



Design and Access Statement

Wickenden Manor

Chilling Street, East Grinstead

RH19 4JB

July 2026

A-Zero Architects is an award winning RIBA chartered practice based in London.

Founded in 2010, we aim to create projects which are both responsive and responsible. By responsive we mean approaching each design exercise as a collaborative effort, one that demands an intimate understanding of both Client and Brief before the design process can begin. By responsible, we mean designing and procuring our buildings in a way which does not have an adverse impact on the environment.



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1.0 | Introduction

This design and access statement has been prepared to support the planning application for works at Wickenden Manor, Chilling Street, East Grinstead RH19 4JB.

The site currently is used as a religious conference centre and has been owned by Netherhall Educational Association (NEA) since 1964. The site includes the manor and a number of ancillary buildings including the lodge and the stables.

Virtually every aspect of the existing building needs refurbishing, from en-suite facilities for each bedroom to the catering facilities and staff living quarters. The proposal is a retrofit and extension of the manor, lodge and stables and is aimed at providing Wickenden Manor the wherewithal necessary to enable the conference centre to continue in the future and by upgrading and expanding the facilities. The project seeks to equip the conference centre with the systems and infrastructure necessary for self-sufficiency and long-term sustainability—both in energy performance and operational costs—while preserving the integrity and visual harmony of the buildings and their setting.

This application first covers relevant contextual and site analysis, before looking at the access to the site, primary development drivers and the proposed design.

This document has been compiled in accordance with the following;

- East Grinstead Historic Character Assessment Report
- The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029
- High Weald AONB Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development

The application should be read in conjunction with the following documents which have also been submitted to support this planning application:

- Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement -
- Landscape Appraisal
- Landscape master plan / Hard and Soft Landscape -
- Energy & Sustainability Statement
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Drainage Strategy
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) & Bat Survey -
- Structural Engineering Report
- Transport Statement & Travel Plan
- Fire Strategy
- Construction Environmental Management Plan

2.0 | Context

2.1.1 / i
Site plan

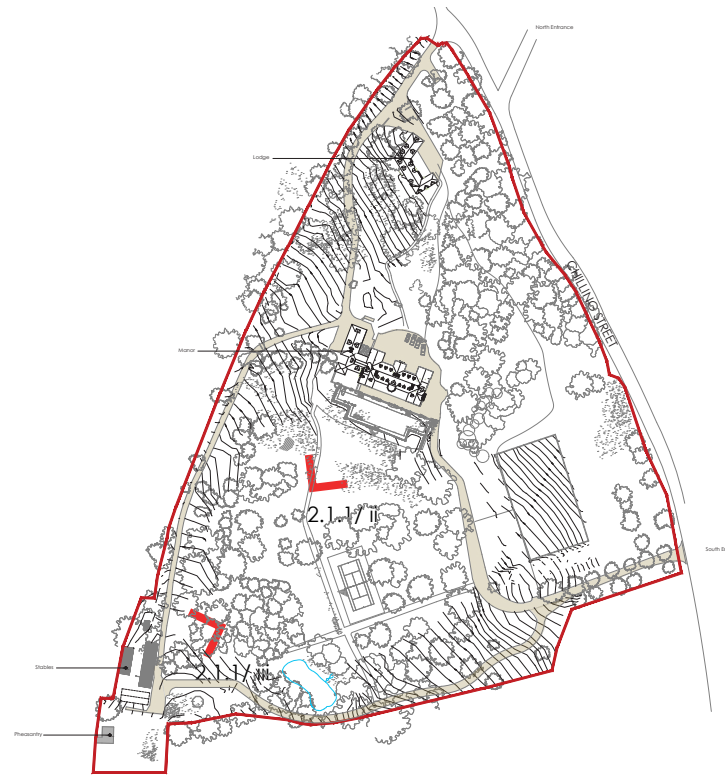
2.1 Site context

2.1.1 Location

Situated in East Grinstead, West Sussex, within the High Weald National Landscape, a designated AONB with the highest woodland cover, Wickenden is one of the 30 manor houses in the area. Trees and woodland are a particularly distinctive feature of the High Weald landscape, covering nearly a third of the AONB – much of it being precious ancient woodland.

The site has two access points from Chilling Street, one to the north and one to the south. A number of ancillary buildings are located on the site - the lodge, located adjacent to the north entrance, and the pheasantry and stables, located to the south of the site. Landscape features include a walled garden, tennis courts and a pond.





2.1.1 / ii
(right)
Aerial view
of site

2.1.1 / iii
(left)
Aerial view
of site

2.1.2 History of Wickenden Manor

Wickenden Manor was built during WWI by Arthur Gibbes, and was home for his family from 1920. The design of the house, responds to the area's earlier historic buildings of similar scale which are predominantly built in sandstone, brick, and clay tiles. In 1945, the house was sold to Lord Astor, grandson of William Randolph Astor. The Astor's made some modifications to the house, and landscape during their time, before relocating to Hever Castle.

Netherhall Educational Association (NEA) acquired the property it in 1964, for use for spiritual retreats and conference, and it has been in operation as such since then.



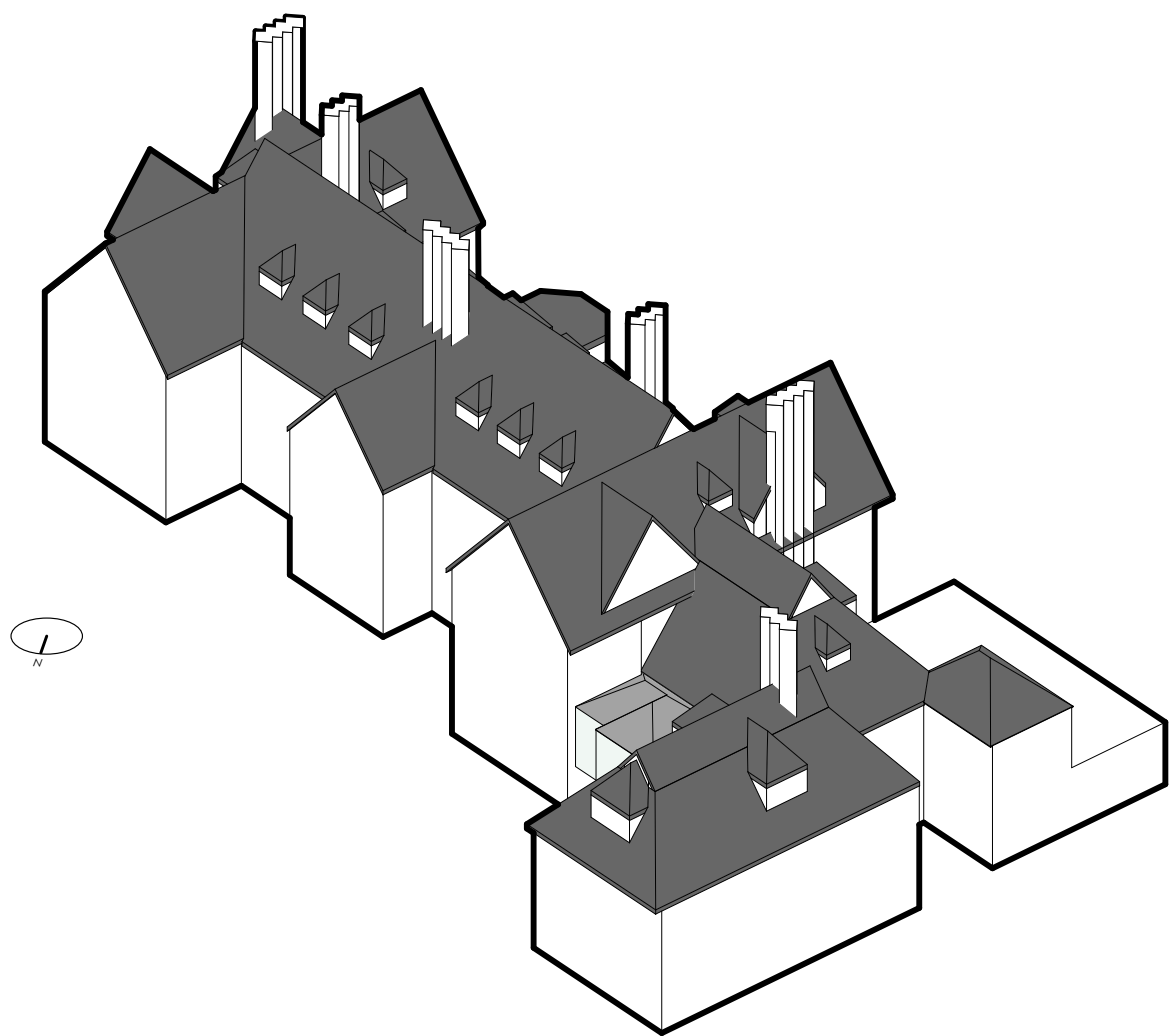
2.1.2 / i
Historical
photo of
Wickenden
Manor
(courtesy of
NEA)



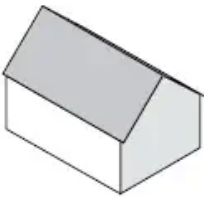
2.1.2 / ii
Historical
photo of
Wickenden
Manor
(courtesy of
NEA)

2.1.3 Existing form & massing

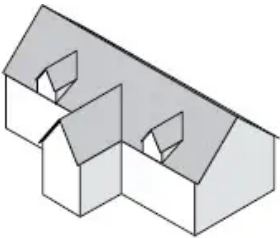
The existing roofscape of the existing Manor is characteristic of Arts and Crafts style. A central pitched roof with stone chimneys arranged symmetrically along its length, has hipped dormers facing both south and north. The north south aligned extend from this to create the profiles north and south elevations. The lower building to the west, has a suppressed gable roof, also with hipped dormers to the north, east and west.



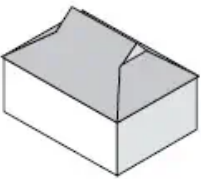
2.1.3 / i Existing manor massing



gable to gable



'T' plan with unequal ridge heights and dormers



suppressed gable or gambrel



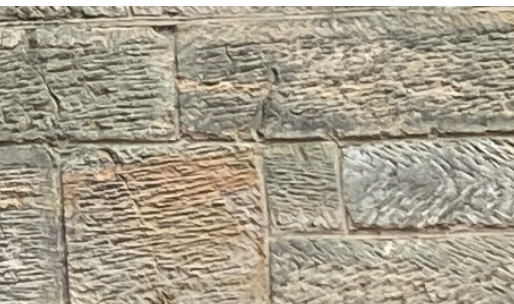
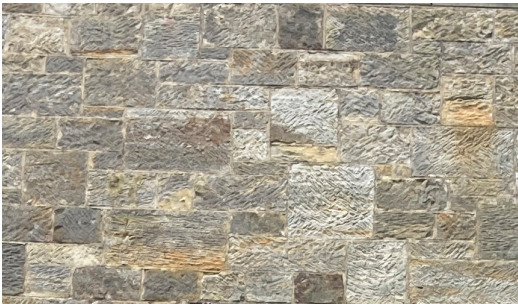
Hipped dormer can be seen throughout the existing Manor:



2.1.4 Existing materials

Wickenden Manor, although built in the early 20th century, materially responded to the area's earlier historic buildings of similar scale. The existing manor is faced with local cut stone, which is also used for detailing around the chimney stacks, window mullions and door lintels. The existing roof is tiled with hand made clay tiles. All rainwater goods are cast iron. The small areas of flat roof on the existing building are asphalted. The existing windows are steel framed within the stone mullions. External doors are timber.

