



## Committee Report

**Planning Committee North** - 14 November 2023

**Application no** DC/23/2049/FUL

**Location**

Former Town Hall  
High Street  
Lowestoft  
Suffolk  
NR32 1HU

**Expiry date** 18 July 2023

**Application type** Full Application

**Applicant** Lowestoft Town Council

**Parish** Lowestoft

**Proposal** Restoration and extension of the Grade II listed Lowestoft Town Hall, to form a heritage hub, cafe, gallery, community event space, Town Council office, and registrar offices.

**Case Officer** Andrew Martin  
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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. Planning permission is sought for the alteration, extension and change of use of the Former Town Hall - a Grade II listed building, to form a heritage hub, café, gallery, community event space, Town Council office, and registrar offices. There is an associated listed building consent application under reference DC/23/2050/LBC.
- 1.2. The application has been amended during the determination period in response to officer feedback, with the originally proposed canopy to the principal entrance having been omitted. There are no objections to the application from consultees.
- 1.3. It is considered that the proposed development would be in accordance with the Development Plan, with no material considerations indicating the application should be determined otherwise, and as such the application is recommended for approval.
- 1.4. The application has been referred to Planning Committee (North) as the Head of Planning and Coastal Management considers the application to be significant due to the Council's previous ownership of the site and the importance of the project for the town of Lowestoft.

## **2. Site Description**

- 2.1. The application site is Lowestoft Town Hall, High Street, Lowestoft. It is a Grade II listed building that was designed by John Louth Clemence and built between 1857 and 1860. The building was subsequently altered between 1869 and 1873, and then rebuilt and extended between 1899 and 1905, with further extensions constructed during the twentieth century.
- 2.2. The Town Hall is a good example of a civic building in the Italianate style with its principal façade on the High Street and Compass Street, dating from 1905, having been composed with aesthetically pleasing proportions and ornate detailing. High quality materials are used across the Town Hall to good effect with the gault brick dressings providing a subtle contrast to the rich red brick, whilst the stone carved detailing is reserved to emphasise the principal entrances.
- 2.3. The Town Hall is a local landmark within the oldest part of Lowestoft, due to its scale, prominence, campanile-style clock tower, and architectural quality. Its history of civic use contributes very importantly to the landmark status of the building.
- 2.4. There are also a number of other listed buildings within the vicinity of the site, with nos. 41-42, 43-44, 45, and 46 High Street being of particular importance in terms of their group value with the Town Hall.
- 2.5. The former New Market Inn Public house, previously incorporated into the Town Hall, was specifically excluded from the listing when Historic England amended it in 2018.
- 2.6. The North Lowestoft Conservation Area boundary wraps around the existing building, meaning that part of the site falls within the Conservation Area and part of it is located outside of it. It is also worth noting that the site falls within the identified Medieval and Post-Medieval Town Core, and there are positive unlisted buildings within the Lowestoft

Conservation Area to the north and south of the site. The former New Market Inn is also a positive unlisted building within the Lowestoft Conservation Area.

- 2.7. The site is currently vacant and, whilst it has been secured and maintained by the Town Council, requires repurposing to secure its future. Due to the prominence and scale of the building, it addresses three street scenes. Specifically, the building faces onto Mariners Street to the north, the High Street to the east, and Compass Street to the south. Within these roads there are a variety of town centre uses, as well as residential properties and a car park. To the west of the site, there is an area of undeveloped land formerly occupied by office buildings, beyond which is the A47 and a predominantly residential area.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1. As noted above, the application seeks planning permission for the alteration, extension and change of use of the Former Lowestoft Town Hall, which is a Grade II listed building.
- 3.2. The buildings had originally been used as a town hall which would fall under Use Class F2, whereas now a mixed use (*sui generis*) is proposed to accommodate a heritage hub, café, gallery, community event space, Town Council office, and registrar offices.
- 3.3. In terms of the proposed extensions, a new events hall building is proposed adjacent to Mariners Street, which would be linked to the main building by a lightweight, glazed link with timber supports. The existing archive building adjacent to Mariners Street would be replaced by a new gallery extension with a raised parapet, to conceal plant on its roof. The gallery extension would be linked to the events hall by a screen wall to create a new courtyard. Towards Compass Street, on the other side of the site, the former New Market Inn public house building would be extended, and its roof would be raised to accommodate and conceal plant equipment within a false mansard.
- 3.4. Alongside this application for planning permission, there is an associated listed building consent application (DC/23/2050/LBC) under consideration for a number of internal and external alterations to the listed building. Some of the external alterations are covered under this application, on the basis that they also require planning permission. These elements principally relate to the installation of external plant equipment and photovoltaics; the use of external window blinds; replacement windows; and the insertion of a roof to central courtyard to create additional internal space.

### **4. Planning History**

- 4.1. The following planning history is relevant to the application site:
- DC/97/0174/LBC – Listed Building Consent – Erection of a sign to existing window opening – Approved on 07.03.1997
  - DC/99/0162/LBC – Listed Building Consent – Internal alterations – Approved on 23.07.1999
  - DC/05/0206/LBC – Listed Building Consent – Provision of floodlighting to illuminate flagpole to comply with flag flying protocol – Approved on 24.08.2005
  - DC/05/0205/RG3 – Provision of floodlighting to illuminate flagpole to comply with flag flying protocol – Approved on 20.06.2023

- DC/11/0908/FUL – Remove existing remains of disused chimney and extend existing roof covering over area of chimney – Approved on 14.11.2011
- DC/11/0910/LBC – Listed Building Consent – Remove existing remains of disused chimney and extend existing roof covering over area of chimney – Approved on 14.11.2011
- DC/16/2733/DEM – Prior Notification – Demolition of former Council offices and boundary wall to Mariners Street car park – Prior approval required and given on 26.08.2016
- DC/23/2050/LBC – Listed Building Consent – Restoration and extension of the Grade II listed Lowestoft Town Hall, to form a heritage hub, café, gallery, community event space, Town Council office, and registrar offices – Pending determination

## 5. Consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Highways Department	19 June 2023 30 August 2023	31 July 2023 19 September 2023
Summary of comments: Initial response recommended a holding objection, however, following clarification from the applicant's agent, and the omission of the originally proposed canopy, the Highway Authority raised no objection to the development and recommended a Construction Management Strategy Condition.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC County Archaeological Unit	30 August 2023	24 July 2023
Summary of comments: No objection to the proposed development. No archaeological conditions recommended subject to the submission of an archaeological evaluation report approved by SCC Archaeology.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Ecology	26 September 2023	16 October 2023
Summary of comments: No objections to the proposed development subject to recommended conditions regarding compliance with the submitted Preliminary Ecological Assessment, and site clearance works mitigation.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Environmental Protection	19 July 2023	16 August 2023
Summary of comments: No comments to make on the application.		

