



Heritage Impact Assessment,  
Design and Access Statement

Former Tattoo Parlour, Gamul  
House, No. 56-60 Lower Bridge  
Street, Chester

Andy Smyth

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**Former Tattoo Parlour, Gamul House, No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street**

## Executive Summary

This report is submitted in support of the full planning and listed building consent application for a change of use from Tattoo Parlour (Sui Generis) to public bar (Sui Generis) with added wooden internal partition to form store, front window cleared to full glazed pane and repainted existing wooden signs at No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street, Chester.

The building is within Chester City Conservation Area. It is located on the west side of Lower Bridge Street, in an area that is predominantly retail, commercial and residential. It is in the vicinity of several heritage assets, including scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and other buildings that are considered non-designated heritage assets. Collectively these have group value that contribute to the conservation area's special architectural and historic character and interest.

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been written to identify the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage assets. This is in accordance with national and local planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework on the historic environment and the local plan.

Chester City Conservation Area covers Eastgate Street, Northgate Street, Bridge Street and Watergate Street, which are the four original streets built inside Roman Chester. Bridgegate dates from medieval times. The character of the area is defined by the rich architecture of built environment, built along its Roman street pattern. Lower Bridge Street is identified in the Chester Characterisation Study within Bridgegate, which “exhibits a strong character resulting from its surviving medieval street pattern; the variety of townhouses on Lower Bridge Street of various eras; its topography (falling from Bridge Street to the River); and the remarkably consistent planned Victorian neighbourhood in the Albion Street area.”

Gamul House was erected as a late medieval townhouse with an undercroft. It was re-fronted in the 1700's with a classical façade. At the same time the Rows walkway was altered. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century three small shops were added. They project out in the street, with Gamul House accessed externally from steps above the shops on Lower Bridge Street. Gamul House has a primary frontage to Lower Bridge Street. The property in question, the former tattoo parlour, has some



features of interest, including a vaulted brick undercroft, and the frontage to Lower Bridge Street, but most of the features inside are modern and are of no special interest.

No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street has evidential, historic, aesthetic and community significance as a shop, physically attached to Gamul House, with a traditional shopfront with some later additions. It has a strong relationship and context to the wider street within a tight knit grain. It forms part of the street scene in Lower Bridge Street that contributes to group value, views, and vistas; and its historical and aesthetic value, which helps define its sense of place.

The internal proposals will create a minor, subtle difference to the existing plan form to facilitate the proposed development. The external alterations, new hand painted signage and the removal of a modern overlay to a modern window, will improve the frontage and will allow for an active frontage to the street scene. The alterations have been assessed against the building's features and significance, and against features that are typically found on similar properties in Chester city centre. These minor changes will both preserve the special interest of the listed building, and the minor external changes will preserve and enhance the conservation area's special architectural and historic interest. It will not diminish the significance of the listed building or the conservation area, nor will it cause harm. The proposal will put an underused and much altered building back into a viable use, restoring, improving, and maintaining important features of the building, which is a public benefit.

Existing access remains through the front door onto Lower Bridge Street. There are no changes.

As such, it is respectfully requested that the application is supported.

## 1.0 The application site and identified heritage assets.

- 1.1 This heritage impact assessment has been prepared on behalf of Andy Smyth, to accompany a full planning and listed building consent application for a change of use from Tattoo Parlour (Sui Generis) to public bar (Sui Generis) with added wooden internal partition to form store, front window cleared to full glazed pane and repainted existing wooden signs at No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street, Chester. The site is within Chester City Conservation Area. It is located on the west side of Lower Bridge Street. Lower Bridge Street is a key thoroughfare within the city centre in the south quarter of the walled city.
- 1.2 The purpose of the assessment is to identify the significance of the heritage assets affected, and to consider and describe the effects of the proposals to them. This includes direct and indirect impacts up the building and its setting. This includes views from key landmark buildings within Chester City conservation area, and how the proposals will preserve and enhance the special architectural interest of the conservation area. It identifies mitigating measures, where necessary, to address this impact.
- 1.3 The designated heritage assets that are relevant in considering the proposed development are identified below:
- Directly impacting:
- Conservation Area: Chester City, designated in 1969, with various amendments to its boundary between then and 1989.
  - Listed Building: No. 56-60 Lower Bridge Street, listed as Gamul House – the application site (Grade II\*), listed 1955 and amended 1998.
- Indirectly impacting: -
- The setting on specific buildings close to the application site.
- 1.4 The building is in the Chester & Boughton Area of Archaeological Importance and within Archaeological Character Zone: 19: Lower Bridge Street in the Chester Archaeological Plan (2014). There will be no impact on archaeology but will be subject to further comment from the Council's Development Management Archaeologist.