SANDSTONE



CLAY



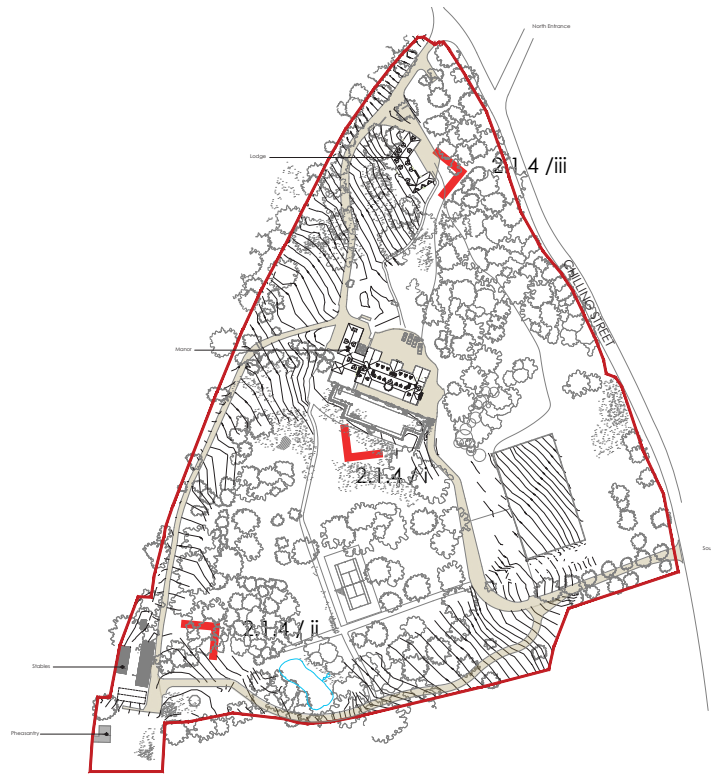
BRICK

Weald red brick/
Horsham stock



STEEL





2.1.4 / i
Manor from
south



2.1.4 / iii
(right)
lodge

2.1.4 / ii
Stables with
pheasantry
to rear
background

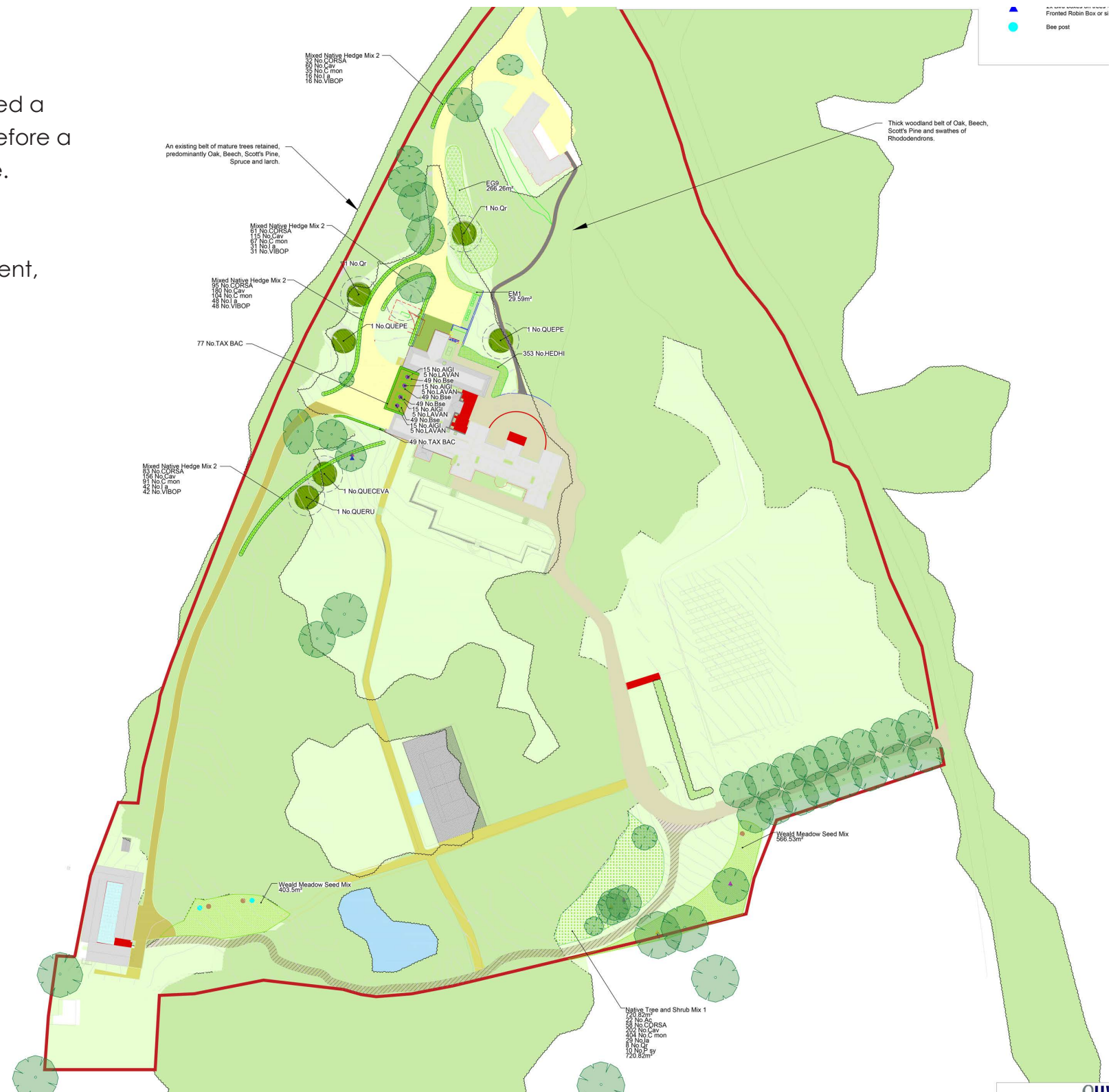
3.0 | Design Proposals

3.1 Landscape

3.1.1 Hard and soft landscaping approach

The reduction in the building footprint of the manor extension, in comparison with the approved application (DM/20/4179) has allowed a substantial reduction in the requirement for hard-standing, and therefore a significantly reduced impact on the landscaping throughout the site.

The impact of the revised layout on the trees is provided in the accompanying Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement, and details of the proposed landscaping are provided in attached Landscape master plan / Hard and Soft Landscape .



3.2 The Manor & extension

3.2.1 Design references

In the absence of any information regarding the original designer of Wickenden Manor, we have been guided by the work of Sir Edwin Lutyens.

- Little Thakeham, West Sussex (1902), in the overall composition of the stone clad façade, the plan layout and the design of the roofs. Perhaps the most decisive inspiration was Lutyen's change from stone to brick for the buildings where he places the ancillary spaces, such as kitchens, staff rooms and other domestic elements, and attaches them to the side of the main building.
- Great Dixter (1910-12) where the composition of hipped and gabled roof forms, using clay tiles on the roof and vertical hung tiles on the wall.

These features became our companion throughout the design process, informing the massing and material approach to the new additions.



3.2.1 / i
Little
Thakeham,
Edwin Lutyens
(1902). Note
the change
from stone to
brick.

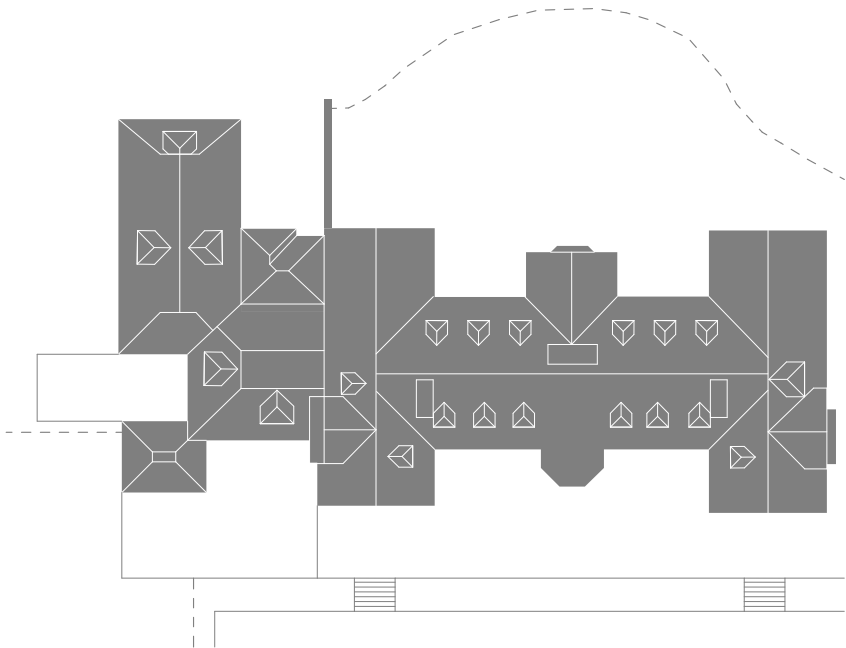


3.2.1 / ii
Great Dixter
(1910-12)
where vertical
hung tiles
have been
applied on
the facade.

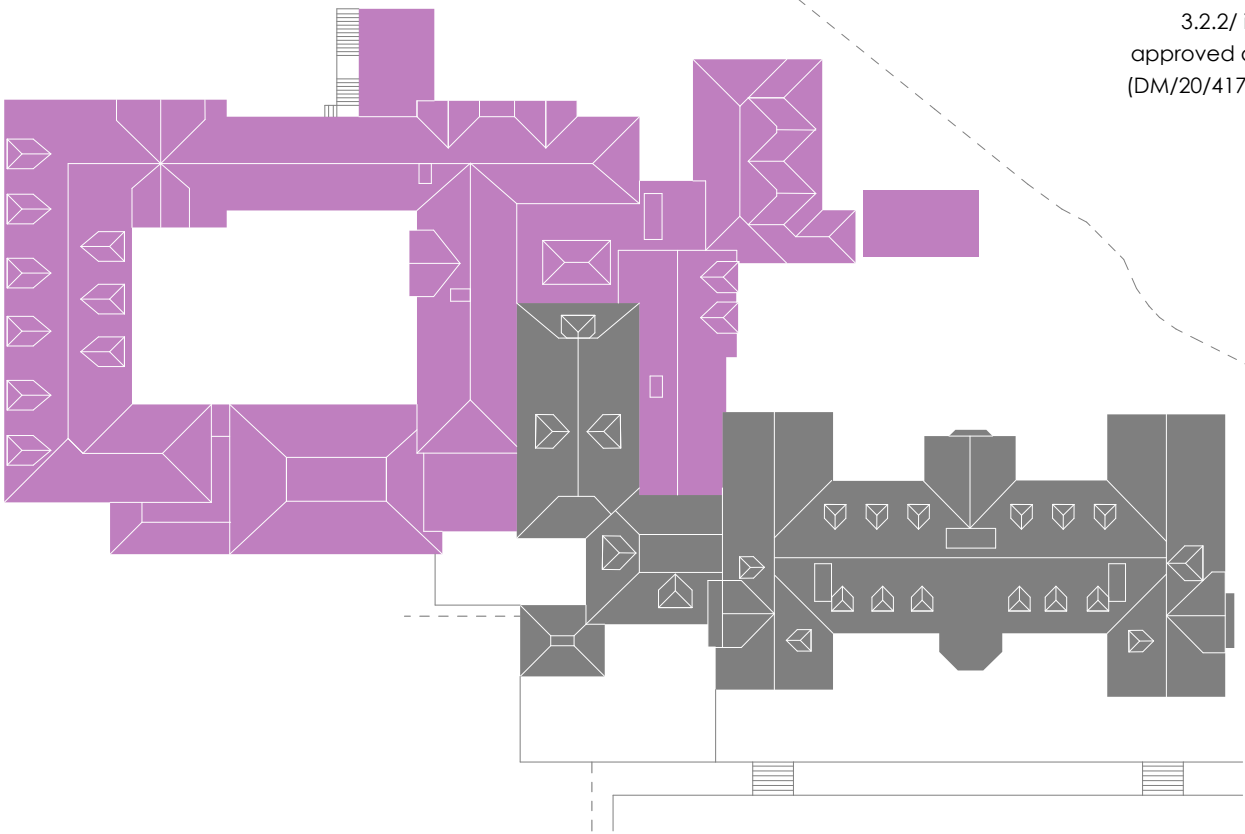
3.2.2 Figure ground

The scale of the proposal has been substantially reduced in scope from the previously approved application(DM/20/4179), in response to a reduced brief. This change has allowed the scale of the scheme to be substantially reduced.