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Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Historic England	2 June 2023	22 June 2023

Summary of comments: The full comments from Historic England, which relate to this application and listed building consent application DC/23/2050/LBC, can be found on public access, via the Council's website, but the main points are summarised as follows:

- Current Town Hall comprises a complex assemblage of structures, the oldest of which is the 1857 Council Chamber and underlying spaces.
- Later nineteenth and early twentieth century extensions to the building comprise a somewhat awkward arrangement of spaces, small offices, staircases and ancillary areas tied together by the unifying façade and central clocktower of its exterior.
- Town Hall is the most recognisable landmark in the north of Lowestoft and represents the historic civic heart of the town centre.
- Town Hall is a Grade II listed building owing to its high level of historic and architectural interest and is a strong contributory feature that lends significance to the North Lowestoft Conservation Area.
- The former Crown Inn public house, which forms the south-west wing of the complex, is excluded from the listing under the provisions of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013.
- Proposals comprise the comprehensive regeneration of the Town Hall and its site into a multi-use complex that, amongst other matters, recaptures its place at the civic heart of the town by incorporating the offices and ceremonial spaces required by Lowestoft's Town Council, and the Registry Offices.
- The uses proposed are the result of extensive public engagement and consultation carried out during the project development phase.
- The project forms one of the key strands to the North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone, instigated in 2017.
- Removal of later partitions within the building and the creation of an internal 'yard' will create an attractive and enticing new area of public circulation where the existing arrangement is cramped, poorly lit and confusing.
- Noted that the modifications proposed affect elements of lesser significance, and overall they would cause minimal harm to the overall significance of the building.
- No concerns regarding the removal of the Mariners Street extension and its replacement.
- Design of new events space is positive, subject to appropriate materials, and will complement the historic core of the Town Hall complex positively.
- Support the creation of an outside garden space.
- Slight concern over the relationship of the northern elevation of the events hall, along with the garden wall, with the road. Currently it is a long blank elevation to the street and represents a missed opportunity to enhance and 'activate' the street scene, whilst retaining the enclosure evidently desired for privacy and security.
- Concern over introducing a pond to the courtyard as it would create unnecessary risk for users and takes up a fairly substantial amount of the quite limited outside space.
- Pleased that the former Crown Inn public house is being retained. Mansard roof alteration to accommodate services is considered to be the least intrusive solution.

- Proposal reorders the south and west facing elevations of the former public house quite considerably, resulting in a negative impact which would be reduced if more of the existing openings were to be reused, including the principal entrance door.
- Cooling and heating proposals have been the subject of considerable discussion at the pre-application stage. Considered that the current proposals represent the least harmful option.
- No concerns regarding the installation of solar panels as proposed. The panels would be minimally visible from the street level and would cause no harm to the significance of the Town Hall or Conservation Area.
- Heritage Statement clearly demonstrates the historic precedent for the use of solar shading to the south-facing windows.
- Proposals are an exciting opportunity to bring the vacant Town Hall back into use as a civic and community building that the town could rightly be very proud of and would secure its long-term conservation.
- Whilst there are some elements of the proposal which are considered to be harmful to the listed building's significance, Historic England are generally supportive of the scheme.
- Local planning authority should carry out the planning balance and consider whether the proposals would be justified or outweighed by the public benefit in their current form, or whether they should be amended.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Design And Conservation	2 June 2023	23 June 2023

Summary of comments: The full comments from the Council's Principal Design and Conservation Officer, which relate to this application and listed building consent application DC/23/2050/LBC, can be found on public access, via the Council's website, but the main points are summarised as follows:

- Application follows a period of positive pre-application engagement on the proposed development.
- List description for the Town Hall was updated in September 2018.
- Town Hall is listed for Group Value with a considerable number of listed buildings, particularly nos. 41-42, 43-44, 45 and 56 opposite.
- Changes to the Town Hall can have impacts and effects on the significance of other listed buildings identified within the same group.
- The submitted Heritage, Design and Access Statement, and the Conservation Management Plan meet the requirements of the NPPF.
- Disagree with the conclusion in the submitted information that there would be less than substantial harm to the heritage asset.
- It is considered that the effects of the proposal on the significance of the listed building will be neutral to beneficial, leading, overall, to the preservation of its special interest.
- Usually suggest including a condition requiring deposition to the Suffolk Historic Environment Record. The Conservation Management Plan includes a 2019 Statement of Significance as one of its appendices. If this can be extracted and deposited at the HER, this would satisfy paragraph 193 of the NPPF alongside as-existing drawings.
- Principle of the proposals for the reuse of the Town Hall building are strongly supported.

