



Delegated Report

Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20250759 (Full Planning Application) and 20250760 (Listed Building Consent)

Location: Little Hermitage Gravesend Road Higham Rochester

Descriptions: Change of use from a wedding venue to a detached dwelling C3 use
And;
Application for Listed Building Consent; Change of use from a wedding venue to a detached dwelling C3 use.

Applicant: Mrs Geraldine Cox

Site Visit Date: N/A

Submitted Documents/Plans

Application Form;
Supplementary Information – Design and Access Statement;
Supplementary Information – Planning Statement;
Drawing No. 3570 – 001 – Site Location Plan and Site Plan;
Drawing No. 3570 – 002 – Floor Plans and Roof Plan – Existing;
Drawing No. 3570 – 003 – Floor Plans and Roof Plan – Proposed; and
Drawing No. 3570 – 004 – Elevations – Existing and Proposed.

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20040701	Change of use of existing dwelling into a mixed use of dwelling and function suites for wedding ceremonies involving alterations to the vehicular access.	Permitted	17.02.2005

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS07 – Economy, Employment and Skills
- CS09 – Culture and Tourism
- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles
- CS20 – Heritage and the Historic Environment

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards
- TC2 – Policy for Listed Buildings
- TC7 – Other Archaeological Sites
- T1 – Impact of Development on Highway Network
- T5 – Access to the Identified Highway Network

Section 16(2) and Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) require special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses when considering whether to grant listed building consent or planning permission respectively.

Paragraph 34 of the NPPF (2024) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2024), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- Section 4 – Decision-making
- Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- Section 12 – Achieving Well-Designed Places
- Section 13 – Protecting Green Belt land
- Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG 2 – Residential layout guidelines including Housing Standards Policy Statement October 2015 Adopted 1996 – amended June 2020
- Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard (2015)
- SPG 4 – KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Design for Gravesham – Design Code (2024)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

National Amenity Societies

No comments received.

GBC Conservation Officer

No adverse comments on the reversion back to residential use. Presumably parking remains as existing, with no additional garaging proposed.



Higham Parish Council

No comments received.

Local Ward Councillors

No comments received.

Dickens Country Protection Society

The society were not consulted on this application however have the following comments to make:

The Society would wish to comment that the features referred to in the listing should be retained and where possible enhanced.

Neighbouring properties

Five surrounding properties were consulted, a site notice was displayed on 07.08.25 and the application was publicised in the paper. No responses were received and the consultation period expired on 29.08.25.

Officer's Analysis

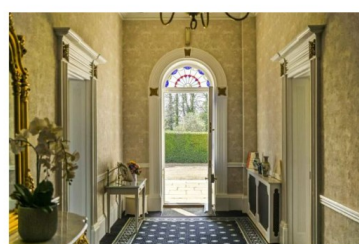
Site Description and Proposal

The application site lies in the rural area, within the Green Belt and the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. This application seeks planning and listed building consent for the change of use of Little Hermitage from a wedding venue to a detached dwelling, C3 use. The building is Grade II Listed.

The Listing:

Early C19 of stuccoed brick, this 2-storey house comprises the central block of a larger house the side wings of which have been demolished. Low pitched slated roof with deeply overhanging eaves. A 2-storey portico extends across the whole front comprising Doric columns and simple entablature. Sash windows, those on the ground floor extending to floor level. Glazing bars intact. Sides and rear quite plain with an irregular shaped addition to the west. Internally staircase with shaped balusters and wreathed mahogany handrail. Decorative door casings and original marble chimney pieces.