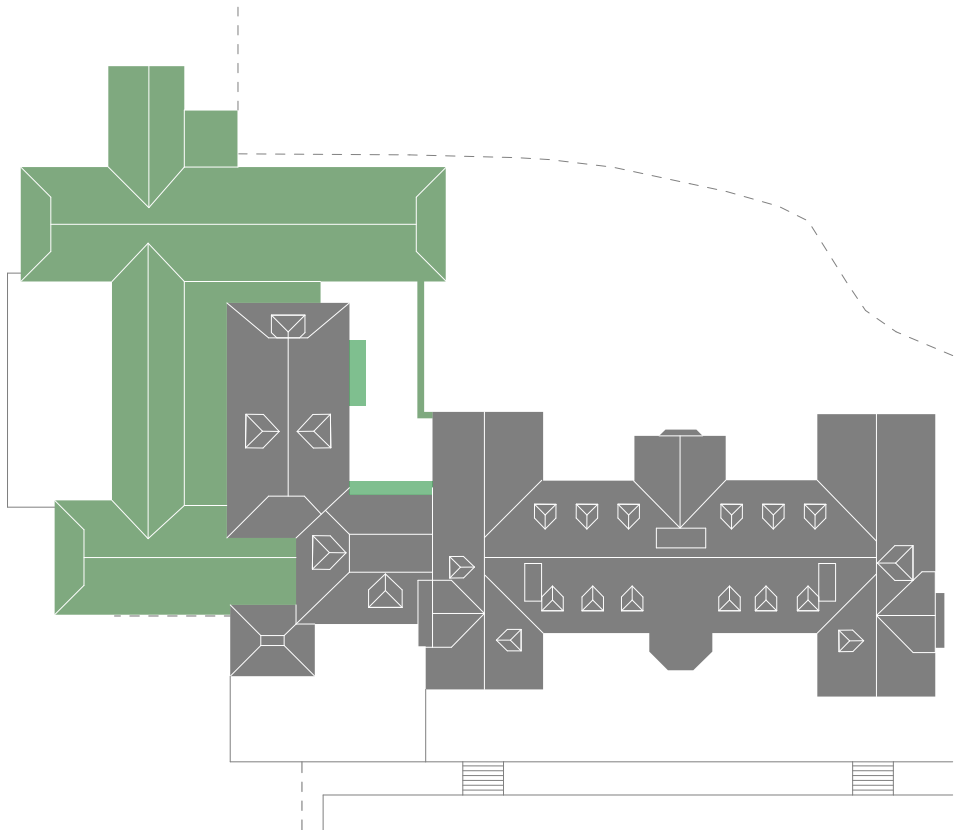
The diagrams below compare the existing footprint of the manor, the previously approved application (DM/20/4179) and the revised proposal. The revised proposal is designed to the west and north of the existing building, ensuring that the experience of guests to the manor is predominantly of the original fabric.



3.2.2/ i Existing manor footprint



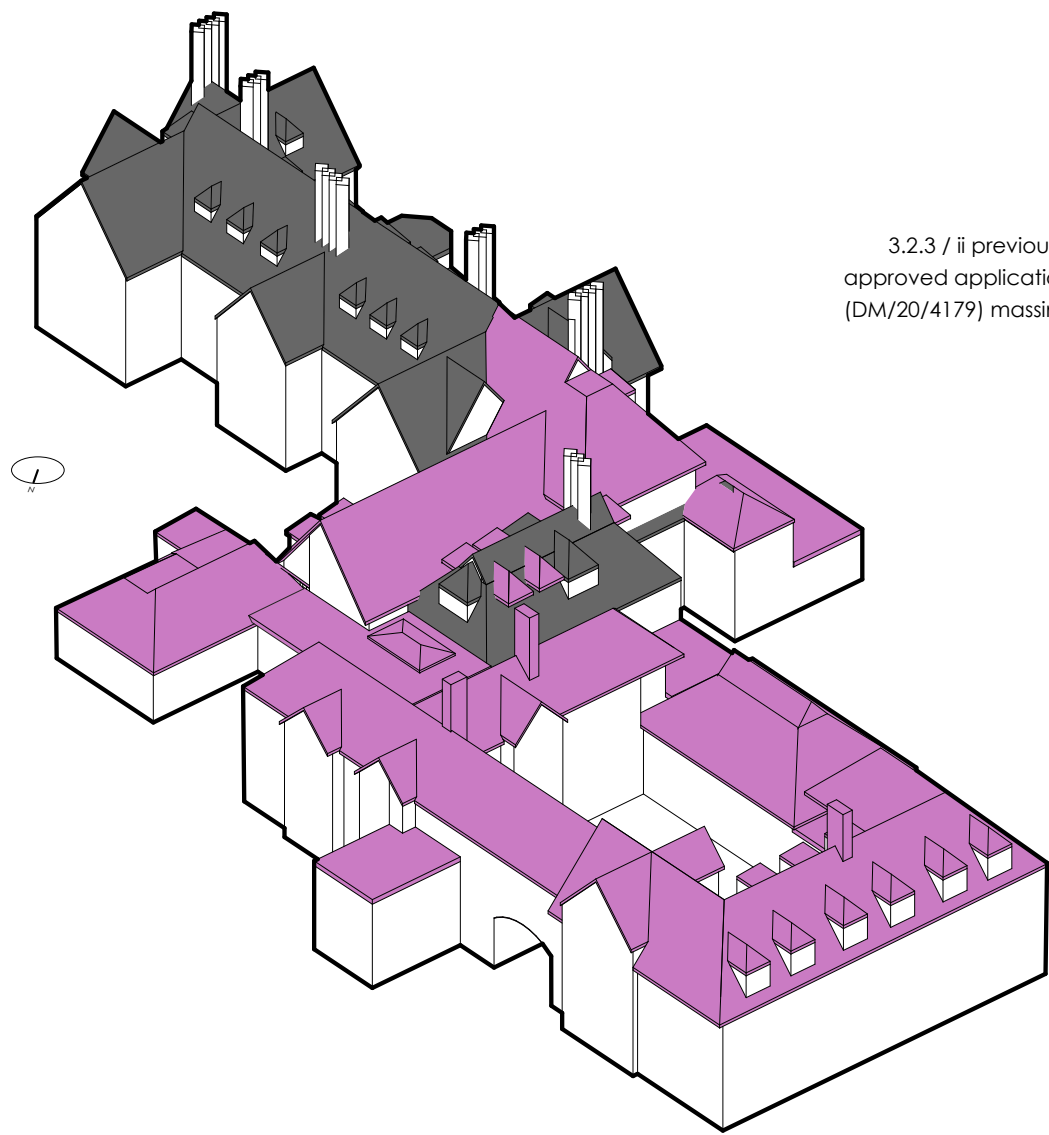
3.2.2/ ii previously approved application (DM/20/4179) footprint



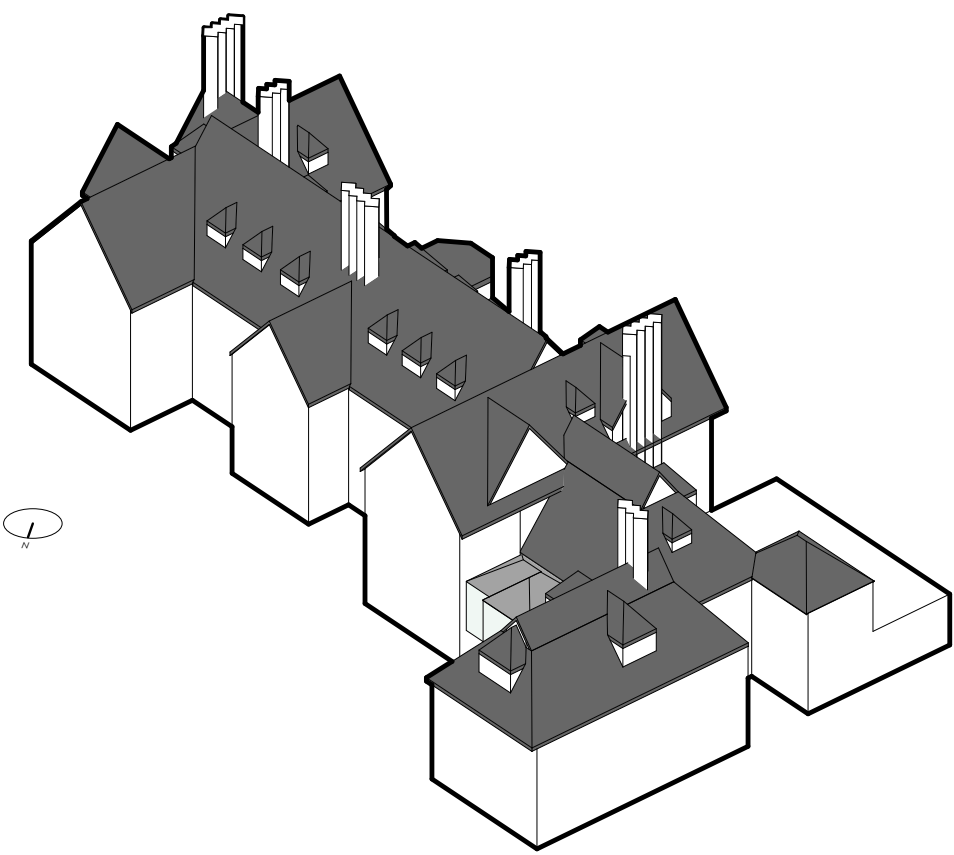
3.2.2 / iii current application footprint

