

Applicant: MJS

Agent: Mr R Swann
Swann Edwards Architecture Limited

61 High Street, March, Cambridgeshire, PE15 9JJ

Erect 1 x block 22 x flats and a commercial unit, involving the demolition of existing building within a conservation area

Officer recommendation: Refuse

Reason for Committee: Number of representations contrary to officer recommendation

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The application seeks full planning permission for the total demolition of the public house and redevelopment comprising a 4-storey building (rooms within the roof space), accommodating 22 flats and provision of commercial space at ground floor, proposed to be a healthcare hub.
- 1.2 The site lies in the defined town centre area, immediately adjacent to the primary shopping area and frontage which terminates at the Iceland store to the north. The site comprises land currently 'George's' public house, which is understood to have been unoccupied since 2019.
- 1.3 The proposal would bring about development of currently underused land in a sustainable location identified for significant housing growth and would provide a modest stock of housing against a national drive to significantly boost housing delivery. The housing would in itself comprise smaller units of accommodation thereby attending to a need for smaller dwellings, having regard to the Council's latest Housing Needs Assessment. The redevelopment of the site also yields opportunities to improve the built environment, where the current condition of the building detracts somewhat from the character and appearance of the area. In addition, the proposal indicates an intention to offer the ground floor area as a healthcare facility, although there are significant doubts regarding how realistic this may be.
- 1.4 Furthermore, there are short-term benefits during the build out, with the possibility of local businesses providing trade and materials. Modest long-term benefits would accrue from future occupiers accessing local services and facilities and through local spend.
- 1.5 However, the development results in severe harm to the residential amenities of existing residents and some of the potential future occupiers, through overlooking, poor outlook and limited internal floor space to some flats.
- 1.6 The development comes forward with nil on-site car parking and insufficient details to demonstrate that adequate and secure cycle parking would be provided. This has the aforementioned impacts on residential amenity, parking

facilities, vitality and viability of the town centre and measures to deter crime.

- 1.7 The development also raises unresolved concerns over flood risk management and the ability to prevent flooding elsewhere
- 1.8 Finally, due to viability constraints the proposal is unable to achieve any level of affordable housing, or any financial contribution toward mitigating the impacts of this development.
- 1.9 There are significant conflicts with policies of the development plan as follows; LP16, LP18 and H2 in respect of character harm; LP15, LP16, and LP17 in respect to parking; LP14 and H2 in respect of flood risk; LP16 and H2 in respect to poor residential amenity standards.
- 1.10 In applying the planning balance it is considered that the modest benefits of this proposal and other material considerations do not outweigh the significant policy conflicts and associated harm set out above. Furthermore, in assessing the proposal against NPPF para 215, the harm resulting from the loss of the historic building and subsequent harm to the CA through the introduction of the development is not outweighed by the public benefits.
- 1.11 As such, in accordance with the statutory duty under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the proposal does not warrant a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan and the application is recommended for refusal.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site lies in the defined town centre area, immediately adjacent to the primary shopping area and frontage which terminates at the Iceland store to the north. The site comprises approximately 660m² of land, currently occupied by 'George's' public house, which is understood to have been unoccupied since 2019.
- 2.2 The public house is thought to have originally been built around the 18th Century, with a number of additions and alterations added to it over time. The first discovered record of the George Inn is believed to date to 1821. The main building has been rendered over and incorporates dormer rooflights (rooms on the loft). Two bay windows to the frontage are later additions.
- 2.4 The Pub faces onto High Street but is set back, a reference to the Hythe drain that used to run north to south along the western side of High Street. To the rear is a pub garden – fronting onto George Street. Also, to the rear and the southern side are later, largely single storey, additions to the original building. The condition of the building looks to be deteriorating, with some external cracking of the render visible. The site is currently screened off with solid hoarding to High Street and with heras fencing to the rear boundary. Adjacent, to the south is a Chinese takeaway, no.67 High Street which is set forward and abuts the footpath and comprises a modest 2-storey building. To the rear is a 2-storey dwelling (67a and 67b High Street Street) which although listed as two dwellings is currently in use a single dwelling. The foodstore, Iceland is set to the north. Opposite comprises a mixture of buildings of age and scale, most being 2 to 3-storeys and finished in a buff or gault brick.

- 2.5 The site lies within the Conservation area of March, with a number of listed buildings in the vicinity, notably; March Museum located 18m to the south; 38 High Street located 62m north-north-east; and St Peters Church located 68m south-east. All are grade II listed. The March Neighbourhood Plan identifies 4 Buildings of Local Interest (BLI) to the north (at 45 High Street) although no information on their historical significance or any such assessment is available for these.
- 2.6 A Public Right of Way (PRoW) footpath number 33 runs along the southern boundary, in between the site and the Chinees takeaway and links High Street to George Street, albeit this appears to be inaccessible at present. City Road public car park is found at the rear of the application site.
- 2.7 The site lies in Flood Zone 1 (rivers and seas flooding) and the southern part of the site is in an area at high risk of surface water flooding.

3 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The application seeks full planning permission for the total demolition of the public house and redevelopment comprising a 4-storey building (rooms within the roof space), accommodating 22 flats and provision of commercial space at ground floor, proposed to be a healthcare hub.
- 3.2 The building occupies a footprint of approximately 460m² with the remainder proposed for footpaths, small pockets of soft landscaping and a bin and cycle store. The main building comprises 4-storeys, shaped in angled 'T' with a 3-storey (both with rooms in the roofspace secured via dormers) rear projecting element. The frontage almost abuts the footpath. A yard is located at its north-western corner which is proposed for cycle parking and waste storage, accessed via George Street. The primary elevation fronts onto High Street and incorporates a central full-height gable. A straight, mansard-style roof accommodates rooms within the roofspace across the building.
- 3.3 The core building is 11.67m to the ridge (9.3m to eaves), with the front projecting gable at 13.2m. The building spans approximately 25m across the frontage. The rear projection sits at approximately 8.8m to the ridge (6.3m eaves height). No details have been provided for the scale and appearance of the bins and cycle stores areas. The Design and Access Statement notes that high-efficiency photovoltaic panels will be installed on suitable roof spaces to generate renewable electricity for the development.
- 3.4 The application advises that the intention is to finish the building externally in a mixture of render and brickwork, with specific detail, including roof tiles, to be agreed at a later date.
- 3.5 The development would provide 13 x 1-bed units and 9 x 2-bed units. All of the 1-bed units indicate double beds inferring 1-bed 2-person flats. An internal floor area of approximately 180m² is proposed for the healthcare element (use class E(e)).
- 3.6 The application is supported by the following plans and documents;
 - Drainage Layout - WECE/25/546/A1/C/100 P03
 - Surface water drainage strategy - WECE/255/546/RP/C/001 P03

- Topographical survey - 1029-01 REV A
- Existing floor plans and elevations 1029-02
- Location plan, proposed site plan and streetscene - PP1000 Rev D
- Proposed ground floor and first floor plan - PP1100 REV D
- Proposed second and third floor plans, roof plan & sections - PP1101 Rev D
- Proposed elevations - PP2100 Rev D
- Design & Access Statement
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Heritage Statement
- BNG statement
- Arboricultural impact assessment
- Financial viability appraisal
- Preliminary ecological appraisal
- Structural survey
- Sustainable urban drainage maintenance plan

3.7 Full plans and associated documents for this application can be found at:
<https://www.publicaccess.fenland.gov.uk/publicaccess/>

4 SITE PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 The site has existed as a public house prior to planning act coming into force. Since that time only modest developments have been applied for as part of the public house use and are not considered to be relevant to this application. However, the following is considered to be of material relevance;

Reference	Description	Decision
F/YR22/1010/F	Change of use of public house to create 5 x flats (2-bed) and the erection of single storey rear extension, involving the demolition of existing rear extension within a conservation area	Granted 02.12.2022

5 CONSULTATIONS (latest responses, summarised)

5.1 **March Town Council – 07.10.2025**

Recommendation Refuse – the four-storey development is not in keeping with the street scene or conservation area. The building line is too close to the road. Concerns about drainage/flooding and impact on the nearby Hythe.

5.2 **CCC Definitive Map Team – 17.10.2025**

Advises that Public Footpath No.33, March runs through the southern section of the proposed development. Where there is no legally defined width for a public right of way, we are not able to advise what the width would be. As the dimensions are not known, we cannot guarantee that the applicant would not be encroaching upon the highway. The applicant therefore would proceed with any development that might affect the highway at their own risk. Would like to ensure that the public amenity of the footpath is safeguarded. Requests conditions ensuring that the footpath access is not altered or hindered through the development.

5.3 CCC Highways – 17.12.205

No objections to the application on the omission of car parking for the residential uses. While the lack of car parking may be inconvenient, in the context of the town centre location it's unlikely to be unsafe. However, advises that the applicant shouldn't be reliant upon on-street parking or nearby public car parks as both are outside of their control. This should be considered by the LPA as a car free development. The Local Plan car parking standards indicate that there's a minimum requirement for 1.25 spaces per unit so would expect the applicant to provide justification for the omission. Acknowledges however in the planning balance, the absence of car parking may be a minor consideration only.

Regarding the commercial unit, wouldn't necessarily expect to see customer parking in this location. However, given the intention is for an NHS occupant, a disabled parking spare or two within the redline may be sensible. Again, it's absence isn't fundamentally unsafe so probably not objectionable in highway terms. Would however like to see a servicing plan for the commercial unit which details how deliveries, commercial waste collection etc. would operate. Would rather this be provided now, but could accept it as a condition

Earlier comments queried how the bins will be collected and recommends that this information is submitted prior to the determination of the development, as the "bin store" is accessed from a non-motorised vehicle section of the highway.

5.4 CCC Lead Local Flood Authority - 17.12.2025

[Following receipt of updated drainage plans and clarification on strategy]

Objects.

Notes that surface pipe route PS1 – PS7 under the building has been removed through the amendments. However, surface pipe route PS2 – PS6 is still shown under the proposed ground floor residential living area. This pipe route is part of the section that links the attenuation tank with the hydrobrake so is of particular importance to the proper functioning of the proposed drainage scheme.

Advises that this practice raises significant maintenance concerns, and contradicts the principles outlined in Paragraph 8, Section C3.1 of Sewers for Adoption 7th Edition - A Design & Construction Guide for Developer.

5.5 Anglian Water Services Ltd – 27.10.2025

Objection

Assets Affected

Assets comprising a water main, 1600mm surface water sewer and a 150mm foul sewer which is crossing the development site and is affected by the proposed development. Anglian Water (AW) does not permit these assets to be located within the curtilage of the proposed building, and AW do not permit permeable paving or suds features over their assets. These assets should be located in areas of public open space and/or adoptable highways to ensure on-going maintenance and access is possible. Strongly recommends the applicant reviews the layout to avoid this conflict.

Wastewater Treatment

March WRC is within the acceptance parameters and can accommodate the flows from the proposed growth.

Used Water Network

Anglian Water objects to any connection into our foul network from the proposed development due to capacity constraints and pollution risk. A sustainable point of connection (SPOC) cannot be given due to the development flows contributing to pollution and flood risk downstream.

Surface Water Disposal

Anglian Water object to this application due to a lack of evidence confirming that the surface water hierarchy has been fully explored.

Further response received 08.01.2025 setting out that their comments remain the same as previous dated 27th October 2025.

5.6 Historic England - 20.10.2025

The former George Inn is not statutorily listed, but is a prominent building at an important juncture in the March conservation area.

Although many of the historic buildings surrounding this space have been replaced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the footprint has persisted, and the surviving historic street plan in this area makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The modern buildings are undistinguished, but mostly respect the historic scale and grain of development in this part of the conservation area; undue erosion of the architectural character has thus been avoided.

The prevailing scale on the west side is consistently lower, at two or even one-and-a-half storeys, which lends this part of the High Street a more expansive character.

The proposed new building would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the March conservation area by eroding the surviving historic street plan and by introducing built form of an inappropriate scale and massing which would be at odds with the characteristic grain of this part of the town.