Photos included with application

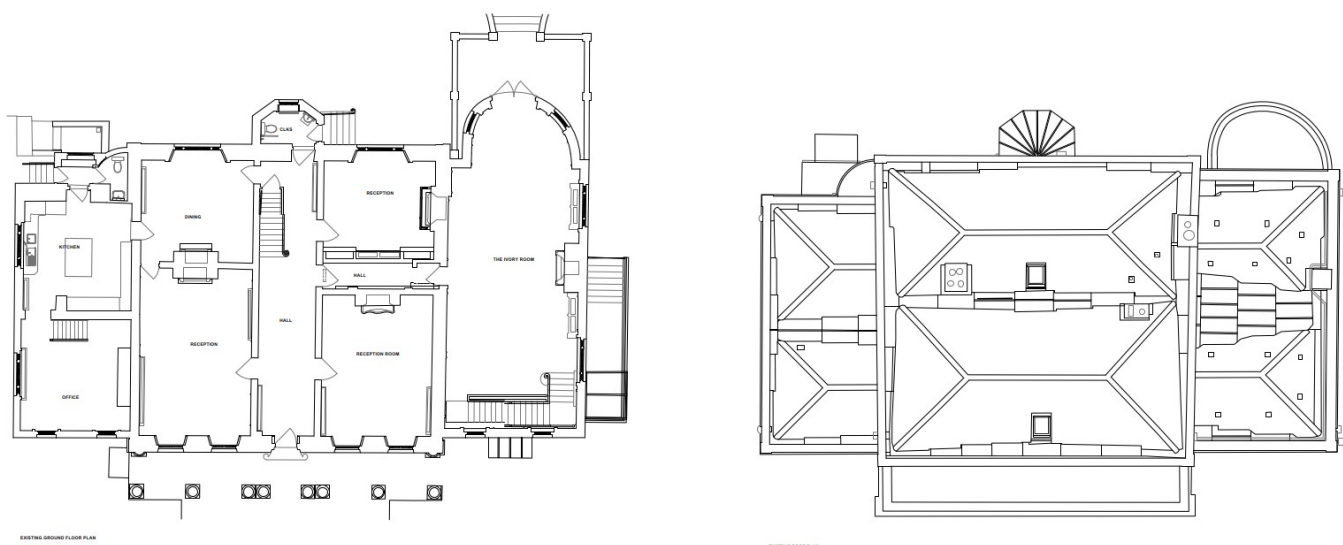


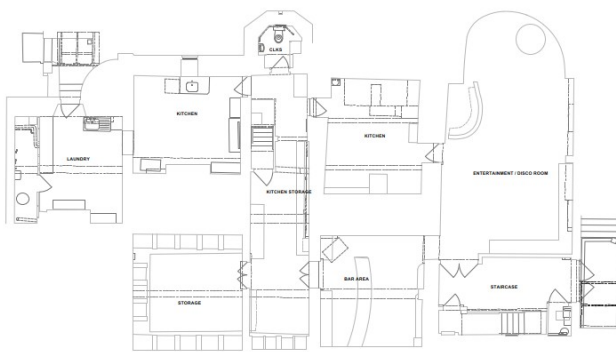
As per the plans and documents included with this application, rooms would be repurposed/rearranged, however there are to be no internal or external alterations to the fabric of the building itself.

Existing and Proposed Elevations:

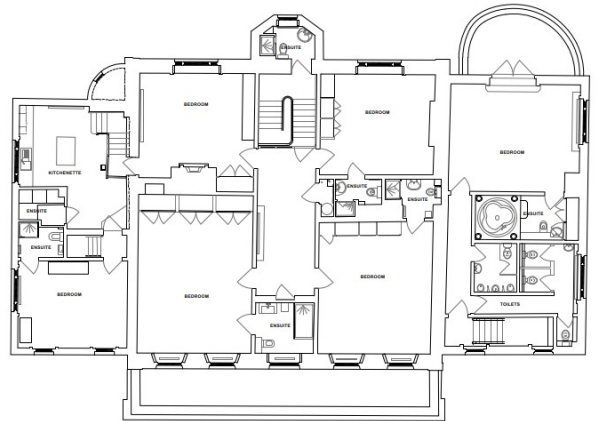


Existing Floor Plans:

