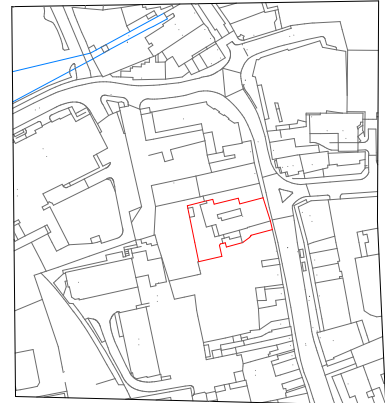


DESIGN +
ACCESS
STATEMENT

Stone Court House

28 Lower Stone St
Maidstone
ME15 6LX

Application for change of use of a Grade II* Listed Property to a hotel with restaurant and wedding venue.



Rev. A
December 2023

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Design & Access statement is prepared to support the Planning Application for Change of Use of Stone Court House , a Grade II* Listed Property located in the town centre of Maidstone.

The property has had a mixed history over the past 150 years ; In the late nineteenth century, it was adapted to form the Judges Lodgings. When that use ceased the County Council used the premises for offices, but they vacated the building around the turn of the last century after which it was in use as a hotel with restaurant, and has since been vacant from the mid 2010's.

The property then became a hotel and fine dining restaurant in 2003, during which period it was also used as a wedding venue between 2003 and 2010. However, after a while that did not prove to be a viable proposition and the building went through a difficult time including more vacant periods until the applicant purchased it in 2019 and substantially refurbished the property to a high standard.

The building currently contains one 3 bedroomed apartment in which the applicant lives with their family, and 7 further apartments which are used as boutique holiday accommodation, attracting visitors to Maidstone from all over the UK and Europe.

The owners have recently obtained a wedding licence and wish to diversify the business to use parts of the property for weddings and other small events, to complement the existing holiday accommodation. A recent pre-application enquiry was lodged for the proposed change of use of part of the applicant's private residence to a Wedding Venue. (planning ref. 23/501576), which received supportive feedback from the Planning Officer and Conservation Officer.

The applicant's ideas for the property have since evolved, and they are now planning to move out of the house, converting the entirety of the property including their existing private residence to a hotel with restaurant and bar, and to hold weddings and civil ceremonies.

2.0 PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE

It is intended to return the property to its former use as a hotel with restaurant, including a pub and wedding venue, which makes the building well suited to welcome outside visitors. The work involved therefore requires limited physical changes to the existing building fabric, and all work is reversible as far as possible.

The proposed new uses of the building are:

1. A new restaurant at the front of the property including outdoor dining to the enclosed courtyard.
2. Existing kitchen converted to a commercial kitchen to serve the restaurant, bar and wedding events.
3. The existing private art studio and cellar will be converted into a pub.
4. The cellar will be renovated to accommodate small-scale brewery equipment and lounge spaces for guests,
5. The existing small lounge used by holiday let guests will be converted to new shared WC's including a disabled WC
6. The existing side entrance and hall will be upgraded with a new glass floor to display the micro-brewery in the cellar.
7. The existing private living room will be converted to a wedding ceremony room (*as per previous pre-application to Maidstone Council 23/501576/PAMEET*)
8. Temporary marquees to rear courtyard for weddings (*as per previous pre-application to Maidstone Council 23/501576/PAMEET*)
9. Small spa pool, changing room and bar added, including the enclosure of the existing bin store.
10. The number of lettable bedrooms will be increased to 12 x lettable ensuite double bedrooms (existing 7 no holiday lets plus private apartment converted).
11. Repairs and upgrades including signage to street frontage
12. Fire safety upgrades

1. Restaurant

A high-end dining establishment showcasing local and seasonal produce. The restaurant will accommodate 58 diners internally, with an additional 26 seats in the outdoor enclosed courtyard (shared with the pub). A maximum of 100 covers at peak usage in the evenings. Only background ambient music will be played, if at all.

Opening hours:

- Breakfast and brunch from 8am to midday. Open to 28 no. hotel guests plus outside visitors. 60 covers
- Lunch from 12 until 2pm , Afternoon Tea 2 - 4pm , 80 - 100 covers
- Dinner 6 - 11pm, with kitchen closing at 10pm. 80 - 100 covers

2. Commercial Kitchen

The existing private domestic kitchen will be converted to a commercial kitchen, as shown on the architect's plans.

The cooking equipment will utilise coil induction heating instead of gas, to minimise the requirements for ventilation. Ventilation system is taken directly through the wall and out to the courtyard minimises the requirement for internal ductwork.