Historic England has no objection in principle to the sensitive redevelopment of the former George Inn. Although the existing building is a historic survival, it has been heavily altered and is in a poor condition; it is unlisted, and makes only a small contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. If retention and refurbishment is impossible, then replacement with a new building of an appropriate scale and form could be acceptable. The current proposals, however, would cause some harm to the significance of the March conservation area, and are not clearly and convincingly justified, as required by the NPPF, paragraph 213.

5.7 FDC Conservation Officer – 22.10.2025

The host building is of historical, architectural, social and communal significance to March and its designated Conservation Area as an historic inn, it also maintains the settlement morphology of the area and historic area layouts. A notable reason that it is set back from the street frontage is owing to the Hythe Stream that runs to the front that was bricked over in the C19.

Despite its current scruffy condition, the building is a positive historic structure of clear late C18-early C19 form, that contributes significantly to March, its history and the character of the Conservation Area.

It should be noted, the building has recently been assessed against the Cambridgeshire Local List criteria for which it meets the criteria and forms an entry on the draft Cambridgeshire List of Buildings of Local Historic Significance. It is refuted that the current appearance of the pub belies its historic character. There is a strong objection to the loss of the host building, which will harm the significance of the conservation area.

There is a contention with the content of the heritage statement that considers the building to be late C19. Evidence indicates it is substantially earlier and likely to date from the late C18- early C19. Concerns over some of the structural survey, the assumptions over the age of elements of the building. It seems that a lot of the condemnation of this building and indeed the photographs relate to the modern structures to the rear rather, than the main historic structure that survives in much better condition.

The proposed building is a substantially oversized, of basic architectural quality and detailing and alien and harmful character to the conservation area. It lacks any local distinctiveness, it is out of scale with its surroundings and will dominate the street. This will have a detrimental impact on the character, appearance, setting and significance of the March Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings.

Furthermore, the building is sited further forward than the existing which will magnify the disparity in scale, making the building entirely dominant of the street scene. Additionally, it will result in the loss of a historic settlement pattern owing to the existence of the Hythe Stream (now bricked over) which ran in front of the George, dictating its setback position within the street.

The heritage statement draws limited attention to the harm it identifies through the loss of the historic building. It also tries to justify the harm based on supposed public benefits. Limited evidence that the healthcare use will happen. The submission fails to provide a visual analysis of how the building, brought to the front of the plot, will impact the area.

Disagrees with the heritage statement that these effects are mitigated through the design. Also disagrees that building is reminiscent of the large three-storey-listed buildings on the east side of High Street and utilises familiar building materials helps it to assimilate into the area. The building is more reminiscent, but larger still, of the poorly detailed modern buildings opposite.

The poor design, oversized and dominant form and massing, overdevelopment of the plot and the associated impacts on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of nearby heritage assets are considered to have a medium/high level of less than substantial harm and are not outweighed by the suggested public benefits.

5.8

FDC Valuation & Estates Team - 02.10.2025

Raises concern, that the lack of parking provision for the development of 22 residential flats - could put pressure on the adjacent FDC owned City Car Park (with potential knock-on effect to on street parking in the area), when considering existing schemes and potential future schemes. We take the view that FDC car parks are provided to facilitate a wider catchment of local resident and visitor to the Town Centre - promoting the use of town centre facilities / events. This type of development without car parking provision, while intending to encourage none

car use - without some sort of mitigation - may essentially provide free town centre resident parking (to a detriment to the wider catchment). Mitigation for example - as a restriction on the flat owner's titles / lease agreements, limiting private / commercial car / van use? We would welcome any discussion/ comments back on this (any scope within the interpretation of compliance with Policy LP15).

Also raises that when City Road Car Park is used for the Fun Fairs - this displaces significant local parking provision to other CP sites / and on street parking. While the times of these events are limited - this may further exacerbate the above.

5.9 **FDC Environmental Services – 10.10.2025**

Further details are needed with regards to the collection of the bins - access & removal of waste.

Plans do not appear to make any provision for waste storage from the commercial unit(s). New residents will require notification of collection and storage details by the developer before moving in and the first collection takes place. Refuse and recycling bins will be required to be provided as an integral part of the development.

Bin store requirements: further details on bin store would be required:

- * Accessing & removal of waste - cannot see on any plan or diagram a designated area for waste (bins) - clarification needed to understand how refuse collectors will retrieve & return the bins
- * Ground floor with dropped kerbs.
- * Suitable size to allow bins to be accessed and moved for collection
- * Enough space to enable each bin to be moved independently, i.e., without moving other bins.
- * Sufficient clearance provided to allow full opening of container lid.
- * Minimum working headroom of at least 2m (where compound is covered).
- * 150mm clear space between and around containers.
- * A mechanism for holding doors open (door hooks).
- * Adequate door widths: This is likely to be a minimum of 20cm in addition to the widest bin contained in the bin store.
- * Keypad security entry (no keys)
- * Residents should not be expected to move bins more than 30m, Collection points should be no more than 10m from highway.

5.10 **FDC Arboricultural Officer – 28.10.2025**

No objections

The tree report identifies the trees as low quality with a growth potentially unsuitable for long term retention, despite the development proposal which is agreed. Suggests a robust planting scheme is provided with structured shrub specimens to offer some softening to the scheme and benefit to wildlife. These details could be conditioned.

5.11 **FDC Environment & Health Services**

No Objections. The proposal is unlikely to have a detrimental effect on local air quality, the noise climate or adversely impact the local amenity as a result of excessive artificial lighting.

Has potential to cause disturbance during the demolition and construction phases

and introduces residential usage into a busy town centre location Recommends conditions;

-Construction Environmental Management Plan

- Scheme securing acceptable internal noise levels to residential properties

5.12 FDC Ecology- 06.10.2025

No objections subject to the following advice/ request;

Bats can be found in unlikely locations. If bats are found at any time during the course of approved works, work must cease and advice sought about the best way to proceed from a suitably qualified person. All UK bats and their resting places carry a high level of legal protection.

As a biodiversity benefit, at least three no. bat boxes should be installed on the new buildings, once completed.

5.13 Cambs Police - Designing Out Crime Officers – 16.10.2025

Advises that security and crime prevention measures should be considered at the earliest opportunity as an integral part of any initial design for a proposed development.

- Doors & Windows – please refer to the “Secured by Design” standards
- Cycle and Bin storage provision – details are required
- Lighting – details are required

Advice also provided on Secured by design and construction phase security measures.

5.14 NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System (CAPICS)

Further to a review of the applicants submission, the following comments are with regard to the primary healthcare provision on behalf of CAPICS. The proposed development is likely to have an impact on the services of the 3 x GP Practices operating within the vicinity of the application: Cornerstone Practice, Mercheford Practice, Riverside Practice which do not have capacity to take on additional patients and this development of 22 dwellings would see an increase patient pressure of circa 52 new resident, with a resulting increase on estate demand of 3.6sqm net internal area.

A developer contribution will therefore be required to mitigate the impacts of this proposal. For healthcare developments for a single storey extension to an existing premises and refurbishment, this equates to £5,224 per m. CAPICS calculates the level of contribution required, in this instance to be £18,913.87 (3.6 sqm at £5224 per sqm).

5.15 Consultations undertaken but no comments received from the following;

- March Ward Councillor
- CCC Cambridgeshire County Council (Growth & Economy)
- CCC Minerals & Waste Planning
- CCC Archaeology
- Middle Level Commissioners
- Environment Agency
- The March Society
- FDC Private Sector Housing
- FDC Section 106 Services
- FDC Business and Economy Team
- FDC Transport

- FDC Leisure Services
- The Wildlife Trust
- Natural England
- The Ramblers Association (G Thomas C/o B Foster)
- Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service
- British Horse Society

5.16 Local Residents/Interested Parties

Three objections received from residents of March, raising the following (summarised) issues:

Objecting Comments	Officer Response
Out of character for the area.	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Existing underground watercourse present at the front	This is discussed at 9.51 -
No parking – will cause traffic issues	This is discussed at 9.33 -
Flats are not required	This is discussed at 9.43 -
The building is within the conservation area and listed as a local heritage asset and should be retained	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Ignores historical layout of the area	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Lack of landscaping	The general scale and massing of the development would limit opportunities for any substantial landscaping. See also 9.10 -
Questions the accuracy of the engineers' reports.	See 9.6 -
The survey to ascertain whether the building could be converted, was carried out on the 27th March 2025 and trial holes on the 9th April 2025. The plans for this scheme were prepared in January 2025.	This is noted, however is not material to the assessment of the application.
Questions the accuracy of the heritage reports	This is discussed at 9.10 (also FDC Conservation Officer's comments
The elevations also indicate the floor levels to be consistent throughout the building, if this is intended the rear entrance will be approximately 400mm above ground level but does not indicate this.	The topographical survey submitted indicates a relatively level site. As such, no concerns are raised as to the ground floor levels.

and 1 from Wimblington raising the following issues (summarised)

Supporting Comments	Officer Response
Prefers to see a new building than a derelict pub	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Will benefit the residents	This is discussed at 9.14 and 10.11
Will benefit businesses	This is discussed at 9.21 -
Will enhance/regenerate the area	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Re-use land	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Provides much needed housing	This is discussed at 9.42 -
The NHS hub is much needed	This is discussed at 9.24 -
The existing building is in a severely dilapidated and unsafe condition.	This is discussed at 9.6 -
In-keeping with the character and appearance of nearby properties	This is discussed at 9.10 -
Promotes sustainable travel - excellent proximity to existing town centre public parking and public transport links	This is discussed at 9.33 -

5.17 Full comments for this application can be found at:
<https://www.publicaccess.fenland.gov.uk/publicaccess/>

6 STATUTORY DUTY

6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a planning application to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan for the purposes of this application comprises the adopted Fenland Local Plan (2014) the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021) and the March Neighbourhood Plan (2017).

6.2 Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require Local Planning Authorities when considering development to pay special attention to preserving a listed building or its setting and to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

7 POLICY FRAMEWORK – please delete as appropriate

7.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

- Chapter 2: Achieving sustainable development
- Chapter 4: Decision-making
- Chapter 5: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Chapter 6: Building a strong, competitive economy
- Chapter 7: Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- Chapter 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Chapter 9: Promoting sustainable transport
- Chapter 11: Making effective use of land
- Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Chapter 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Chapter 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

7.2 **National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)**
Determining a Planning Application

7.3 **National Design Guide 2021**

- Context
- Identity
- Built Form
- Movement
- Nature
- Public Spaces
- Uses
- Homes and Buildings
- Resources
- Lifespan

7.4 **Fenland Local Plan 2014**

- LP1: A Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- LP2: Facilitating Health and Wellbeing of Fenland Residents
- LP3: Spatial Strategy, the Settlement Hierarchy and the Countryside
- LP4: Housing
- LP5: Meeting Housing Need
- LP6: Employment, Tourism, Community Facilities and Retail
- LP13: Supporting and Managing the Impact of a Growing District
- LP14: Responding to Climate Change and Managing the Risk of Flooding in Fenland
- LP15: Facilitating the Creation of a More Sustainable Transport Network in Fenland
- LP16: Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments across the District
- LP17: Community Safety
- LP18: The Historic Environment
- LP19: The Natural Environment

7.5 **March Neighbourhood Plan 2017**

- H2: Windfall Development
- H3: Local Housing Need
- TC1: Primary Shopping Frontages

7.6 **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2021**
Policy 14: Waste management needs arising from residential and commercial Development

7.7 **Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments in Fenland SPD 2014**
DM3: Making a Positive Contribution to Local Distinctiveness and character of the Area
DM4: Waste and Recycling Facilities
DM6: Mitigating Against Harmful Effects

7.8 **Developer Contributions SPD 2015**

7.9 **Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2016**

8 KEY ISSUES

- **Principle of Development**
- **Impact on the Character of the Area and Historic Environment**
- **Vitality and viability of town centre**
- **Access and Highways**
- **Housing Mix**
- **Residential Amenity**
- **Flood Risk and Drainage**
- **Affordable Housing/ Infrastructure contributions**
- **Biodiversity (including BNG)**

9 ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

9.1 The site is located in the town centre of March. March is identified under policy LP3 and housing policy LP4 as an area for substantial housing growth, given its sustainable location. Therefore, the provision of housing in this regard is acceptable in principle. Furthermore, the development would incorporate ground floor commercial use in the way of a healthcare facility which aligns with need to maintain vitality and viability in the town centre under Local Plan policy LP6.

