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HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In respect of

**Hulse Ground Farm,
Little Faringdon, West Oxfordshire**

On behalf of

ECL Chartered Surveyors

AHC REF: 10231

Date: December 2023

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report has been prepared and written by Sarah Watt, MCIfA, Director of Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd. Its purpose is to consider the potential impact of, and provide a justification in heritage terms for, proposals for repair and minor alterations to Hulse Ground Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building in Little Faringdon.
- 1.2 This report follows the preparation by AHC of a comprehensive Statement of Significance in November 2023, which describes and assesses the heritage significance of the building. This was prepared (in line with the requirements of paragraph 194 of the NPPF) with the aim of gaining an understanding of the significance of the listed building and a group of former agricultural buildings associated with it in order to inform proposals for any future works.
- 1.3 The Heritage Impact Assessment (which also addresses the requirements of paragraphs 194 and 195 of the NPPF) examines the proposed scheme of works (which relates only to the farmhouse and not to the barns) in the context of the significance and 'special interest' of the listed building and its setting, as revealed in the accompanying Statement of Significance, and provides it with a reasoned justification in conservation terms. It should therefore be read in conjunction with the Statement of Significance.
- 1.4 This two-stage approach, of analysing and understanding significance first and allowing this to inform the formulation of the subsequent proposals, is very much in accordance with the good practice advocated in documents such as English Heritage's (now Historic England's) *Conservation Principles* (2008) and formally expressed in the requirements of the government's policies on the Historic Environment set out in Section 16 of the NPPF and the accompanying advice provided by the PPG.

2.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSALS

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The proposed works comprise the following elements:

- i. the carrying out of conservative repairs to the exterior masonry of the farmhouse (repointing with lime mortar);
- ii. the replacement of areas of internal gypsum plaster with new lime plaster to arrest damp issues;
- iii. the replacement of 20th-century timber lintels over two fireplaces;
- iv. the cleaning of historic timber lintels over windows;
- v. works to the 20th-century staircase;
- vi. the replacement of internal doors;
- vii. the insertion of a new internal partition wall on the ground floor;
- viii. the insertion of new fitted joinery and floor finishes; and

2.1.2 For ease of reference, the floor plans included at Appendix 4 of the Statement of Significance are also included at **Appendix 1** of this report. These are annotated with the room numbers referred to throughout.

2.2 (i) Masonry repointing

2.2.1 As per Historic England advice (in *Listed Building Consent Historic England Advice Note 16, June 2021*), *'Re-pointing is an essential repair...and, with care, compatible repairs can be carried out without affecting special interest. LBC is not generally required for careful removal of failed or defective pointing using hand tools and without damaging the masonry, and re-pointing of walling by hand, to match the original pointing in terms of material, texture, quality, colour, width and finish.'*

- 2.2.2 Parts of the building's elevations have been previously repointed with a cement-based mortar, which is inappropriate and will eventually lead to decay of the masonry. Secondly, the areas of cementitious repointing have a negative impact on the historic character and appearance of the building. In order to prevent and/or arrest the process of decay, and to restore the building to its proper appearance, the existing mortar requires removal, to be followed by re-pointing with an appropriate lime-based mortar.
- 2.2.3 It is proposed therefore to carefully rake out the existing defective or cement-based pointing and replace it with a non-hydraulic hot lime mortar. The specification for the works indicates that this will comprise 3 parts locally sourced aggregate and 1 part calbux 90 lime. The colouring will match the example given in the specification of the only surviving original lime mortar noted on the building.
- 2.2.4 These works, which will be undertaken to the whole of the front (south-east) elevation and to the historic elements of the return (south-west and north-east) elevations (from ground to roof level) simply comprise the necessary repairs required to maintain the building in proper condition and should not require listed building consent. However, they are included in this application for thoroughness and to demonstrate the applicant's intention to repair and care for the listed building.

2.3 (ii) Internal plaster

- 2.3.1 Investigation has found so-called 'rising damp' in the ground-floor rooms of the historic parts of the building. This includes to all three walls of G9; the front wall of G1; and the front and side walls of G7. These walls have, in the past, been replastered with gypsum plaster, an impermeable material which retains moisture. The problem is manifesting in the form of bubbling and delaminating plaster at the base of the affected walls.
- 2.3.2 In order to address this problem, the gypsum plaster will be hacked off and then replaced with three-coat lime putty plaster, which is a breathable material and will allow moisture to pass out of the wall. The type of plaster to be used is detailed in the specification.