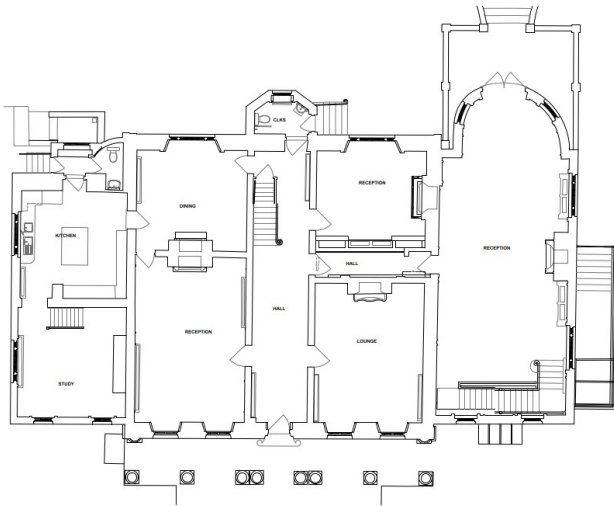




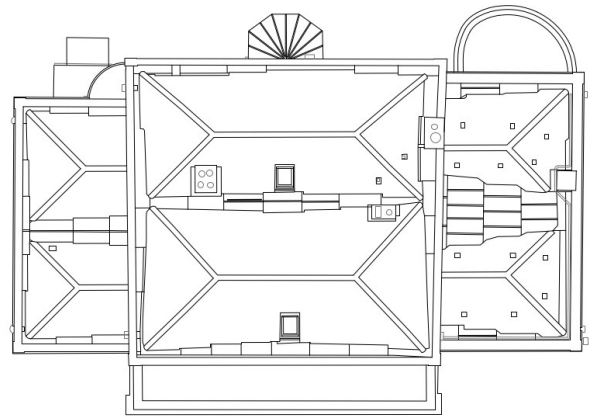
EXISTING BASEMENT PLAN



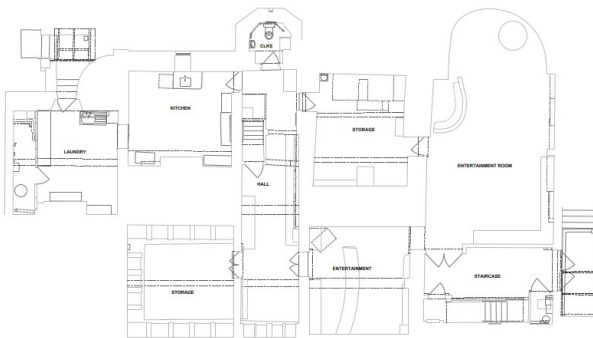
Proposed Floor Plans:



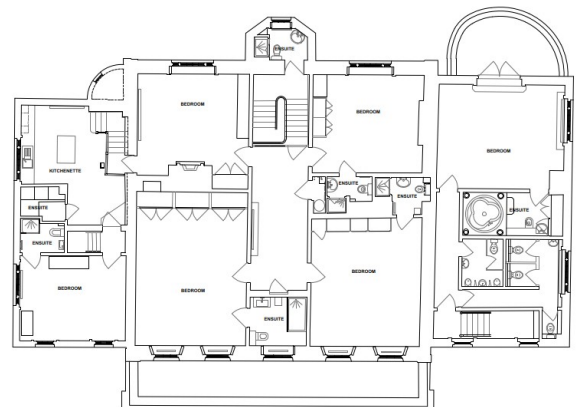
PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN



PROPOSED ROOF PLAN



PROPOSED BASEMENT PLAN



PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Principle of the Development

The application site is located within the Green Belt, as defined by the Local Plan, and as such Policy CS02 (LPCS) is relevant. Development in the urban area is prioritised as the sustainable location for development. In the rural area, Policy CS02 states that development will be supported within rural settlements that are inset from the Green Belt and defined on the policies map. Development outside those

settlements, i.e. in the Green Belt, will only be supported where it is compatible with national policies for protecting the Green Belt and policies in the LPCS.

The principle issues in determining this application are;

- Green Belt;
- Loss of the Wedding Venue
- Impact on the Listed Building, character and appearance of the area, and landscape;
- Amenity;
- Parking and Highways

Green Belt

Is the proposed development appropriate in the Green Belt?

Green Belts are of great importance. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by preserving the open and permanent characteristics of Green Belts (paragraph 142 of the NPPF 2024), with the Green Belt serving five purposes (paragraph 143):

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF (2024) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Footnote 55 includes the caveat; *Other than in the case of development on previously developed land or grey belt land, where development is not (my emphasis) inappropriate.* An assessment on whether the site falls under previously developed land or grey belt land shall be considered in the relevant section of this report. Beforehand, consideration of whether the proposed development is inappropriate must be made.

A Local Planning Authority should regard development as inappropriate in the Green Belt unless it falls within the specified exceptions of paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF (2024). Paragraph 155 is not relevant to this proposal. There is not a demonstrable unmet need for the development proposed and as such, the remaining parts of paragraph 155 do not need to be considered. Paragraph 154 is set out below:

154. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than

the one it replaces;

e) limited infilling in villages;

f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- i. mineral extraction;
- ii. engineering operations;
- iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
- iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
- v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
- vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

In the case of this application, it is considered that paragraph 154. (h)(iv) is relevant:

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

- iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;*

The consideration of exception (h) (iv) shall now be made. This exception also requires an assessment of openness.

The building is existing and there would be no extensions or alterations to the building required; it is of permanent and substantial construction. In addition, the building would be reverting back to its original use; solely as a detached dwellinghouse, which is seen to have less of an impact on the Green Belt than the current use of the building.

As per the Government guidance (paragraph 013 Reference ID: 64-013-20250225):

Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgement based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume*
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness*

- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation*

In the case of this application, the change of use is not considered to harm the openness of the Green Belt. There is no proposed additional built form and the proposed use is less intensive than the existing situation. As such, the openness is considered to be preserved.