9.2 The proposal would constitute windfall development. Policy H2 of the March Neighbourhood Plan supports windfall development subject to matters of amenity, flood risk, highway impacts, infrastructure contributions, design, and compliance with Local Plan policy LP6 (where loss of a community facility is proposed). Proposals are expected to meet all of the criteria set out in H2. Whilst not an explicit criterion, H2 goes further to set out that such applications should provide demonstration of pre-application community consultation. No such consultation is evidenced in the submission. Whilst this weighs against the scheme and indicates some conflict with H2, given that the requirement is not set out as a strict criteria of H2 and indicates applicant's 'should' undertake community consultation, it is not felt that this results in any significant or principle conflict with H2 *per se*. Notwithstanding, through the application process, the LPA has undertaken consultation, with responses noted and considered in this assessment.

9.3 The development would result in the total loss of the public house building. Fenland Local Plan policy LP6 aim to retain community facilities unless evidence demonstrates that a continued use is unviable, which in turn follows demonstration of a marketing exercise to evidence that no alternative community use is viable. LP6 also seeks to ensure that the vitality and viability of town centres is maintained and enhanced, in line with Chapter 7 of the NPPF.

9.4 Of material relevance to the proposal, is application F/YR22/1010/F, which granted planning permission for the re-use of the public house building into 5 flats. Whilst this planning permission has now lapsed and has not been implemented, the LPA has nonetheless accepted a residential use of the site, whereby justification of the continued use of the building as a pub was deemed unviable. It is important to note however that this permission only accepted the re-use of the building and for a quantum of 5 flats. This is different to the application now before the LPA, which is for the total removal of the building and a greater quantum of housing units.

9.5 Therefore, whilst the principle of residential use of the building is acceptable, as it was before, this does not necessarily extend to the removal of the building, which is assessed further in this report. Notwithstanding, subject to consideration of other policies of the development plan, the re-use of the land for a mixed commercial and residential use is supported in principle.

Loss of public house building

9.6 The Council's Conservation Officer and Historic England both conclude that, despite its current condition, the building contributes to the history and the character of the Conservation Area, maintaining reference to the historic morphology of the town, with both social and historic significance. Historic England has concluded that a sensitive redevelopment of the site may be acceptable in principle, noting the detracting elements of the building's current visual condition.

9.7 It is understood that proposal F/YR22/1010/F was unviable to deliver, due mainly to the condition of the building and associated works required to achieve the necessary standards of living accommodation. In this regard, the application is supported by a structural survey which indicates that the building is unviable for re-use, with areas of structural integrity of concern.

9.8 Whilst the findings of the report are noted, it is apparent that not all of the building was accessible for inspection and a majority of the structural concerns raised pertain to the later, 20th Century extensions to the pub i.e., elements of the building that have the least historic value. Furthermore, whilst a viability appraisal of the proposed new building has been provided, no viability assessment of the cost to repair and convert the pub into flats has been provided.

9.9 As such, whilst its condition is noted and the building clearly would require works to improve its structural integrity and then works to convert it for residential use, given that no detailed viability appraisal as to the cost of these works, versus the return achievable, has been provided, it has not been demonstrated that the demolition of the building, on the grounds of its current condition, is fully justified in this regard.

Impact on the Character of the Area and Historic Environment

9.10 Policy LP16 (d) of the Local Plan requires development proposals to make a positive contribution to the local distinctiveness and character of the area, enhance the local setting, respond to and improve the character of the local built environment, reinforce local identity and not adversely impact, either in design or scale terms, on the street scene, settlement pattern or the landscape character of the surrounding area. Policy LP18 sets out that all development proposals that would affect a heritage asset will be determined in accordance with local and national policy.

9.11 The NPPF at para 210 sets out. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

9.12 The public house itself, whilst not benefitting specifically itself as a designated asset, nonetheless contributes to the wider historic environment and therefore to the Conservation Area (CA) in which it lies. The CA as a whole (including all the elements which contribute towards it, including the public house) is considered to be a heritage asset for the purposes of applying national and local policy. Whilst the removal of the pub, which arguably currently provides a degree of visual harm to the character of the area due to the condition it has fallen into, does however still make an unequivocal positive contribution toward the special historical interest of the CA, with clear reference to the historic morphology of the area.

9.13 Its contribution to the CA would be permanently lost and the character and appearance of the CA would be diluted as a result. Accordingly, the proposal would neither preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA, having regard to the statutory duty under S72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and in taking account of the criteria set out under paragraph 210 of the NPPF.

9.14 Its loss has been determined to amount to less than substantial harm (albeit at the higher end). In this regard, NPPF paragraph 215 sets out that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (as in this case), this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. It therefore falls to assess whether there are public benefits in the proposed scheme that are capable of outweighing the loss.

The proposed development

9.15 The development is substantially larger and occupies a significantly greater area of the site than the current building. Most striking is the positioning of the building forward of the current build line, and setting of it directly over the historic Hythe, a watercourse that ran through this part of the town. The reference to this would be completely lost through the development, further diluting the character and appearance of the CA.

9.16 Notwithstanding, the scale and massing, combined with its forward position would dominate the street scene and buildings around it, dwarfing the takeaway immediately adjacent, the dwelling to the south-west, Nos 67a and 67b, and the museum to the south. This is demonstrated clearly in the submitted Elevations and Streetscene plans. It would also be substantially larger than buildings north and opposite, which are generally no taller than 12.5m. Historic England note that prevailing scale on the west side is consistently lower, at two or even one-and-a-half storeys, which lends this part of the High Street a more expansive character. As such, the development, by scale alone would appear out of character, visually dominating and result in an enclosing effect on this part of the High Street.

9.17 The physical design of the building appears similar to the flatted developments found at Abbeygate Court, approximately 130m south, on the eastern side of High Street, incorporating a central gable and finished predominantly in brick. This development lies outside of the town centre boundary and mostly outside of the conservation area and therefore is not an appropriate reference point to translate into the historic environment, where greater attention could have been made to more traditional features and building designs and scales found in the CA. Whilst it is noted that modern building are found opposite the site along High Street, these are not necessarily positive additions to the historic part of March and repeating designs in this way does not necessarily enhance the CA. To

revert to a relatively modern design where there appears significant scope to reference more traditional design and scale appears unjustified.

9.18 Historic England summarise their observations by concluding that development would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the March conservation area by eroding the surviving historic street plan and by introducing built form of an inappropriate scale and massing which would be at odds with the characteristic grain of this part of the town and harm to the significance of the March conservation area, and are not clearly and convincingly justified. In this regard, NPPF paragraph 213 sets out. "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."

9.19 It is noted that the level of significance and appreciation of the public house differs slightly between the Council's Conservation Officer and that of Historic England (HE), with HE perhaps more open to sensitive redevelopment, given the visual condition of the current pub. However, both acknowledge its current contribution to the CA. Notwithstanding, the introduction of the development would also fail to enhance or positively contribute to the area and indeed would carry greater negative impacts to the historic environment than at present, due to the development resulting in total loss of a historic building and replacement with one that is inappropriate in respect of scale, massing and design, along with the erosion of the surviving historic street plan.

9.20 In conclusion, having regard to the Council's statutory duty under S72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the development by virtue of its scale, massing and design would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the March Conservation area. Accordingly, it would conflict with Fenland Local Plan policies LP16 and LP18 and Policy H2 of the March Neighbourhood Plan which collectively seek to ensure that development represents a high quality of design and makes a positive contribution to local character and does not undermine the quality of existing development and streetscape. There would also be conflict with DM3 of the Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments in Fenland SPD 2014, along with failure to justify the harm to the significance of the heritage asset, contrary to NPPF paragraph 213.

Vitality and viability of town centre

9.21 Chapter 7 of the NPPF seek to ensure that decisions support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Paragraph 90(f) sets out that policies should recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

9.22 Policy LP6 of the Local Plan seeks to retain appropriate commercial uses at ground floor level within the Town/District Centre boundary unless evidence indicates why this type of use can no longer be justified. It also supports alternative community facilities, where previous ones are no longer deemed viable.

9.23 In this regard, the development proposes a healthcare facility at the ground floor of the core building. This aligns with LP6, as noted above, the continued use as a public house use has already been agreed to unrealistic following the marketing

exercise. Furthermore, in principle, the continued use of the ground floor for commercial purposes and the residential uses above would likely support the vitality and viability of the town centre through increased footfall which would likely increase visitors accessing other services, facilities and shops on their visit, thereby aligning with the aims of NPPF Chapter 7.

Healthcare facility

9.24 The applicant asserts that the NHS hub meets a critical community need, ensuring local residents have convenient access to essential healthcare services. This reduces pressure on other health facilities in the borough and supports wider policy objectives around sustainable, inclusive communities.

9.25 The presence of a healthcare facility in the town centre location would be advantageous, providing access to a further facility in a sustainable location with a choice of travel modes. It is understood from the NHS estates team that the three existing surgeries will need to be expanded to accommodate the town's growth. Furthermore, the West March strategic allocation has a vision to deliver a local centre which could also include a healthcare facility. This application was resolved to be granted in 2024 and is at an advance stage of S106 drafting, which includes provision of healthcare facilities (see application F/YR21/1497/O).

9.26 The application was accompanied by a letter from the Clinical Director at Mercheford House Surgery at Elwyn Road in March. The letter sets out a vision for a health hub in the High Street, in providing an opportunity for healthcare partners to provide a range of healthcare services from one site. The letter sets out an invitation for partners across health, care, local government, and the voluntary sector to commit to the shared vision and contribute expertise, funding, and support to deliver the High Street Health Hub in March.

9.27 Officers sought further advice from the Clinical Director, to understand whether any agreements or arrangements had been made for the healthcare facility, in order to ensure that appropriate planning weight was given to the proposal.

9.28 A letter of clarification was subsequently received dated 30 October 2025 from the Clinical Director, setting out that the letter constituted a general statement to express the recognised need for a clinic within the local community, confirming that its inclusion in the application submission should not be interpreted as direct endorsement or approval of any specific planning application or proposal. The letter goes on to advise that no binding arrangements, formal agreements, or definitive commitments relating to the proposed clinic have been made at this stage. Only that they have discussed potential layouts and the need for clinical space in the building without any formal commitment. Also, that the steering group are engaged in wider strategic discussions about the provision of clinical facilities in the area and are open to consider a range of possible sites and opportunities.

9.29 In addition, NHS Estates team were consulted on the application and, as per their comments at 5.14 above, set out that they would be seeking a financial contribution toward improvements to existing healthcare facilities in March, including Mercheford House. Further to this, despite a request to provide comments specifically on the merits and/or potential of the healthcare hub, no response has been received.

9.30 As set out above, it is important to understand the public benefits and associated weight to be afforded to a proposal, where the development will lead to harm to a heritage asset. In this instance, whilst the development proposes a healthcare hub, there appears to be little in the way of any firm commitment or confirmation that this will ultimately be used for this purpose, with what appears to be a number of key stakeholders yet to engage and agree to take on the facility. The Clinical Director themselves setting out that the representation should not be interpreted as direct endorsement or approval of any specific planning application or proposal, inferring that other sites may also be considered. This, combined with NHS Estates' lack of reference to any commitment to the facility also casts doubt on how realistic the occupation of this site as a healthcare hub will be. As such, this element of the proposal can only be afforded very limited weight at this time.

9.31 The application commits the ground floor only to the healthcare facility (Use Class E(e)). As such, in the absence of any firm commitment for such a use, there is significant risk this would leave an empty ground floor use in a town centre location, thereby failing to promote the vitality and viability of the town centre and resulting in an inactive frontage in a key location. This in essence is no better than the current situation, and arguably worse given that it would also have resulted in harm to the historic environment through loss of a historic building.

9.32 Whilst an alternative ground floor use may be possible in such a scenario (albeit not necessarily through this application), it is noted that a number of recently completed retail units approximately 120m south on the east side of High Street, have so far failed to attract any tenants and in fact the applicant has recently applied to use the redundant space for residential use, which was refused (see application F/YR25/0588/F). Taking into account the above, this casts substantial doubt on the ability of the development to achieve a meaningful ground floor commercial use and again, limited weight is advised to be applied to this aspect.