- Repurposing the landmark building will not only conserve the important heritage asset but contribute significantly the revitalisation of the historic core of Lowestoft and its Conservation Area.
- The building's redundancy in 2015 placed it at risk through vacancy, absence of a new use and a change in ownership.
- Town Council has been a responsible owner while the future of the building is being determined.
- Comprehensive approach taken to the project has been exceptional and is fully supported.
- The building is of a scale and character that can no longer support a single use.
- Felt strongly that the building is a public building and should retain publicly accessible uses, as proposed.
- Relocation of the Town Council into the building, and the inclusion of the registrar office, is a significant benefit of the current proposal. It would retain and maintain the original purpose of the building, which is an important conservation benefit.
- Proposal represents a positive re-use of the building which will retain its civic use, and which will also add further uses that will populate all spaces of the building; provide for its use to extend into evenings and weekends; diversify its range of users; and retain the building in a public use.
- Proposal layout and changes follow on closely from those supported at the pre-application stage.
- Proposals recognise those parts of the building that are most sensitive to change and therefore minimise change to them.
- Equally, the proposals recognise those parts of the building that are least sensitive to change and provide for necessary change to be focussed in these areas.
- Proposals utilise opportunities to introduce permeability into a building layout that is complicated by years of extension and adaptation, and this is strongly welcomed.
- Proposals also make best use of the associated rear courtyard space to the Town Hall through an extension which will enclose it and assist in the repair of the townscape in this area of Mariners Street.
- The proposals cannot repair the damage wrought through demolition to the west of the Town Hall which has harmed its setting and that to the Conservation Area, as well as the local townscape.
- Mix of uses and their arrangement within the layout provide an excellent fit with the building's character and layout.
- The building is considered to be eminently adaptable and the submitted proposals are sensitive to important surviving historic fabric and features.
- Application does not include plans and elevations marked up to indicate demolitions, but, based upon the outcome of the pre-application process and knowledge of the proposals, it is considered that the demolitions, layout changes, and additions proposed are acceptable.
- There will be some minor loss of historic fabric and layout legibility, but the effects arising from the impact of that will be neutral overall on the significance of the building.
- Proposed additions to the building are to the upper level and rear of the former New Market Inn; the rear courtyard to the Town Hall; and to the Mariners Street elevation.
- The former New Market Inn is not part of the listed building, but it is part of the Conservation Area and is identified as a positive unlisted building in the adopted Conservation Area appraisal (2021).
- The New Market Inn building would have its eaves raised and roof replace with one that hides the plant behind it, in effect a false roof. The building would also be extended northwards. Proposals to the building will increase its bulk and the new roof would result

in a rather strange proportion, but there is a substantial functional benefit to the changes, as the roof would hide new plant. The rear extension would be appropriately designed. The changes to the building are considered to be acceptable on that basis.

- Additions to the rear courtyard to the Town Hall, which will house the event hall and ancillary spaces, are acceptable in principle and design. Strongly support the creation and meaningful use of the limited external space to the rear of the Town Hall. Presentation of the rear of the site to Mariners Street, along with the abutting screen wall, is very welcome.
- Event hall design adopts a bold gabled profile with generous glazing and permeability into the courtyard space and is linked to the main building by a lightweight glazed link with expressed timber posts. This part of the proposal will also re-densify the site so that it can approximate to its original historic character as an urban block. The event hall element is fully supported.
- Replacement gallery building to Mariners Street will reveal its function which is the provision of hanging space. Its design is straightforward and will complement the attractive decorative quality of the part of the Town Hall adjacent to Mariners Street by not competing or detracting from it.
- Front wall of the gallery, along Mariners Street, is designed to appear as a continuation of the screen wall to the new rear courtyard space which connects to the new events space building, and this is an attractive presentation to the street.
- Raised parapet to the roof of the gallery addition will screen plant from public views.
- Ground floor alterations are based upon the significance and sensitivity analysis included within the Conservation Management Plan. Changes to the frontage block are improvements, removing inappropriate, modern interventions in and around the entrance, making the entrance more permeable and understandable for visitors and users. Existing inner courtyard will be enclosed to provide a new internal space in a creative way which enables several positive outcomes in terms of internal connectivity between multiple uses.
- Flank block to Compass Street be adapted to provide enlarged room spaces and/or subdivided to provide ancillary and functional spaces. There are no concerns over the ability of these spaces to accommodate the proposed changes.
- The engraved windows to Compass Street are to be retained, with the side entrance also to be retained for use as a fire escape only.
- Interior of the former New Market Inn will be heavily adapted in terms of its layout and additions. The internal spaces of the building are of no note, with its identified positive contribution to the Conservation Area derived from its external configuration and townscape qualities only, and the effect of these will be largely retained.
- First floor of the Town Hall accommodates the key principal spaces of the building, including the Council Chamber, Chairman's Room, and the Chamber Landing. This sequence of spaces is of the highest importance in understanding the civic purpose of the building and how it was used for over 140 years.
- Council Chamber is pre-eminent space in the building, and it is welcome that the submission acknowledges this importance and retains the sequence of spaces mostly unaltered. The chamber is to be repurposed as a multi-use space for council meetings, talks, weddings, events, concerts, and associated uses. Interventions within the space will be limited to air exchange equipment to support the ventilation strategy for this space, which has suffered from solar gain when in past use, and the removal of the non-historic dais. Retaining and increasing public accessibility to this space is strongly welcomed.
- Supporting plant to the chamber will be annexed to the hidden roofspace above the adjacent replacement gallery.



- A fully glazed roof will toplight the new ground floor courtyard infill space, and the existing cellular layout to the flank block is mostly retained as found and adapted to serve as the registry office.
- Proposed first-floor plans show a photovoltaic array to one pitch of the rear gabled courtyard extension, positioned in such a way as to screen them from Mariners Street.
- Principal change to the second-floor relates to the former New Market Inn, with the upwards extension, as already noted, supported.
- The roof plan indicates the new roof form to the former New Market Inn building; the addition of buildings to the rear courtyard space; and the replacement building to Mariners Street. These changes cause no concern.
- The photovoltaic strategy is of note and the Council's advice, contained within the Historic Environment SPD, is for roof-mounted arrays to avoid the principal listed building. In this instance, there are literally no other positions for the arrays to be mounted, in terms of open space or curtilage or secondary buildings. Their accommodation on the listed building can be accepted. It is helpful that the parapet and low-pitched roof design to the front and flank blocks should entirely mitigate the visibility of the arrays from ground-level.
- Principal elevations of the Town Hall will be retained unaltered, except for the proposed gallery addition that will replace the archive building on Mariners Street.
- Existing elevations impart a high degree of value and significance to the building and define its character. They permit the building to be very much read as a late 19<sup>th</sup> Italianate civic building. The conservative approach demonstrated as part of the application is therefore welcome.
- The new Mariners Street frontage does have a curiously unfriendly character and it is unclear why the events space addition, and attached screen wall, are so relentlessly blank. A more visual permeability into the space would have been preferred.
- The design of the windows to the former New Market Inn building are unsympathetic. It would have been preferable for these windows to have a historic character with the appearance of sliding sash windows to the Compass Street elevation.
- Cannot locate any detail for the proposed canopy over the principal entrance onto the High Street. No evident historic precedent for a canopy or justification for one. It would be preferable for this element of the proposal to be deleted, in order to retain the principal entrance unaltered.
- Other proposed fixtures to the listed building, such as frontage banner signage or lighting, are ephemeral in nature and are not cause for any concern. It is reasonable for the building to be able to highlight its activities and offer, and we need to be able to facilitate a way to do that.
- Proposals for improving the internal and external accessibility to all parts of the building are strongly supported, including the physical measures proposed to implement the access strategy.
- Ventilation strategy for the Council Chamber was discussed in detail during the pre-application process. A balance was sought between external and internal impacts of the plant and equipment needed, and a conclusion was reached that managed internal impacts would provide the least harmful outcome. The proposed array of nozzles at high level to the east wall of the chamber do have the potential to be visually intrusive. It is considered, however, that their design can be enhanced such that they can somehow integrate with the decorative scheme in the room once the details are provided at the discharge of condition stage.
- Proposed plant is mostly accommodated in the new build elements of the proposal.