3.2.3 Massing

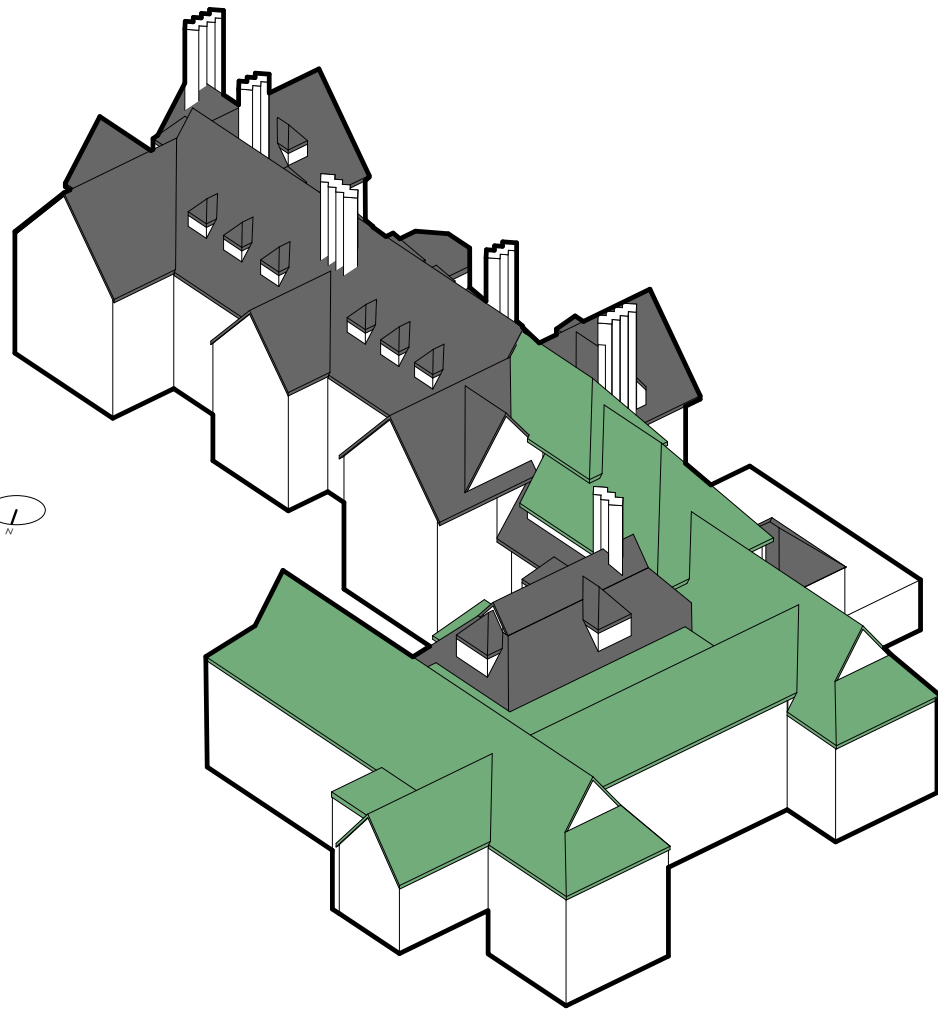
The below diagram compares the massing of the existing manor, the massing of the approved application (DM/20/4179) and the massing of the revised proposal. The new proposal has been designed to ensure that the extension is complementary, but subservient to the existing Manor. To the north, the new extension roofs follow the existing roof, in terms of the ridge height of the western building and repressed gable design. To the south, the new roofs reduce in scale from the ridge of the main manor to the roof over the dining hall.



3.2.3 / ii previously approved application (DM/20/4179) massing



3.2.3/ i Existing manor massing



3.2.3/ iii current application massing

3.2.4 Access / Fire strategy

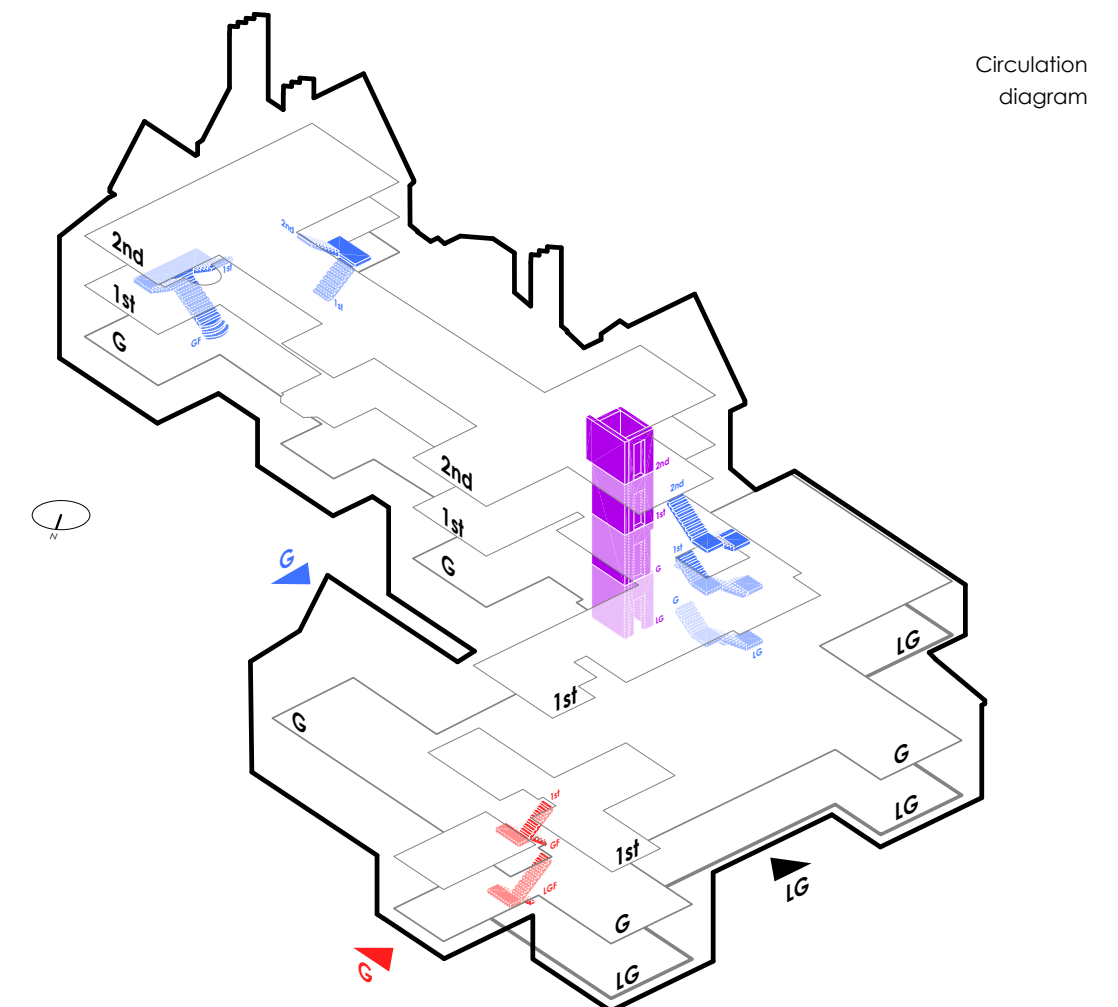
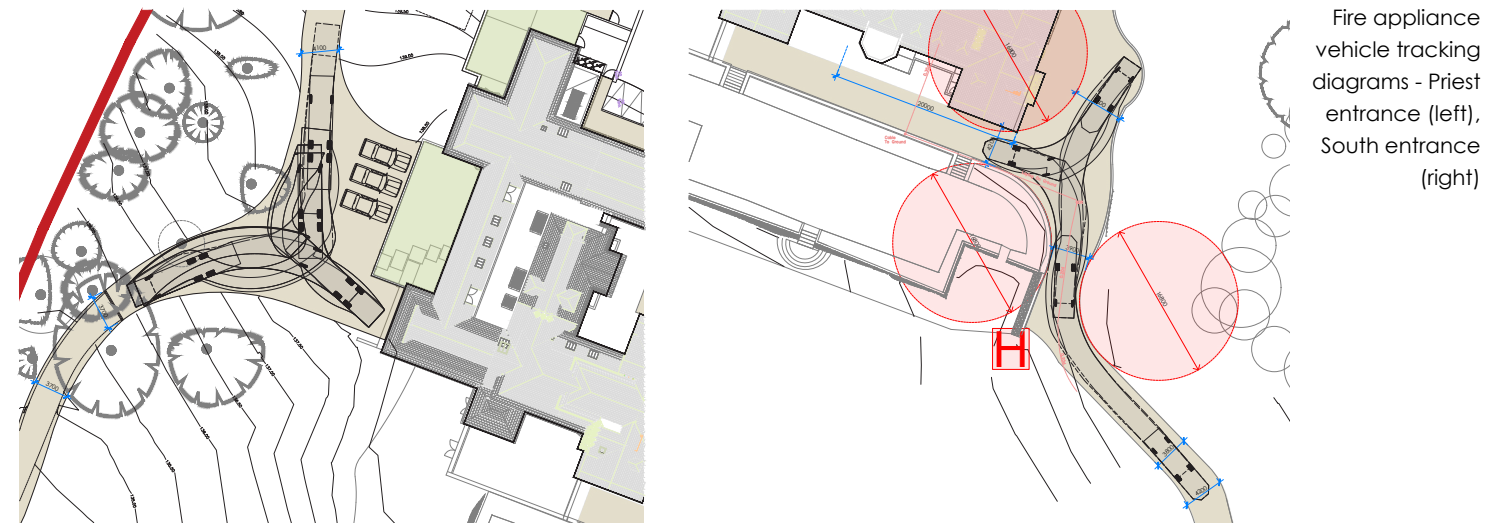
Accessibility in the Manor is limited at present. One of the principle aims of the project is to address this through the provision of a new lift which provides access to all levels of the Manor and the Manor extension. The lift has been accommodated at the western edge of the existing manor, working within the pitch of the existing roof so that there are no unsightly protrusions.

The diagram illustrates the circulation logic of the Manor and extension in which the existing eastern stairs from ground to first floor levels east are retained, and new stairs are added to the west from basement to second floor and to the east from first to second. Within the manor extension, a single new stair connects lower ground to loft level. Collectively, these form part of the fire escape strategy which is described in detail in the accompanying Fire Report.

There are two entrances to the site at present, one to the north which is used by staff and deliveries, and one to the south which is used by guests. This arrangement is retained in the proposal, with modifications to the western access road limited to what is required for vehicular access for fire engines and refuse collection.

The Manor and Manor extension are currently accessed by the guests to the north and by the staff to the west. This separation is retained in the revised proposal for operational reasons, with parking provided for both staff and guests accordingly.

Level access from inside to outside is provided on the east, west and northern sides of the building. The existing stepped access to the terrace to the south is retained. DDA compliant bathrooms are provided at all levels.





3.2.5 Materiality

We aim to honour the existing building while establishing the foundation for a sensitive execution in which detailing will serve as the culmination of this historical dialogue. One of the most decisive inspirations drawn from Lutyens's Little Thakeham—and echoed in several of his country houses—was the principle of locating all ancillary functions within a dedicated extension. In doing so, the historic quality of Wickenden Manor is preserved, while its functional needs are met with greater efficiency. Lutyens's frequent use of brick for such spaces—housing kitchens, staff rooms, and other domestic spaces—attached to the stone main house guided our material choice.

