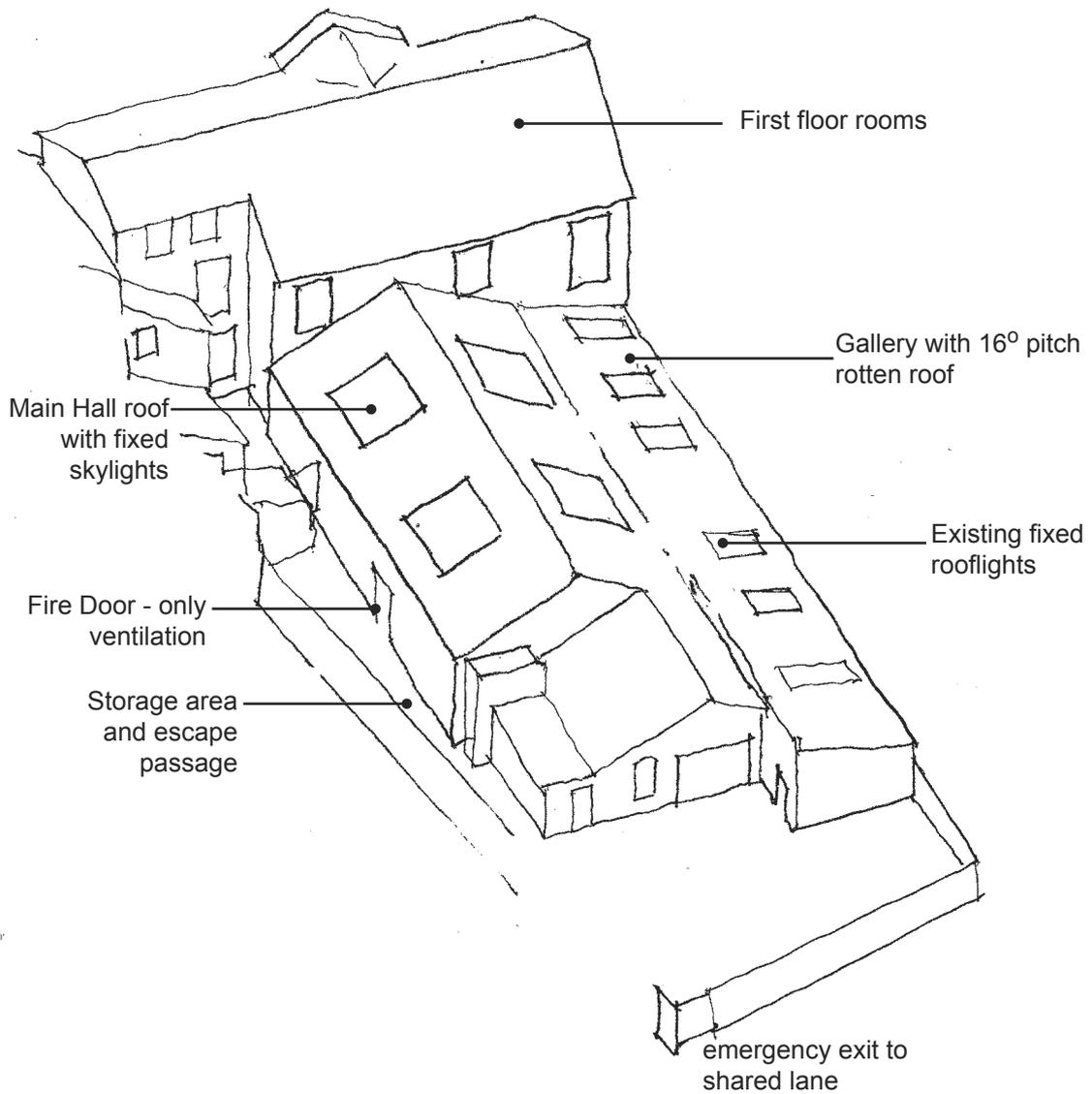
The opportunity exists therefore to create a flat roof refuge at first floor level where users can evade the smoke and be rescued from a place of safety. To do this involves building up the west wall of the gallery and rear classrooms to the first floor level, and provides an opportunity to remove the skylights and to introduce natural ventilation with inward opening windows to these rooms – a bonus in Covid times. A level roof will also allow the other roof elements to be maintained without recourse to the adjacent pub land. Finally, a roof and gutters currently clogged by needles from the established conifers in the pub grounds can be maintained and rainwater from the majority of the building harvested to offset the heavy use in the Pre-school areas. Refurbishment of the main roofs must include insulation to reduce the centre's energy bill and subject to grant aid in the future, can provide for solar panels to generate electricity. Most of this work will sit behind the raised parapet to the west wall, with a simple post and wire balustrade making it safe as an escape route and for volunteers to continue to maintain the building. Conservation of the building and its substantial embodied energy, together with upgrading of the energy performance and internal comfort levels, not too hot in summer and not freezing in winter, can thus be done without detriment to the Warwick Conservation Area. These improvements have been carefully considered to have minimum impact on the Conservation Area and the setting of the listed Public House. The largely tented garden to the adjacent pub and the parking of large vehicles close to the centre, means that the provision of the smoke refuge will remain largely unnoticed. The improvement in the energy performance of the main slate roofs will raise them around 150 mm with the slate finish- a minor amount of change within the context of a building of this scale- that will help secure its long term future.