- Sustainability strategy set out within the Heritage, Design and Access Statement is supported. The improved energy performance measures that are set out, such as secondary glazing, addition of insulation, addition of PV panels, and the addition of solar shading, are accepted measures for improving historic buildings without harm to their significance.
- It is welcome to see a specific strategy for windows within the submitted Heritage, Design and Access Statement. This includes the restoration and protection of stained glass windows; retrofitting of main street windows with slimline sealed units; restoration and retention of etched glass windows, with secondary glazing to be added, facing onto Compass Street; replacement of other windows which do not face onto the street with slimline sealed units. Window strategy proposed demonstrates a sound conservation approach.
- Details have been submitted which essentially provide a schedule of how each window will be treated in terms of retention, modification, or replacement. This level of detail is welcomed and obviates the need for a schedule to be required by condition.
- Proposed addition of external window blinds, as illustrated in some of the submitted visualisations available within the Heritage, Design and Access Statement, is a delightful idea.
- The Heritage, Design and Access Statement includes a brief strategy for repairs to the building. Some inconsistency identified between the brief strategy and the submitted drawings. This specifically relates to the proposed use of Canadian slate. The approach outlined can be supported in principle, but a condition is recommended to require a sample of the Canadian slate for approval.
- Any aspects of the proposal not commented on can be taken to mean that they are not objectionable.
- The applications will preserve the special interest and group value of the Grade II listed Lowestoft Town Hall and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the North Lowestoft Conservation Area free from harm, in conformance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- Relevant tests of the NPPF at paragraphs 201 and 202 are not engaged.
- Proposals would meet the requirements of paragraph 197 of the NPPF.
- The scheme will conserve and revitalise this landmark building to its benefit and that of the Conservation Area and town of Lowestoft.
- Concluded that the applications are supported subject to recommended conditions.

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Private Sector Housing	2 June 2023	2 June 2023
Summary of comments: No comments.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Economic Development	2 June 2023	No response
Summary of comments: No response received.		

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Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Lowestoft Town Council	2 June 2023	29 June 2023
Summary of comments:  “Thank you for providing Lowestoft Town Council with this planning application consultation. However, as applicant and landowner, the Town Council will not submit a recommendation.”		

### Third Party Representations

None received.

## 6. Publicity

6.1. The application has been the subject of the following press advertisement:

Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	9 June 2023	30 June 2023	Beccles and Bungay Journal

Category	Published	Expiry	Publication
Conservation Area	9 June 2023	30 June 2023	Lowestoft Journal

## Site notices

General Site Notice

Reason for site notice: Conservation Area; Listed Building  
Date posted: 22 June 2023  
Expiry date: 13 July 2023

## 7. Planning policy

WLP1.2 - Settlement Boundaries (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP2.9 - Historic High Street and Scores Area (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.18 - New Town Centre Use Development (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.21 - Sustainable Transport (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.24 - Flood Risk (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.29 - Design (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.31 - Lifetime Design (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.34 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.37 - Historic Environment (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.39 - Conservation Areas (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

WLP8.40 - Archaeology (East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan, Adopted March 2019)

Historic Environment Supplementary Planning Document (East Suffolk Council, Adopted June 2021)

North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (East Suffolk Council, Adopted July 2020)

National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF)

## **8. Planning Considerations**

### Principle of Development

- 8.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Council's Development Plan in the context of this application consists of the East Suffolk Council – Waveney Local Plan (Local Plan), adopted March 2019.
- 8.2. Other material considerations to the determination of the application include the Historic Environment Supplementary Planning Document (2021); the North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2020); and the National Planning Policy Framework (2023), from herein referred to as the NPPF.
- 8.3. The application site is located within the development boundary for Lowestoft, as defined under Policy WLP1.2. Policy WLP2.1 states that the Council will work with its partners to deliver the objectives for Central and Coastal Lowestoft and the specific objectives identified for the main themed opportunity areas. In this instance, the site is within the Historic High Street and Scores Area where Policy WLP2.9, amongst other matters, requires the conservation and enhancement of the area *“through heritage-based regeneration to complement the town centre, provide local shopping services and facilities*

*and support local tourism and links between the town centre and the East of England Park”.*

- 8.4. Policy WLP8.18 explains that new town centre use development (falling within the former use classes A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, C1, D2, and B1a) will be permitted within Town Centre Boundaries.
- 8.5. Paragraph 86 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.
- 8.6. Planning permission is sought for the restoration, alteration, and change of use of the former Town Hall to provide a heritage hub, café, gallery, community event space, Town Council office, and registrar offices. Whilst the town centre uses referenced under Policy WLP18.18 have since been consolidated into Use Class E, the mix of uses proposed are appropriate to the town centre and high street location, and the proposed development would significantly improve the quality of the local environment through the sympathetic repurposing of a historic, landmark building.
- 8.7. The principle of the proposed development therefore accords with Policies WLP1.2, WLP2.9, and WLP8.18, and the objectives contained within the NPPF.