3. Pub

The existing private room used by the family as an art studio will be converted to a pub/bar with micro-brewery located in the cellar. This room was previously used as a commercial kitchen in the early 2000's when the property was in use as a hotel with a restaurant.

4. Microbrewery

The cellar will be converted to a brewery. This will utilise the existing natural spring water from the well in the cellar of the property (previously tested in Germany by Ivario Lab).

Small fermentation equipment will be installed :

<https://www.polsinelli.it/en/easy-100-conical-beer-system-with-conical-trunk-fermenter-60%C2%B0-P2885.htm>

The relevant licences will be obtained for these activities.

Opening hours:

- 7 days per week, 12 midday until 11pm with last orders at 10.30pm. All visitors to vacate the property by 11.20pm.

5. New shared bathrooms to ground floor

The existing small lounge used by holiday let guests will be converted to a shared WC's including accessible WC. This will tie into existing waste drainage already in place from the historic use of the building.

The existing laundry room will be sub-divided to create an additional bathroom. (Note- This allows the previously proposed temporary WC's to be omitted from the application.)

6. Upgrades to existing south entrance from side passage

The existing entrance and hall will be upgraded, with a new ramp to provide for wheelchair access to the pub and restaurant, and a new glass floor to view the brewery in the cellar.

7. Wedding Ceremony room

[As included in the previous pre-planning application 23/501576/PAMEET]

The existing private living room will be converted to a ceremony room to cater for 75 guests. This will only involve the re-arrangement of furniture, no physical alterations to the fabric of the building are required. After the ceremony, live and recorded music will be performed in the ceremony room.

8. Rear courtyard - Marquees

[As included in the previous pre-planning application 23/501576/PAMEET]

At the rear of the property two marquees will be installed, mounted onto a timber deck, catering for a maximum of 80-100 guests. These are 6m wide x 10m long x 2.6m high (eaves) and constructed from an aluminium frame enclosed with PVC panels. They will be secured down onto a plywood deck as detailed on the drawings. No fixings will be required into the existing paving. For lighting, electrical cabling will be required from the building's existing consumer unit. This will be a temporary removable connection. The marquees will be used for a sit-down meal for guests after the ceremony.

There will be small scale boutique weddings and events, for up to 80-100 guests. The intention is to hold one wedding per week through the season, with a possible additional two events per week during the peak months, potentially for schools events and children's parties. The property has a 24 hour Alcohol and live music licence, but the wedding receptions are typically planned to finish at 11.30pm.

9. Rear courtyard - Pool, bar and changing

A small spa pool mounted into an above-ground timber deck, including a small bar and changing room will also be installed in the rear courtyard. The existing open bin area will be enclosed with a permanent timber-framed structure with slate roof, as shown on the drawings.

https://www.trade-point.co.uk/departments/canadian-spa-company-swim-spa-7-seats/5056374214807_TP.prd

The spa will hold a maximum of 7 people at any one time, plus an additional maximum of 5 people at the bar. The spa will have low level ambient music played from the speakers within the spa.

The spa unit includes it's own water heater, pump and filtration system.

10. Hotel

The number of lettable bedrooms will be increased from the 7 existing holiday lets, to 12 no. lettable ensuite bedrooms. The property already has 7 no holiday lets plus with a private apartment where the owner lives with their family. The family apartment will be converted into 3 lettable double ensuite rooms, and existing 2 bedroom holiday let suite will be subdivided into three separate lettable rooms, with a shared living room. This allows the option of these rooms to be let as a single suite.

The existing circulation including three staircases will be upgraded with 30 minute rated fire doors to protected escape routes to comply with requirements for Means of Escape from Fire.

11. Street facing elevation, entrance gates and side courtyard upgraded

To create a more welcoming entrance and sense of arrival, various upgrades will be made to the front of the property;

- Discreet and elegant signage and flagpoles will be installed on the entrance gates (installed recently in 2019), together with artificial foliage garlands.
- New signage installed next to the front door, for the restaurant
- Lightweight garland will be installed on the street facing elevation, (*as per previous pre-application to Maidstone Council 23/501576/PAMEET*)
- The existing side courtyard will be used as an entrance area for the pub, hotel and rear pool, as well as an area where the wedding hosts can welcome guests. This work will involve placing removable garlands on the entrance gates and side walls, and to the walls and soffit of the arch leading to the rear courtyard. (*as per previous pre-application to Maidstone Council 23/501576/PAMEET*)