2.3.3 This is clearly a remedial action that needs to take place to ensure the protection and preservation of the building's historic fabric.

2.4 (iv) Replacement of fireplace lintels

2.4.1 This element of the works proposes the replacement of the timber fireplace lintels in G1 and G9.

The fireplace in G1 is a historic fireplace with bread oven that was remodelled at some point in the late 20th or early 21st century. One element of these works involved the insertion of a new lintel or bressummer over the opening, which has been given notched angles in order to try and present an 'antique' look. Around and above the inserted timber, a crudely implemented excess of cementitious mortar has been

2.4.2 applied; this was perhaps used to infill areas where the masonry was defective or eroded, or perhaps the original intention was to plaster over it. The result is aesthetically unpleasing as far as the mortar is concerned, while the lintel itself is an overtly 'modern' smooth-finished timber.

2.5

2.5.1 It is now proposed to prop the existing masonry, remove the lintel and replace it with a new oak lintel of more characterful appearance. This will not involve any loss of historic fabric and will result in a more aesthetically pleasing appearance that is more compatible with the character of the fireplace.

2.5.4 The same intervention is proposed to the fireplace in G9. This fireplace (and also the chimneybreast) was inserted into the room in 2013. The replacement of the existing smooth-finished lintel with a new oak lintel will not, therefore, affect any element of historic fabric.

2.6 (v) Cleaning of window lintels

2.6.1 The exposed historic timber lintels over the stone-mullioned windows in G1, G7, G9, F8 and F11 have all been painted black, a common intervention found in historic buildings with exposed timber structure.

2.6.2 It is proposed to remove this paint and restore the lintels back to their natural state. This will be done using an appropriate method (either air abrasive or chemical) to be agreed with the Council's Conservation Officer and undertaken by a specialist contractor, who will prepare a detailed method statement for approval. The method chosen will ensure maximum retention of the surface underlying the paint and will consider the type of wood present and the nature of the paint that has been applied. A sample panel will be undertaken for inspection if required.

2.6.3 A carefully chosen paint-removal method undertaken by an experienced professional has the potential to improve the character of the rooms affected.

2.7 (vi) Staircase alterations

2.7.1 The existing staircase is of late 20th-century date and of no heritage interest. On the first-floor landing (F1), there is a timber post of square section between the balustrades respectively enclosing the staircase and the stairhead. This, which was inserted to provide additional support when the flat-roofed dormer structure containing the staircase was constructed and the rear wall of the house was cut through, is proposed to be removed.

2.7.2 Its supporting function will be replaced with an alternative solution to a structural engineer's design, involving the installation of a new RHS beam as shown in the accompanying drawings. This will provide the necessary support for the joined roof structures without harm to historic fabric and result in an aesthetically superior appearance to the space.

2.7.3 It is also proposed to replace the existing balustrade and handrail to the staircase and stairhead. The existing turned and moulded balusters are to be replaced with new oak stick balusters and simple unmoulded handrail influenced by a Georgian style. The existing balustrade is, if anything, reflective of a Victorian style and does not have any close relationship to any surviving element of historic character in the interior. Its replacement as proposed will have a 'neutral' effect on significance.

2.9 (viii) New internal wall

2.9.1 A single new partition wall is proposed to be inserted across G8, latterly used as a large utility room, now to be divided into a smaller utility and a boot room. This part of the building was constructed in 2013 and the proposed insertion therefore has no impact on any historic fabric or aspect of historic character.

2.10 (ix) New fitted joinery and floor finishes

2.10.1 New fitted joinery (wardrobes and shelving) are indicated on the drawings in ground-floor rooms G7 and G8 and in first-floor rooms F3 and F9 (G8 and F9 being part of the 2013 extensions). This does not involve the removal of any historic fitted furniture, is all ultimately reversible and does not require listed building consent.