## 2.0 Relevant Conservation Planning Policy and Guidance

- 2.1 Under Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 local authorities must give special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Section 72 of the same Act states, in the exercising of planning functions in conservation areas special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area, when assessing planning applications.
- 2.2 National guidance is within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Policies 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Of relevance is policies on Proposals Affecting Heritage Assets, which states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.” In Considering Potential Impacts the NPPF states that “193. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation ... irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 194. states that “Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 196. advocates that “Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.” Paragraph 206 of the NPPF states that “Local Planning Authorities should look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset should be treated favourably.”
- 2.3 In the Bramshill case in the Court of Appeal, Lord Justice Lindblom stated “what amounts to "substantial harm" or "less than substantial harm" in a particular case will always depend on the circumstances. Whether there will be such "harm", and, if so, whether it will be "substantial", are matters of fact and planning judgment.” This is balanced against the public benefits generated by the proposals.

- 2.4 Relevant local plan policies are in the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan: Part 1: ENV5 Historic Environment, and ENV6 High quality design and sustainable construction; and Part 2: CH 5 - Chester conservation areas, CH 6 - Chester key views, landmarks and gateways and historic skyline, DM 3 - Design, character and visual amenity, DM 14 – City and Town Centres; DM 46 - Development in conservation areas and DM 47 – Listed buildings. These policies reflect national planning policy in the preservation and enhancement of the building environment. In line with Local Plan (Part One) policies STRAT 3 and ENV 5, development within Chester's conservation areas, as identified on the policies map, will be required to demonstrate a very high quality of design, and contribute positively to the townscape and the city's setting.

### 3.0 The significance of the heritage assets

3.1 **Assessing significance** is embedded in national planning policy. Heritage values that contribute to a greater understanding of significance are identified by Historic England in 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (April 2008)' as being: -

- Evidential
- Historical
- Aesthetic
- Communal

3.2 There are six commonly accepted levels of significance. These are as follows: -

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| • Outstanding        | Highest level of importance, SAMs, WHS, Grade I / II* listed buildings, Historic Parks & Gardens |
| • High (significant) | Grade II listed buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens and conservation areas                     |
| • Medium (moderate)  | Locally listed buildings, and those buildings that contribute to a listed building's setting     |
| • Low (limited)      | Limited heritage value   |
| • Neutral            | Neither positive nor negative features   |
| • No significance    | Features that detract from the heritage values   |

### 3.3 The significance of Chester City Conservation Area – Lower Bridge Street

3.3.1 Chester City Conservation Area has a very distinct character created by its ancient history, its high quality and distinctive architecture, the City Walls, amphitheatre, the two-tiered Rows, Cathedral, the topography which influences its key views into and outside of the city and setting on the river Dee.

3.3.2 The conservation area has been assessed in the Chester Characterisation Study. Its overall character has been subcategorised into several character areas and summarised as follows:

- Critical: of utmost importance, this sub-area plays a crucial role in the character of the conservation area overall.
- Positive: the sub-area contributes positively and is important to the character of the Character Area.
- Neutral: the sub-area either has no overall or both positive or negative impacts on character; and is neutral in balance.
- Negative: the sub-area detracts from the character of this Character Area.

(Chester Characterisation Study 2011: Executive Summary)

3.3.3 The site is within Area B1. Lower Bridge Street. The Chester Characterisation Study defines the boundary as the area that is “the spine of this Character Area, from the south of the Grosvenor Street frontage to Bridgegate.” The character area is described as thus: - “a key historic City Centre Street with many fine Georgian buildings in good condition.” It is identified as **critical** to the character of the sub area.