Self-set Sycamore trees have become established on the western boundary with the pub car park. These are too close to the main building and likely to cause damage to the foundation of the end elevation and to the incoming electricity supply. These should be removed as part of the improvements.

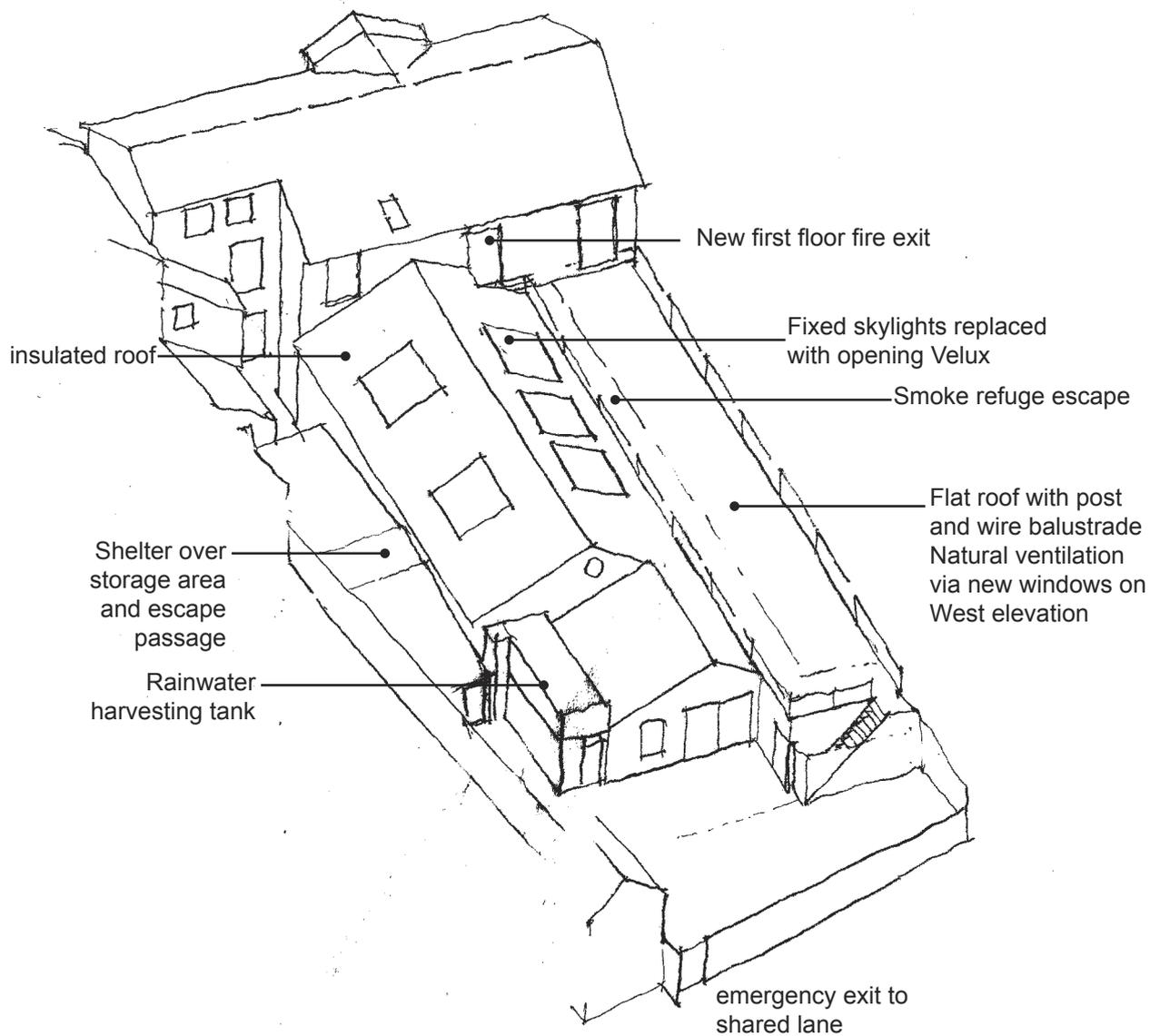
Being constructed prior to 1914, the building has solid brickwork walls and is best externally insulated to avoid interstitial condensation and to remove air leakage. A simple grey through-tone render will retain the neutral appearance of these walls and the raised section above the failed wall plate at the current eaves, can be slate hung, with slates salvaged from the unwarrantable existing low pitch roof.