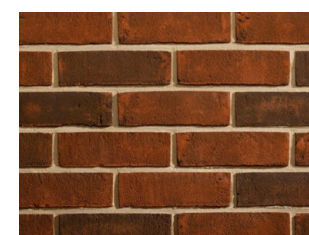
The extension is built in the same brick as the walled garden and stables, ensuring a quiet visual continuity. Bricks will be laid in a flemish bond with lime pointing. Hand made clay tiles, matching the existing roof-tiles are used on both the roofs and west facing façade. The windows, will be steel framed windows to reference the existing, but thermally broken to meet the Building Control Requirements.



Sandstone



Clay roof and hung tiles



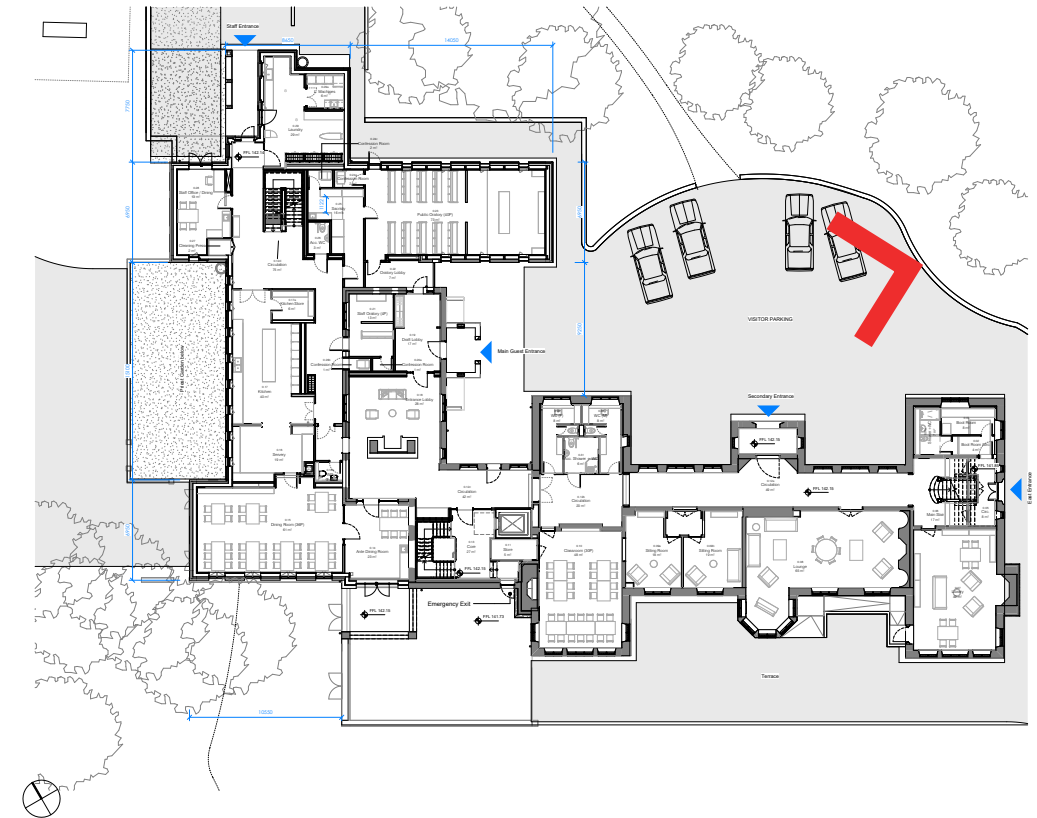
Red bricks



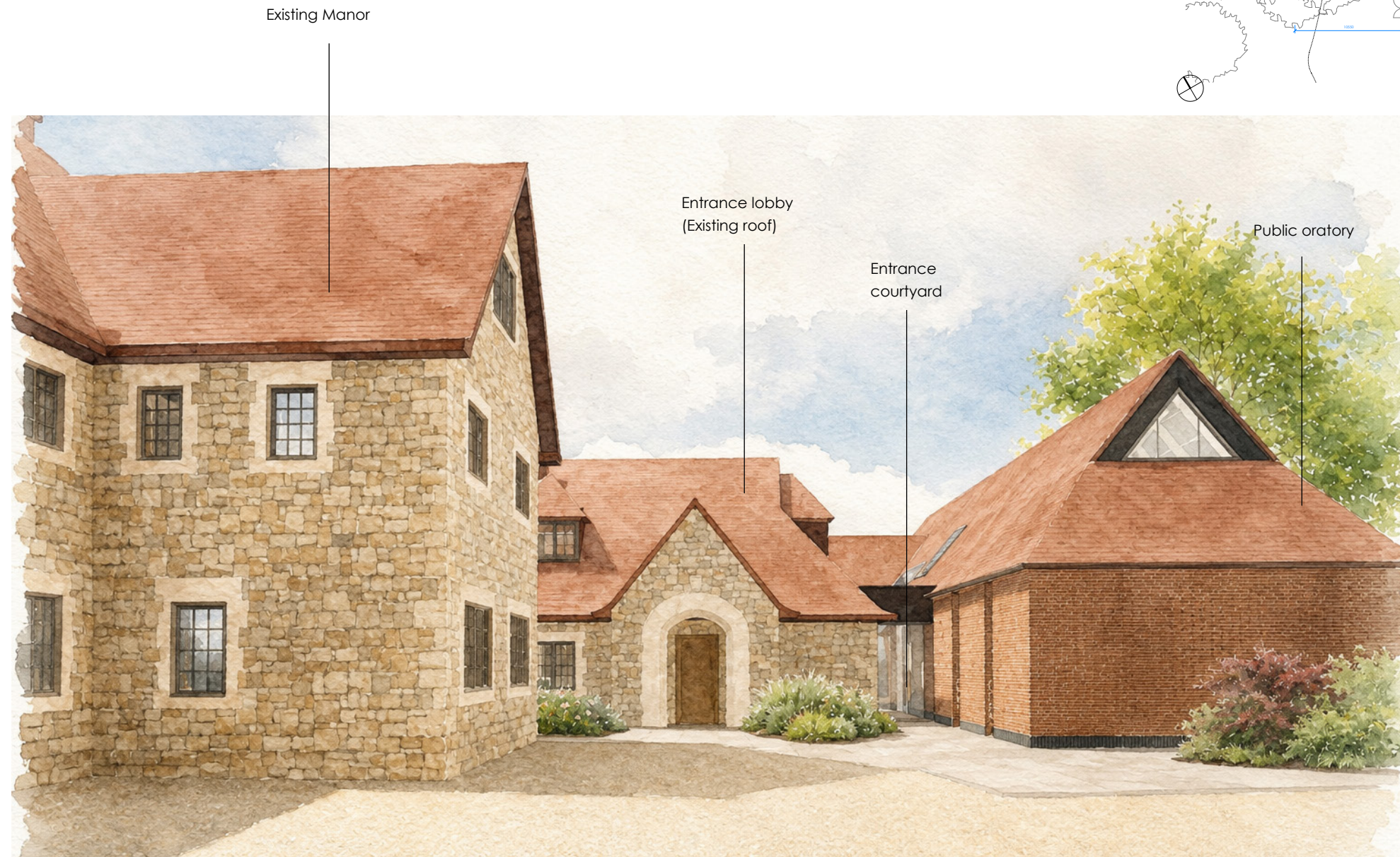
Steel window frame

3.2.6 Materiality

This view illustrates the new guest entrance, approached via the courtyard where the extension connects to the existing Manor. The gabled roof of the new public oratory follows the form and materiality of the existing guest lobby entrance roof, creating a coherent architectural dialogue between old and new elements.



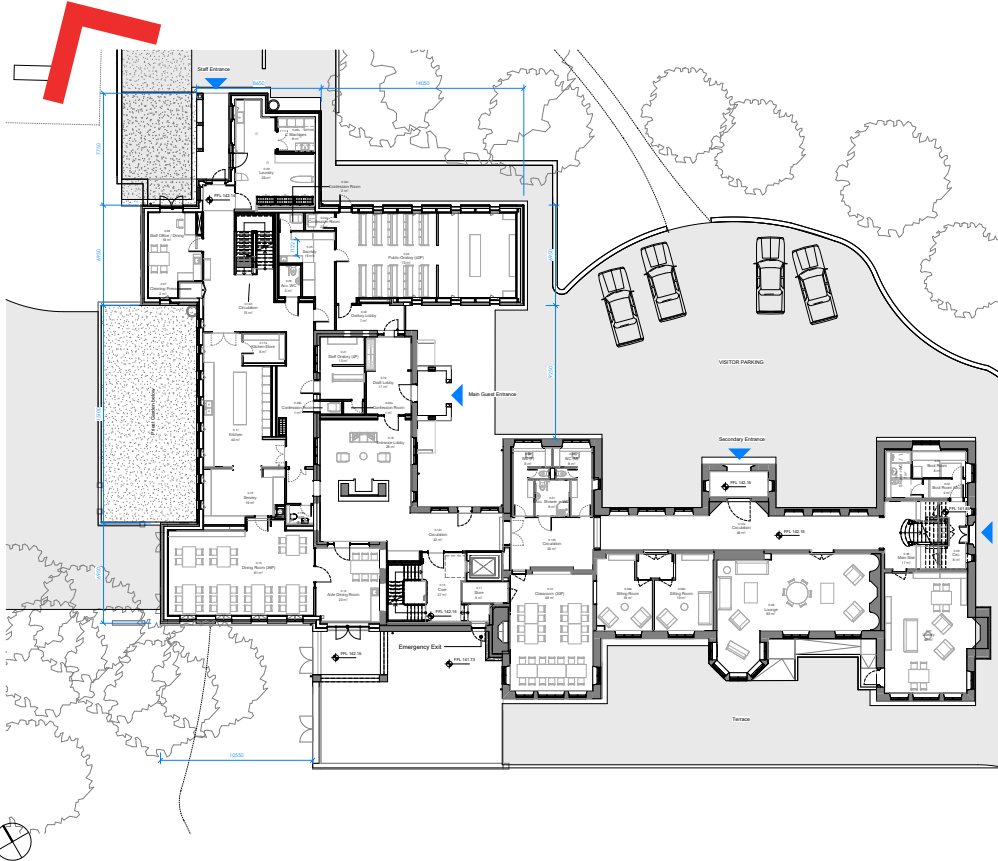
Key Plan



Proposed view from guest entrance toward new oratory

3.2.7 Materiality

This view shows the staff entrance, positioned to remain distinct from both the priests' and guests' entrances. The brickwork, laid in Flemish bond follows the rest of the extension and the clay-tiled roofs are consistent with the architectural language of the Manor.