3.3.4 Lower Bridge Street is in the south eastern Roman quadrant within the city walls. It is a key thoroughfare, dating from the Roman times, and used through medieval times. It formed the historic gateway to North Wales into the city centre over the Old Dee Bridge, which was built in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

- 3.3.5 With the exception of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Church of St. Olaf, Ye Old Edgar, The Bear and Billet, Gamul House and The Falcon Inn, many of the buildings in Lower Bridge Street are reflective of a period of rebuilding in this part of the city centre that generally date from between the late 1600's to the 20th century. Many are built on the footprint of earlier structures, whilst others are new buildings, such as Oddfellow Hall in 1676, the first to be built in the neoclassical style in Chester or have medieval and later features concealed within a later façade, such as No. 9 and 9A and No's 13-15 Lower Bridge Street. The buildings on Lower Bridge Street tend to be mostly used for commercial and retail use at ground floor level and residential or offices above.
- 3.3.6 Some buildings on Lower Bridge Street were listed in 1955, with more listed in 1971/2, and in 1998 during a resurvey of the area. Gamul House is one of the early listings. It contains the only medieval, stone built, great open hall to survive in Chester and as such it is highly significant. Whilst the shops at street level are important, it is unlikely that they would be listed without their association to Gamul House. Nonetheless, the impact of proposed changes are of primary importance on Gamul House, and its setting, and its conservation area context.