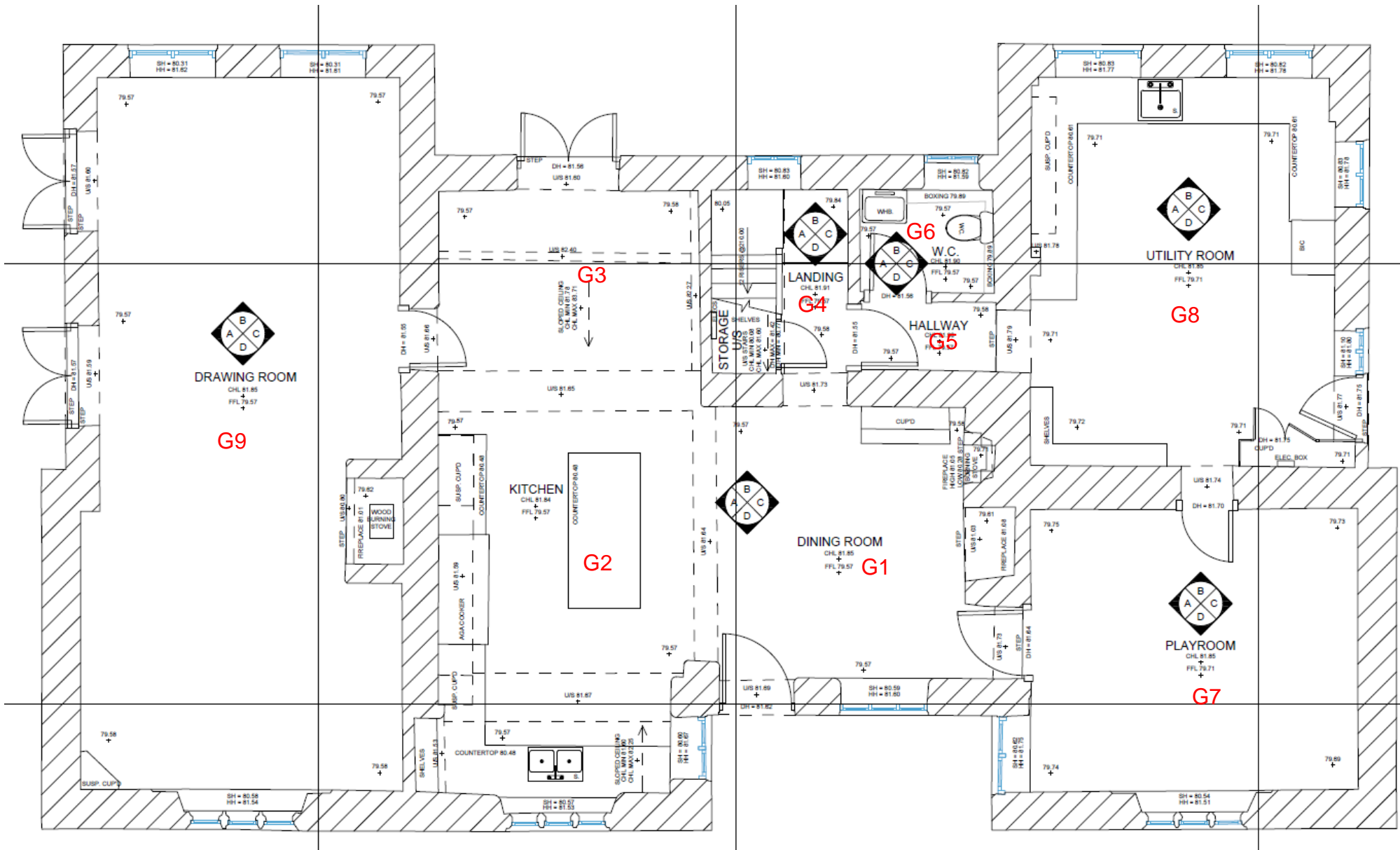
2.10.2 The only exposed historic flooring on the ground floor comprises the stone slabs in G7. This is to be retained. Other floor finishes date from later works and will be replaced as indicated on the plans.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