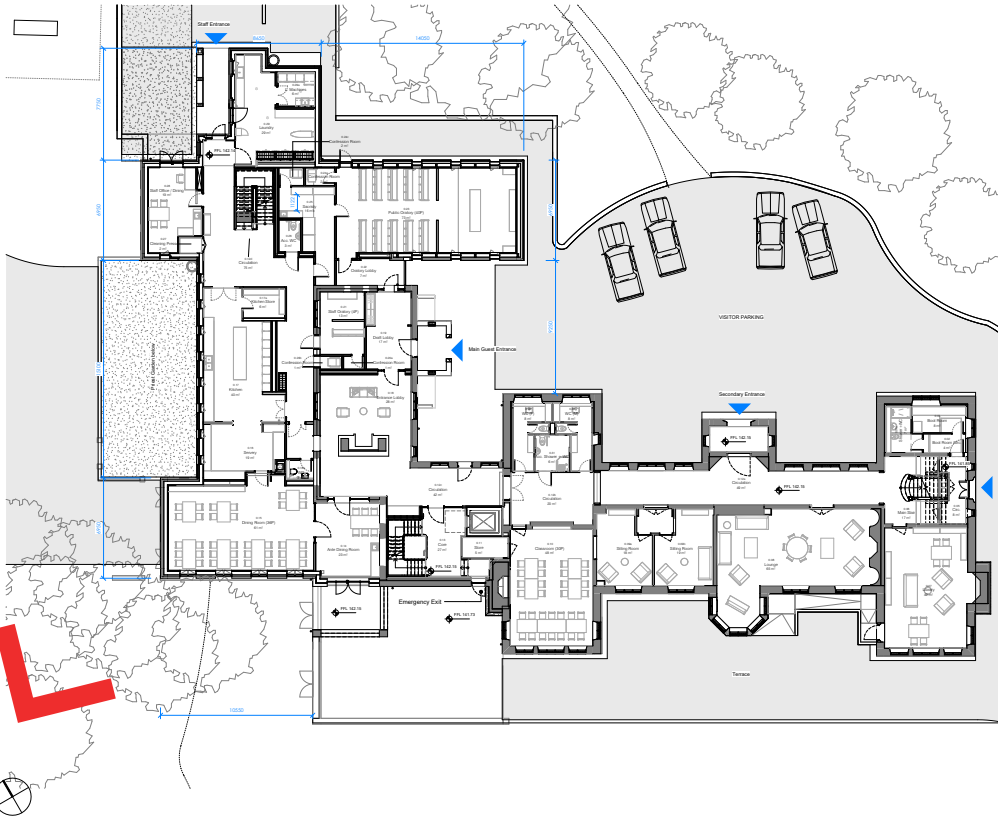
Key Plan



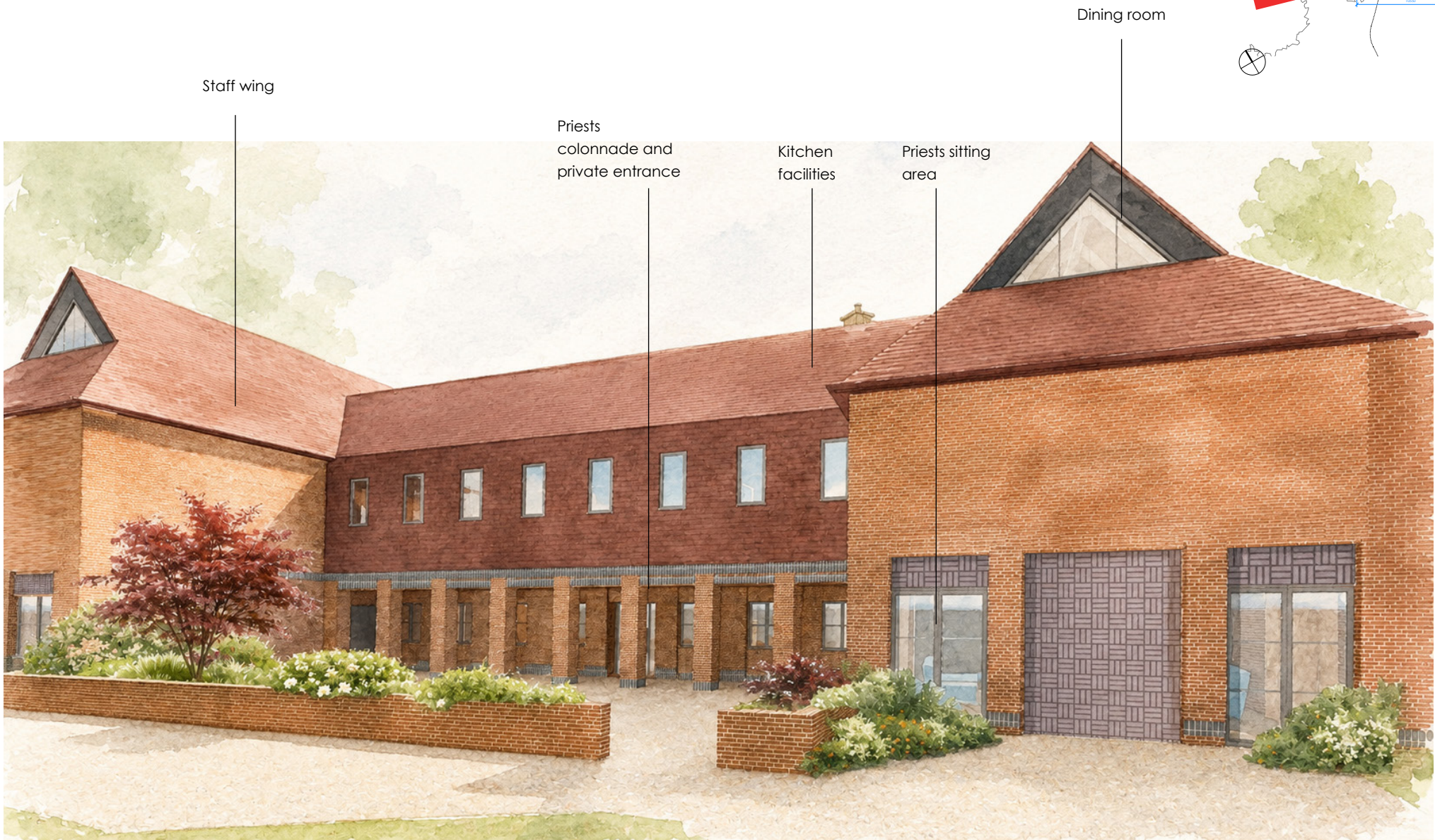
Proposed
view from staff
entrance

3.2.8 Materiality

The priests' entrance features a brick colonnade with sandstone lintels, visually linking the extension to the Manor's primary material palette. This colonnade design is echoed at the guest entrance courtyard, creating a sense of architectural continuity across the different façades of the extension.



Key Plan



Proposed view from priests entrance

3.2.9 Views

The top view depicts the south elevation of the existing Manor. The bottom view presents the same perspective, now showing the extension positioned to the side of the Manor, partially screened by existing trees.



3.2.9 / i
Existing Manor



3.2.9 / ii
Extension
in brick to
the side of
the manor,
hidden by
trees

3.3 The Lodge

3.3.1 Existing

Originally designed to house servants and caretakers, chief gardeners and others, the Lodge was built at the same time as the Manor and other buildings on the site. These two semi-detached cottages have been linked internally from the time of the previous owners. With the proposed project they will retain its subservient relationship with the Manor.

The Lodge will now be offering the number of rooms that will make the conference centre viable economically. The provision of the extra rooms will make it possible to reach the operational breakeven point number of 33 bedrooms without having to squeeze any more rooms in the Manor, which will enable the Manor to retain its charm and scale. The Lodge will be an integral part of the conference centre.



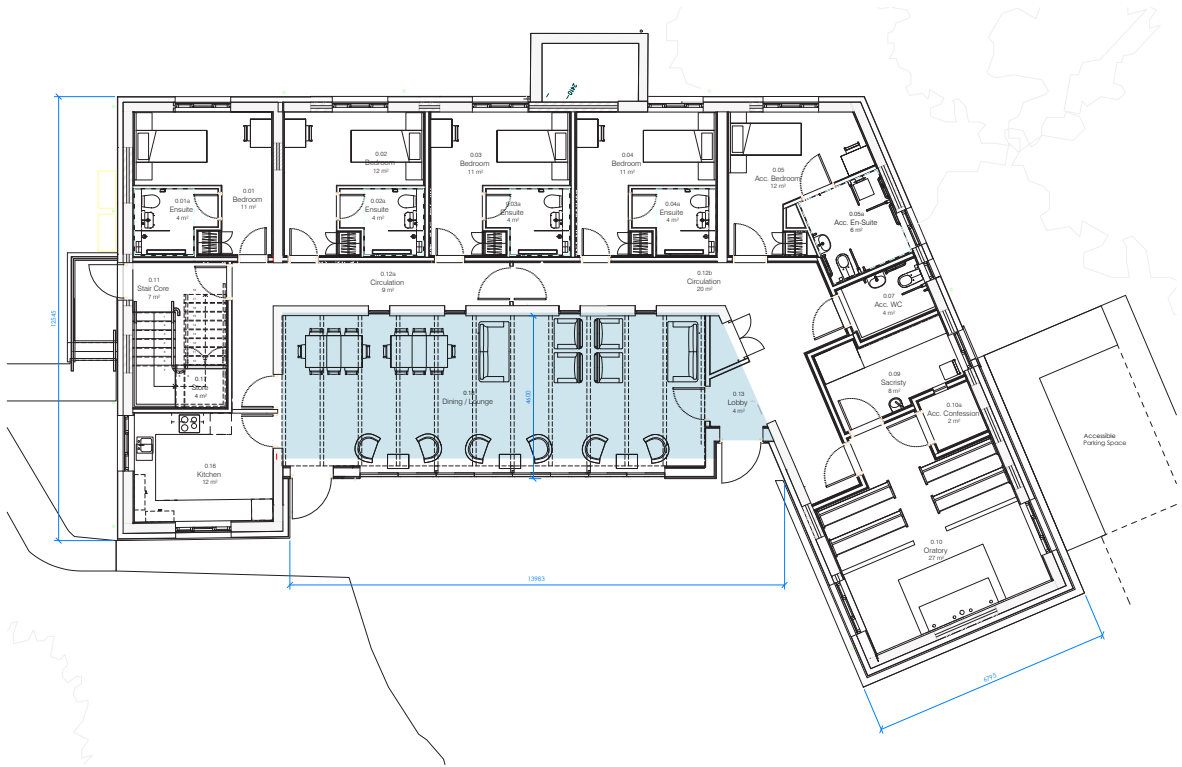
3.3.1 / i
Existing
Lodge/ east
view



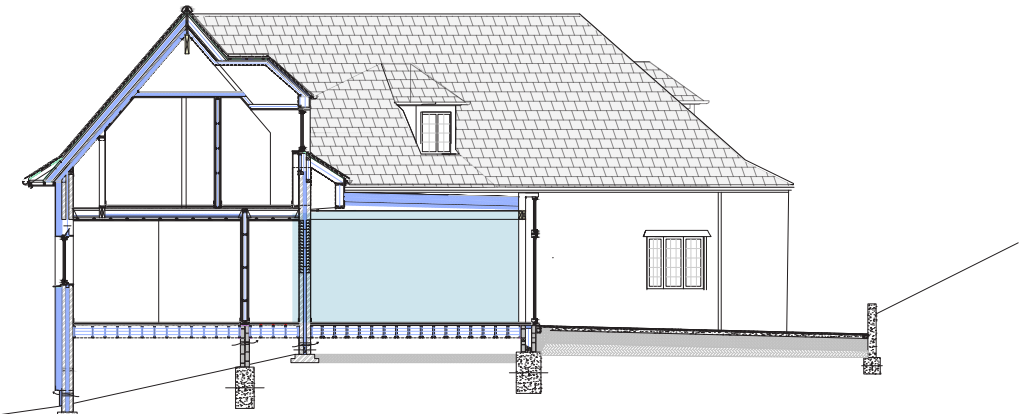
3.3.1 / ii
Existing
Lodge/
side view

3.3.2 Layout and Massing

In line with the approved application (DM/20/4179), the lodge has been designed to ensure that the new additions have a minimal impact on the existing structure. A new infill element is offset from existing building by a linear roof-light sits below the existing eaves level, thereby allowing deconstruction in the future without damage to the existing.