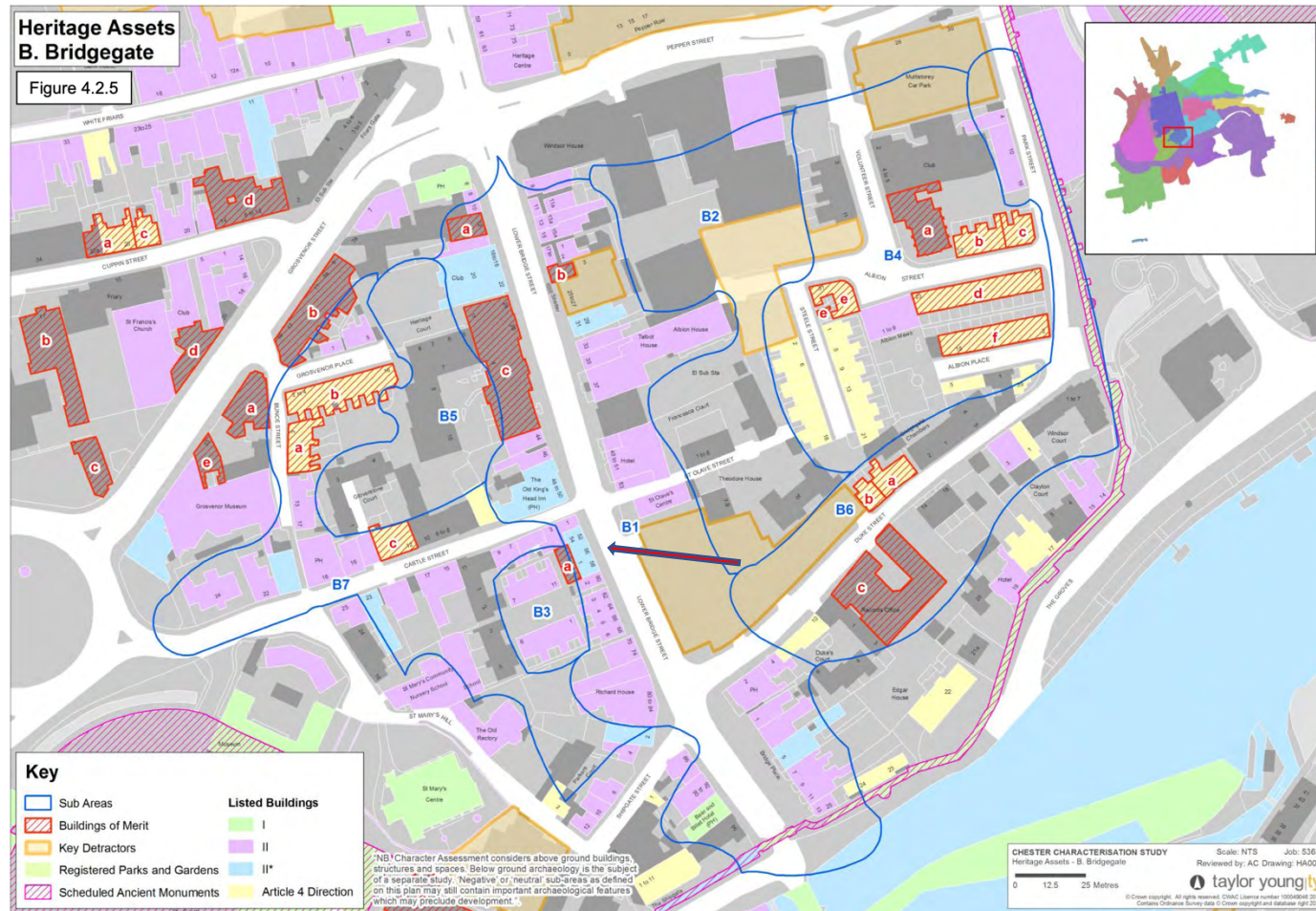



Fig 1: Heritage assets in Bridgegate from the Chester Characterisation Study 2011 (red arrow is application site)



### 3.4 Heritage values - Chester City Conservation Area – Bridgegate

<p><b>Evidential Value – High</b></p>	<p>The area has a history of use that has gradually evolved over time, as evidenced in archival and archaeological records. This includes historic use, including the shape and boundaries, which are well preserved as indicated by historic mapping sources and reports.</p> <p>There is national archaeological significance as the existing street pattern forms part of a medieval street pattern.</p>	<p>Overall significance <b>High</b></p> 
<p><b>Historical Value – High</b></p>	<p>Chester is unique with its Roman street pattern and amphitheatre, the City Walls and later historic settlement pattern, landform, landscape, topography and architecture contributing strongly to its sense of place. The conservation area retains many authentic structures that contribute to its wider setting. The evolution of the city is demonstrated in its streets and architecture. The Cross area is a key historic node, dating from Roman times.</p> <p>Lower Bridge Street is of medieval origin, with surviving fabric and buildings of character from the medieval, Georgian, and Victorian period and later. Narrow frontages suggest that plots were built on burgage plots, and these have not substantially changed.</p>	
<p><b>Aesthetic Value – High</b></p>	<p>Lower Bridge Street is a busy thoroughfare on a north-east / south-west axis from Bridge Street to the River Dee and is in the city centre within the Walls. It has a diversity of architectural style and is predominantly retail and commercial. Buildings mostly sit directly on the building line at back of pavements, with an almost continuous frontage. The street generally is of high architectural quality, with a tight urban grain, defined by the street, block and plot patterns, and linear form, with many buildings in a Georgian style. It has funnelled stop views along the street of buildings, with views up to St Peter's church at The Cross and Ye Old Edgar and The Bear and Billet to the south. The experience of the view changes because of the topography, staggered rooflines, strong narrow frontages, narrow grain, and architecture character. Its character is generally bustling. It is part of the permeable network of streets and alleys within the city centre. It has a high number of listed buildings.</p>	
<p><b>Communal Value - High</b></p>	<p>The conservation area has regional interest for the wider community in which it serves and national and international significance for its historic and unique buildings.</p>	