As the development is considered to fall within the aforementioned exception, the development is not considered to be inappropriate and further assessment, including special circumstances is not required.

Therefore the proposal complies with Policy CS01 (Sustainable Development) and Policy CS02 (Scale and Distribution of Development) of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) (Protecting Green Belt Land).

Loss Of the Wedding Venue

Policy CS07: Economy, Employment and Skills of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) Economy, Employment and Skills identifies the importance of ensuring sufficient provision is made for offices, industrial and storage and distribution uses, and the range of job opportunities that this can provide. In addition, it seeks to protect existing employment sites, unless they are truly redundant for modern needs or identified elsewhere in this strategy as regeneration opportunities. Policy CS09: Culture and Tourism of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) seeks to protect and support improvements to existing cultural and tourist facilities.

On the Website for Little Heritage, the building is advertised as a wedding (and events) venue. The wedding package includes a complimentary overnight stay in the bridal suite. Although the change of use would result in the loss of the wedding venue, this is not considered to be contrary to the aims of Policy CS09.

In terms of employment, it is evident that the change of use would result in a loss of employment. However, it is noted that the venue is currently running at a loss, as per the Design and Access statement and the business is not viable. In this instance, the building would be returned solely to a detached dwelling house (C3) which would contribute to protecting this important Heritage asset.

In summary, although the loss of the wedding venue is regrettable, it is not considered to be contrary to the aforementioned policies.

Impact on the Listed Building, Design, Character and Appearance and Impact on the Landscape

The NPPF 2024 places great significance on the desirability of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. This is echoed in Policy CS20 of the Core Strategy 2014, which states the Council will accord a high priority towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of its heritage and historic environment as a non-renewable resource.

The property is situated within the Higham Arable Farmlands Landscape Character Area. Relevant Policy considerations include paragraph 187 of the NPPF 2024, which aims for development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Policy CS12 (LPCS) (2014) seeks to protect the green infrastructure within the Borough and states at 5.7.26 the overall landscape character and valued landscapes will be conserved, restored and enhanced.

Furthermore, Policy CS19 (Development and Design Principles) (LPCS) (2014) states that new development will be visually attractive and locally distinctive. It should also conserve and enhance the character of the local built and natural environment and integrate well with the surrounding area. Moreover, Section 12 (Achieving well- designed places) of the NPPF (2024) sets out that developments should function well and add to the overall quality of the area, be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character.

In addition to the above, the Design For Gravesham Design Code (2024) is a strategic document that sets out Gravesham's vision and expectation for quality place-making.

As previously mentioned, there are no internal or external changes proposed to the fabric of the building, and the change of use would return the building back to its original purpose; as a detached single family dwellinghouse. In the case of this application, the proposal would result in a less intensive use. Therefore the change of use is considered to be acceptable in terms of design, character and appearance and there would be no impact on the Landscape. In terms of the Listed Building; the proposal would not cause harm to the character or architectural or historic interest of this Grade II Listed Building.

Overall, the proposed development is considered to accord with Policies CS12 (Green Infrastructure) and CS19 (Development and Design Principles) of Gravesham's Local Plan Core Strategy (LPCS) (2014), along with Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024). Furthermore, the development is in accordance with statutory test 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Policy CS20 (Heritage and the Historic Environment) of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014), as well as Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). In addition, the building would be used solely as a dwellinghouse, which is beneficial in terms of housing provision.

Amenity of Future Occupiers

The proposal would provide sufficient garden space and room area, post development in accordance with Gravesham's SPG2 – Residential Layout Guidelines (RLG) (2020). Therefore, the proposed development would safeguard the amenity of future occupiers in accordance with Policy CS19 (LPCS) (2014) and Section 12 (NPPF) (2024).

Neighbouring Amenity

No neighbour responses were received as a result of the consultation carried out for this application. As previously mentioned, the removal of the use of Little Hermitage as a wedding venue would result in a less intensive use of the building. The proposal is considered to safeguard neighbouring amenity in accordance with Policy CS19 (LPCS) (2014) and Section 12 (NPPF) (2024).

Parking and Highways

There are no highways or parking concerns that arise as a result of this proposal and more than sufficient parking provision is retained on site.

Conclusion

The development is considered to be not inappropriate development in the green belt. The change of use would not result in a detrimental impact on the Listed Building surrounding area or the Landscape Character Area. Moreover, the development protects the amenity of future users and neighbouring properties and would provide sufficient off street parking provision.

Recommendation

Permission

(For detailed conditions and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mrs Lucy Hankin	Team Leader:	Richard Hart
Signed:	L Hankin	Signed:	<i>R Hart</i>
Dated:	4th December 2025	Dated:	8th December 2025