3.3.2 / i
Proposed
ground floor
plan



3.3.2 / ii
Proposed
section
through the
extension

3.3.3 Materiality / Sustainability

The existing lodge is a brick construction with white painted render externally. The existing roof is of clay tiles. Windows are non-original PVC.

The lodge, being a rendered building, is well-suited for a fabric upgrade through the installation of external wall insulation. This intervention will not alter its visual appearance but will substantially reduce heating energy demand. Existing windows will be replaced with high-performance timber units, and the roof will be retiled in clay tiles to match the existing.

The new extension will be finished in brick to complement the manor extension and roofed in zinc. These materials have been specifically selected to enable future disassembly, should the lodge be restored to its original footprint.

As a separate and smaller building to the main manor, and the lodge has the potential for a higher environmental performance, particularly with respect to fabric upgrades.

As per the manor, the heating demand will be met principally through heat pumps. Please refer to the Energy & Sustainability Statement.



3.3.3 / i
Existing east
facade



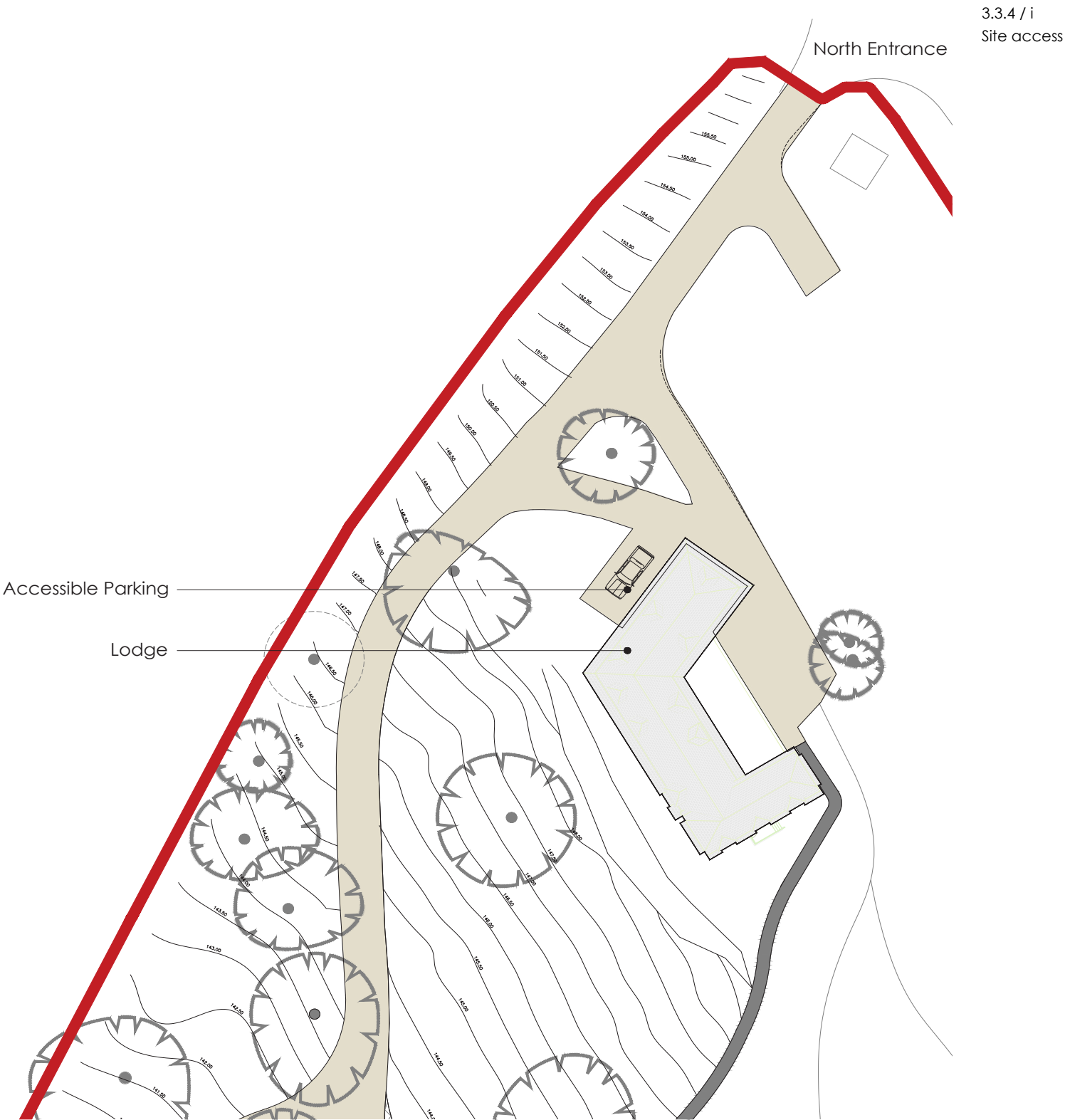
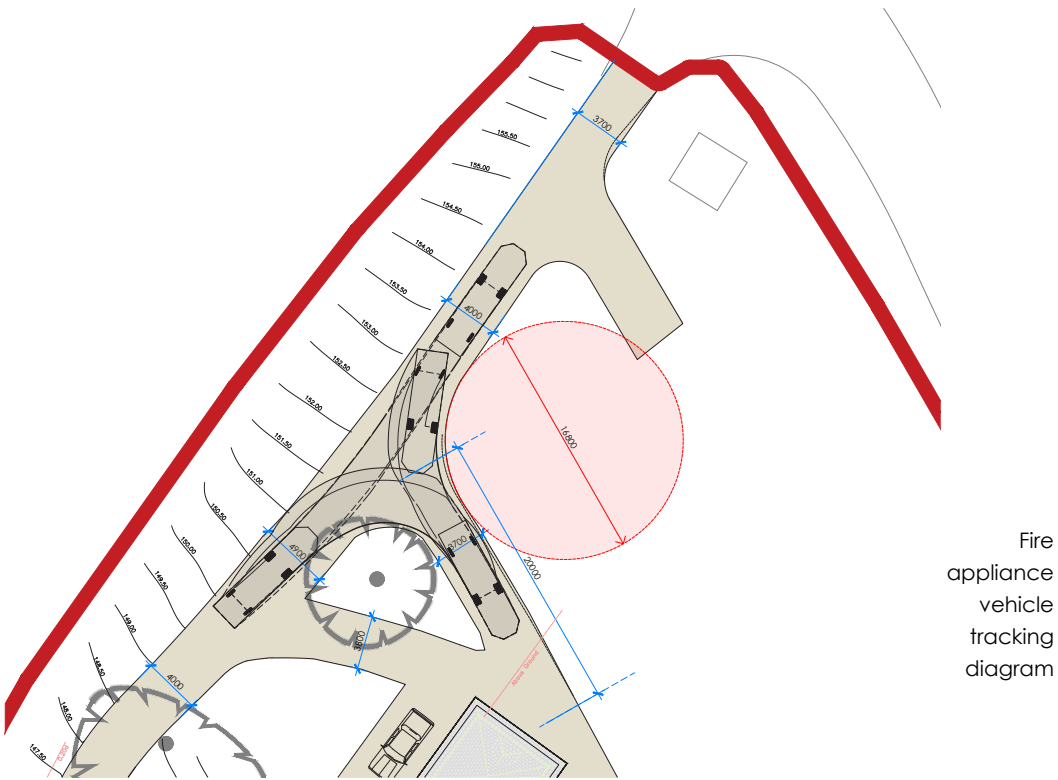
3.3.3 / ii
Proposed
east facade
extension

3.3.4 Access/ Fire Strategy

The lodge is currently accessed via the site's North entrance, and this arrangement will be retained in the proposal. Parking will continue to be accommodated within the existing hardstanding area to the east of the building.

A new east-facing entrance will provide level access to the lodge. At ground floor, a DDA-compliant bedroom and bathroom are incorporated, ensuring all key functions are fully accessible from this level.

The Lodge contains 12 bedrooms arranged over two floors. Escape from the upper floor is provided via a single protected stairway. A detailed description of the fire strategy is set out in the Planning Fire Statement.



3.4 The Stables

3.4.1 Existing

The stables were built in the 1950s with the precast concrete framed barn erected sometime later. The concrete framed barn was demolished sometime in the 2020s. The complex has not been used as stables for over sixty years. The project proposes to convert them into a conference facility and weekend retreat for younger people.