12. Fire Safety Upgrades

The applicant has submitted the proposals to Maidstone Building Control and appointed Vemco , a specialist fire engineer to review the existing building and advise on the alterations and upgrades would be required to comply with Building Regulations Approved Document B, Fire Safety. The fire strategy is described in detail in the attached report, and summarised below:

Summary of the architectural alterations required:

- (1) The existing fire alarm system requires upgrading to a Category L2 fire detection and alarm system in accordance with BS 5839-1:2017
- (2) Wheelchair accessible ramps will be added to all final exits as shown on the plans
- (3) The staircases 1 2 and 3 form protected escape routes to allow safe escape from the upper floors. This requires upgrading of the existing doors to 30 minute fire and smoke rating (FD30s) , as highlighted on the plans.
- (4) A new protected lobby to be added between stair 1 and the kitchen.
- (5) To provide a protected means of escape for Bedroom 3 to reach Stair 1, a new fire curtain is required to the first floor landing, as shown on the plans.
- (6) The escape distances have been reviewed. Where these exceed the distances stipulated in Approved Document B, new stud walls and fire doors are required. This is required in bedroom 9 and bedroom 12
- (7) Door FF26 requires widening to 750mm clear width, involving the removal of the modern door casing.

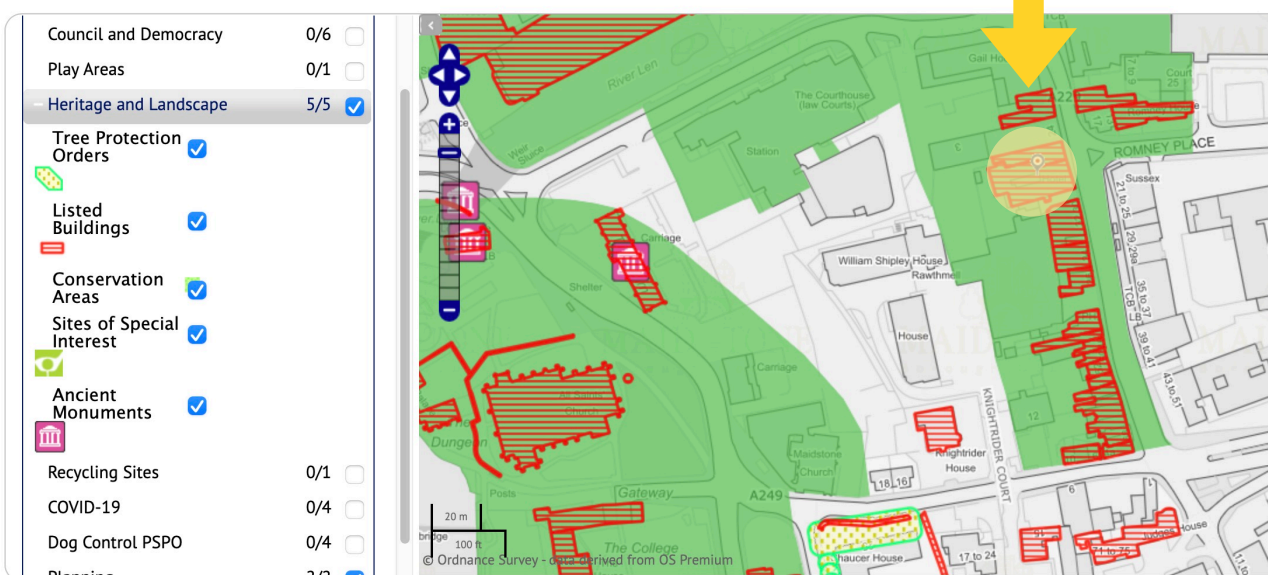
2.0 LOCATION & ACCESS

- (1) The application site is occupied by a Grade II* listed building in the Maidstone Town Centre Conservation Area, in the High Street Ward.
- (2) The application site is located on the west side of Stone Street, which carries a significant quantity of traffic as part of the arterial road network. The site is in the Maidstone urban area and to the south of Maidstone Town Centre. The local area is of mixed character with commercial and residential uses, generally with commercial activity at street level and residential above.
- (3) There are a number of bars and restaurants in the immediate vicinity. The neighbouring property at 30 Lower Stone Street is a Sports Bar / Pub with late night music , and there is a restaurant at no. 26.
- (4) The application building is located at the back edge of the pavement in Stone Street with the front elevation including a gated access to a narrow yard.
- (5) There are a number of listed buildings in the vicinity of the site; and the site also falls within an Area of Archaeological Potential, and within the Maidstone Centre Conservation Area
- (6) The site has a narrow yard on its southern side [with gated access to Lower Stone Street] and a small parking area behind the building, with access via a circuitous route through several third-party holdings to Palace Avenue; this is currently used by the owner.
- (7) Guests do not park on site but use public transport and the public car parking facilities available in the near vicinity. Kent Highways have accepted in considering previous applications that on-site parking is not required. Please refer to the appended Travel plan from Berrys.