Access and Highways

9.33 Fenland Local Plan policy LP15 requires developments to be served by safe and suitable access and provides well designed car and cycle parking appropriate to the amount of development proposed, ensuring that all new development meets the Council's defined parking standards as set out in Appendix A.

9.34 The applicant advises that the proposal does not include vehicular access or car parking and instead includes provision for cycle storage. They contend that on the basis of the location of the site and in view of the sustainable transport options available to future residents, that nil parking provision is acceptable in this instance. Accordingly, in their view, the proposal complies with Policy LP15 of the Local Plan.

9.35 The application infers that residents with cars would use the public car parks available in the vicinity. The nearest and most likely car park to be used in this scenario would be City Road, located a short walk from the application site to the west. A footpath from the site and the cycle storage area to the rear is provided.

9.36 Having regard to the car parking standards set out at Appendix A of the Local Plan (referred to in policy LP15) and based on the quantum and mix of residential units proposed, the following parking provision would normally be required;

13 x 1 bed: 1.25 spaces per unit = 38.75 for the 13

9 x 2 bed: 1.5 spaces per unit = 13.5 spaces
Total required: 29 to 30 parking spaces

9.37 Appendix A to Policy LP15 also advises that where a site has good public transport links, such as in a central area of a market town, a reduction in car parking provision may be negotiated and, in special circumstances, nil parking provision may be appropriate. In this instance, it is considered that the impact of a nil provision of car parking has not been adequately assessed or justified, other than due to the site being within the town centre. As such, no special circumstances, as required by Appendix A, have been identified. In reference again to the Abbeygate Court development, also located within the town centre boundary, this development incorporates a substantial amount of on-site parking for residents which appears to be regularly full, thereby indicating that despite the site's town-centre location, there is still a heavy reliance on private motor car and therefore a demand for parking spaces. It can be reasonably concluded therefore that a large number of occupants of the proposed development are likely also to require car parking and therefore that a nil provision will likely have impacts on public car parks in the vicinity.

9.38 The Council's assets team has raised concerns over the pressure the development may have on the public car parks and advises that City Road car park is regularly at 95% capacity, with around 255 spaces used daily, leaving only 13 spaces free on average. This is not including times when, for example, the travelling fair visits and occupies a substantial area of the car park.

9.39 Notwithstanding, whilst resident parking has been considered, the matter of the healthcare facility must also be factored in. The development does not provide any parking for staff or visitors to the facility, again placing further pressure on the public car parks and without any guarantees that said staff and visitors would be able to park nearby. This is particularly concerning in respect to the healthcare facility where customers may suffer mobility issues and where no dedicated disabled parking is provided.

9.40 Notwithstanding the matter vehicular parking, the development does indicate a provision of cycle storage within the development area. However, limited detail is provided for this, and the plans indicate an open, walled area for bike storage. Whilst further detail in respect of bike stands, lighting, CCTV etc could be reasonably secured through planning conditions, there would be an expectation that a covered cycle area would be provided and some assessment of how many bikes it could accommodate versus the occupancy levels with flats, in order to ensure that the maximum amount can be accommodated and to encourage non-car reliance (in view of the lack of car parking on site). No information has been provided in this regard and no ability to assess the suitability of any such structure that could achieve safe and secure cycle parking, having regard to the site's location within the CA. In the absence of this detail, it is considered that the proposal fails to demonstrate that users of the flats would be encouraged to rely on cycles or suitably accommodated for such.

9.41 The lack of parking and cycle storage detail in this instance is considered to result in a number of issues. To place further pressure on public car parking (and in the absence of suitable cycle parking to reduce car reliance), to the scale proposed here, is likely to reduce the car parking offered to visitors to the town's shops and services, thereby having a negative impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre (contrary to LP6 and NPPF) and would also in turn fail to secure

appropriate amenity for future occupiers and visitors to the healthcare facility, who may find themselves having to park some distance away, in areas lacking in security, or in areas that impact on amenity of existing residents in order to park their vehicles, contrary to Local Plan policies LP15, LP16, LP17 and H2 of the March Neighbourhood Plan.

Housing Mix

9.42 The development comprises 13No. 1-bed flats and 9No. 2-bed flats. The Council's latest Housing Needs Assessment (GL Hearn, October 2021) recognises that brownfield sites in the centre of towns may be more suited to flatted development and that such flats will usually come forward as 1 or 2-bedroom units. Flats in this way make effective use of land and can address a need for smaller units. In this regard, the housing type and mix proposed is acceptable and in principle would make a positive contribution to March's housing stock, thereby supporting the housing ambitions of Local Plan policy LP4.

Residential Amenity

9.43 Policy LP2 of the Local Plan requires development proposals to promote high levels of residential amenity. In addition, policy LP16 (e) of the Local Plan states that development will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that the proposal does not adversely impact on the amenity of neighbouring users such as noise, light pollution, loss of privacy and loss of light.

Existing residents

9.44 The development would sit adjacent to an established dwelling 67a and 67b, which as noted above is currently in use as a single dwelling. The development would run alongside its northern eastern elevation and partly across its rear, eastern elevation. The northern elevation of no.67a/b includes a 1st floor kitchen with high-level window and landing window, with the rear elevation served by bedroom windows. The rear projecting element of the flats would run approximately 1.8m wall-to-wall with no.67a/b, with the core building 6.7m from the rear of no.67a/b. Given the scale of the development, it is considered that the outlook, particularly from the bedroom window would be severely compromised, with an outlook consisting of a 4-storey (including roof) vertical run of flats, with only a small gap of 1.97 between the corner of the flats and the adjacent building serving the takeaway, where outlook for occupiers of no.67a/b is currently largely uninterrupted and views of the opposite side of High Street are clear. The limited degree of separation between no.67a/b and the rear of the development would reduce the amount of skyline and which would be seen from the first-floor rear bedroom, kitchen and would dominate the outlook from these rooms. This would result in oppressive living conditions for the existing occupiers.

9.45 Furthermore, direct views between bedrooms serving flats 10 and 16, and the rear bedroom of no.67a/b will be easily achievable at the distance of 6.7m, thereby significantly compromising privacy.

9.46 In addition, the flat over the takeaway building immediately south incorporates windows which will face into, and be faced into by, flats 6 and 12 at distances of between 2.4m and 5m. Again, at these distances, any outlook from these windows will be dominated by the full scale of the development.

9.47 It is considered that the scale of the development, combined with its proximity to existing residences and window positions would result in an oppressive environment for existing occupiers, failing to achieve a high-quality living

environment. Whilst the site is within town centre where expectations of separation distances and outlook can perhaps be lower than, for example a planned out-of-town estate development, the degree of impacts shown here are unacceptable and unwarranted, given the scope of the site to avoid such impacts through careful design.

Future residents

9.48 As with the observations made above, the counter impact of placing proposed bedrooms at close proximity to existing residents has the same impacts and it is considered for the same reasons as set out above, occupiers of those flats will experience an oppressive living environment with privacy compromised through the inter visibility of new and existing bedroom windows and the proximity of built form. Furthermore, it is noted that all bar one of the flats are below NDSS (Nationally Described Space Standards (DCLG, March 2015)), with twelve of the flats less than 85% of NDSS – a usual limit that most registered housing providers are willing to go down to, and some less than 75% of NDSS. Whilst the Council has no space standards adopted through their policies, nonetheless the NDSS is a useful benchmark of some material weight and this goes further to illustrate that, combined with the noted outlook and privacy issues, occupants of some flats will experience cramped and oppressive environments, without justification, again where the scope of the site to avoid such impacts through careful design could be achievable, albeit likely to result in a reduction in flats overall.

9.49 The application does not detail any assessment of residential or other amenity impacts – other than how it would appear in the street scene and adjacent to existing premises. Whilst the applicant in their Design and Access Statement considers it sits sympathetically to adjacent residences, however – this is not qualified by any actual assessment of the scale, character, use or sensitivities of these residential units and its interrelationship with the proposed development. The same applies equally to occupiers of the takeaway adjacent. As per the assessment above, it is considered that the building has not been sympathetically designed around existing residences, with significant consequences on residential amenity as a result.

9.50 The proposed development would therefore fail to provide acceptable living conditions for existing and future occupiers with regard to outlook, privacy and general amenity, contrary to policies LP16 and H2 and Chapters 8 and 12 of the NPPF.

Flood Risk and Drainage

9.51 As noted, the site lies in flood zone 1 and therefore at low risk of flooding. Whilst the southern corner of the site lies in an area of high surface water flooding, this does not appear to be in any direct line of flow path and therefore it is reasonably assumed that surface water flooding could likely be designed out through the development, subject to an appropriate drainage strategy. The LLFA's initial concerns on this point appear to have been resolved.

9.52 However, the drainage design approach taken by the applicant has raised objections from both the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and Anglian Water (AW). The main concern lies with the siting of the rear part of the building on top of a surface water drainage pipe, that links the attenuation tank with the hydrobrake. Due to the importance of this route, access should be readily achievable in order to reduce surface water flooding impacts. Furthermore, a

surface water sewer runs along the front of the development (the former Hythe) but the development is proposed to be placed over this, without justification, likewise part of a foul sewer to the rear. Lastly, the development proposed to discharge all of its outfall to the AW sewer which does not follow the sustainable drainage hierarchy in the first instance.

9.53 As such, the development fails to demonstrate that it can sustainably manage foul and surface water flows and would not increase flooding, contrary to policy LP14 of the Fenland Local Plan.

Affordable Housing/ Infrastructure contributions

9.54 Local Plan policy LP13 sets out that planning permission will only be granted if it can be demonstrated that there is, or will be, sufficient infrastructure capacity to support and meet all the requirements arising from the proposed development. Conditions or a planning obligation are likely to be required for many proposals to ensure that new development meets this principle. Developers will either make direct provision or will contribute towards the provision of local and strategic infrastructure required by the development either alone or cumulatively with other developments. Where a planning obligation is required, in order to meet the above principles of infrastructure provision, this will be negotiated on a site-by-site basis. This will be required in addition to the affordable housing requirement as set out in Policy LP5.

9.55 Statutory tests set out in the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 (Regulation 122) requires that S106 planning obligations must be necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, directly related to the development and fairly and reasonable related in scale and kind to the development. S106 obligations are intended to make development acceptable which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms.

9.56 The following contributions and infrastructure are sought through this proposal (based on 22 dwellings) and are considered to be CIL compliant;

- 25% Affordable Housing (5 units) – to be provided on site in the first instance.
- NHS – £18,913.87 toward expansion of existing surgeries in March

9.57 The application is supported by a viability assessment which sets out that the development is not viable to provide any affordable housing or contribution in lieu of this, or any contribution toward other infrastructure demands, in this case NHS requests for capital contribution. The Council has undertaken a review of the viability appraisal and its consultant has generally concurred with the baseline, being that the scheme is not viable to make any such contributions.

9.58 The NPPF is clear in that viability is a material consideration to be given weight. In this instance, whilst the viability constraints are acknowledged, the site is windfall development and therefore, by its very nature, not strictly necessary to fulfil the district's housing ambitions and would instead place additional burdens on services with very limited mitigation. As such, the viability position and subsequent shortfall in infrastructure/ affordable housing contributions weighs negatively against the proposal. This is to be considered in the overall planning balance.

Biodiversity (including BNG)

9.59 Local Plan Policy LP16 seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity on and

surrounding the proposal site and seeks to retain and incorporate natural and historic features of the site such as trees, hedgerows, field patterns, drains and water bodies. Policy LP19 seeks to take opportunities to incorporate beneficial features for biodiversity in new developments

9.60 The application is supported by a preliminary ecological appraisal (PEA) which has considered a number of protected species currently at the site and sets out opportunities for biodiversity enhancements. The conclusions broadly set out that no habitats warranting any specific protection were recorded, that existing trees should be protected appropriately where they are to be retained for the development and the inclusion of the following protection and enhancement measures.

- 6 Bat bricks or boxes.
- 6 Bird boxes.
- Construction methods to avoid animals being trapped.
- Hedgehog highway gaps in fencing to serve the development.
- Lighting scheme to follow recommendations within guidance issued by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) and Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) – Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night – Guidance Note 08/23.
- Site clearance and demolition to be undertaken outside of bird breeding season or under watch of an ecologist.

