Chapel House
Bronington Chequer
Flint
(Wrexham Maelor)
NGR: SJ 494 408

A Heritage Impact Statement of Alterations

Text
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Summary

Proposals have been made to continue the permitted restoration of Chapel House, a former combined Methodist chapel and minister's house near Bronington, Flint. Planning consent had previously been granted in 1997 for its conversion to a single dwelling, and these proposals include a small rear extension. The building is Grade II listed. Under the guidelines of Planning Policy Wales and local guidance, this report was commissioned to provide a heritage impact assessment of the proposals; it is not concerned with any other planning matters. It concludes that the proposals are well-considered and proportionate and will result in no harm to the character or significance of the building. Instead, it will result in an overall enhancement which will ensure its long-term futures. It will also not cause harm to any other adjacent heritage asset.

Crynodeb

Mae cynigion wedi'u gwneud i barhau â'r gwaith adfer a ganiateir i Chapel House, cyn gapel Methodistaidd a thŷ gweinidog cyfun ger Bronington, y Fflint. Roedd caniatâd cynllunio wedi'i roi yn flaenorol ym 1997 i'w drosi yn un annedd, ac mae'r cynigion hyn yn cynnwys estyniad bychan yn y cefn. Mae'r adeilad yn adeilad rhestredig Gradd II. O dan ganllawiau Polisi Cynllunio Cymru a chanllawiau lleol, comisiynwyd yr adroddiad hwn i ddarparu asesiad o effaith y cynigion ar dreftadaeth; nid yw'n ymwneud ag unrhyw faterion cynllunio eraill. Daw i'r casgliad bod y cynigion wedi'u hystyried yn dda ac yn gymesur ac na fyddant yn arwain at niwed i gymeriad nac arwyddocâd yr adeilad. Yn hytrach, bydd yn arwain at welliant cyffredinol a fydd yn sicrhau ei ddyfodol hirdymor. Ni fydd ychwaith yn achosi niwed i unrhyw ased treftadaeth cyfagos.

1. Introduction

Proposals have been made to restore and convert to residential to residential use the former Methodist Chapel in Bronington - to the west of the Shropshire town of Whitchurch but within the historic Welsh county of Flint. Under the guidelines of Planning Policy Wales and local guidance, this report was commissioned to provide a heritage impact assessment of the proposals; it is not concerned with any other planning matters.

1.2 Report Format

The report format is straightforward. After this introductory section and one on planning guidance (Section 2), is a short history (3), description (4) and discussion (5). Section 6 is a discussion, Section 7 outlines the proposals, Section 8 is a heritage impact assessment of the proposals, and Section 9 is a short conclusion.

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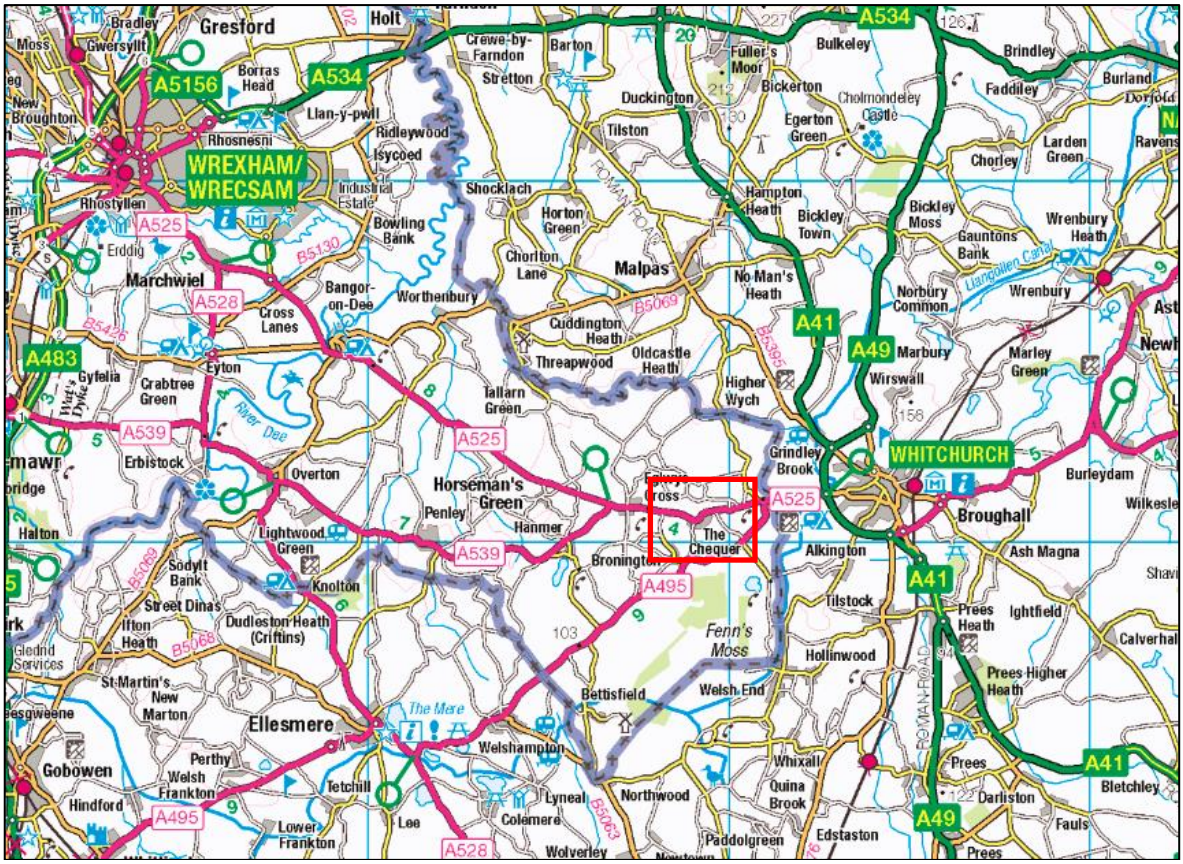


Fig.1: Location plan.

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2. General Planning Guidance

The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 received the Royal Assent in March 2016, with some of its provisions coming into force in May of the same year. The main planning laws are still enshrined in the earlier Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990.

Section 66 of the Act deals with the responsibilities of local planning authorities – the decision makers - when dealing with planning applications that could impact on heritage assets.

The first part of Section 66 states:

> '*In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*'.[1]

The main planning guidance for Wales is now set out in *Planning Policy Wales*, the latest iteration of which was published in February 2021. Chapter 6 deals with the historic environment and includes the following paragraphs:

> **6.1.1** *The historic environment comprises all the surviving physical elements of previous human activity and illustrates how past generations have shaped the world around us. It is central to Wales's culture and its character, whilst contributing to our sense of place and identity. It enhances our quality of life, adds to regional and local distinctiveness and is an important economic and social asset.*
>
> **6.1.7** *It is important that the planning system looks to protect, conserve and enhance the significance of historic assets. This will include consideration of the setting of an historic asset which might extend beyond its curtilage. Any change that impacts on an historic asset or its setting should be managed in a sensitive and sustainable way.*
>
> **6.1.10** *There should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation or enhancement of a listed building and its setting, which might extend beyond its curtilage. For any development proposal affecting a listed building or its setting, the primary material consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.*
>
> **6.1.11** *For listed buildings, the aim should be to find the best way to protect and enhance their special qualities, retaining them in sustainable use. The continuation or reinstatement of the original use should generally be the first option, but not all original uses will now be viable or appropriate. The application of planning and listed building controls should recognise the need for flexibility where new uses*

[1] Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 c.9 section 66 (1), 41

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have to be considered in order to secure a building's survival or provide it with a sound economic future.

6.1.13 *Applicants for listed building consent must be able to justify their proposals, show why the alteration or demolition of a listed building is desirable or necessary and consider the impact of any change upon its significance. This must be included in a heritage impact statement, which will be proportionate both to the significance of the building and to the degree of change proposed.*

The potential impact of any changes to heritage assets needs to be assessed during the development of the proposals for such changes; Cadw, the national heritage body in Wales, have produced guidance on the production of such heritage assessments – *Heritage Impact Assessments in Wales* (2017) – which outlines what information is required. It:

'*should take into account sufficient information to enable both the significance of the asset and the impact of change to be understood. It should be proportionate both to the significance of the historic asset and to the degree of change proposed.*'

An earlier Cadw guidance document, *Conservation Principles*, of 2011, provides a more succinct, pragmatic and useful summary of the issues of conservation and its core principle (para.1.1) recognises that:

'*Changes in the historic environment are inevitable. This can be the result of decay caused by natural processes, damage caused by wear and tear of use, and the need to respond to social, cultural, economic and technological changes*' (para.1.1).

Furthermore, it states that '*conservation is the careful management of change*' (para.1.2).

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3. Setting & Outline History

Chapel House lies a little to the north-east of the village of Bronington. It is within a projecting portion of the historic Welsh county of Flint and very close to the modern border with England – the nearest town being Whitchurch, just over that boundary – within a post-glacial undulating landscape, well-watered and with an abundance of ponds often formed from 'kettle holes'.

This area was a part of the 'Maelor Saesnag' which was once within the English kingdom of Mercia by the 8th century CE and on the eastern side of the definitive Offa's Dyke, which would account for the many place-names derived from Saxon in the area instead of from Welsh – such as Bronington.

Away from the village of Bronington itself, historically a chapelry within the parish of Hamner, most settlement is scattered and much of it in the 19th and 20th century was built along the main routes through the area.

Church House is known to have been built on the south side of the main Whitchurch to Wrexham road in 1820 in part of the township known as Bronington Chequer. It originally combined a chapel for Wesleyan Methodists and a small dwelling for the minister.

It is clearly shown on the tithe map of 1839 – at which time it was listed as being owned (presumably nominally) by Thomas Allwood, a trustee of the Wesleyan Meeting House which took up about two-thirds of the building; the remainder, to the west, was described as a 'house and yard' occupied by Joseph Horton, presumably the minister.

The chapel section was one single full-height space, possibly open to the roof trusses or a ceiling. The house had rooms front and back on two floors with a small stair in the south-western corner.

Externally the elevations were not as regular as they are now; on the rear the differences between the former chapel and house section are quite clear – but that is no longer the case on the principal façade. However, originally, it is known that the window to the left – lighting the chapel – was once one tall single window that was in the recent past reconfigured to match the fenestration of the house.

In the 1905 religious census the chapel had 53 adherents. Despite low numbers it continued in use until the later-20th century, latterly known by some locals as the Chequer Chapel. It was disused by the 1990's, if not earlier, and in 1997 consent was granted for the conversion of the building into one single dwelling (*see* Appendix, Figs.7 and 8).

As well as the external changes to the windows and a much needed refurbishment, the main changes were internal. The interior was effectively gutted and re-ordered and the most obvious change was the insertion of a first-floor in the formerly single storey chapel area of the building.

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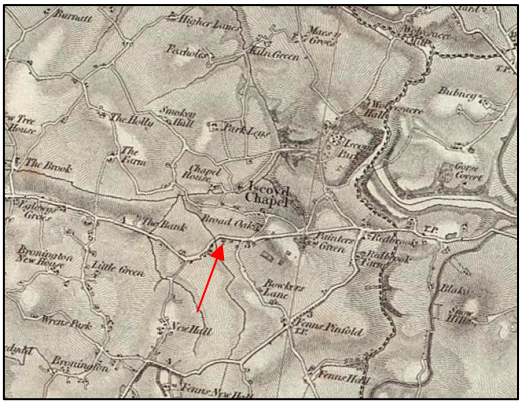


Fig.2: Extract from the 1st published edition of the 1" OS map of 1833.

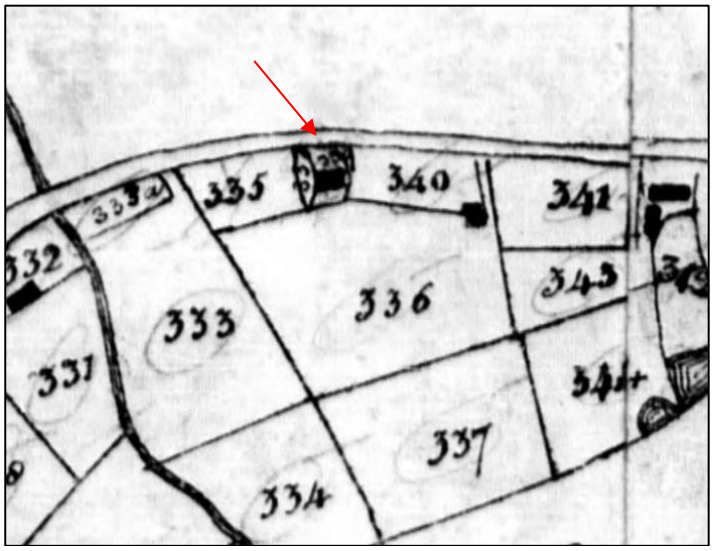


Fig.3: Extract from the tithe apportionment map of 1839.

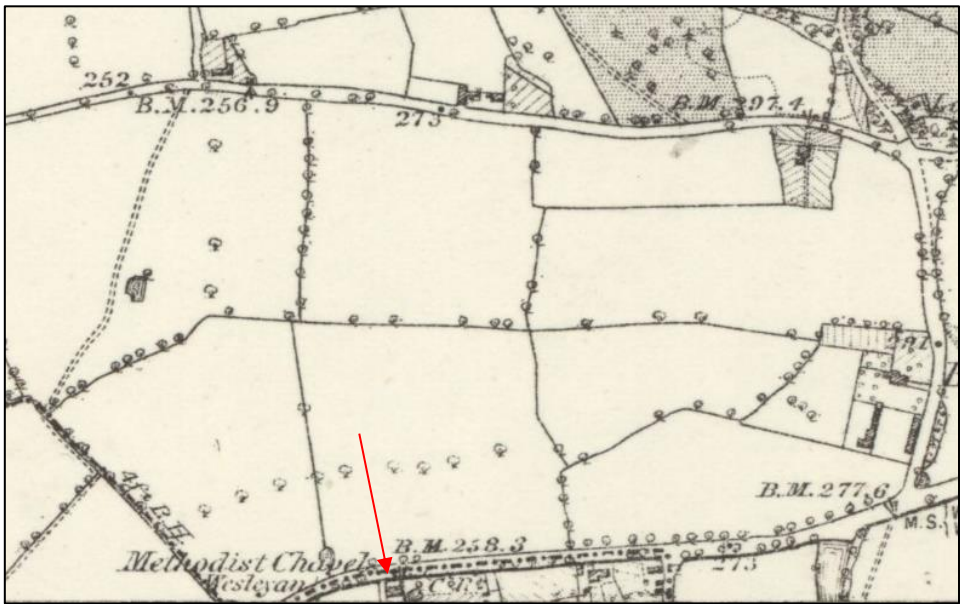


Fig.4: Extract from the 2nd edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, revised in 1900.

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4. Description

Chapel House is, excepting for shallow projecting central sections, rectangular in plan and now entirely of two storeys; it is built parallel to the main road and set back slightly from it, though there are no remains of any forecourt.

4.1 The Exterior

4.1.1 The Entrance Front or North Elevation

The front, or north, elevation faces the main road. It is a symmetrical composition of three bays, with the central bay breaking forward slightly beneath a triangular and simply coped pediment. The elevation is faced in fairly regular dark red bricks, laid to a Flemish bond and rising from a low ashlared sandstone plinth to a dentilled eaves detail that also forms the base of the pediment.

The entrance is in the central bay and has a simple architrave and canopy. The six panelled door is probably original but its rectangular fanlight has been boarded over. Directly above is a low upper window under a semi-circular stuccoed head with plain springers and keystone, and a projecting sill. It contains radial glazing in the head above a four-light casement.

To either side in the end bays there are vertically aligned ground and first-floor windows. The ground-floor windows have flat-arched stone or stuccoed heads with simple keystones and projecting sills. They contain timber 4x2 balanced sashes. Above, the first-floor windows are similar to the central window.

There is a slight discontinuity in between the left-hand windows, explained by the fact that these are the result of the remodelling after 1997 of one tall window opening – and understanding of the building's development further complicated by the possibility that there was also a doorway at this point reflected in vertical construction breaks marked on the planning drawings.

4.1.2 The Rear, or South, Elevation

The rear elevation has the same basic composition as the front elevation, in being of three bays – with the central section breaking forward. However, it is faced in cruder bricks rising from a painted stucco plinth and laid to a less regular bond; there is no central pediment.

In addition, whilst there are tall full-height window openings with plain brick semi-circular heads in the central and right-hand bays, the fenestration of the left-hand bays is quite irregular.

In this section there is a ground-floor doorway and two-light casement window to its right, with two more windows, of slightly different sizes, on the first floor – also of two-lights. These have crude heads of timber or brick and could be inserted. The doorway is set within brickwork that has been limewashed in the past and there was evidently once a projecting porch protecting it which has since been demolished.

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Pl.1: The front, or north, elevation of Chapel House.



Pl.2: Chapel House from the south-west, showing scar of former extension.

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4.1.3 The Gable Ends

In the western gable end of the building is a former doorway on the ground floor which has been blocked in brick, but no other openings. There are also no openings in the eastern gable end of the building.

4.2 The Roof

The roof is hipped and covered with slate; the main and hip ridges are covered in ceramic bonnets and there is a cross-dormered section behind the coped pediment on the front elevation.

Structurally it is of four bays; the brick cross-wall between the original chapel and house sections acts as a 'brick truss' and the other trusses are of simple bolted king-post design supporting two tiers of trenched purlins.



Pl.3: Part of the first-floor inserted into the chapel section, showing part of the roof structure.

4.3 The Interior

The interior was radically altered when the building was converted into a single dwelling and the original chapel was floored over. There are some fixtures and fittings that appear to have been reused and reset – such as the main stairs which could incorporate material from the chapel but which could equally have been acquired from elsewhere. Very little of the original character of either the chapel or of the house survives.

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Pl.4: Part of the remodelled and floored in chapel section.



Pl.5: View from within the remodelled ground-floor of the former minister's house through the site of the cross-wall between it and the former chapel section beyond.

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5. Discussion

The basic date and development of Chapel House are relatively easy to determine and there is no reason to doubt the 1820 date stone on the front elevation. As built, the eastern two-thirds was the chapel itself, full height and with no indications of a gallery, whilst the western third was a small house for the minister. The chapel entrance was through the central doorway on the north, or front, elevation whilst the original entrance into the house was in the west gable.

The chapel section had a small fireplace in the stack incorporated into the brick cross-wall between the two sections. The house originally had rooms front and back; a lobby inside the entrance provided access to a kitchen in the rear and a living room to the front, as well as the foot of a narrow stair in the south-western corner leading up to the first-floor landing and the two bedrooms at that level.

By the late-20th century there had been some changes to the fabric and some additions made – including a corrugated-sheeted rear porch to the house section and an enclosed smaller porch to the original main entrance or side door to the house on the west gable. The limited evidence suggests that these had been added by the start of the 20th century. It is not clear how long the chapel was empty after services ceased and plans made for its conversion to a dwelling; it is possible that surviving fixtures and fittings were removed during that period.

Following panning consent in 1997 the building was radically altered internally and more subtly altered externally when the conversion works began; it was also refurbished throughout. The interior was effectively gutted and a floor added in the former chapel section. Externally, the already altered left-hand window on the front elevation to the chapel section was remodelled to match the window pattern of the right-hand bay.

As noted in the listing description the building was '*Listed for its special architectural interest as a former chapel and minister's house in a single integrated design, retaining definite Georgian external character after conversion*', but '*the interior has been rebuilt*'. Although most of the conversion was completed, it has been empty for several years and has been subject to break-in and vandalism; it is now again in need of refurbishment.

6. The Proposals

The proposals are to complete the already consented conversion of the building to residential use. On the front elevation the present door is in very poor condition and needs replacing – and a replica door is proposed. The windows on this elevation are also in a poor condition and they relate to the last of several alterations to the design. It is proposed to introduce conservation double glazed units that copy the existing glazing pattern. The windows to the rear will be carefully refurbished.

Small new windows on the first floor in the gable ends have been included for escape purposes. The only loss of structural fabric is in the already much altered western end of the rear wall where a French window is to be created; this part of the building has, in the past, been abutted by a later extension since removed. The main changes are to the much-altered interior.

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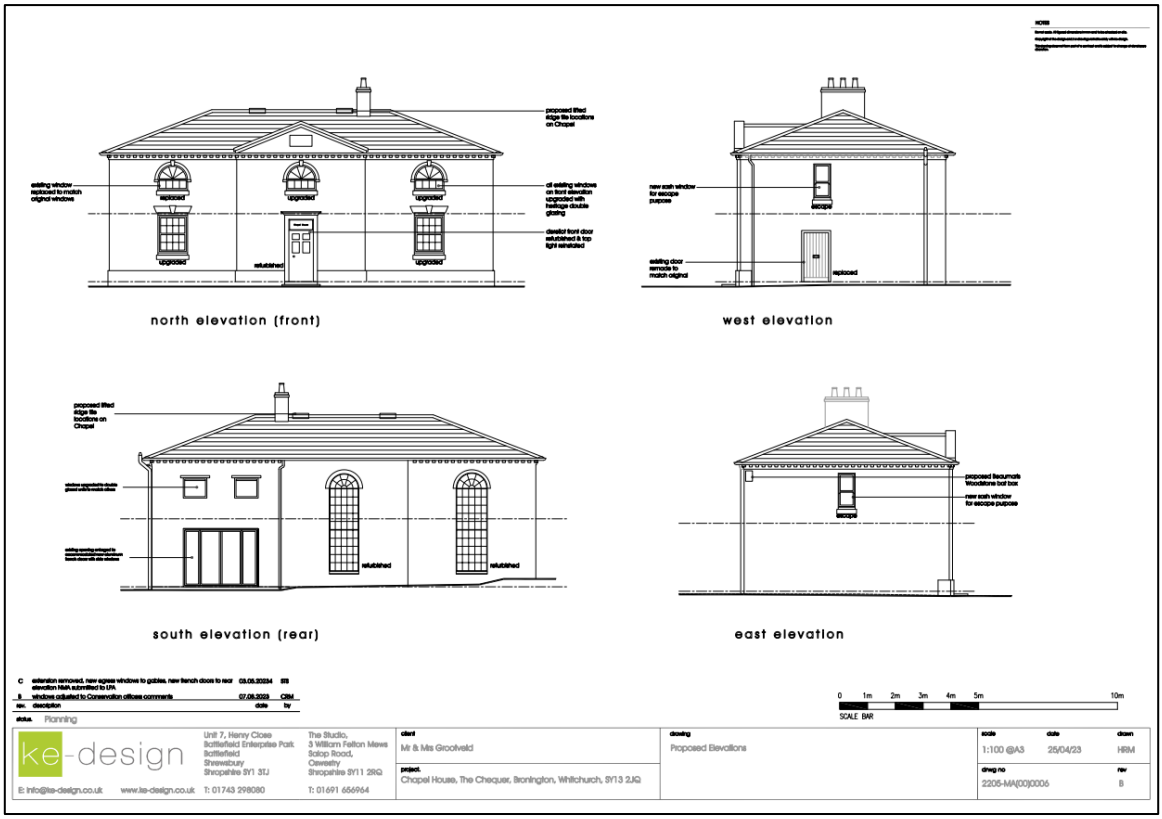


Fig.5: Proposed elevations.

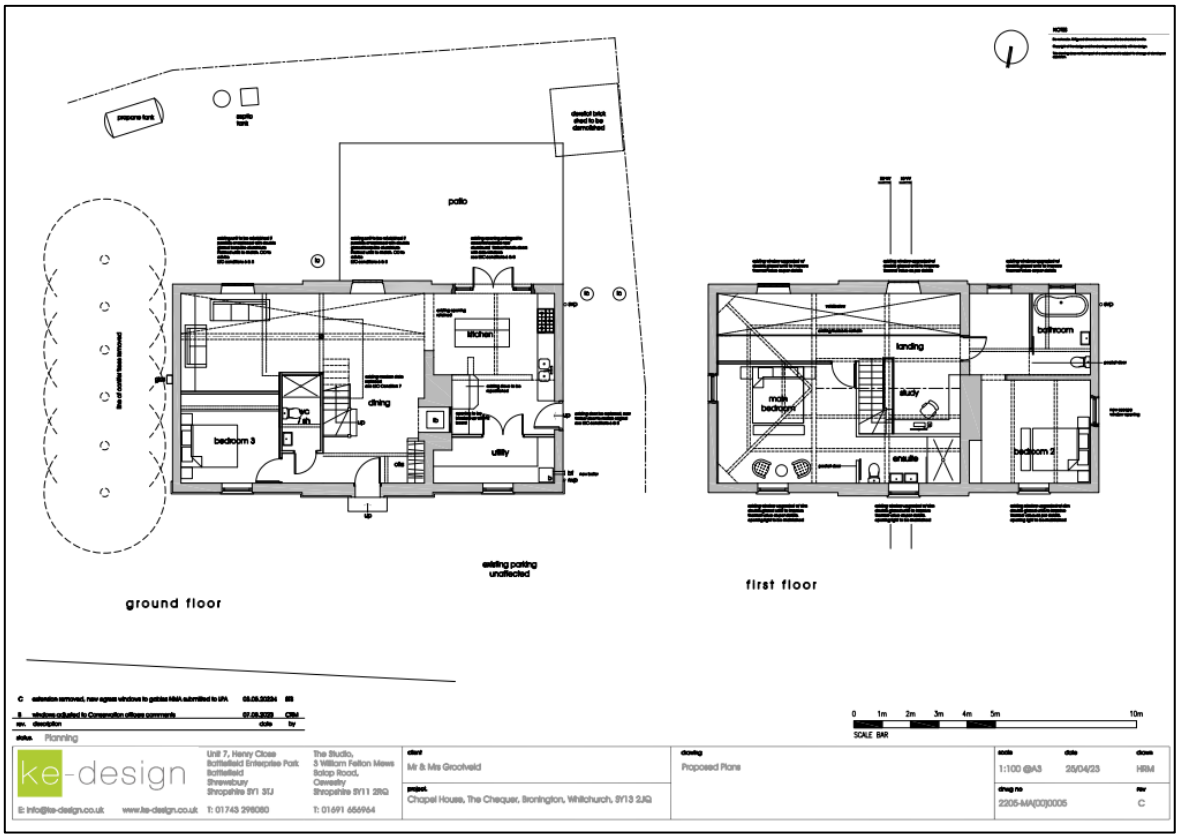


Fig.6: Proposed plans.

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7. Heritage Impact Assessment

7.1 Impact on the Listed Building

The proposals will mainly impact the rear elevation of the property and the existing front elevation will not be significantly impacted other than by the replacement of the existing windows in modern conservation double glazing copying their basic pane and frame patterns. As noted above and demonstrated in the 1995 plans in the appendix, the present façade is something of a quite modern architectural compromise.

Given the fact that this elevation had already been 'tidied' and made more symmetrical than it had originally been, the proposals for the façade are considered to be well designed and proportionate; there will be an overall enhancement of its appearance due to the intended refurbishment of the property.

The main physical impact on external fabric will be on the left-hand section of the rear elevation in order to create the French windows. This is presently a rather unattractive and clearly altered part of the former house, once associated with a rear extension. The proposed internal changes are to an already radically altered interior and are not considered to impact on its limited surviving heritage values.

7.2 Impact on Adjacent Heritage Assets

There are no adjacent designated or undesignated heritage assets to the site, and consequently no such assets could be impacted by these proposals.

7.3 Archaeological Issues

The proposals are for the restoration and changes of a standing building with no need for any extensive groundworks; it is considered therefore that there would be no archaeological issues raised by the proposals.

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8. Conclusions

For the reasons outlined above the proposals for the continued restoration and internal changes to Chapel House are considered to be well-considered and well planned. The proposals are considered to meet all national and local planning policies related to heritage matters.

Specifically they would meet the requirement '*to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*' outlined in para.6.5.9 of *Planning Policy Wales*.

Paragraph 45 of Cadw's *Conservation Principles* provides a good summary by stating that:

> '*The assessment of the degree of harm to an historic asset needs to consider the impact of any proposal on its heritage values, and the likely consequences of doing nothing……The impact of the proposals being put forward need to be assessed by comparing the significance of the historic assets to be affected in their current condition and after the completion of the works*'.

It is considered that these proposals meet the criteria set out in both national and local policies and will result in the enhancement of the listed building that will ensure its long-term future – and that there would be no harm to the heritage asset.

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9: Appendix: Selection of 1995 drawings for the 1996 Planning Application

These drawings were made in 1995 to accompany the planning application for the conversion of the chapel which was eventually permitted in 1997; they were produced by © Mr and Mrs Buckley.

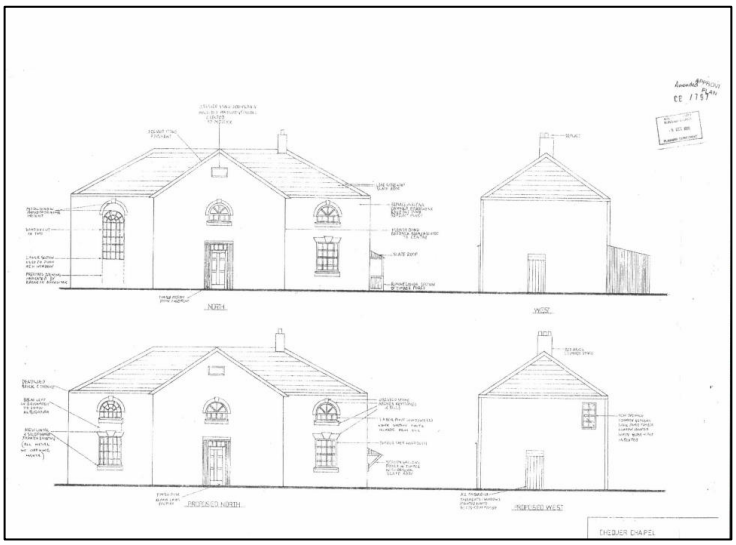


Fig.7: Front or north elevation, existing (top) and proposed.