Current address **28 Lower Stone Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 6LX** [Find](#)

Site highlighted in yellow

[Hide side panel](#) [Reset](#)



3.0 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Please refer to the separate report and appended historic assessments.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The building is currently in use as a private dwelling house , with 7 tourist accommodation units with shared communal areas , a mix of C3/C1 use.

The Maidstone Borough Local Plan 2017, which covers the period until 2031, makes much of the importance of a vital Maidstone Town Centre with a range of activities which will contribute to the vision for a regenerated and sustainable centre. Policy SP4 sets out policies for the regeneration of the town centre which includes opportunities for residential development. Policies also seek to enhance retail, cultural and leisure attractions which can only benefit from town centre tourist demand and local tourist accommodation. ¹

A summary of the relevant planning history in reverse chronological order is presented below (not including minor developments and discharge of condition submissions)

- (1) 23/501576/PAMEET 23 May 2023, Pre-planning Application advice for change of use of the building to hold weddings and civil ceremonies, including new marquees and temporary WC's. The proposals were deemed acceptable in terms of Planning. The Conservation Officer commented that the proposals would be supported for Listed Building Consent, with clarification of certain details. Planning Officer Kathryn Altieri and Conservation Officer Janice Gooch.
- (2) 23/500388/LAWPRO Lawful Development Certificate (Proposed) for use of part of the site as a wedding venue including the erection of a 120sqm marquee in rear courtyard and siting of portable toilets. Change of use of part of the dwelling to be used to hold civil ceremonies with a wedding licence in place. - This was refused by the Local Authority on the grounds that it would constitute a material change of use, for which no permitted development rights could occur without the need for planning permission.
- (3) 22/505043/FULL : Change of use of existing dwelling house to 1no residential dwelling and 7no tourist accommodation units with shared communal areas (retrospective). - Permitted
- (4) 22/502777/LAWPRO : Lawful Development Certificate for proposed change of use from dwelling to mixed use C3 dwellinghouse and Sui Generis short term holiday let. – Refused
- (5) 21/500751/LBC Listed Building Consent for installation of new windows and doors to existing courtyard openings and minor internal alterations (works partially completed). Granted LBC Dxfs
- (6) 19/505442/LBC - LBC for removal of internal wall, addition of walls in Courtyard and repairs to masonry – Granted LBC

¹ As described in Gasson Planning and Projects Planning statement October 2022 - 22-505043-FULL

- (7) 19/505360/full Change of use from C1 hotel to dwellinghouse Granted Permission.
- (8) 15/500334 - Conversion of vacant hotel to create 14 residential apartment Granted Permission - including 15/500338/LBC - Listed Building Consent
- (9) 01/0315 Change of use of existing offices to hotel, Granted Permission including 01/0316 - LBC to convert building from offices to hotel – Approved (the site was then used as a wedding venue between 2002 and 2010)
- (10) 97/0883 - Change of use from offices to dwelling – Approved
- (11) 75/0373 - Permanent use of premises as offices (KCC application) – No objections

6.0 TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

Please refer to the enclosed Travel Plan prepared by Berrys.

7.0 NOISE & AIR ASSESSMENTS

Please refer to the enclosed report prepared by Hawkins Environmental consultants.

8.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN

The property is to be fully managed as a hotel an restaurant with a full team of staff. Please refer to the appended management plan for further information.

During events involving significant groups of people, it will be essential have a clear management plan in place to ensure the safety of guests, clear means of escape, and minimising noise impacts for surrounding neighbours as guests enter and leave the property. An outline management plan is appended below.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The applicant has already restored this important listed building to a particularly high standard, in close liaison with the Borough Council, and this change of use will enable this important building, which has had a difficult time in the last decade, to remain in active use and contribute to the vibrancy of the immediate local area and the town centre as a whole.

The building will benefit from the combined activities which will contribute to the vitality of the town centre whilst at the same time furthering the economic uses for a building of considerable historic significance and which contributes to the character of this important part of the town centre.

In considering previous proposals for this property the Council has previously accepted the absence of parking on site and the limited open space are compensated for by facilities available in close proximity to the site.