### 3.5 Heritage Values – Gamul House (Grade II\*) and No. 56-60 Lower Bridge Street


<p><b>Evidential Value - High</b> <i>This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity.</i></p>	<p>The site has a history of use as town house and shops, as evidenced in archival and map sources. Gamul House has medieval origins with later and clearly defined alterations. The great hall on Rows Level is of very high significance, as is the external appearance of the Hall. The shops at street level, including the application site, have been altered and are of some significance. No. 56-60 Lower Bridge Street has been altered in the 19th and 20th century.</p>	<p>Overall significance <b>High</b></p> 
<p><b>Historical Value – High</b> <i>(Special Historic Interest)</i></p>	<p>Gamul House contain several historic features within the great hall, including a door to the solar, evidence of a screen passage and a 17<sup>th</sup> century sandstone fireplace. The shops at street level were built in 1872 by T. Flutt. The shops are accessed from street level only. The building is listed at Grade II* for its special historic interest and is within the City Centre conservation area.</p>	
<p><b>Aesthetic Value - High</b> <i>(Special Architectural Interest)</i></p>	<p>The building has a classical frontage at Rows level which was probably undertaken c1700. At street level the shops have been subject to varying degrees of change. The shop fronts at street level is contemporary but suits the building because of their proportions and symmetry. Internally the tattoo parlour has few features of interest, apart from the brick vaulted arch.</p> <p>Whilst it forms part of a terrace, this is not uniform, and the surrounding buildings have all been constructed at different times, which adds to the character of the street.</p> <p>The building is listed at Grade II* for its special architectural interest and is within the City Centre conservation area.</p>	
<p><b>Communal Value - high</b></p>	<p>The building was a medieval townhouse and includes The Rows walkway, which is an historic route above street level that has been used for centuries in Chester.</p>	



Fig 2. Left: Lower Bridge Street with Gamul House on the right – by Louise Raynor 1820-60. (Source: Cheshire Image Bank). Left centre: Gamul House 1950 – 1959 (Source: Cheshire Image Bank). Right centre: Gamul House was restored on the 1970's – photograph taken 1975 following restoration (Source: Cheshire Image Bank). Right: The window to be altered was changed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (arrowed red).

#### 4.0 Impact of The Development Proposal on The Heritage Assets

4.1 The proposal includes the follows: -

- Change of use from tattoo parlour to public bar
- Internal partition to form store to rear north of building.
- New glazing / repair of front window to full glazed pane
- Repainted existing wooden signs at No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street, Chester.



**Window to be altered.**

#### 4.2 Assessment of Heritage Impact of the proposed works.

Proposal	Features affected	Heritage values	Significance	Scale of Change	Heritage Impact	Justification
Change of use from tattoo parlour to public bar	Ground floor shop unit No. 56-60 Lower Bridge Street	Evidential Historic Aesthetic Communal	Moderate – shop High Gamul Place	Minor	Positive – no harm. New use for vacant listed building on key thorough fare	The shopfront is traditional in style, but various features have been modernised in the latter part of 20 <sup>th</sup> century. These include doors, windows, fascia's, new door steps, new materials. The change of use will introduce an active new use to the streetscape and will be in keeping with uses along this street and to Gamul House (The Brewery Tap).
New glazing / repair of front window to full glazed pane	As above	None – modern window	Of no significance	Minor	Positive – no harm	Solid panel to be carefully removed or pane of glass replaced if beyond repair. This will create an active window frontage to the street scene.
Repainted existing wooden signs at No 56-60 Lower Bridge Street, Chester.	External north shop front to above	Evidential Historic Aesthetic Communal	Moderate – the three shopfronts collectively make a string contribution to this part of the street.	Minor	Positive – no harm.	The use of painted signage is a traditional technique which will preserve and enhance the character of the building and conservation area. Holes in the fascia made by the applied acrylic letters will be made good and painted to match the fascia. The hanging sign will be repainted with the new signage.
Internal partition to form store to rear north of building.	Internal north shop	Evidential	Internal area has no features of significance	Minor	None	The area in which the partition is located has no features of significance. The proposal is reversable and will cause no harm to the spatial characteristics or the general character of this part of the building's plan form has already been altered.