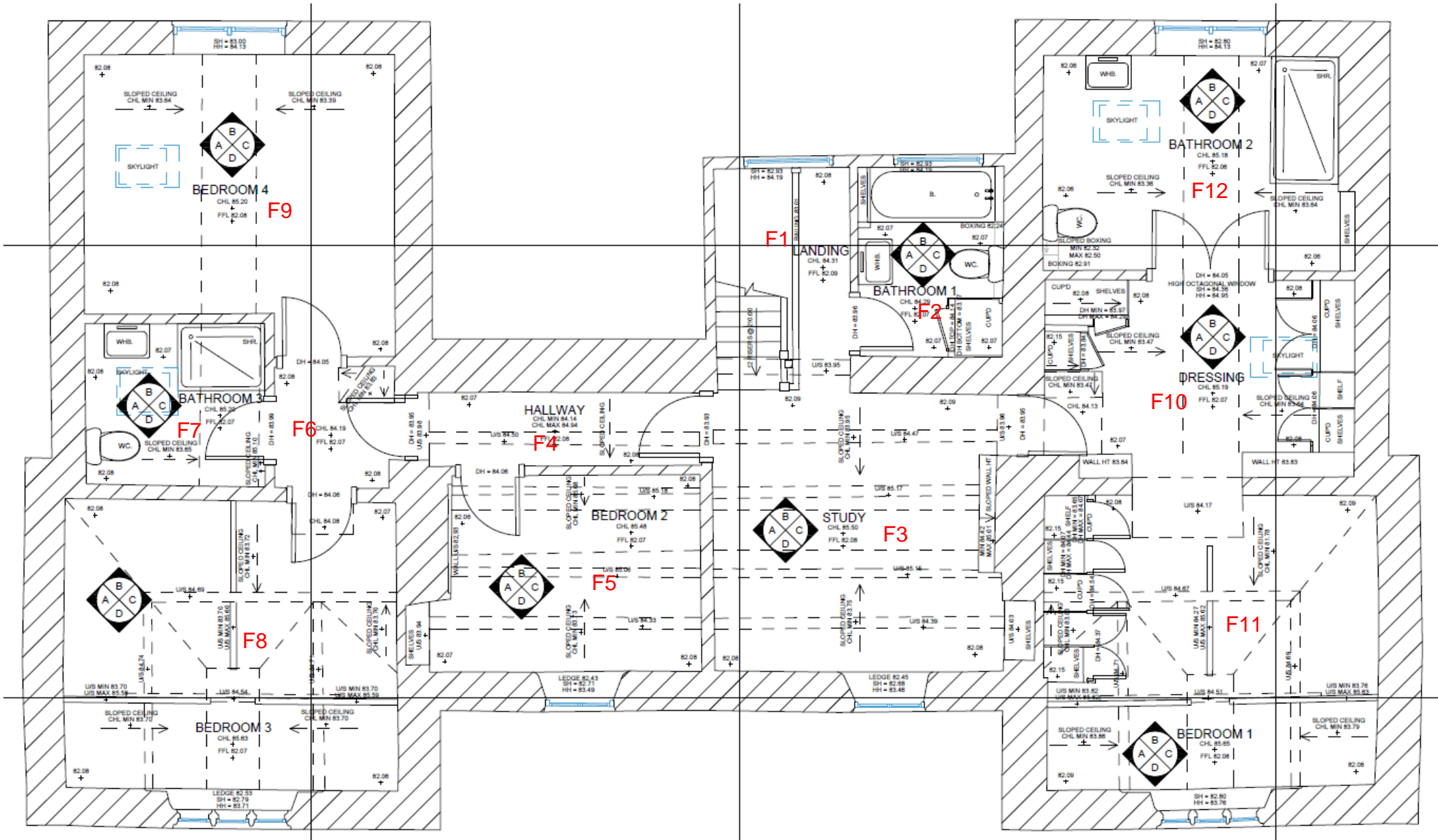
- 4.1 For all the reasons set out in this report, informed by the Statement of Significance, it is my considered opinion that the application proposals will preserve the significance and 'special interest' of the listed farmhouse.
- 4.2 Most of the works involve works of repair and remediation of past poor-quality repair (in terms of the external masonry and internal plastering) and many do not strictly require listed building consent. However, the full programme of proposed works is presented here in the interests of demonstrating a thorough approach and the desire to involve local authority officers in discussions about the listed building from the outset.
- 4.3 It is therefore my professional view that the application proposals comply with both local and national policies on the conservation of the historic environment, including the advice contained in the NPPF and accompanying PPG and, most importantly of all, meet the statutory requirements set by Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Appendix 1:

Annotated floor plans



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR