

Design & Access, Heritage Statement

Proposed refurbishment, revised floorplan, and rear cloister extension

Penydarren Road, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 0AJ

Issued Jan. 2023

Amended and re-issued Nov. 2023



About us

George and Co. was found in 2002 to undertake a number of small research projects. This led to a steady growth and has evolved into a collaborative architectural design led practice, where poetics of space, technical detailing, material specification and the environment all have equal weighting.

We place importance on process; we listen, question, and interpret to create well crafted, low energy buildings, through a dialogue of materials, history, context and the character of each site. Each project for us is unique, while defined by a rigorous consistency of attitude, quality, experience and research, with an emphasis on drawing, sketching and physical modelling to understand, edit and refine our designs.

A central part of the fundamental design process is the movement and direction of light throughout the day and the relationship of the built form to the surroundings and the aspirations of its occupants. Our aim is to produce enriched environments which are informed, and define the subtleties that provoke a sense of place.

"All architecture is shelter, all great architecture is the design of space that contains, cuddles, exalts, or stimulates the persons in that space."

Philip Johnson

Work to date has included residential, educational and commercial work, both for private and public sector clients. We have been responsible for the design of private houses as well as social housing, schools, community and cultural art projects, conservation projects and work to several listed buildings. Our services range across all stages of the RIBA Plan of Works from design to inspection.

Introduction

Our studio was approached to refurbish and revise the floorplan of grade II listed Thespian House, Merthyr Tydfil (see appendix 1 for listing). From 1 September 2017 a Heritage Impact Statement is required to support any application for listed building or conservation area consent in Wales. The Heritage Impact Statement replaces the Design and Access Statement in the application process for listed building consent.

This Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared on behalf of Catherine Jones ('the applicant'), to provide relevant information to Merthyr Tydfil Council on the particular significance of a range of historic assets and impacts associated with the proposal.

Our client

Our client, Catherine Jones, approached us to aid her business take its next steps to set up permanent residence at Thespian House. Catherine Jones, through the renovation and refurbishment of Thespian House seeks to safeguard her personal training business through creating an environment that best suits her and her clients. Currently working out of other privately owned gyms the future of her business is in the hands of others.

Situated at the heart of Merthyr just 100m from castle multi storey car park and other local amenities, it's locality will allow her business to thrive.

Our client has a great appreciation for the history and heritage of Thespian House and endeavours to hold its historic features and detail at the heart of the proposed refurbishment. Her enthusiasm for the building has been inspiring and we seek to capture this inspiration in our proposed scheme, in a way that does both our client and Thespian House justice.

Our Strategy

Our strategy for the refurbishment and regeneration of Thespian House is clear. Based on evidence found through historic research we propose that the building is returned to the grandeur of its 1920s Neoclassical origins with detailed elements restored. The building has since been butchered, mainly through its 1960s Art Deco makeover, and has fallen into disrepair. We believe the reason for its decline is down to the nature of the attached building (Theatre Royal) to which Thespian House was built as an extension in the 1920s (see historical map).

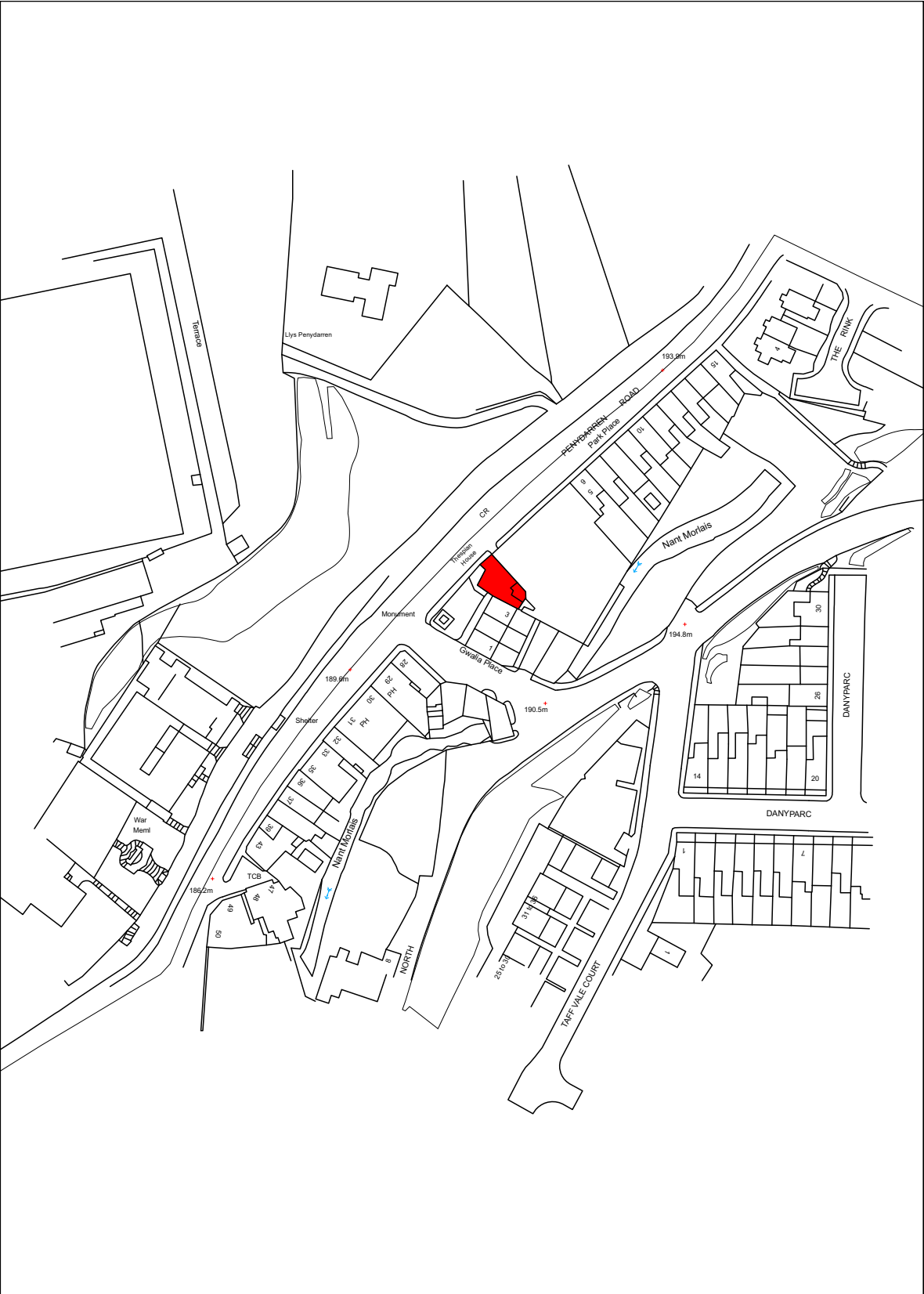
The restoration of 1920s external details see the crenelated parapet restored, the removal of the rendered façade and sash windows to have rebated jam details as per the historic details. Our strategy also sees a small, lightweight rear cloister extension to improve the link to the garden, increase privacy and improve circulation. This extension seeks to be an extension of the architectural language of the building whilst clearly identified as a modern addition.

The strategy for internal works follows the same principles. The internal refurbishment strategy is itemized into the following categories:

1. Circulation and function
2. Historic architectural features as the focal point within spaces
3. Appropriately considered materiality and detailing

Further elaboration in relation to the internal refurbishment strategy can be found within the body of this text.

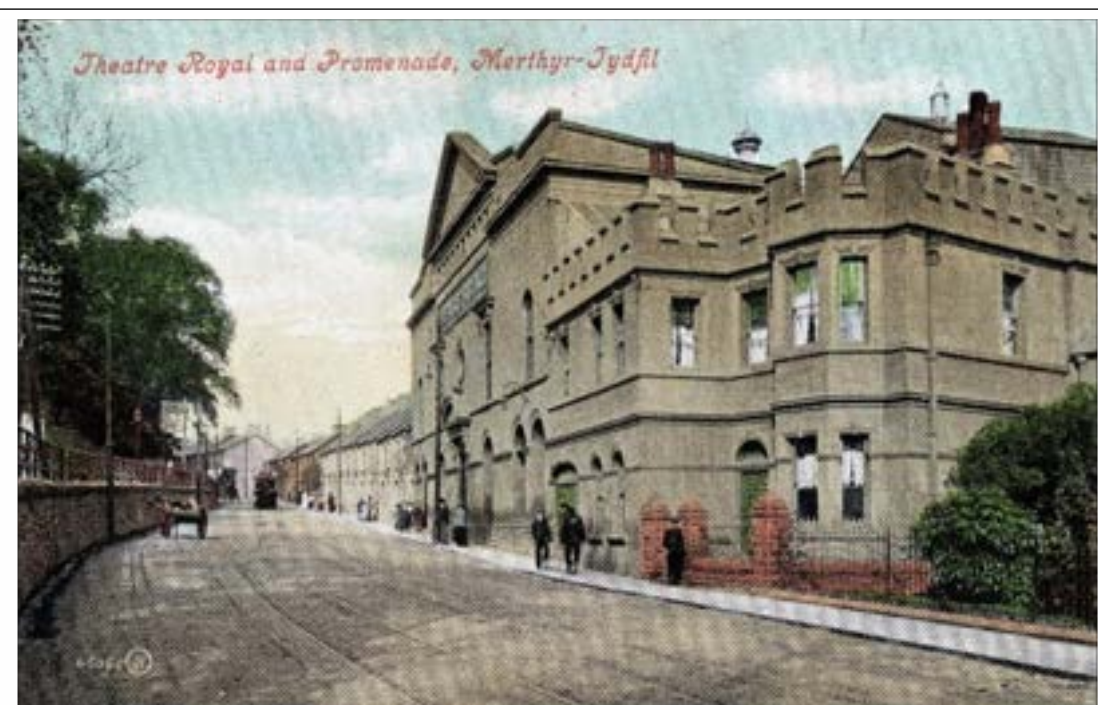
site location plan below:



The purpose of the text is to briefly explain the principles or philosophy, terminology, methodology and techniques of cultural heritage conservation. This sets out the general principles to consider when planning changes to historic assets and applying for listed building, conservation area and scheduled monument consent.

It sets a standard of practice for those who provide advice, make decisions about, or undertake works to places of cultural significance, including owners, managers and custodians, while creating a nationally accepted standard for heritage conservation practice, based on a philosophy first set out in the Burra Charter in 1979 and last updated in 2013 (The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013.).

As outlined in the drawing package, applications for planning permission and listed building consent are submitted for the proposed refurbishment of grade II listed Thespian House.



Thespian House and adjacent Theatre Royal – early 20th Century



Thespian House and adjacent Theatre Royal – photo taken 1970's showing 1932 Art Deco Makeover



Thespian House and adjacent Theatre Royal



Thespian House – current condition



Thespian House and adjacent Theatre Royal – 2019, current condition

The Historic Assets

Introduction

Planning Policy Wales defines the historic environment as: “The historic environment of Wales is made up of individual historic features, archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic parks, gardens, townscapes and landscapes, collectively known as historic assets. The most important of these historic assets have statutory protection through scheduling, listing or designation as a conservation area. Other assets are included in formal registers, which identify them as being of special historic interest. Many others make a positive contribution to local character and sense of place. Some, such as buried archaeological remains, have still to be identified. It is important to protect what is significant about these assets and sustain their distinctiveness. Historic assets should be the subject of recording and investigation when they are affected by proposals that alter or destroy them. Historic assets are a non-renewable resource.”

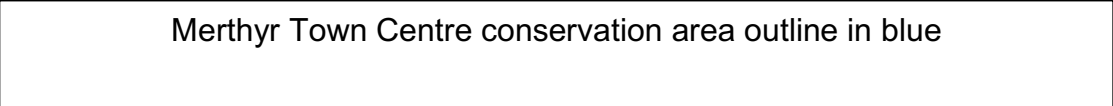
A historic asset is defined as: “An identifiable component of the historic environment. It may consist or be a combination of an archaeological site, an historic building, or a parcel of historic landscape. Nationally important historic assets will normally be designated.”

Designated Historic Assets

Designated historic assets are those which possess a level of heritage interest that justifies designation and are then subject to particular procedures in planning decisions that involve them.

Conservation Areas

The site of Thespian House is located within Merthyr Town Centre conservation area. See map below:



The importance of setting to the significance of a historic asset is identified in draft best practice guidance, which states: “Setting is important to the way in which historic assets are understood, appreciated and experienced, and contributes to their significance.”

Historic Development of the Site

Theatre Royal was opened in May 1894 as the Theatre Royal and Opera House. It was designed by local Merthyr Tydfil architect T.C. Wakeling in a Neo-Classical style and was equipped with a stage that was 28 feet wide and 22 feet deep, with six dressing rooms. It was one of the premier theatres in Wales and attracted many of the biggest stars who performed there. With the growing popularity of films in the 1920s, the theatre began to operate as a cinema, as well as presenting live performances.

Thespian house is an extension to the Theatre Royal building. Evidence of this has been found whilst researching historic maps. The below map shows the Theatre Royal built in 1900, with Thespian House clearly missing from the map. Evidence that Thespian House was built as an extension can also be found when analysing the plan. The plan clearly indicates that the site is an infill plot with the axis clearly responding to that of the Theatre Royal and that of the adjacent terrace houses. As a result, the axis seems to clash at the centre of the plan.



Map showing Theatre Royal before construction of Thespian House
1900

The property was built in the 1920's and was a fine example of a Neoclassical building. The growing popularity of the theatre at that time and the name 'Thespian House' meaning actor or actress would suggest that it was built to house those performing at the Theatre Royal. It is likely that Thespian House was designed by another Architect but in a way that adopted the architectural language of Theatre Royal. The theatre was taken over by the Associated British Cinemas (ABC) chain in 1932, who gave the venue the Art Deco

makeover (Thespian House given art deco refurb at the same time, presumably). The Theatre Royal closed in the late 1960s and was converted into a bingo club. The theatre closed as a bingo hall in 2006 and has been unused ever since. Plans for the site have been considered but never submitted. The building is now in a very poor state and on the “at risk” register.

Assessments of Significance

Thespian House, adjacent to Theatre Royal (Grade II Listed Building).

The reasons for the listed designation (see appendix 1) of Thespian House is as follows:

‘Attached downhill to right is Thespian House, a 2-storey rendered block set back with a splayed bay further right. Continuous plain parapet (formerly crenellated), architraves with keyblocks to (boarded) windows, string-course over ground-floor links to theatre. Arched ground-floor openings also linked with segmental carriage arch on left, double boarded doors.’

The listing of the adjacent Theatre Royal is key to the listing of Thespian House. Grade II listing of Theatre Royal is as follows:

‘2-storey and attic, 5-bay classical front with modified parapets over centre (pediment removed), lean-to flanking parapets. Centre 3-bay cornice over small vents, THEATRE ROYAL panel below. First-floor sash windows, outer round-headed, inner with lion-mask brackets to cornices; central oculus over broken segmental pediment with urn finial and scrolled brackets. Ground-floor arched openings linked by impost and hood-mouldings, recessed doors up steps. Modern canopied entrance (replacing arched openings) to left. Bulky rear elevation with corrugated-iron fly-tower above wide slate roof.’

‘Fine auditorium completely rebuilt in later 1920s with a large balcony inserted. Splendid sunburst ceiling rose (1890s?) over stalls; Art Deco borders, rosettes etc. Art Deco proscenium with ramped and stepped surround, Royal Arms to centre, splayed crestings. Side walls with linked low-relief panels with stepped detailing, acanthus and anthemion cornices over. Organ pipes to niches flanking stage. Recessed coffering over gallery with convex, cantilevered front, Art Deco embellishments. Polygonal, pendant light-fittings.’

We would argue that the listing of Thespian House is largely by its association to Theatre Royal. It is also worth noting that much of its character and both neoclassical and art deco features have been eradicated over time.

Setting of the Listed Building and Local Context

The setting of Thespian House amongst its local context is central to its designation as a grade II listed building.

Its neoclassical style is consistent with nearby architecture built at that time and encapsulates the history, heritage and character of the area. See below significant examples of nearby architecture that adopts the same neoclassical style.



- A – Thespian House 1920
- B – Theatre Royal 1894
- C – Masonic Temple 1910
- D – Merthyr General Hospital 1888



C - Masonic Temple built 1910, neoclassical style



D – Merthyr general hospital 1888, neoclassical style



E – Labour Exchange 1907, neoclassical style

The distinct architectural style and language of the buildings noted above reflect a time in which Merthyr Tydfil sat at the heart of industrial Wales. An architectural presence that links the people of 21st century Merthyr Tydfil to its industrial history and heritage upon which the town was built.

Summary of the Proposed Development:

The proposed development sees the restoration of the historic façade and parapet detail, internal refurbishment and lightweight rear cloister extension at Thespian House, Merthyr Tydfil.

Justification for the Proposed Works

This proposal brings the historic building into modern day use. Its restoration is sensitive and respects the historic fabric with the view to restoring the Neo-Classical façade. The proposal will enhance the rich history and heritage of the conservation area. The proposed coffee shop, gym and yoga studios will bring new use to the area, allowing the historic building to be embraced and enjoyed.

Structural Report

Some local internal repairs will be required. These are caused by settlement and neglect over time.

The interior has been gutted, walls knocked off and windows taken out. New timber floors have been put in and modern cement render applied to the walls. The render has blown in places and will require localised repair.

Parts of the front elevation have had modern pebble dash render added that has blown in places.

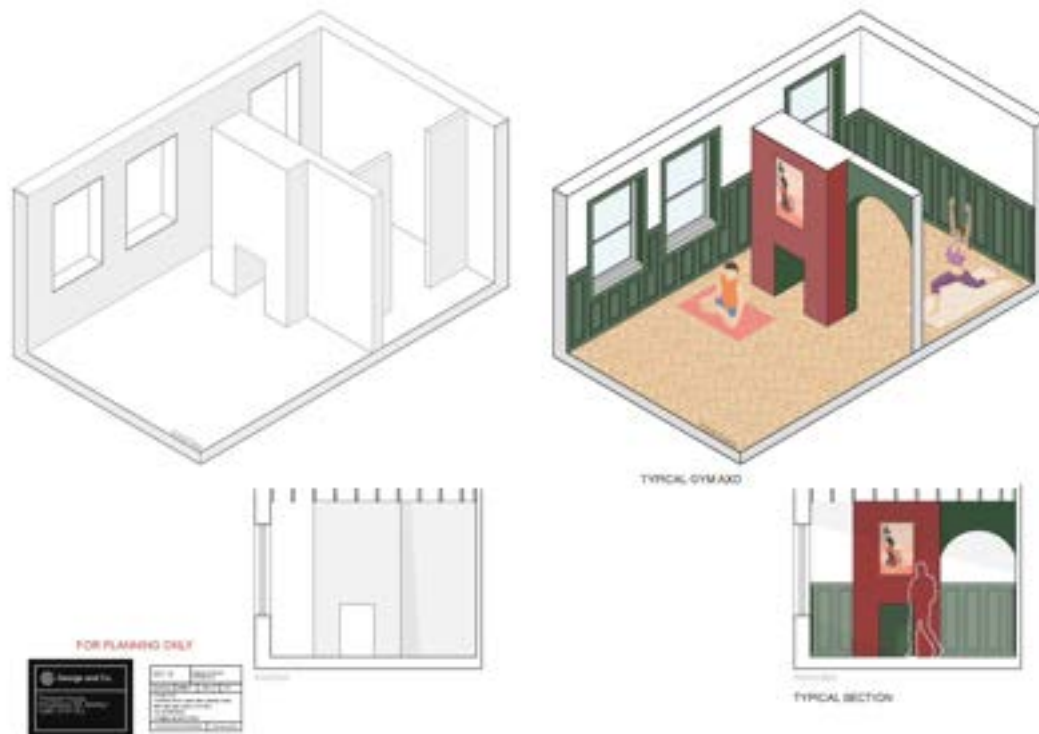
The design

The design is centred around the restoration of the neo-classical architectural features to the road facing façade. This will include the addition of the parapet that was removed during the 1960s found on historic photos. The restoration of the façade sees the removal of the rendered façade and blocked up windows to restore to the original. Window openings will have sash windows with rebated jam details as per the historic details.

Thespian House has been rendered featureless and unused. Our proposal seeks to reintroduce character and warmth to the interior spaces that will drastically improve this listed building.

Note that we believe that this building should be restored to its neoclassical 1920s origins and not that of the 1960s Art Deco makeover. Although listed largely by association to the adjacent Theatre Royal, the key architectural elements of Thespian House mentioned within the listing refers to its original form, with splayed bay's, arched windows, and its formerly crenelated parapet. Our proposal sees the above architectural elements as focal points that are central to the design. As a result, the proposal sees the restoration of the crenelated parapet and arched forms adopted to the rear cloister extension and internally with the treatment of new openings.

Interior refurbishment strategy



Shown above is an illustrative example that encompasses the overarching strategy for the interior refurbishments at Thespian House. Shown here is a typical studio arrangement as existing and proposed. The strategy for the treatment of and alterations to interior space is outlined below:

- 1. Circulation and function** – Historically used as accommodation the plan is somewhat confined to its existing layouts of domestically sized spaces e.g., bedrooms. To bring Thespian House into modern day use subtle openings are proposed, to better connect spaces. For example, the above illustration shows a feature archway introduced to open the space for better connectivity and function as a yoga studio. The design of the archway is borrowed from the language of existing archways within the road facing façade.
- 2. Historic architectural features as the focal point** – This strategy is one that aims to centralise historical architectural features and detail at the heart of the building. The above studio example sees the original fireplace emphasised through the use of colour at the centre of the room. Not only a reminder of the original function of the building but a reminder of scale and feeling within the spaces at Thespian House.
- 3. Appropriately considered materiality and detailing** – Although there is no record showing the historic treatment of interiors, Thespian House

will keep its Neo-Classical origins at the focal point of material choice and detailing. For example, the above illustration shows the introduction of timber panelling up to dado rail level (see appendix 5 for example). This material choice as well as bringing the much-needed character also responds to its proposed function. The panelling can be easily maintained with dents and scuffs easily removed. The illustration also shows herringbone patterned timber flooring; a hardwearing flooring treatment suitable for the proposed studio spaces but consistent with the neoclassical style.

Heritage Impact Summary

The proposal seeks to enrich the history and heritage of the area. Its restoration and refurbishment will see the building returned to its neoclassical origins. The ultra-light touch cloister extension to the rear has no negative impact on the heritage of the building nor the surrounding area. This addition seeks to improve the function and circulation of the plan and addresses the garden area to the rear.

Its location to the rear of Thespian House has allowed for a disabled W/C to be slipped into the old outbuildings with ample circulation space to allow for it to be comfortably used. The rear cloister extension also aids with privacy for this new disabled W/C by screening the doorway. It also allows for views out toward the garden area at the same time.

In terms of its detailing, the rear cloister extension borrows its architectural language from the existing archways found on the front elevation. By doing so, the addition appears as if it is an extension of the architectural language whilst clearly identified as a modern addition. The existing pebble dash lean-to rear extension is to be removed.

Note that the rear cloister extension is 6sqm, and the existing lean-to extension measures 7.6sqm. As a result, the work to the rear of Thespian House sees no increase in footprint.

Response to pre-application enquiry

The following sets out comments and responses to concerns raised as part of the pre-application enquiry for the restoration and conversion of Thespian House to accommodate a gym, yoga studios and coffee shop.

Principle of development

The pre-application enquiry supports the restoration and conversion of Thespian House to accommodate a gym, yoga studios and coffee shop, in principle. Its location and use is supported by policies SW4 and EcW3 of the LDP.

Thespian House is located within a C2 Flood Risk Zone, requesting the need for a Flood Consequence Assessment to accompany this application.

Design and Heritage

The proposal sees the demolition of an existing lean-to extension to the rear. The pre-application enquiry asks that the reasoning for its demolition is clearly justified.

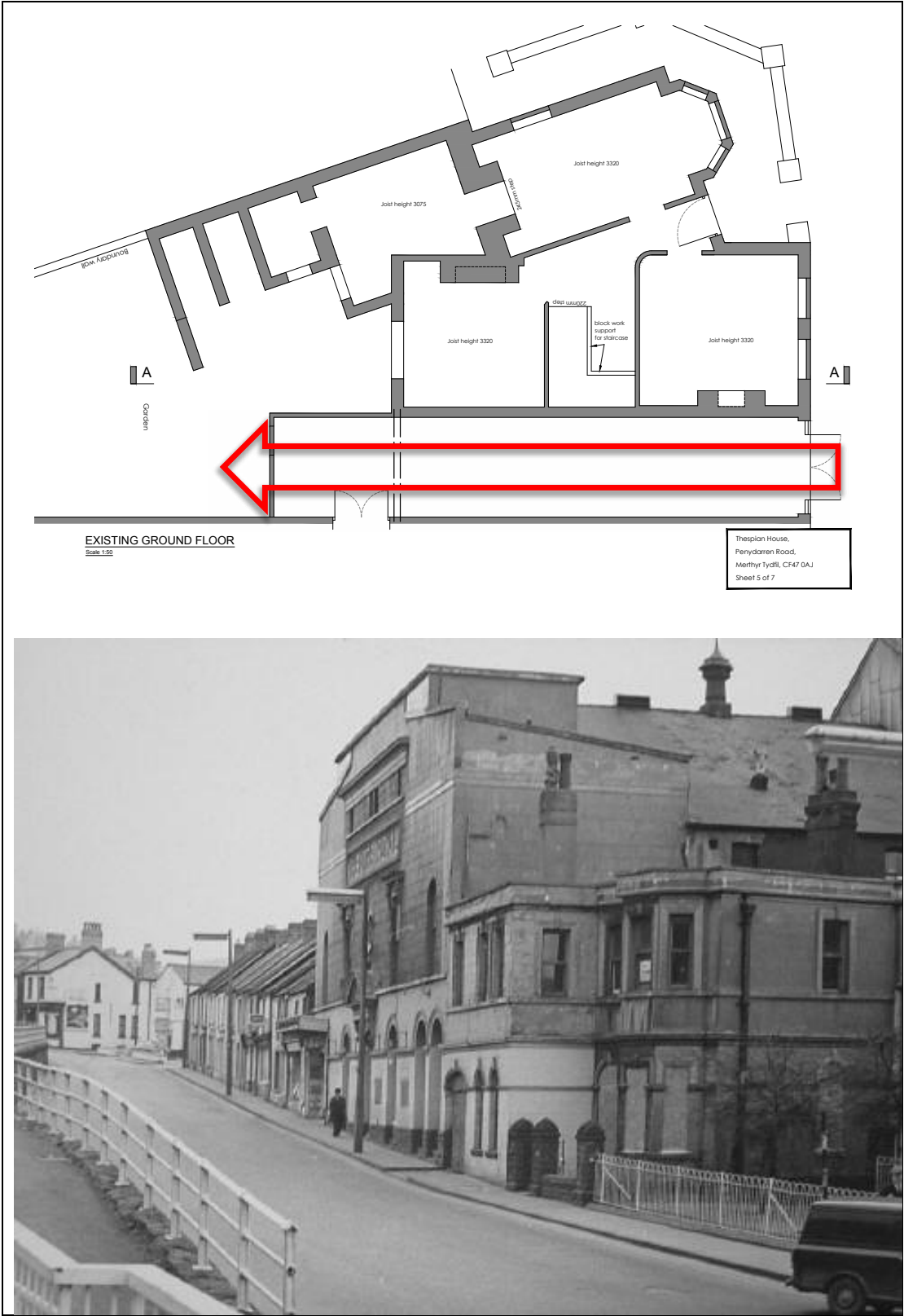


The above photograph shows the existing lean-to extension. Exactly when this was built is unclear although its fabric has been adapted over time and thought to have been a later addition to the building. It is currently finished with pebble dash.

It is thought that the lean-to extension to the rear was a later addition to serve as a plant room (see vents on above photo).

Furthermore, the existing plan shows this area separated as a 'corridor' from the house itself, suggesting an alternative function. Upon further analysis it is clear that the historic photos show a dropped kerb to the front elevation, which strongly suggests its use as a drop off area. Carriages would pass under the segmented archway to drop people and goods at the rear of the property. This evidence suggests further that the lean-to extension was a later addition and is of no architectural or historic merit.

See plan and dropped kerb below:



'In regard to the proposed extension, it needs to be demonstrated how it reflects the historic character of the building and whether it affects any features of importance.'

In response to the above comment, arches are key to the architectural language of Thespian House. The front elevation sees 4 arched windows and doorways, a theme continued with 7 arches to the front elevation of the adjacent Theatre. Archways are a key architectural element of the original building fabric architectural language.

The proposed cloister extension seeks to be a modern adaptation and a continuation of the architectural language. The proposed extension is a historical link to a journey through arches. Pre-application guidance states that the approach to reintroducing various architectural features to the building that draw on the historic references is welcomed, and the proposed alterations would greatly improve its character and appearance.

We would say that the preservation of the internal layout is of no merit in terms of its listing and association to the theatre, as indicated by Cadw:

'Thespian House is listed by virtue of being directly attached to the theatre and contemporary with it, and they share a function in the provision of entertainment' – Mike Weatherhead, Casework Team Leader, Cadw.

We would therefore consider the internal alterations to be acceptable. The merit in terms of the listing and its prior function lies with the external architectural detailing such as detailing around the windows and arches, and the crenelated parapet.

Parking Assessment

It is required as part of this application that it is demonstrated that the proposal adheres to the CSS Wales Parking Standards 2008.

We would anticipate that Thespian House sits within parking Zone 2 – Town Centre or City Fringe.

Parking required at Thespian House would fall under short-term operational parking as outlined under section 7.2 (b) of the CSS Wales Parking Standards 2008.

The parking document fails to outline a use that is specifically relevant to the development proposed for Thespian House.

- The document outlines the need for 1 space per 2 facility users for fitness clubs, leisure clubs and sports clubs.
- The document outlines the need 1 space per 14sqm of café space, and 1 space per 3 staff.

The proposal at Thespian House will see a maximum of 10 yoga studio users at a time which would require 5 spaces.

The proposed coffee shop area is 26sqm and would require provision for a further 2 spaces.

Staff at Thespian House would not exceed 3 at any one time, therefore only 1 parking space would be needed.

As itemised above the required number of spaces for Thespian House would be 8 spaces.

The public car park approximately 120m to the south of site, identified as part of the pre-application enquiry, would comfortably accommodate the provision for short-term parking for the proposal at Thespian House, in compliance with CSS Wales Parking Standards 2008.

Conclusion

In summary, this proposal seeks to enhance the condition and function of Thespian House with a soft restoration that is centred around original neoclassic and features based on photographic evidence. The restored façade will significantly enhance the front and side elevations as per the historic photographs. Restoring the sash windows, rebated jambe details and crenelated parapet are architectural features that are key to the grade II listing. These details are also central to the character and will enhance the historical character within the conservation area.

This refurbishment and repurposing of Thespian House, Merthyr Tydfil is about giving this historic building a new life through a conservation process that has its historic significance and architectural character at its heart. A process driven by high levels of design, consideration, research, and construction to deliver an end product that appropriately respects the history as well as the future use and longevity of this listed building.

Conservation Processes

Process is described as *'include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these'*

Each item above looks at the significance of the works whether its minor, or major as look as and its appropriate in its interpretation, done in a respectful way, or even reversible through documentation of a survey and photography. It is an important part of the process to document, understand and maintain what has happened. Especially if the works need to be reversed, but more importantly to protect the history of the culture and why.

As part of the Submission, we have attached the following:

Application form

Site Location Plan at a scale of 1:1250

Existing and proposed plans at a scale of 1:50 identify any buildings or features to be removed and/or any new extension or additions.

Heritage Impact Statement

The summary Heritage Impact Statement above includes the following:

- A description of the proposed works including the design principle and concepts;
- The reasoning for the proposed works explaining what the works intend to achieve and why they are desirable or necessary;
- Photographs, plans and detailed drawings submitted with the application;
- A brief description of the special interest of the building and an assessment of its significance with particular focus on the areas or features affected by the proposed works;
- An assessment of the impact of the proposed works upon the special interest and significance of the building including reference to any potential benefits and any harm that may result;
- A summary of the design options considered and the reasons for the preferred approach/works;

Photographs

Drawings as Existing and Proposed

Details

Bibliography

Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales 2017

Technical Advice Note 24: The Historic Environment

Technical Advice Note 12: Design

Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Planning Policy Wales, (Edition 6, November 2016)

The Local Development Plan (LDP) for Merthyr Tydfil

CADW, Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of the historic environment on Wales (2011)

Welsh Office Circular 61/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas

Welsh Office Circular 1/98: Planning and the Historic Environment: Directions by the Secretary of State for Wales

The Burra Charter

(The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013)

Appendix 1

Full Report for Listed Buildings



Summary Description of a Listed Buildings

Reference Number	Building Number	Grade	Status	Date of Designation	Date of Amendment
11465		II	Designated	22/08/1975	13/01/1988

Name of Property	Address
Thespian House at Theatre Royal	

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Town	Locality	Easting	Northing
Merthyr Tydfil	Town			395138	206701

Street Side	Location
	Massive rendered brick frontage set into the slope opposite Penydarnen Park. Lower block attached on right.

Description

Broad Class	Period
Domestic	

History

1891. By T C Wakeling, architect of Merthyr.

Exterior

2-storey and attic, 5-bay classical front with modified parapets over centre (pediment removed), lean-to flanking parapets. Centre 3-bay cornice over small vents, THEATRE ROYAL panel below. First-floor sash windows, outer round-headed, inner with lion-mask brackets to cornices; central oculus over broken segmental pediment with urn finial and scrolled brackets. Ground-floor arched openings linked by impost and hood-mouldings, recessed doors up steps. Modern canopied entrance (replacing arched openings) to left. Bulky rear elevation with corrugated-iron fly-tower above wide slate roof.

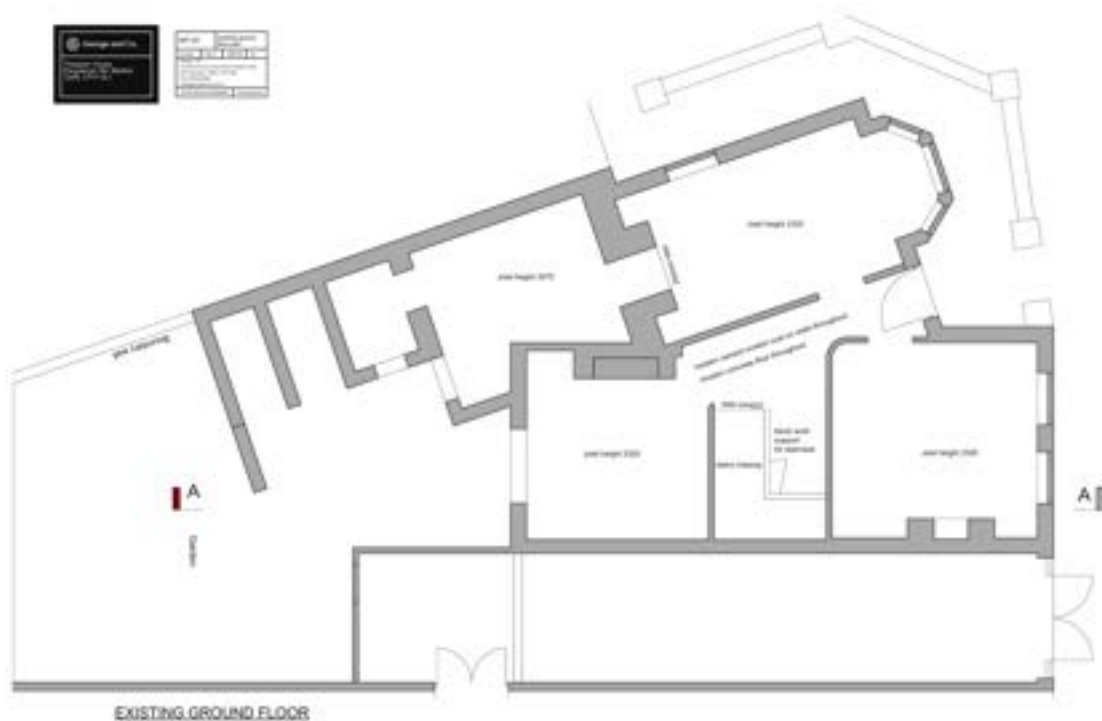
Attached downhill to right is Thespian House, a 2-storey rendered block set back with a splayed bay further right. Continuous plain parapet (formerly crenellated), architraves with keyblocks to (boarded) windows, string-course over ground-floor links to theatre. Arched ground-floor openings also linked with segmental carriage arch on left, double boarded doors.

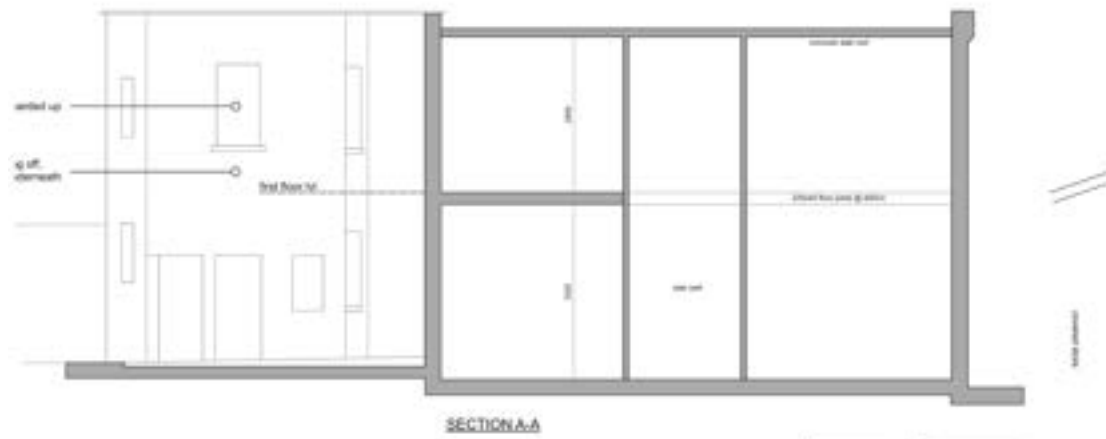
Interior

Fine auditorium completely rebuilt in later 1920s with a large balcony inserted. Splendid sunburst ceiling rose (1890s?) over stalls; Art Deco borders, rosettes etc. Art Deco proscenium with ramped and stepped surround, Royal Arms to centre, splayed crestings. Side walls with linked low-relief panels with stepped detailing, acanthus and anthemion cornices over. Organ pipes to niches flanking stage. Recessed coffering over gallery with convex, cantilevered front, Art Deco embellishments. Polygonal, pendant light-fittings.

