

LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION FOR EMERGENCY REPAIRS: Proposed ceiling and roof repairs to classroom H1 at Gad's Hill School, Gravesend Road, Higham, Rochester, Kent ME3 7PA

clay architecture



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Gad's Hill School is an independent day school educating girls and boys aged 3-16 years in the Lower (Junior) and Upper (Senior) Schools. The school is set in the grounds of Gad's Hill Place, the former home of Charles Dickens, which is Grade I Listed, in the village of Higham.

Gad's Hill Place, currently part of the Upper School, is in a poor condition from almost a century of over-use as a school building. In a recently completed Condition Survey, the structural engineer strongly advises that Gad's Hill Place stop being used as a school building within the next 5 years, and that urgent works be carried out as soon as possible to strengthen the floors, landing and central staircase of the house.

This Listed Building Application runs in parallel with a pre-application for a more comprehensive project, just submitted, for the redevelopment of Gad's Hill School, which involves developing gad's Hill Place as a Creative Arts Hub. More detail about this is available in pre-app PRE20230077.

The roof of Gad's Hill Place is in poor condition, suffering water ingress over some years, which have weakened the lathe and plaster ceilings on the second floor. The ceilings to one of the second-floor classrooms failed this winter. Urgent ceiling and roof repairs are required, which are the subject of this emergency Listed Building application.

Situated in the village of Higham in Gravesham Borough, Gad's Hill Place is a four-storey (including basement / lower-ground floor), double-fronted mansion built in 1779 by Thomas Stevens, a former mayor of Rochester. Currently used as a school building, the mansion occupies a 9.25 acre site along the A226, Gravesend Road.

The mansion is a site of national and international historic and cultural significance because Charles Dickens lived at Gad's Hill Place from 1857 until his death in 1870. While living at Gad's Hill Place Dickens wrote some of his most important works including Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend, A Tale of Two Cities and the unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood.

The building is Grade I Listed.

Significant changes Dickens made to the 2nd floor and roof are thought to include:

- A second-floor rear extension providing or extending 2 bedrooms H1 and H2

The mansion house was first occupied by the school in 1924.

Significant changes Gad's Hill School made to the mansion include:

- Adapting the mansion house into a school building, converting bedrooms into classrooms
- Installing acrow props to the lower ground floor, ground floor and first floor to prevent further deterioration of the central stair and stair landings (the acrow props have been in place approximately 20 years)
- Installing a water tank on the roof

Below is an extract, detailing findings on the roof from the executive summary of a Condition Survey Report we recently carried out on the house:

- The roof consists of a central wide stepped valley gutter lined in lead, with double-pitched slate roofs to the front and rear of the building.
- Large areas of the roof are difficult to access or are obscured by trees and vegetation.
- Both front and rear slate roofs are of a shallow pitch (23°), and fairly exposed. The slate tiles are generally past their useful life, and the lead flashing of the central wide gutter does not lap up far enough behind the slate tiles. Water has penetrated the roof and

affected all the ceilings on the second floor. The worse affected ceiling (room H1) failed in November 2022.

- The weight of the water tank on the central roof, and leaf-fall from the trees growing against the house further exacerbate these issues.
- Coping stones and ridge tiles need rebedding.
- The clay tiled mansard is missing tiles.
- All rainwater goods should be overhauled and redecorated.
- The roofs are not insulated, many windows on the second floor are either fixed shut or do not open well. The rooms on the second floor are poorly ventilated and are unbearable on hot days.

The report recommends refurbishing, conserving and insulating all the roofs where possible.

The immediate priority, and the subject of this LBA, is to carry out necessary repairs to the slate tiled roof to the rear, and to reinstate the lathe and plaster ceiling where it has failed.

The intention is also to use this opportunity to improve the thermal efficiency of the roof (where it is being repaired), without compromising the history fabric of the building, by insulating the roof void, if possible without the need to re-roof the lead-lined gutter— though this idea needs further development, discussion and investigation.

We have produced a quick outline sketch proposals for the repair works to discuss with the Conservation Officer.

Once we have agreed an approach in principle, we will produce detailed drawings of repairs for approval.



Ceiling of HSFX06 H1 classroom looking west
Ceiling shows signs of cracking , sagging and previous repairs.
Photograph taken 01/08/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSFX06 H1 classroom looking east
Photograph taken 01/08/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSFX06 H1 classroom looking east
After ceiling came down on the advice of the SE straps were fixed to underside of main beam.
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSF06 H1 classroom looking north
Underside of lead roof RFX03.
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSF06 H1 Classroom looking south
Bee/ wasps nest above fireplace.
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSF06 H1 classroom looking east west
Underside of roof RFX02. Gaps between sarking boards. Some are rotten and damp coming in from above.
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP



Ceiling of HSFX06 H1 classroom looking east west
Sarking boards have been lime washed . Some boards are showing signs of damp ingress
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP



Underside of roof HRFX02 of HSFX06 H1 classroom looking at the sarking boards.
Sarking boards showing signs of water ingress coming in from above.
Photograph taken 23/11/2022 by CP