9.61 The Council's Ecologist has reviewed the report and concluded that subject to the above measures, the development would protect and enhance biodiversity, therefore in accordance with Policies LP16 and LP19 of the Local Plan. The above measures can be reasonably secured through planning condition(s).

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

9.62 The Environment Act 2021 requires development proposals to deliver a net gain in biodiversity following a mitigation hierarchy which is focused on avoiding ecological harm over minimising, rectifying, reducing and then off-setting. This approach accords with Local Plan policies LP16 and LP19 which outlines a primary objective for biodiversity to be conserved or enhanced and provides for the protection of Protected Species, Priority Species and Priority Habitat.

9.63 There are statutory exemptions, transitional arrangements and requirements relating to irreplaceable habitat which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. In this instance, the exemptions are considered to apply and a Biodiversity Gain Condition is not required to be approved before development is begun because the pre-development biodiversity value is too low to require statutory net gain in this instance.

Other matters

Refuse collection

9.64 The Design and Access Statement includes a refuse strategy, which sets out that the building will introduce separate bins for different types of waste, with each flat provided with clear instructions on how to properly segregate waste and recycling at the point of disposal. A local waste collection service will be contracted to ensure regular pickups of the communal bins.

9.65 The site layout denotes a waste storage area to the rear with assumed access via George Street for collection. Whilst limited details of this are provided at this

stage, a more detailed waste storage and collection strategy could be reasonably secured via planning condition and it is likely that a suitable strategy could come forward to align with the requirements of policy LP16 and Policy 14 of the Cambridge and Peterborough Waste and Minerals Plan. This would also need to account for clinical waste and commercial that may arise from the healthcare facility.

10 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 The proposal would bring about development of currently underused land in a sustainable location identified for significant housing growth and would provide a modest stock of housing against a national drive to significantly boost housing delivery. The housing would, in itself, comprise smaller units of accommodation thereby attending to a need for smaller dwellings, having regard to the Council's latest Housing Needs Assessment. This carries substantial positive weight.
- 10.2 Furthermore, there are short-term benefits during the build out, with the possibility of local businesses providing trade and materials. Modest long-term benefits would accrue from future occupiers accessing local services and facilities and through local spend. This carries moderate positive weight based on the quantum proposed.
- 10.3 In addition, the proposal indicates an intention to offer the ground floor area as a healthcare facility. Whilst this would otherwise carry substantial weight, this is tempered significantly by the apparent lack of commitment and or contractual arrangements at present and therefore uncertainty that this would ultimately be accommodated. In this regard therefore the healthcare facility is given very limited weight.
- 10.4 The redevelopment of the site also yields opportunities to improve the built environment, where the current condition of the building detracts somewhat from the character and appearance of the area. This has potential to carry substantial weight. However, the proposal put forward fails to positively contribute to the character and appearance of the area (including the Conservation Area), leading to direct conflict with H2 and LP16 and LP18. And would also result in the loss of a building which currently contributes positively to the historic environment. This carries significant negative weight.
- 10.5 As noted above, the development results in severe harm to the residential amenities of existing residents and some of the potential future occupiers, conflicting directly with H2 and LP16 which again carries significant negative weight.
- 10.6 The development comes forward with nil on-site car parking and insufficient details to demonstrate that adequate and secure cycle parking would be provided. This has the aforementioned impacts on residential amenity, parking facilities, vitality and viability of the town centre and measures to deter crime, contrary to policies LP15, LP16, and LP17.
- 10.7 The development also raises unresolved concerns over flood risk management and the ability to prevent flooding elsewhere, directly conflicting with the aims of policy LP14, again attracting significant negative weight.
- 10.8 Finally, the proposal is unable to achieve any level of affordable housing, or any

financial contribution toward mitigating the impacts of this development. This carries substantial negative weight.

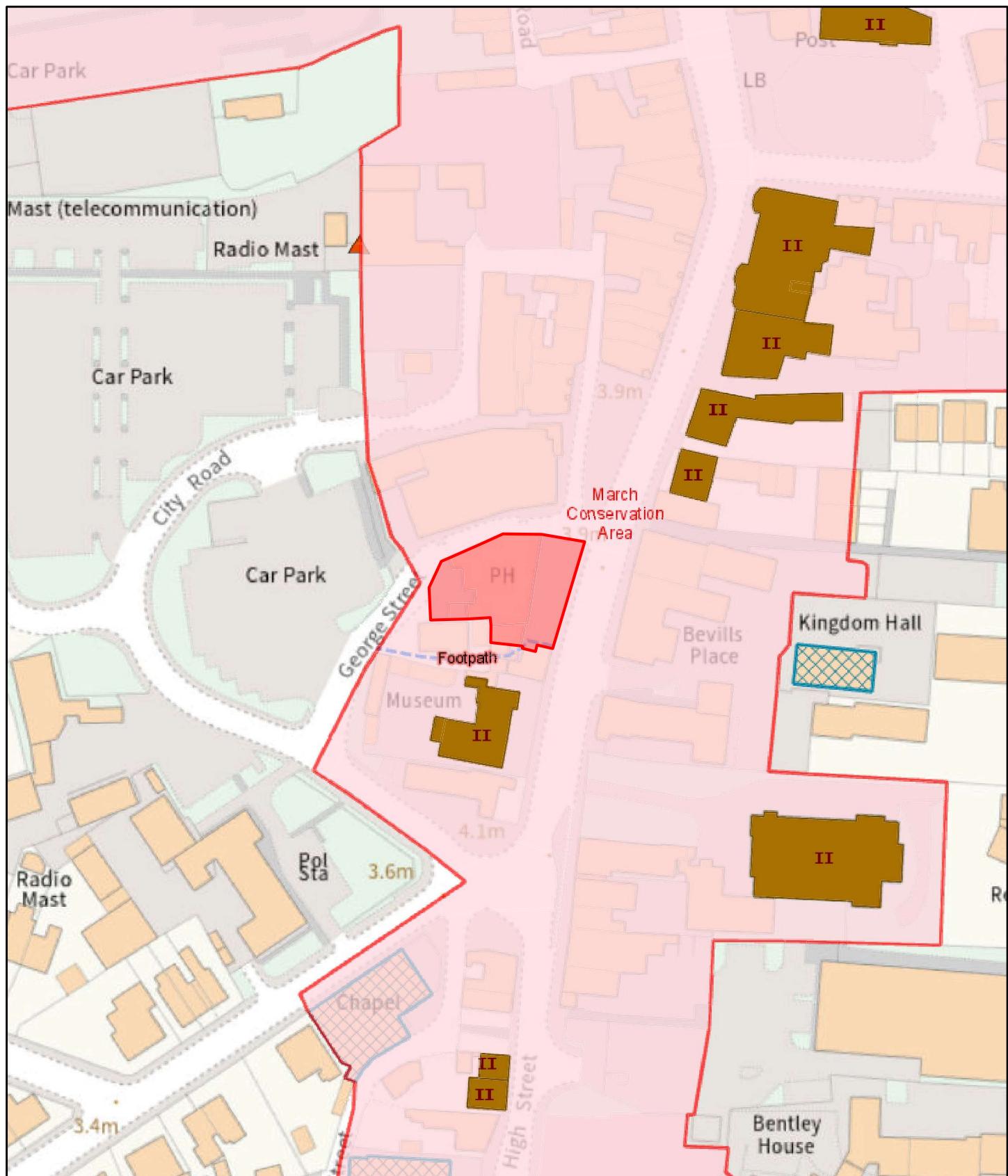
- 10.9 There are significant conflicts with policies of the development plan as follows; LP16, LP18 and H2 in respect of character harm; LP15, LP16, and LP17 in respect to parking; LP14 and H2 in respect of flood risk; LP16 and H2 in respect to poor residential amenity standards.
- 10.10 Regrettably, no pre-application enquiry was undertaken, which would have otherwise enabled the LPA to flag concerns and associated policy conflicts with the applicant, potentially enabling a more appropriate scheme to be presented.
- 10.11 In applying the planning balance and having regard to general housing delivery success in March to date, and the ongoing and proven appetite for developers to bring forward strategic and other windfall sites in sustainable locations in March (often with better viability outcomes) and in noting that the Council can currently demonstrate a healthy housing land supply of 6.6 years, it is considered that the modest benefits of this proposal and other material considerations do not outweigh the significant policy conflicts and associated harm set out above. Furthermore, in assessing the proposal against NPPF para 215, the harm resulting from the loss of the historic building and subsequent harm to the CA through the introduction of the development is not outweighed by the public benefits.
- 10.12 As such, in accordance with the statutory duty under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and S72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 of the proposal does not warrant a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan and the application should be refused.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 **REFUSE;** for the following reasons:

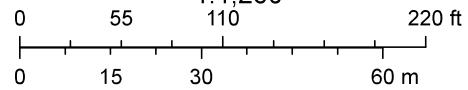
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Impact on the Character of the Area and Historic Environment</i> The development would result in the loss of a building which contributes to the significance of the March Conservation Area, and would involve the erection of a building which by virtue of its siting, scale, massing and design would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the March Conservation Area, with an unsympathetic design, visually dominant scale and erosion of the historic pattern of development in this location. Accordingly, it would conflict with Fenland Local Plan policies LP16 and LP18 and Policy H2 of the March Neighbourhood Plan which collectively seek to ensure that development represents a high quality of design and makes a positive contribution to local character and does not undermine the quality of existing development and streetscape. There would also be conflict with DM3 of the Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments in Fenland SPD 2014, along with failure to justify the harm to the significance of the heritage asset, contrary to NPPF paragraph 213.2. <i>Vitality/ viability on town centre</i> Policy LP6 of the Fenland Local Plan seeks to retain appropriate commercial uses at ground floor level within the Town/District Centre boundary unless
--

	<p>evidence indicates why this type of use can no longer be justified. It also supports alternative community facilities, where previous ones are no longer deemed viable. The development proposes a healthcare facility at the ground floor of the core building, however there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that there is a realistic prospect of this coming forward and no alternative ground floor commercial use is proposed. Consequently, the development fails to demonstrate that it would not harm the vitality and viability of the town centre through lack of commercial use of the ground floor, contrary to Policy LP6 of the Fenland Local Plan and Chapter 7 of the NPPF.</p>
3.	<p><i>Parking</i></p> <p>Fenland Local Plan policy LP15 requires developments to be served by safe and suitable access and provides well designed car and cycle parking appropriate to the amount of development proposed, ensuring that all new development meets the Council's defined parking standards as set out in Appendix A. The development would not provide any designated parking for either the residential use or the commercial use and fails to provide adequate cycle store facilities. The development would therefore place pressure on public car parking (accentuated by the absence of suitable cycle parking to reduce car reliance), would likely reduce the car parking offered to visitors to the town's shops and services, thereby having a negative impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre and would also in turn fail to secure appropriate amenity for future occupiers and visitors to the healthcare facility, who may find themselves having to park some distance away, in areas lacking in security, or in areas that impact on amenity of existing residents in order to park their vehicles, contrary to Local Plan policies LP6, LP15, LP16, LP17 and H2 of the March Neighbourhood Plan.</p>
4.	<p><i>Residential Amenity</i></p> <p>It is considered that the scale of the development, combined with its proximity to existing residences at 67a and 67b High Street and flats above the adjacent takeaway at 67 High Street and window positioning would result in unacceptable loss of privacy and outlook resulting in an oppressive environment for existing and future occupiers. Furthermore, by virtue of the limited internal floor area afforded to some of the proposed flats, this would further add to the feeling of a cramped and oppressive environment. Consequently, the development would fail to achieve a quality living environment for existing or future occupiers contrary to policies LP16 and H2 and Chapters 8 and 12 of the NPPF.</p>
5.	<p><i>Drainage</i></p> <p>The development proposes to site part of the building across the top of a public foul and surface water sewer and fails to demonstrate that it can sustainably manage foul and surface water flows and would not increase flooding, contrary to policy LP14 of the Fenland Local Plan.</p>