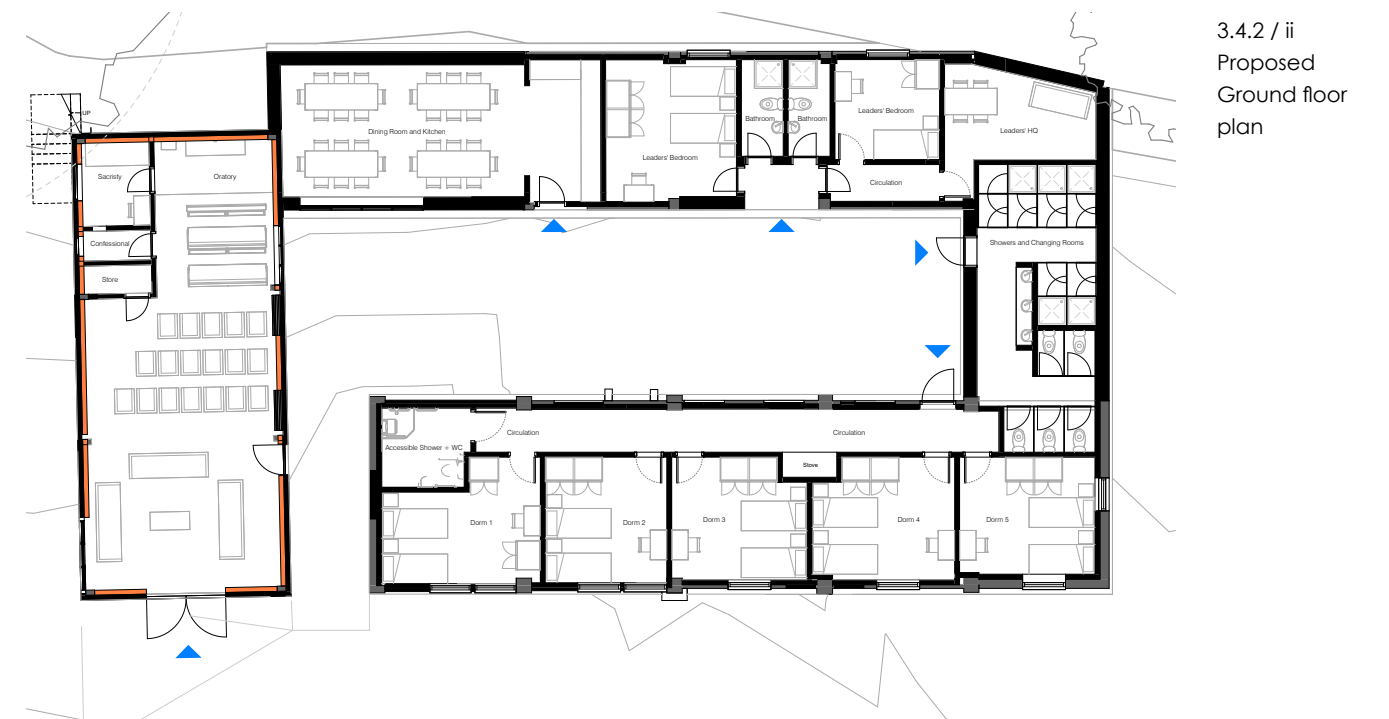
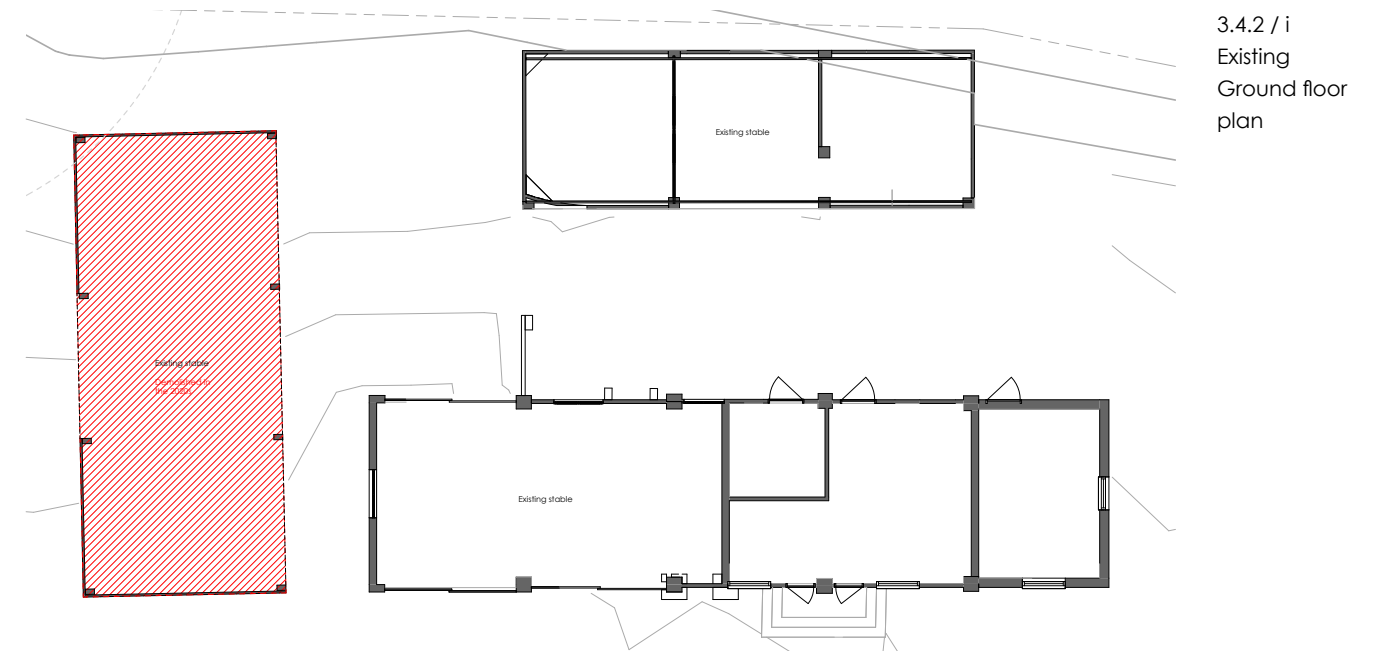
3.4 / i
Existing
Stables



3.4 / ii
Existing
Stables

3.4.2 Proposed

The stable yard will be enclosed by building an additional small building at the north end, which is at present open, to house washrooms in the same style and materials. The roof of the existing stable block on the east will be extended southwards till it reaches the barn to provide a sheltered entrance for both the Barn and the Stables. The West Stable block will also be extended to provide a dining area and to complete the stable yard enclosure.



3.4.3 Materiality / Sustainability

The recently removed barn located to the South will be replaced by an insulated black timber cladded structure with a Zinc roof. The East and West buildings will have the current corrugated asbestos sheeting replaced with a zinc roof and brick walls reconstructed from the existing reclaimed brick. These buildings will feature new timber framed doors and windows. The overall intended effect is that the Stables will be tidied up but remain visually recognised as unchanged to existing.

The overhauled Stables will have insulated walls to comply with the latest regulations. The materials used will consist of natural and recycled materials - such timber cladding or reclaimed brickwork.



3.4.3 / i
Existing
Stables -
Marked
building
has been
demolished.



3.4.3 / ii
Visualisation
Proposed
Stables

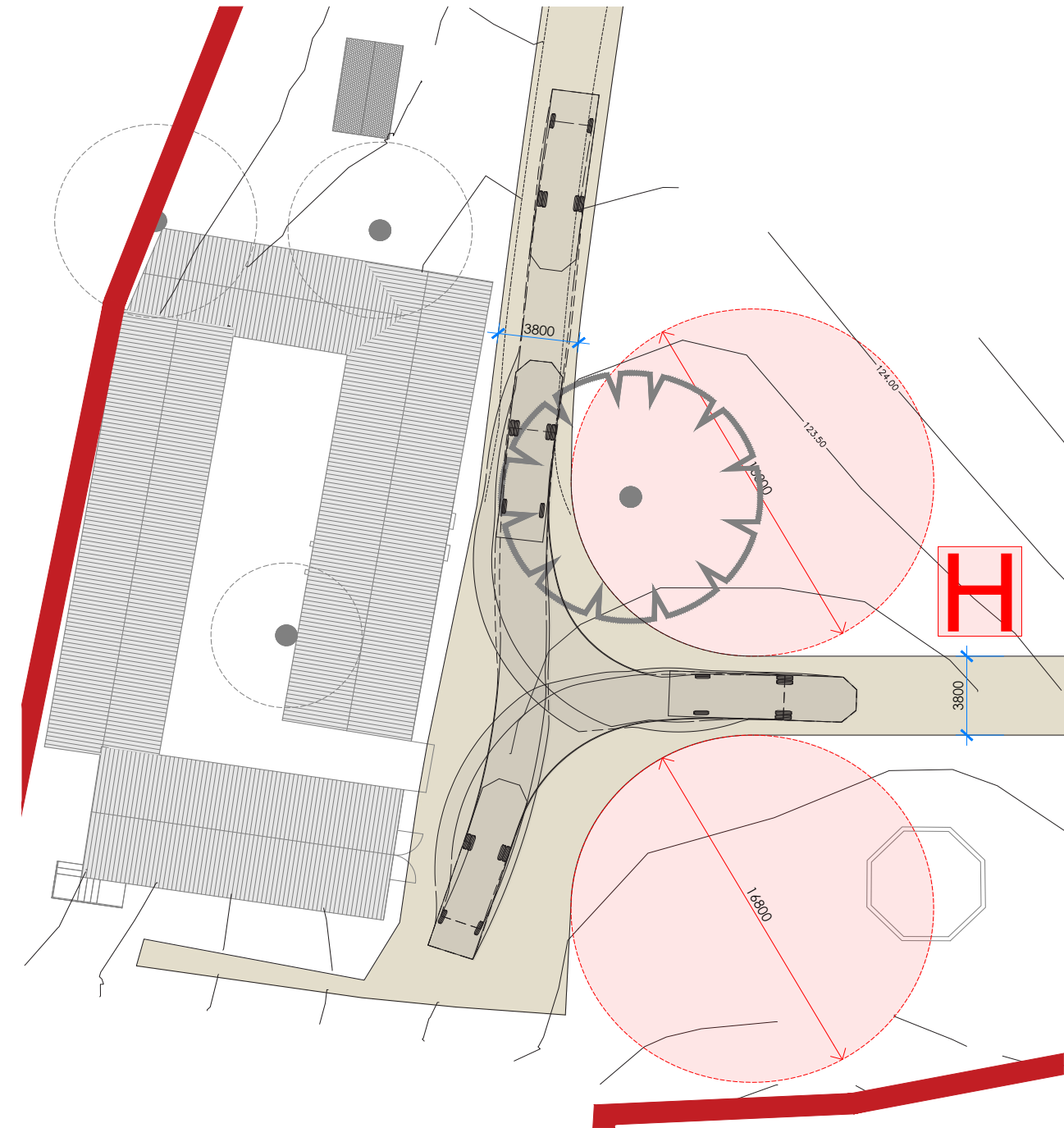
3.4.4 Access/ Fire Strategy

3.4.4 / i
Site access

The stables can be accessed via the newly established connection to the South for easy Guest access. It can also be accessed from the North for staff access which will be gated near the Priest Manor parking.

All parts of the building on the ground floor are step free and wheelchair accessible. In addition to general washrooms, a Part M compliant shower and WC bathroom is provided in the East Stable block.

In case of fire emergency, the fire engine will use the secondary staff access to the Stables. For exit, a turning circle has been provided for a 3-point turn for the fire engine to leave the premises.



4.0 Environmental & sustainability approach

The Wickenden Manor development in Mid-Sussex is a part-new build, part-retrofit project designed to assure the continued use of the manor, with a lower energy demand and lower overall carbon emissions. The scheme adopts a fabric-first approach, with the new extension rebuilt to achieve high insulation and the existing manor internally insulated to preserve its stonework while targeting high thermal performance. Heating and hot water in the new-build areas will be provided entirely by efficient air source heat pumps, which will also supply hot water to the existing building. Combined with high-performance fabric, passive low-energy design, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery and LED lighting, the design achieves a 72% reduction in regulated CO2 emissions compared to the Part L 2021 baseline, from 5.3 to 1.5 tonnes per year. A 35.4 kWp ground-mounted solar PV array will generate an estimated 27,774 kWh annually.

Water-saving appliances will meet the equivalent of a BREEAM Good standard, while responsibly sourced low-carbon materials will be used throughout. The scheme incorporates demand-side response capability via the heat pump system with buffer storage, enabling alignment of energy use with low-carbon electricity periods.

With sustainable transport links and the challenge of delivering a low-carbon basement extension, Wickenden Manor aims to be an exemplar of heritage-sensitive, high-performance sustainable design.



4.1 / i
Proposed solar plant, located in the walled garden

5.0 Conclusion

The redevelopment of Wickenden Manor, Chilling Street, East Grinstead, presents a rare opportunity to revitalise a site of both architectural merit and spiritual significance.

The proposal has been carefully developed to respond to the estate's varied functions, combining massing that is sensitive to the historic Manor with a contextual design which respects the original manor without being a pastiche of it. It delivers high-quality accommodation and purpose-built spaces for spiritual contemplation and learning, all while exceeding statutory environmental performance standards.

The scheme ensures full accessibility, protects the existing mature landscape, and preserves the heritage character of the Manor. Together, these elements create a development that is both respectful of its past and equipped for its future.

On this basis, we believe that planning permission should be granted for this proposal.

A-Zero Architects
July 2026