#### Design/Character and Appearance of the Area

- 8.8. Policy WLP8.29 requires all new developments to achieve a high standard of design that reflects local distinctiveness. To assist in the achievement of this objective within the historic core of Lowestoft, the North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone Design Guide SPD identifies the overriding features of the townscape which should be referenced when developing proposals, including the prevailing materials.
- 8.9. Policy WLP8.30 establishes that developments should be designed to support the needs of older people and those with dementia through the creation of environments which are familiar, legible, distinctive, accessible, comfortable, and safe.
- 8.10. Paragraph 130 of the NPPF details that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area. To achieve this, developments must be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout, and effective landscaping. Moreover, developments must establish a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming, and distinctive places to live, work, and visit.
- 8.11. The proposed development incorporates a number of extensions and alterations to the former Town Hall building. To the rear, a new events hall building is proposed, utilizing a subordinate form and an attractive orangery or coach house typology, which would connect to the existing built form through a lightweight, timber framed, glazed link. The Mariner Street frontage would also be updated by replacing the 1930's archive building with a gallery extension, the principal elevation of which would appear as a continuation of the screen wall to the new rear courtyard that would be created. On the other side of the building, the former New Market Inn would be extended to the rear and its roof would be raised to create a false mansard. In the middle of the existing building, the central courtyard would become an internal space by adding a glazed roof.

- 8.12. Plant and photovoltaic panels would be installed in various locations across the site, but crucially the design has been sensitively considered throughout to ensure that in all instances the visual impact of these elements would be limited and mitigated. For instance, the false mansard roof to the former New Market Inn building is proposed to screen plant.
- 8.13. Where window replacements to the listed building are necessary, the new windows will be slimline sealed windows. External window blinds are also proposed to the Compass Street elevation. Existing windows to the former New Market Inn building will be either filled in or replaced with aluminium-timber composite frames. Whilst the Council's Principal Design and Conservation Officer considers the replacement windows to the New Market Inn building to be the least satisfactory element of the scheme, the overall strategy for windows is one that is fully supported.
- 8.14. Materials proposed for the extensions seek to create an impression of cohesion and continuation with the materials of the existing building and its local context. Traditional red brick is proposed for all new external walls; slate will be used for the event hall roof; plain clay tile will be used for the former New Market Inn building; and natural copper will be used for the roof finish of the lightweight, glazed structure that links the event hall to the existing building. These materials are considered to be acceptable subject to conditions, including the requirement for a sample of the Canadian slate to be submitted for approval.
- 8.15. All of the proposed extensions and alterations noted above have been subject to extensive pre-application engagement. Even during the determination period of the application changes have been made in response to the request of officers, namely the omission of the originally proposed canopy over the High Street entrance. The subsequent result is a comprehensive scheme which reflects the importance of the former Town Hall building and the collective desire of all stakeholders to see it regenerated in a manner that is sympathetic to its heritage significance and its surroundings.
- 8.16. It is also of note that the proposed interventions have been designed to increase accessibility to the Town Hall building and its various uses. The Applicant had even enlisted the services of an access consultant to inform the proposals. This has translated into the inclusion of two full lifts; a platform lift; raised floor levels to create level access; provision of steps and ramps; accessible WCs near all entrances; and a changing place WC.
- 8.17. Overall, it is considered that the proposed development would represent a very high standard of design and accessibility in accordance with Policies WLP8.29 and WLP8.30. Likewise, the proposed development would comply with the design objectives contained within the NPPF.

### Heritage

- 8.18. Policy WLP8.37 requires development proposals to conserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings. Additionally, as aforementioned, Policy WLP2.9 states that the Historic High Street and Scores area should be conserved and enhanced through heritage-based regeneration to complement the town centre. The policy also notes that new developments should also provide for environmental improvements.

- 8.19. The adopted Historic Environment SPD provides further guidance on a range of topics including conservation areas, listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, and sustainable construction and renewable energy.
- 8.20. The above policy objectives are consistent with the policies contained in chapter 16 of the NPPF which recognises the importance of heritage assets and the subsequent importance of sustaining and enhancing their significance. Notably, paragraph 197 states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, alongside recognising the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality. It concludes by emphasising the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 8.21. Paragraph 199 of the NPPF indicates that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation irrespective of whether any potential harm is considered to be substantial or less than substantial.
- 8.22. Paragraph 203 of the NPPF sets out that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In doing so, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 8.23. The Council also has statutory duties, under s.66(1) and s.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the significance of listed buildings and the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas.
- 8.24. An associated listed building consent application, reference DC/23/2050/LBC, is also under consideration and addresses the works which require listed building consent rather than planning permission. It is not therefore intended to cover the internal alterations and listed building consent works within this report.
- 8.25. In terms of the heritage considerations relevant to this application, the proposed development seeks to change the use of a Grade II listed building, whilst simultaneously seeking to alter and extend the building to facilitate its enhanced offering. As the building is listed in part due to its Group Value with nos. 41-42, 43-44, 45 and 46 High Street, consideration also needs to be given to any potential impacts on the significance of the listed buildings within its vicinity, as well as the significance of the North Lowestoft Conservation Area which envelopes the majority of the site and adjoins the remainder of it.
- 8.26. In addition to the above, the proposed development affects unlisted buildings of significance, including the former New Market Inn building that is to be extended and altered as part of the scheme. A number of other unlisted buildings of significance can be found within the High Street.
- 8.27. The Council's Principal Design and Conservation Officer has reviewed the application and commends the approach taken by the Applicant and project team as exceptional. This is

because, amongst other matters, it is proposed to repurpose the building in a creative way by introducing a range of uses to sustain its life, whilst retaining its civic use and public accessibility. The retention of the original civic use, alongside the building's diversification of use, is identified as a significant conservation benefit arising from the proposed development.