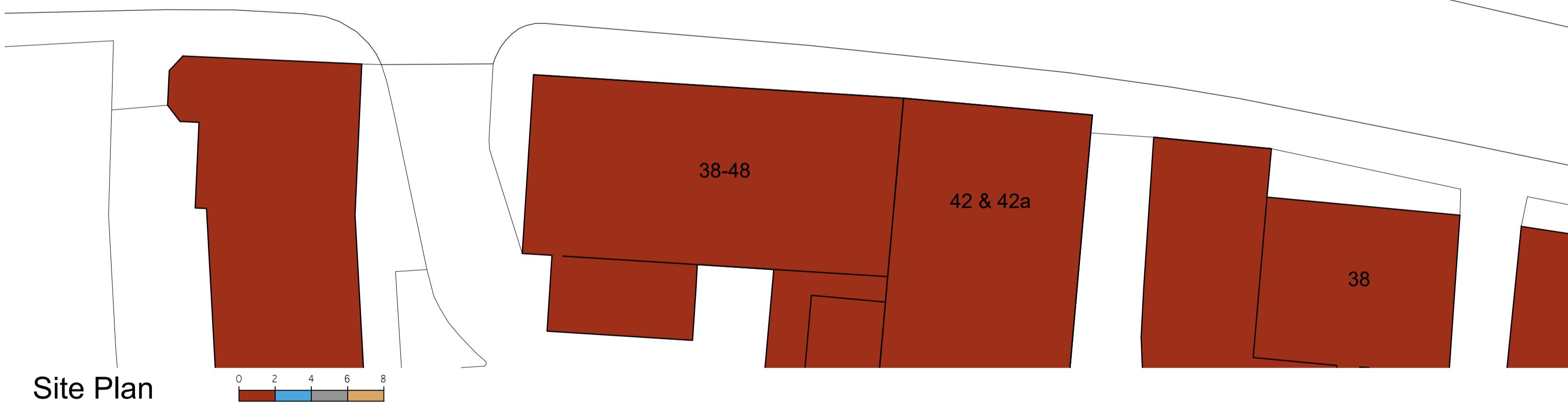
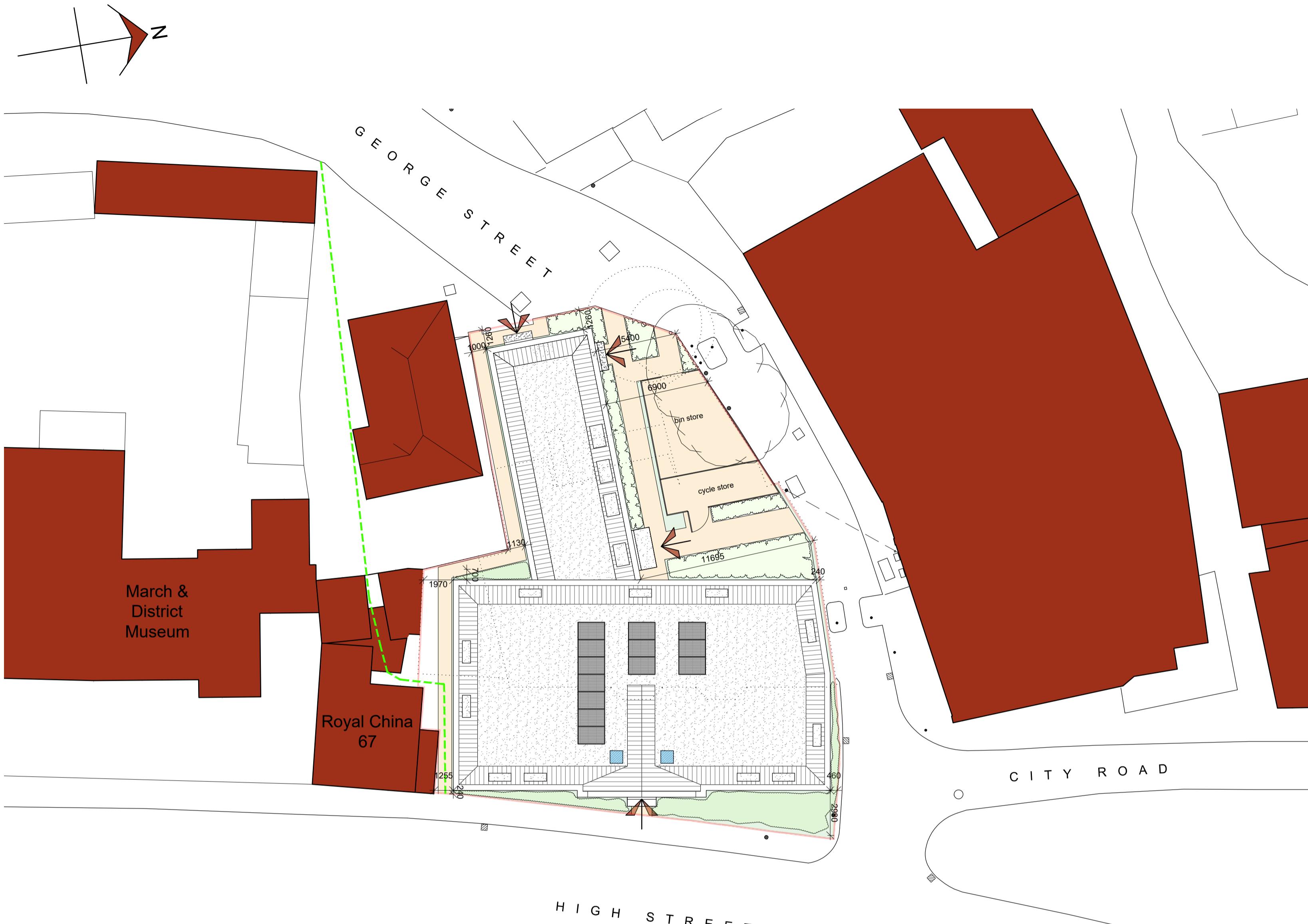
9/30/2025, 12:39:07 PM

1:1,250



- Fieldwork (Area)
- Fieldwork (Line)
- Fieldwork (Point)
- Monuments (Area)
- Monuments (Line)
- Findspots
- Public Rights of Way
- Tree Preservation Orders Areas
- Tree Preservation Orders Trees
- Conservation Area Boundary
- Fenland District Boundary

Fenland District Council

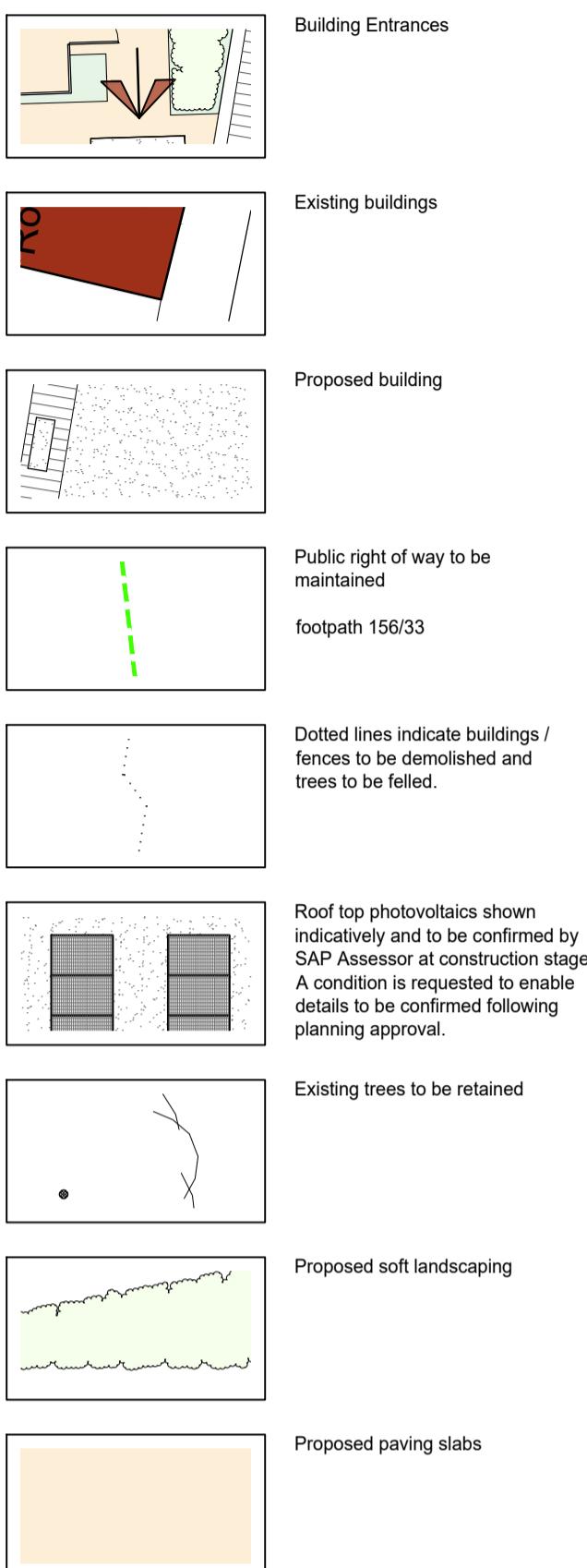


Schedule of Sizes				
Plot	Location	Bedrooms	Floor Area	Notes
Commercial Unit	Ground Floor		179.0m ²	
Flat 1	Ground Floor	2 Bed	55.1m ²	
Flat 2	Ground Floor	1 Bed	44.0m ²	
Flat 3	Ground Floor	1 Bed	42.1m ²	
Flat 4	Ground Floor	1 Bed	41.2m ²	
Flat 5	First Floor	1 Bed	55.0m ²	
Flat 6	First Floor	2 Bed	53.9m ²	
Flat 7	First Floor	1 Bed	47.5m ²	
Flat 8	First Floor	2 Bed	54.6m ²	
Flat 9	First Floor	2 Bed	54.4m ²	
Flat 10	First Floor	1 Bed	40.9m ²	
Flat 11	First Floor	1 Bed	42.4m ²	
Flat 12	Second Floor	2 Bed	53.9m ²	
Flat 13	Second Floor	1 Bed	47.5m ²	
Flat 14	Second Floor	2 Bed	54.6m ²	
Flat 15	Second Floor	2 Bed	56.6m ²	
Flat 16	Second Floor	1 Bed	40.9m ²	
Flat 17	Second Floor	1 Bed	56.9m ²	
Flat 18	Third Floor	2 Bed	44.2m ²	
Flat 19	Third Floor	1 Bed	42.7m ²	
Flat 20	Third Floor	2 Bed	44.2m ²	
Flat 21	Third Floor	1 Bed	44.4m ²	
Flat 22	Third Floor	1 Bed	35.6m ²	

General Notes

- All dimensions are shown in 'mm' unless otherwise stated.
- The contractor, sub-contractors and suppliers must verify all dimensions on site prior to the commencement of any work.
- This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant engineers and specialist sub-contractors drawings and specifications.
- Any discrepancies are to be brought to the designers attention.