Reason for designation

Appendix 2: Survey Drawings

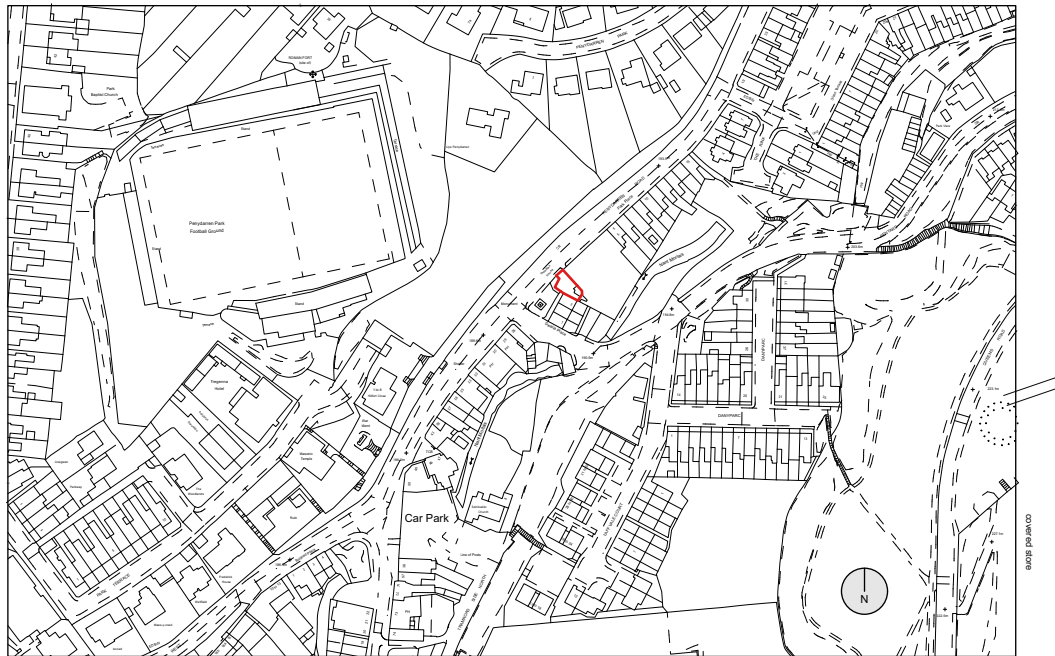




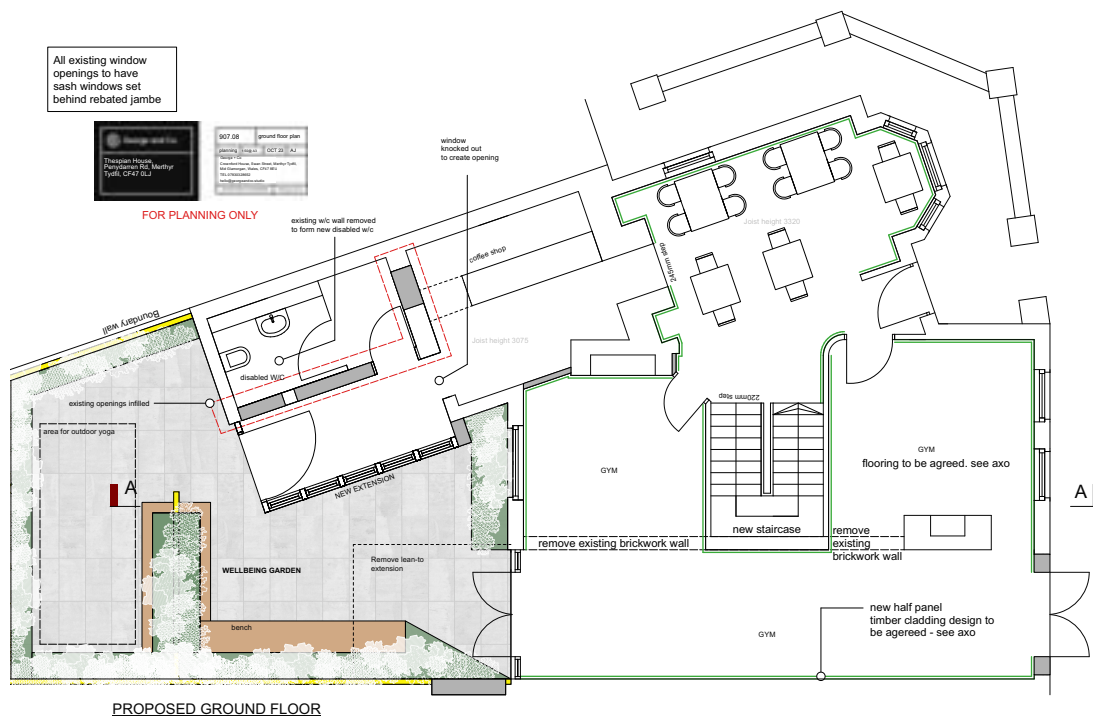
SECTION A-A



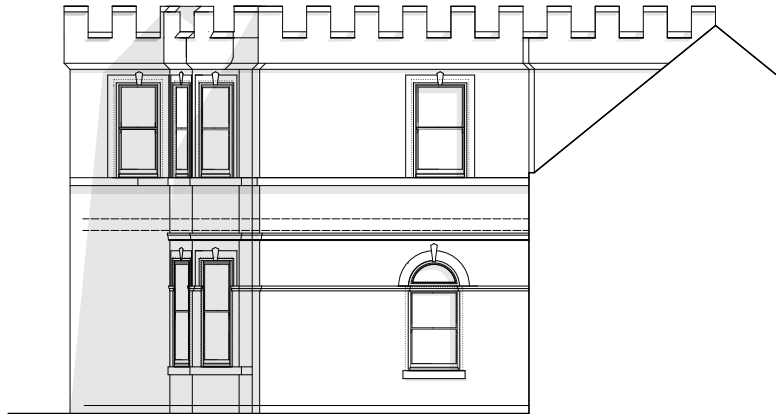
Appendix 3: Proposed drawings



SITE LOCATION PLAN 1:1250



All existing window openings to have sash windows set behind rebated jambe



PROPOSED SIDE ELEVATION

FOR PLANNING ONLY



All existing window openings to have sash windows set behind rebated jambe



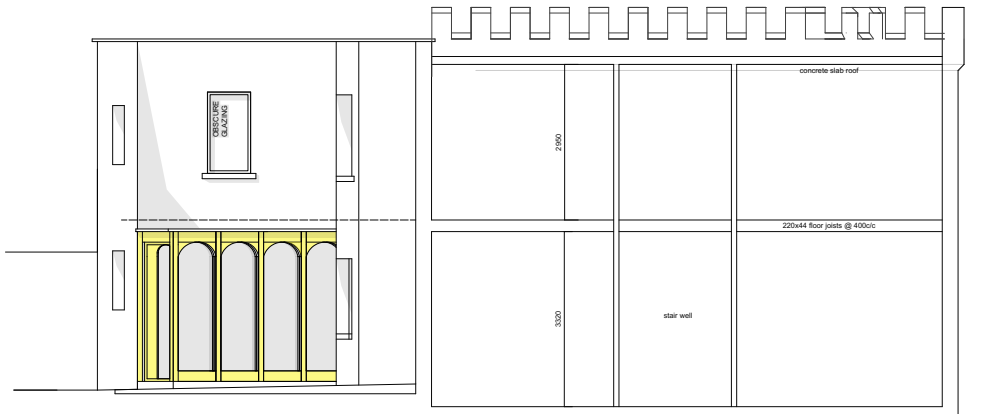
PROPOSED REAR ELEVATION

new timber structure influenced by the existing window layout and design

FOR PLANNING ONLY

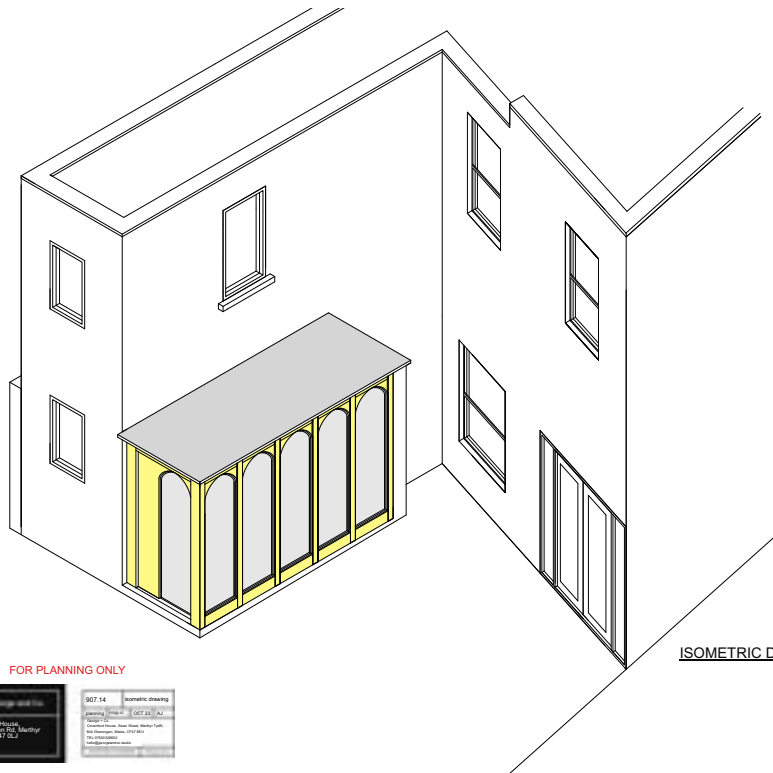


All existing window openings to have sash windows set behind rebated jambe



PROPOSED SECTION A-A

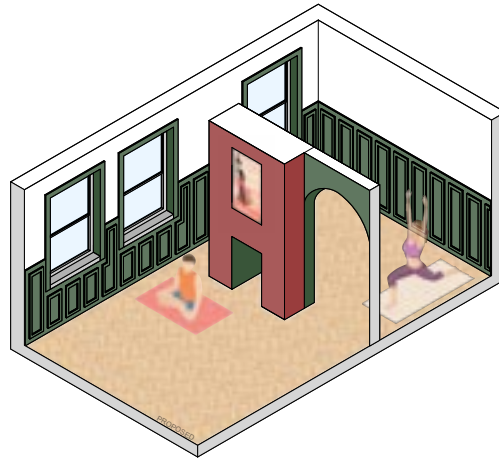
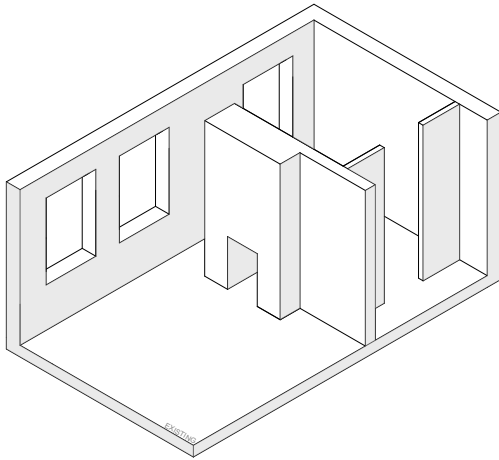
FOR PLANNING ONLY



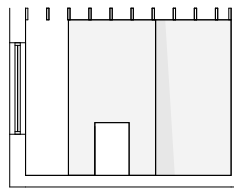
ISOMETRIC DRAWING

FOR PLANNING ONLY

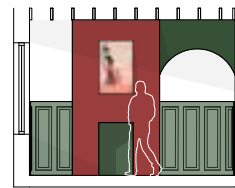




TYPICAL GYM AXO



EXISTING



PROPOSED

TYPICAL SECTION

FOR PLANNING ONLY



FOR PLANNING ONLY



Appendix 4. Existing photos











































Appendix 5. Precedent studies

These precedent studies aim to capture the materiality and feel of the internal spaces of Thespian House. The overall strategy seeks to utilise soft natural materiality that is carefully detailed.



Example of contemporary cloister architecture by Artefact



Example of contemporary cloister architecture by Artefact

Perspective



Penarth Seaside Structure (bus stop) – Aberrant Architecture. Precedent for arched forms, colour, and material pallet

Perspective



Penarth Seaside Structure (bus stop) – Aberrant Architecture. Precedent for arched forms, colour, and material pallet

Perspective



Penarth Seaside Structure (bus stop) – Aberrant Architecture. Precedent for arched forms, colour, and material pallet



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Penarth Seaside Structure (bus stop) – Aberrant Architecture. Precedent for arched forms, colour, and material pallet



Penarth Seaside Structure (bus stop) – Aberrant Architecture. Precedent for arched forms, colour, and material pallet



Example of neoclassical interiors