- 8.28. As concluded in the above discussion on design, the proposed extensions and external alterations have been the subject of meaningful pre-application engagement and represent a very high standard of design. There would be some loss of historic fabric as a result of the proposed development, but the effects from this impact are considered to be neutral overall on the significance of the building. Hence, in summarising their comments, the Principal Design and Conservation Officer considers that the impacts of the proposal on the Grade II listed former Town Hall building will be neutral to beneficial, leading, overall, to the preservation of its special interest and group value.
- 8.29. Similarly, the Principal Design and Conservation Officer concludes that the effect of proposals on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area will both preserve and enhance it.
- 8.30. Historic England has been consulted on the proposals due its previous involvement at the pre-application stage following the recently completed North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) project, in which it was a key partner, rather than as a statutory requirement. Historic England's response outlines support for the application on heritage grounds, albeit some concern is raised regarding the treatment of the proposed elevation to Mariner Street; the inclusion of a pond within the rear courtyard; and the reordering of the elevation to the former public house building.
- 8.31. Despite the minor reservations raised by Historic England, officers are in agreement with the Council's Principal Design and Conservation Officer and take the view that the proposals as a whole would have a neutral to beneficial impact upon the Grade II listed building, whilst both preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 8.32. In the absence of harm to any heritage assets, the relevant balancing tests set out at paragraphs 201, 202, and 203 of the NPPF are not engaged. Notwithstanding this, even if harm were to be identified to any of the affected heritage assets, it would be 'less than substantial' and the extensive public benefits arising from the proposed development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any such harm. Therefore in either scenario the scheme is acceptable in heritage terms.
- 8.33. To summarise, the proposed development would preserve the special interest and group value of the Grade II listed Lowestoft Town Hall and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the North Lowestoft Conservation Area, thereby complying with Policies WLP2.9 and WLP8.37, in addition to the heritage policies and objectives contained within the NPPF. The local planning authority could therefore grant planning permission without prejudicing its statutory duties under s.66(1) and s.72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.



## Amenity

- 8.34. Policy WLP8.29 requires new developments to protect the amenity of the wider environment, neighbouring uses and provide a good standard of amenity for future occupiers. This objective is reflected under paragraph 130 of the NPPF.
- 8.35. The Town Hall is situated in Lowestoft High Street where there are a range of existing town centre uses. There are also residential properties within Mariner Street, Compass Street, and the High Street.
- 8.36. Given the mix of uses proposed as part of the Town Hall's regeneration, including an events space for wedding receptions and live music etc, it is reasonable to expect that when compared to the current redundant use of the site there will be an increase in activity and noise generated. Noise will also be generated by the proposed plant. However, the uses proposed, and their hours of operation, would not be uncharacteristic for a town centre location.
- 8.37. The application is supported by a Noise Impact Assessment, prepared by Max Fordham LLP, which concludes that with the implementation of mitigation, in the form of induct insulation and the proposed parapet walls and screening, the plant noise would not result in any significant impacts. Likewise, through the implementation of a management strategy to limit outdoor night-time activities, the proposed uses would not result in any significant noise impacts. A condition is recommended requiring compliance with the Noise Impact Assessment.
- 8.38. An element of 24-hour access will be required to the building for maintenance staff and staff of the registrar offices, Town Council's office, and co-working offices. This flexibility for maintenance and office staff is reflected in the recommended condition which restricts the public use of the building to the hours specified within the application form.
- 8.39. In addition to the above, a Kitchen Ventilation Odour Control document, prepared by Max Fordham LLP, has been submitted to demonstrate how a ventilation system has been carefully integrated into the design of the proposed development to ensure that any amenity issues with regards to odour, fumes, and food particles are limited and mitigated.
- 8.40. Environmental Protection have been consulted on the application and returned no comments or objections.
- 8.41. The proposed development is considered to accord with Policy WLP8.29, and the relevant objectives contained within the NPPF.

## Highway Matters

- 8.42. There is no vehicular access proposed as part of the development. The principal highway considerations therefore relate to parking, and the maintenance of pedestrian thoroughfares free of obstruction or hazard.
- 8.43. In terms of parking, the Suffolk Guidance for Parking is the starting point for determining the amount of car parking spaces that need to be provided for a development. In urban areas, where there is good provision for public transport and high-quality infrastructure for walking and cycling, the guidance does permit the relaxation of the prescribed standards.

In this instance, the site is located in a town centre location where there are excellent opportunities to maximise the promotion of sustainable modes of transport.

- 8.44. The proposal includes 18 spaces for cycle parking towards the rear of the building, exceeding the minimum standard required under the Suffolk Guidance for Parking. Shower facilities are also proposed inside the building to encourage staff to cycle to work.
- 8.45. Aside from the cycle parking proposals, the submitted Transport Statement highlights that there are sufficient existing car parking spaces within the locality, including a public car park in Mariners Street, to justify, alongside the sustainable transport opportunities, an absence of proposed car parking as part of the development.
- 8.46. It is also proposed that four existing on-street spaces would become dedicated accessible spaces, subject to approval from the Highway Authority and the use of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). Whilst this is positive, and the Applicant is encouraged to engage with the Highway Authority to secure it, the TRO is not considered necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms and therefore it cannot be secured by condition, or through a planning obligation, under this planning permission.
- 8.47. Sufficient on-street parking would remain within Mariners Street, High Street, and Compass Street for loading and unloading associated with the operation of the proposed development.
- 8.48. The Highway Authority, Suffolk County Council Highways (SCC Highways) have been consulted on the application and initially recommended a holding objection, due to clarification required on the door openings, entrance canopy, and cycle storage. Following the omission of the entrance canopy, in addition to clarification on the door openings and cycle storage, SCC Highways subsequently responded to the application raising no objections subject to a Construction Management Strategy condition.
- 8.49. There are no objections to the application on highway grounds.

#### Ecology

- 8.50. Policy WLP8.34 establishes that where there is reason to suspect the presence of protected species or habitat, applications should be supported by an ecological survey undertaken by a suitably qualified person.
- 8.51. Paragraph 174 of the NPPF is also explicit that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.
- 8.52. The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA), prepared by Abrehart Ecology, which assesses the likely impact of the development on Protected and Priority Habitats and Species, as well as the identification of proportionate mitigation measures. Due to the potential suitability of the site for bats, the PEA recommended three further bat surveys which were subsequently completed and submitted for consideration. The Council's Ecologist has reviewed the application and is content that sufficient information has been submitted for determination, with no objections raised subject to conditions.