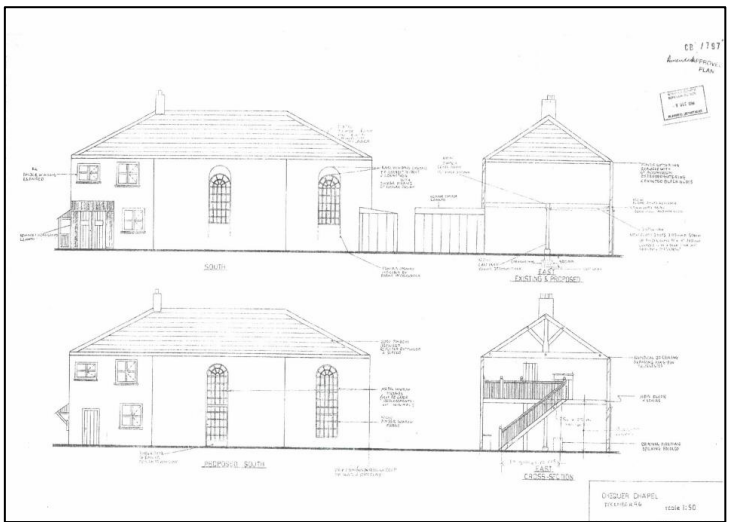
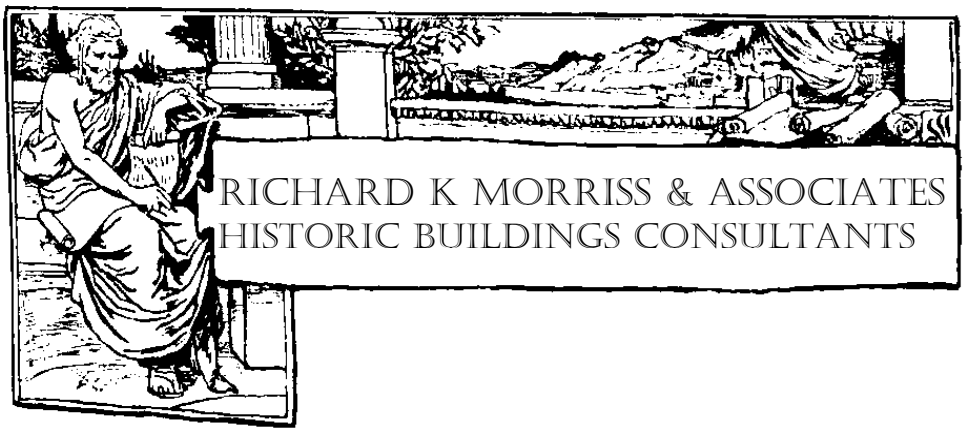


Fig.8: Rear or south elevation, existing (top) and proposed.

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The Consultancy

Richard K Morriss founded this Consultancy in 1995 after previously working for English Heritage and the Ironbridge Institute of the University of Birmingham and spending eight years as Assistant Director of the Hereford Archaeology Unit. Although Shropshire-based the Consultancy works throughout the UK on a wide variety of historic buildings for clients that include the National Trust, the Landmark Trust, English Heritage, the Crown Estates, owners, architects, planning consultants and developers. It specialises in the archaeological and architectural analysis of historic buildings of all periods and planning advice related to them. It also undertakes broader area appraisals, heritage impact assessments and Conservation Management Plans.

Richard Morriss is a former Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and of the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, archaeological advisor to four cathedrals, occasional lecturer at Bristol and Birmingham universities, and author of many academic papers and of 20 books, mainly on architecture and archaeology, including The Archaeology of Buildings (Tempus 2000), The Archaeology of Railways (Tempus 1999); Roads: Archaeology & Architecture (Tempus 2006) and ten in the Buildings of series: Bath, Chester, Ludlow, Salisbury, Shrewsbury, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Winchester, Windsor, Worcester (Sutton 1993-1994). The latest work is an Historic England funded monograph on the Houses of Hereford (Oxbow 2018).

He was a member of the project teams responsible for the restoration of Astley Castle, Warwickshire, winner of the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize; the restoration of the Old Market House, Shrewsbury, winner of a 2004 RIBA Conservation Award; and Llwyn Celyn, Monmouthshire, winner of the RICS Conservation Project of the Year 2019. He has also been involved in several projects that have won, or been short-listed for, other awards including those of the Georgian Group for Mostyn House, Denbigh; St. Helen's House, Derby; Radbourne Hall, Derbyshire and Cusgarne Manor, Cornwall.



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