The frontage onto Coten End requires further maintenance of the timber windows. The proposal is to seek funds for new timber vertical sliding sash windows with lead weights to offset the weight of double glazing. This together with some restriction to avoid children falling out, will continue the natural ventilation approach to these popular large upper rooms. This building can continue to be an attractive presence on Coten End by replacing the glazing the windows on the road frontage in timber vertical sliding sashes without the failing sash bars. The roof to the taller frontage block will be insulated and re-slatted in the future as funds allow.

AERIAL VIEW OF EXISTING BUILDING FROM NORTH



AERIAL VIEW OF PROPOSED ALTERNATION FROM NORTH



SETTING:

WARWICKSPACE is located within Warwick Conservation Area. Coten End/Emscote Road is in Area 1 in the Warwick Conservation Area Appraisal. It is described as a major vehicle link with high traffic levels. The buildings are mostly Victorian terraces and villas between 2-4 storeys. The Millwright Pub (now The Black Pug) is a notable landmark being timber framed but with a poor visual quality forecourt and open car park area detracting from it. The former Drill Hall, Community Centre is not discussed but a photograph of the entrance was included. The Conservation Area has been extended a number of times.

SUSTAINABILITY:

The successful community use of the building achieves the first criteria of sustainability, given the WCC had initially proposed redevelopment for residential. A number of the activities have been here for fifty years, as have some of the users. Part of being a multi use space is providing storage for the many groups who run activities from their front rooms. The small existing storage area to the east side of the building is to be sheltered by adding to the low pitch corrugated sheet roof. This would not be visible from the garden of number 73, the adjacent house. In the longer term this shelter could be fully enclosed to create a draught lobby between the hall and the garden, substantially reducing the free flow of heat as children move from the hall to the garden. Reducing the sound is another benefit to the Broad Street side, as the proposed opening roof lights in the hall will avoid the need to open the eastern fire exit door to ventilate the hall. Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery to the hall in the future would also reduce energy use and carbon, and how this can be placed is identified on the strategy drawings, but does not form part of the proposals currently.

A future addition could be an electric vehicle charging point on the west boundary wall. This, along with solar panels, would be part of an initiative to assist the local community to adapt to climate change. We hope to run sessions at Warwickspace to show how the fabric of existing buildings could be upgraded- perhaps in a way reminiscent of the General Improvement Areas that introduced basic amenities street by street to the housing stock fifty years ago. Set up post war, the Warwick community centre was where a generation were taught to cook, do DIY and first aid. Making Warwickspace a part of the resilience to events like flooding, loss of power from the grid, whether it be to provide hot food or charge up mobile phones in an emergency, having this capacity could be invaluable

DESIGN AND ACCESS

The centre has progressively responded to the aim to be inclusive. The ground floor escape passages have been widened and sloped to avoid steps. There is emergency lighting inside and out, smoke detection and signage. There are baby change facilities and toilets for people with disability on both floor levels. Mind and now Mencap run sessions for wheelchair users, and other groups have events, training and meetings where people with disabilities make use of the lift to the upper floor spaces. The concern is that in the event of a fire affecting the only stair and also ruling out the lift, the smoke and fumes can be contained until the fire brigade can rescue individuals with restricted mobility. Putting a balcony on the front of the building is an alternative option but still means that a window cill has to be taken down to first floor level and a door set in to allow a number of individuals out onto an open balcony away from smoke from which a fire appliance with a turntable can rescue them. The strategy of an external refuge by creating a place of safety at first floor level to the rear, but outside the building is the best option. To do this by replacing the leaking gallery roof which has rotten sarking, stolen lead flashings and missing and broken slates is an appropriate way of optimising the expense. The escape will also be available to all users, not just exclusive to some and will significantly reduce the travel distance to a place of safety. The new fire exit will be linked to the fire alarm so that it can be secure at other times. It will also make it possible for our volunteers, mostly retired, to access the roofs to the rear without climbing ladders and crawling across the roof slates to remove moss and other debris, clean and carry out other repairs.

PLANNING

The proposal to create a shelter to the east of the hall simply covers over more of the existing storage passageway so that it can better serve the different user groups' needs and support the continuance of this building as a public asset. The proposals for the upper floor escape/ smoke refuge create no additional floor space in the building. The insulation of the fabric is improvement not development. It is a positive way to ensure the sustainability of the building in community use.