- 8.53. The proposed development would subsequently be in accordance with Policy WLP8.34, as well as the relevant objectives of the NPPF.

#### Contamination

- 8.54. The application is supported by a Ground Investigation Report, prepared by Listers Geotechnical Ltd, which does not identify any significant risks to construction and maintenance workers, or end users, associated with the proposed development. The proposed development is therefore considered to be acceptable with regards to contamination, subject to compliance with the Ground Investigation Report and the imposition of a further condition with regards to the identification of any unexpected contamination during the construction phase of the development.
- 8.55. Environmental Protection have been consulted on the application and returned no objections.

#### Unexploded Ordnance

- 8.56. The application is accompanied by a Detailed Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Threat and Risk Assessment report, prepared by 6 Alpha Associates. The risk assessment concludes that the risk rating for UXO is high; however, following investigation and the recommended implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, the risk level can be reduced to 'as low as reasonably possible'.
- 8.57. A condition is recommended to secure the recommendations and mitigation measures outlined within the UXO risk assessment, whilst also establishing the mitigation procedures and measures that should be implemented should any previously unidentified UXO be encountered.

#### Archaeology

- 8.58. As identified on the Suffolk Historic Environment Record, the site is located within an area of archaeological importance (medieval and post medieval town core) meaning there is high potential for archaeology. Accordingly, the application is supported by an Archaeological Evaluation, prepared by Britannia Archaeology Ltd.
- 8.59. SCC Archaeology have been consulted on the application and, following the receipt of the Archaeological Evaluation, recommend that no archaeology conditions are required due to there being no archaeology present within the heavily disturbed ground.

#### CIL

- 8.60. The proposed development is not CIL liable.

### **9. Conclusion**

- 9.1. To conclude, the proposed development would repurpose a landmark, historic building within Lowestoft for uses appropriate to the heritage context and town centre location. The design of the proposed development is considered to achieve a very high standard, and the heritage impacts arising would be neutral to beneficial. There are no amenity,

highways, ecology, contamination, or UXO concerns associated with the development that cannot be mitigated through the use of conditions, and there are no objections to the application from consultees. Significant public benefits would arise from the sympathetic restoration and re-use of the Town Hall, and no harm has been identified with regards to the proposed development. The proposed development is considered to accord with the Development Plan as a whole and the objectives contained within the NPPF. Planning permission can therefore be granted.

## **10. Recommendation**

10.1. Planning permission be approved, subject to conditions.

## **11. Conditions**

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: This condition is imposed in accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act (as amended).

2. The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out other than in complete accordance with the following drawings:

- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P01 Rev. PL (Location Plan and Block Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P10 Rev. B (Proposed Ground Floor Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P11 Rev. A (Proposed First Floor Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P12 Rev. A (Proposed Second Floor Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P13 Rev. A (Proposed Roof Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P14 Rev. PL (Proposed Landscape Plan)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P15 Rev. A (Proposed North and South Elevations)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P16 Rev. A (Proposed East and West Elevations)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P17 Rev. PL (Proposed Sections A and B)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P18 Rev. PL (Proposed Sections C, D, and E)
- 194\_HAT\_PL\_P19 Rev. PL (Proposed Treatment of Existing Windows)
- 5170-MOM-XX-XX-DR-C-62000 Rev. P03 (Proposed Drainage Layout)
- J7182-MXF-ZZ-01-DR-M-20100 Rev. P3 (Ventilation Level 01 Layout)

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what has been approved.

3. A Demolition and Construction Management Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to work commencing on site. The strategy shall include access and parking arrangements for contractors vehicles and delivery vehicles (locations and times) and a methodology for avoiding soil from the site tracking onto the highway together with a strategy for remedy of this should it occur. The development shall only take place in accordance with the approved strategy.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety to avoid the hazard caused by mud on the highway and to ensure minimal adverse impact on the public highway during the construction phase. This is a pre-commencement condition because an approved Management Strategy must be in place at the outset of the development.

4. No development shall commence until a full specification of all external materials to be used in the approved extensions and alterations, including rainwater goods, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: This is a pre-commencement condition to ensure that the development does not harm the architectural and/or historic character of the existing building.

5. Prior to development above slab level, a sample of the proposed Canadian slate shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approval sample and thereafter permanently retained as such.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the architectural and/or historic character of the existing building.

6. Prior to development above slab level, details of both hard and soft landscaping works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. These details shall include:

- Means of enclosure and retaining structures;
- Boundary treatments;
- Hard surfacing materials;
- Minor artefacts and structures (e.g. furniture, railings, refuse or storage units, etc.)
- Water features;
- Planting plans;
- Written specification, including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment;
- Schedule of plants noting species, plant supply sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate;
- An implementation programme.

The landscaping works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details before any part of the development is brought into use in accordance with the agreed implementation programme.

Reason: To ensure that there is a well laid out landscaping scheme in the interest of visual amenity.

7. Prior to the installation of any photovoltaic panels, full details of the photovoltaic panels, including size, final positions, and method of fixing, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the architectural and/or historic character of the existing building.

8. Prior to the installation of the external awnings, manufacturers details for the proposed Markisolette external awnings shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local

planning authority. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the architectural and/or historic character of the existing building.

9. The infill brickwork to existing external openings shall match the existing, adjacent brickwork in size, colour, face, coursing, and bonding.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the architectural and/or historic character of the existing building.

10. The recommendations and mitigation measures outlined within the Detailed Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Threat & Risk Assessment, prepared by 6 Alpha Associated Ltd and dated 18 April 2023, shall be undertaken in full alongside the implementation of any other necessary mitigation required under Government guidance.

If, at any time during development, high risk UXO not previously identified in the aforementioned report is encountered/found to be present on the site, no further development (unless otherwise agreed in writing with the local planning authority) shall be carried out until a revised and/or additional UXO risk management and mitigation programme/plan is submitted and approved detailing how the high risk UXO not previously identified shall be dealt with. The revised and/or additional UXO risk management and mitigation programme/plan shall be implemented as approved and, following the completion of the mitigation, a completion verification report confirming that all risks to (including the possible evacuation of) existing and proposed premises have been satisfactorily mitigated shall be submitted in writing to the local planning authority for approval.