SITE PLAN KEY



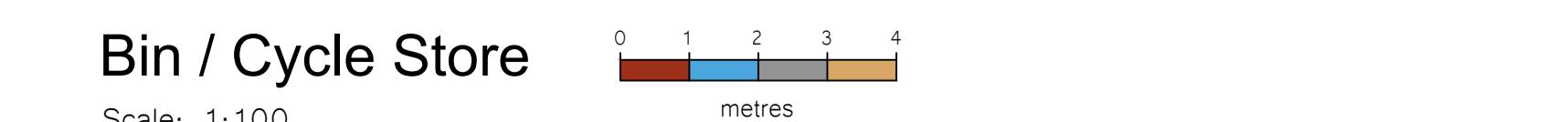
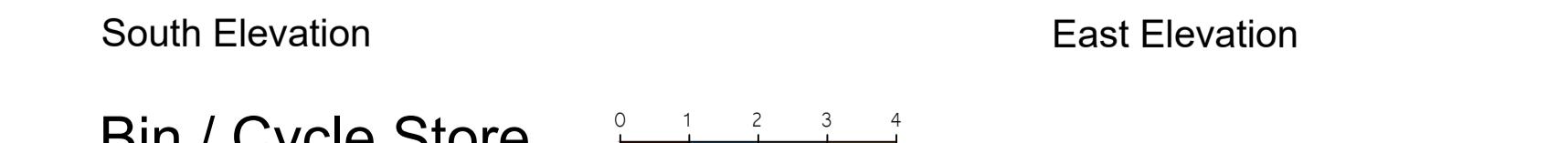
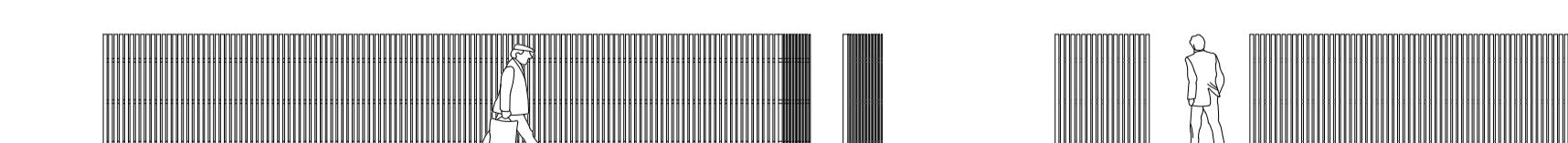
FOR APPROVAL

SWANN EDWARDS
A R C H I T E C T U R E

Swann Edwards Architecture Limited, Black Barn, Fen Road,
Guyhirn, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 4AA
01945 450694 e info@swannedwards.co.uk w www.swannedwards.co.uk

Redevelopment of The Georges
High Street, March
for
MJS Construction Ltd

Job Title: Date:
Planning Drawing Drawn by:
Proposed Site Plan, Checked by:
Location Plan & Dwg No.:
Street Elevation Dwg No.:
Sheet Size:
Revision:



General Notes
1. All dimensions are shown in 'mm' unless otherwise stated.
2. The contractor, sub-contractors and suppliers must verify all dimensions on site prior to the commencement of any works.
3. This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant engineers and specialist sub-contractors drawings and specifications.
4. Any discrepancies are to be brought to the designers attention.



High Street (East) Elevation

Scale: 1:100



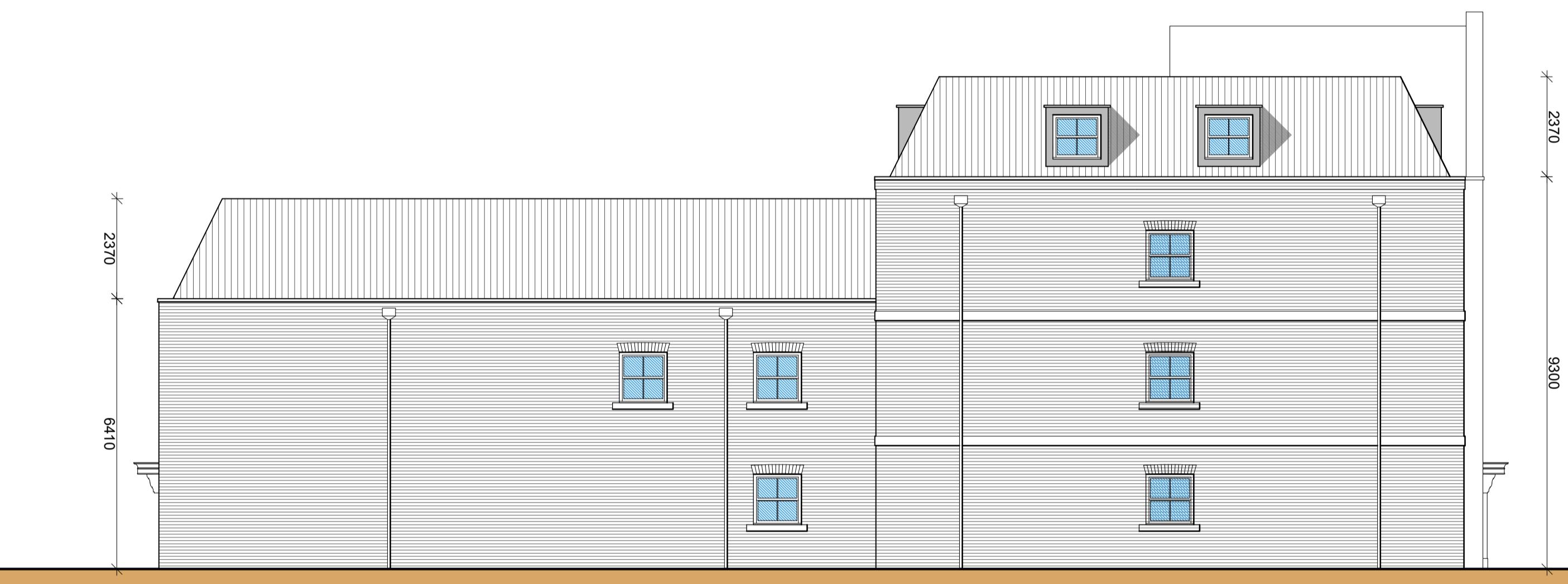
George Street (North) Elevation A

Scale: 1:100



George Street (West) Elevation A

Scale: 1:100



George Street (South) Elevation

Scale: 1:100



George Street (West) Elevation B

Scale: 1:100



George Street (North) Elevation B

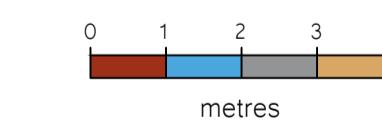
Scale: 1:100

Status		FOR APPROVAL	
		SWANN EDWARDS	ARCHITECTURE
		Swann Edwards Architecture Limited, Black Barn, Fen Road, Guyhirn, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 4AA t 01945 450694 e info@swannedwards.co.uk w www.swannedwards.co.uk	
Redevelopment of The Georges High Street, March for MJS Construction Ltd		Date January 2025	Drawn by GT Checked by GL
Planning Drawing Proposed Elevations		Job Title SE-2216	Job No. Dwg No. PP2100
		Sheet Size A1	Sheet Size A1
		Revision D	Revision D



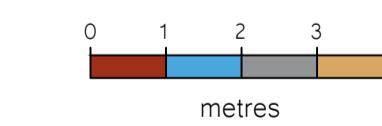
Ground Floor Plan

Scale: 1:100



First Floor Plan

Scale: 1:100



General Notes
 1. All dimensions are shown in 'mm' unless otherwise stated.
 2. The contractor, sub-contractors and suppliers must verify all dimensions on site prior to the commencement of any work.
 3. This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant engineers and specialist sub-contractors drawings and specifications.
 4. Any discrepancies are to be brought to the designers attention.