- 4.3 Historic England's guidance on "I want to Change the Internal Layout" is principally for houses, but relevant in this context. It states that "Changing the internal layout or plan ... can be a major undertaking. As the layout is one of a building's most important characteristics [and] (t)he layout dictates such things as the size and shape of rooms, the positions of staircases, doors, and windows and how rooms connect." It goes on to say that "the layout ... is valuable because it tells the history of how the (building) was used when first built, and how it might have changed over time, because of fashion and as living standards improved." However, it does not specifically state that the plan should not be altered, but "it may be possible to remove internal walls to make larger rooms or to divide a large room to make smaller spaces. But this will very much depend on the importance of the wall or room. In most cases - and usually in listed buildings - you will be expected to keep old walls, or at least enough to show where they were. "
- 4.4 In this case, internal works are to areas that have for the most part, have already been altered. These minor changes do not cause any substantive changes to the legibility of the plan and can be easily removed. The changes are reversible and will not impact adversely on the building's special interest or significance. There are no key features of significance internally that are affected by the proposal.
- 4.5 The other works are all positive. The changes will involve a high degree of investment into the building. The proposals will have a minor positive material impact on the building's architectural interest and the key features of the listed building are still appreciated. It is considered that the changes would not adversely diminish the character of the building.

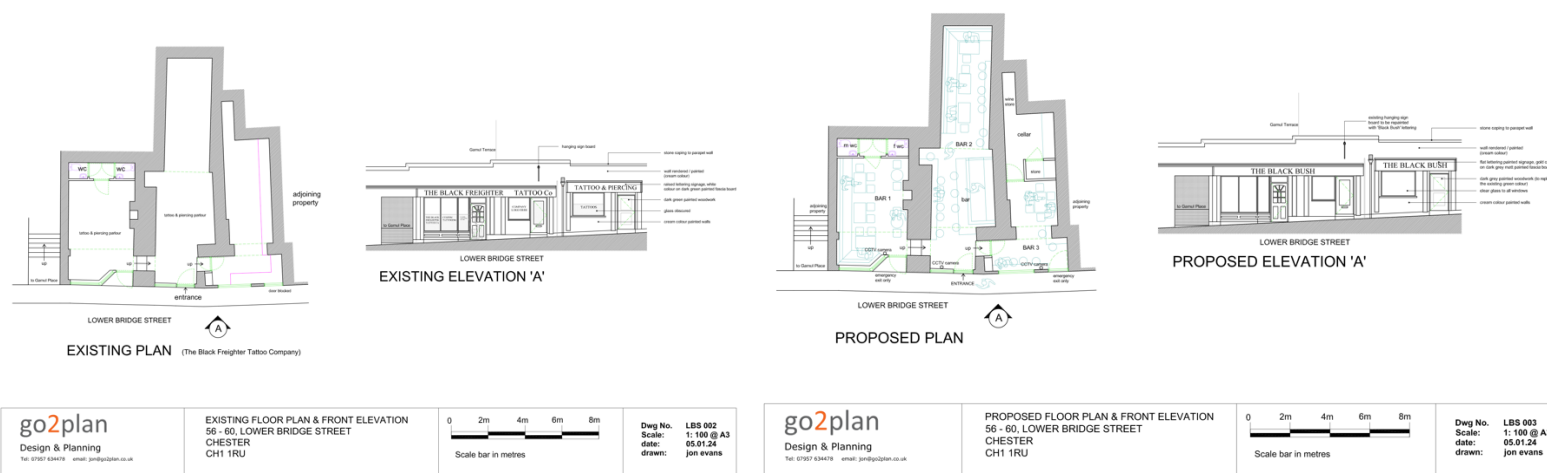


Fig 3. Existing and proposed plans and elevations (Copyright: go2plan)

## 5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The application site is located on Lower Bridge Street. Gamul House, and by association, No 58 – 60 Lower Bridge Street, and the conservation area are of high significance and are designated heritage assets. Great weight has been given to the conservation of these designated heritage assets.
- 5.2 The desirability of preserving the building or its setting has been assessed upon a clear understanding of the baseline heritage significance. This has established the extent of the assessed harm and the heritage value of the assets in question, as well as identifying opportunities where proposals better reveal the assets significance. There has been a proper balancing of harm vs benefits, and it has been established that there is no harm and there is a positive aesthetic and communal beneficial gain.
- 5.3 The proposals are a positive and sensitive intervention to the building. The proposed development would preserve the character and appearance of conservation area, and its special architectural and historic interest. They are in accordance with local plan Policy CH5 – Chester Conservation Areas and DM 46 – Listed Buildings, and in accordance with the legislative requirements in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the requirements of the NPPF.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Bibliography

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