Reason: To ensure that the risks from site wide unexploded ordnance to future users of the land and existing neighbouring land are eliminated and or minimised, so that the development can take place without unacceptable risk to workers, residents and neighbours.

11. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved Noise Impact Assessment, prepared by Max Fordham LLP and dated 26 April 2023.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the protection of the local environment.

12. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved Kitchen Ventilation Odour Control document, prepared by Max Fordham LLP and dated 18 May 2023.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the protection of the local environment.

13. The premises shall only be open to the public between 07:00 and 00:00 Monday to Friday; between 07:00 and 00:00 on Saturdays; and between 08:00 and 23:00 on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The premises shall be closed to the public at all other times.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and the protection of the local environment.

14. The development must be undertaken in full accordance with the ecological avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures identified within the Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Abrehart Ecology, October 2022, Revision 1) and Bat Roost Characterisation and Mitigation Report (Abrehart Ecology, September 2023, Revision 1) as submitted with the planning application and agreed in principle with the local planning authority prior to determination.

Reason: To ensure that ecological receptors are adequately protected and enhanced as part of the development.

15. No removal of hedgerows, trees or shrubs, brambles, ivy and other climbing plants or works to or demolition of buildings or structures that may be used by breeding birds shall take place between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> August inclusive, unless a competent ecologist has undertaken a careful, detailed check of vegetation for active birds' nests immediately before the vegetation is cleared and provided written confirmation that no birds will be harmed and/or that there are appropriate measures in place to protect nesting bird interest on site. Any such written confirmation should be submitted to the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that nesting birds are protected.

16. The development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved Ground Investigation Report, prepared by Listers Geotechnical Consultants Ltd.

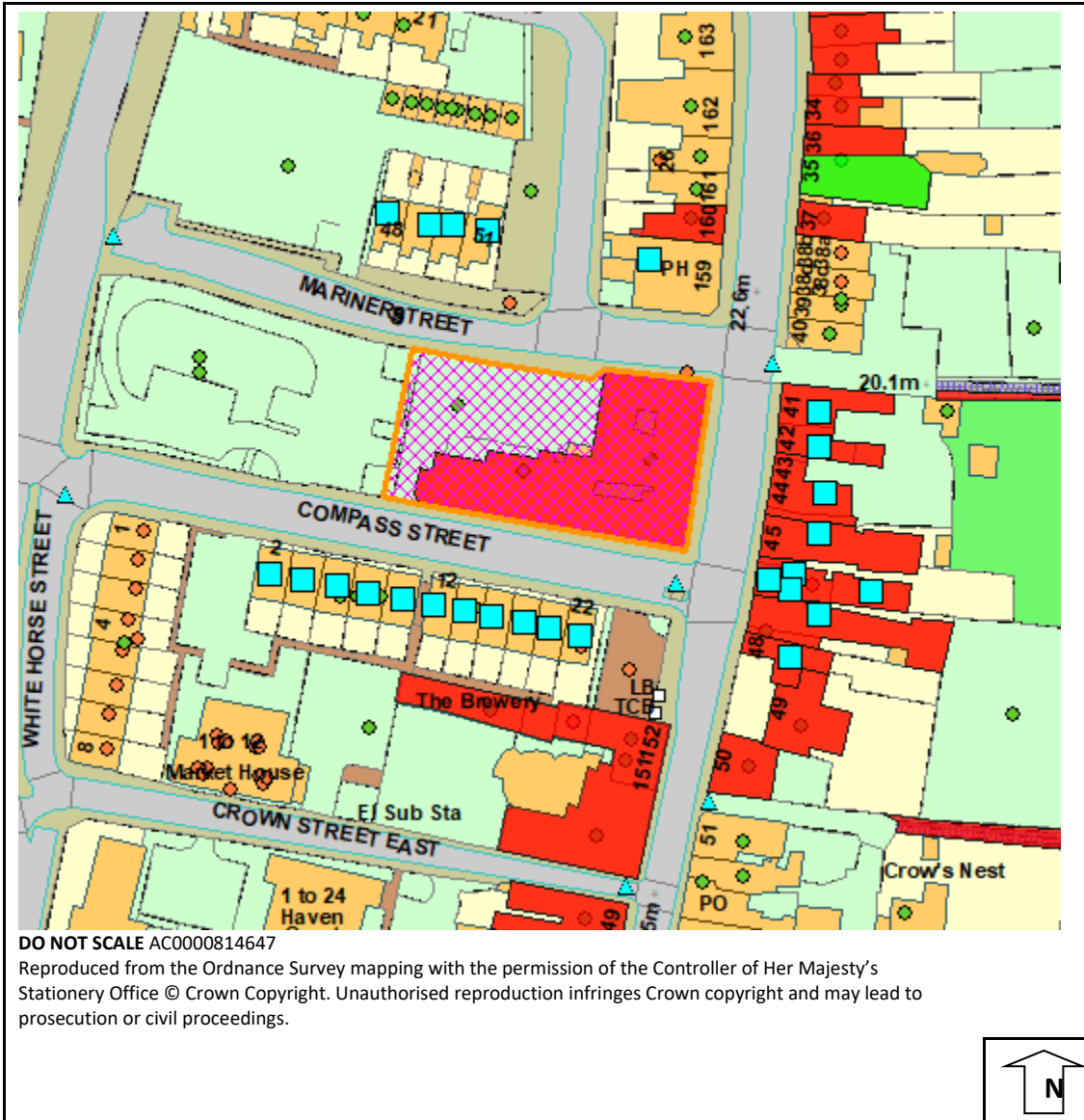
If, during development, contamination not previously identified is found to be present, then no further development shall be carried out until a remediation scheme, detailed how the contamination shall be dealt with, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Only when evidence is provided to confirm the contamination no longer presents an unacceptable risk, can development continue.

Reason: In the interests of public health and to avoid pollution of the water environment.





### **Background information**

See application reference DC/23/2049/FUL on [Public Access](#)

# Map



## Key

-  Notified, no comments received
-  Objection
-  Representation
-  Support