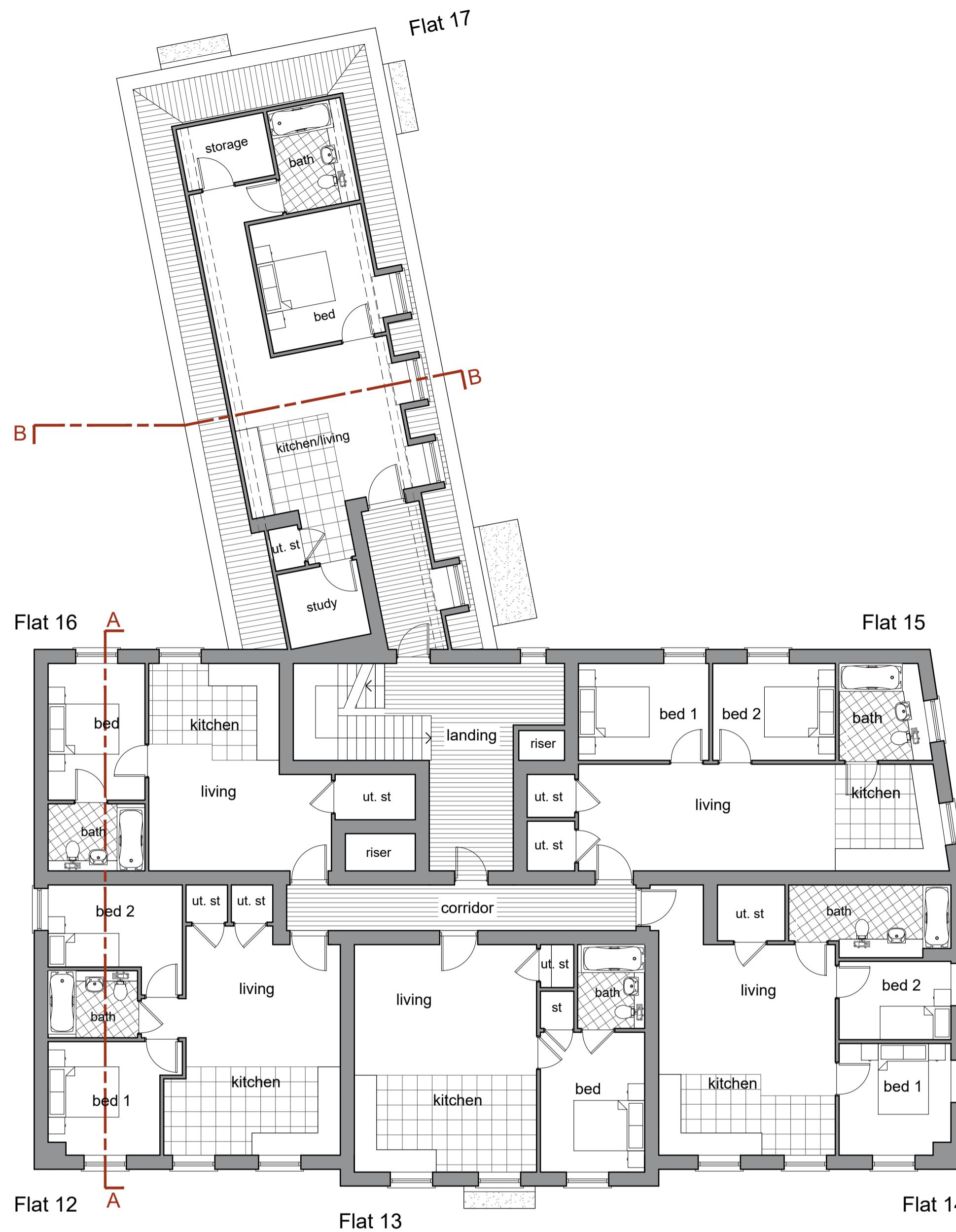
FOR APPROVAL

SWANN
EDWARDS

ARCHITECTURE

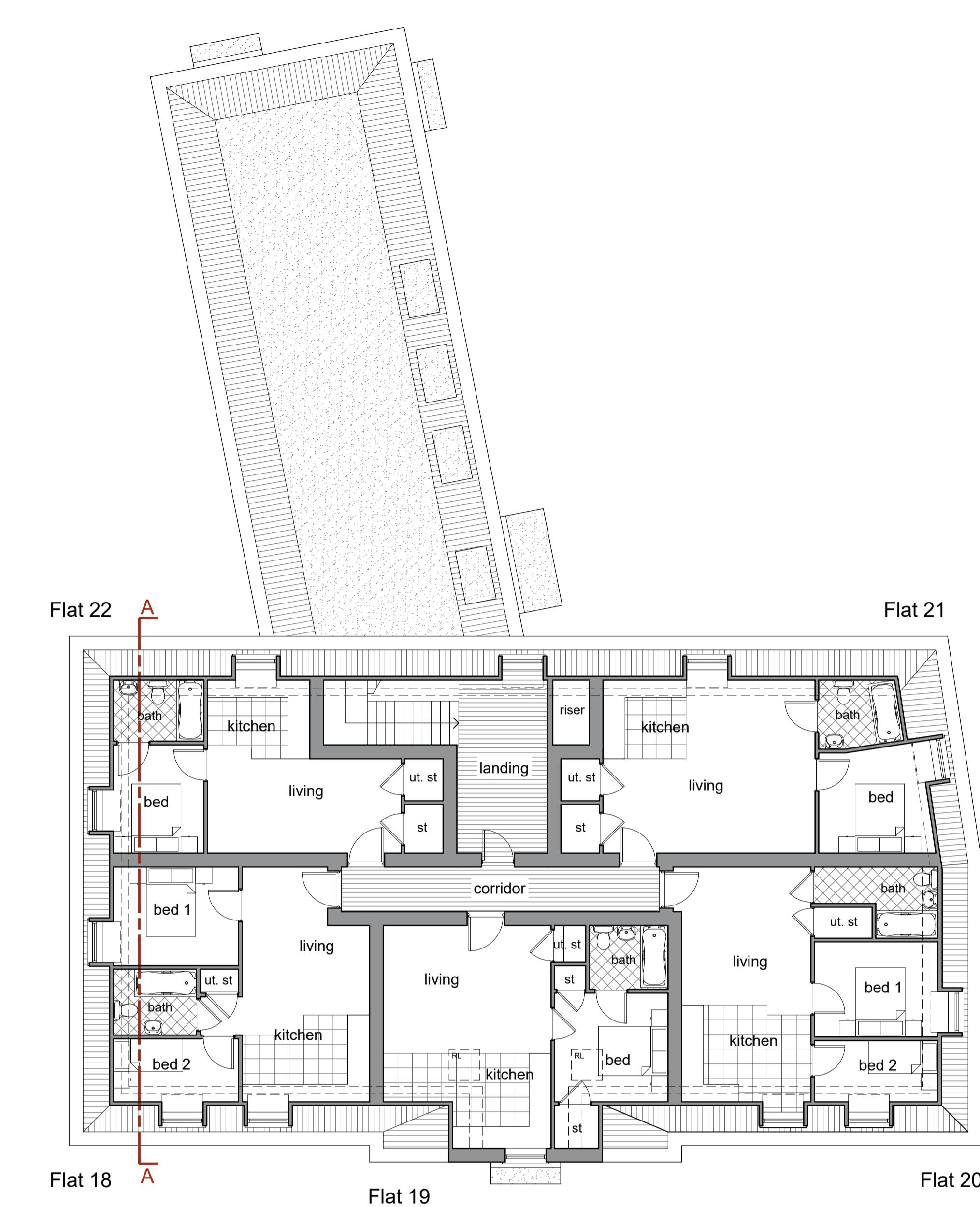
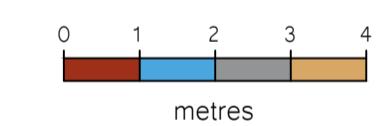
Swann Edwards Architecture Limited, Black Barn, Fen Road,
Guyhirn, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 4AA
01945 450694 e info@swannedwards.co.uk w www.swannedwards.co.uk

Redevelopment of The Georges High Street, March for MJS Construction Ltd	Date January 2025	Drawn by GT
Planning Drawing Proposed Ground & First Floor Plans	Checked by GL	
Job No. SE-2216	Dwg No. PP1100	Sheet Size A1
		Revision D



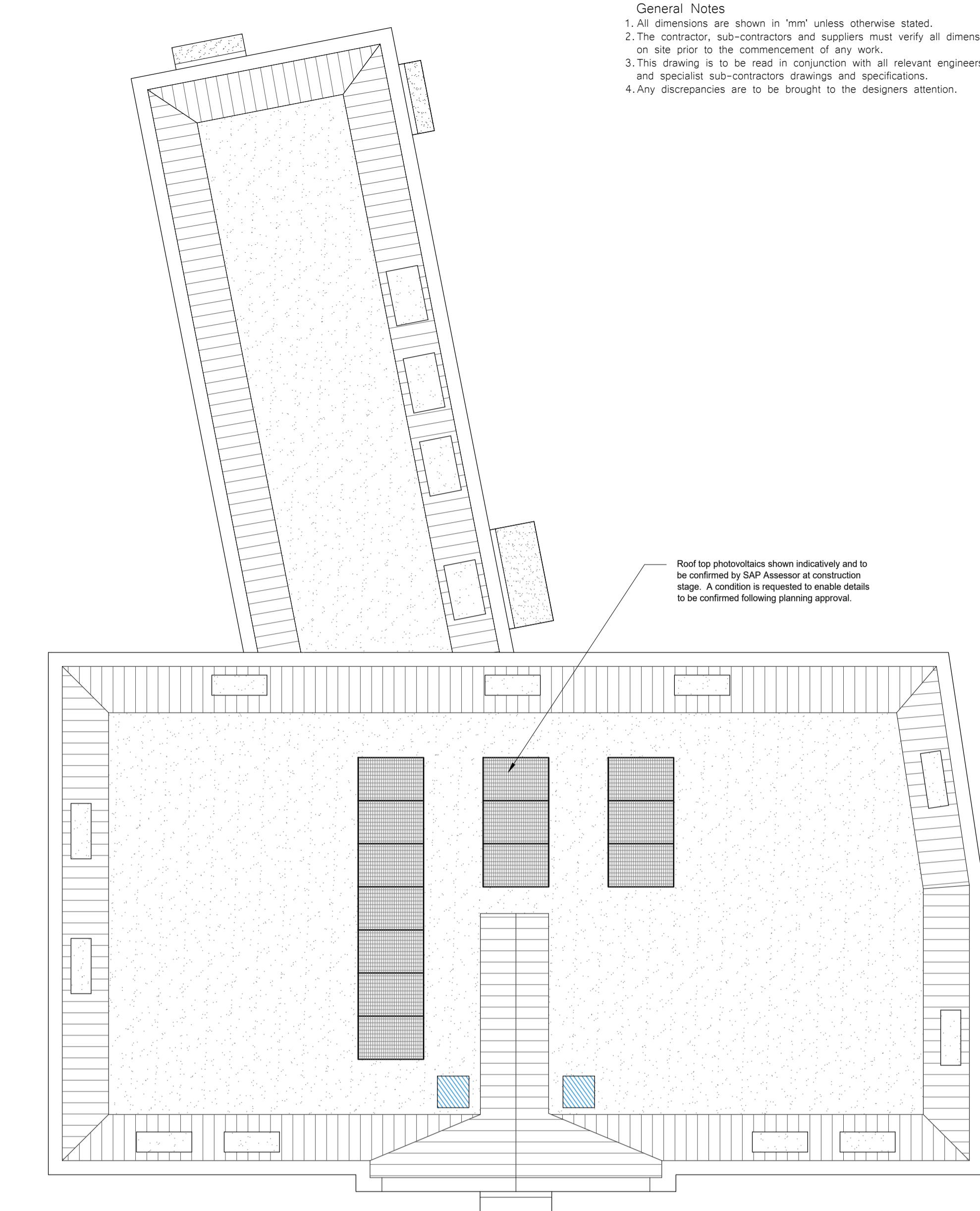
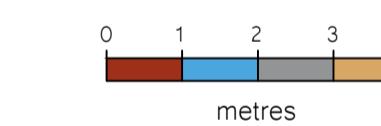
Second Floor Plan

Scale: 1:100



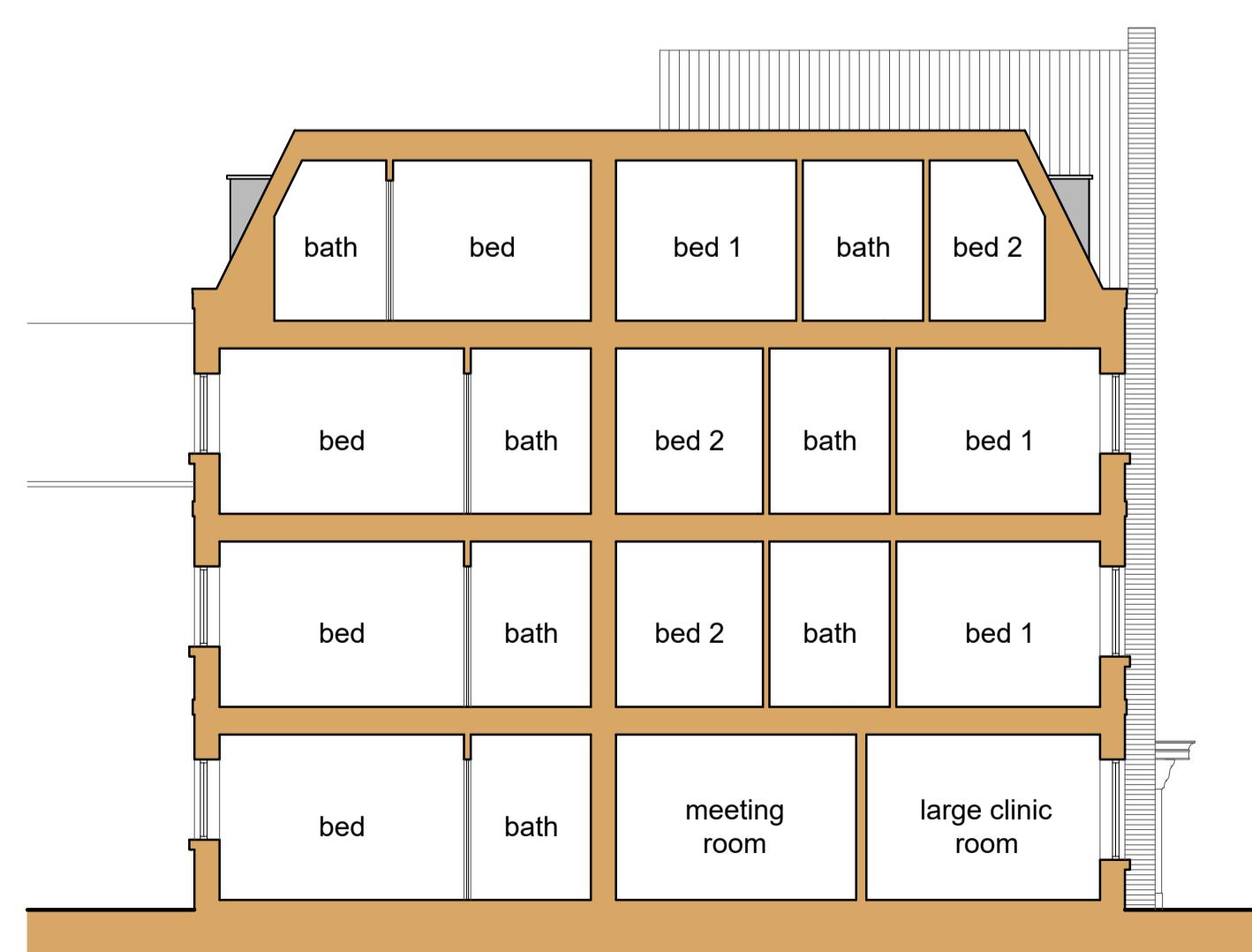
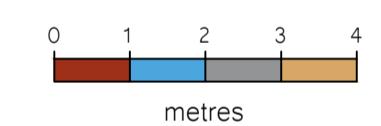
Third Floor Plan

Scale: 1:100



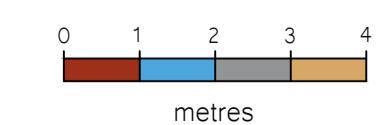
Roof Plan

Scale: 1:100



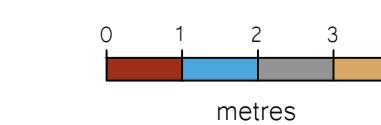
Section A-A

Scale: 1:100



Section B-B

Scale: 1:100



Status
FOR APPROVAL

**SWANN
EDWARDS**

A R C H I T E C T U R E

Swann Edwards Architecture Limited, Black Barn, Fen Road,
Guyhirn, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 4AA
01945 450694 e info@swannedwards.co.uk w www.swannedwards.co.uk

Redevelopment of The Georges
High Street, March
for
MJS Construction Ltd
Job Title: Planning Drawing
Drawing Title: Proposed Second Floor Plan,
Third Floor Plan, Roof Plan &
Sections A-A & B-B
Date: January 2025
Drawn by: GT
Checked by: GL
Job No.: SE-2216
Drawing No.: DWG No.: PP1101
Sheet Size: A1
Revision: D

General Notes
1. All dimensions are shown in 'mm' unless otherwise stated.
2. The contractor, sub-contractors and suppliers must verify all dimensions on site prior to the commencement of any work.
3. This drawing is to be read in conjunction with all relevant engineers and specialist sub-contractors drawings and specifications.
4. Any discrepancies are to be brought to the designers attention.

