

HERITAGE STATEMENT: Gad's Hill School– Retention of the
Hewlett Pavilion and ancillary buildings on a permanent ba-
sis with associated external alterations

Version 1 20/08/2025



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Situated in the village of Higham in Gravesham Borough, Gad's Hill Place is a three-storey plus basement, double-fronted mansion built in 1779 by Thomas Stevens, a former mayor of Rochester. Currently used as a classroom block as part of Gad's Hill School, 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*.

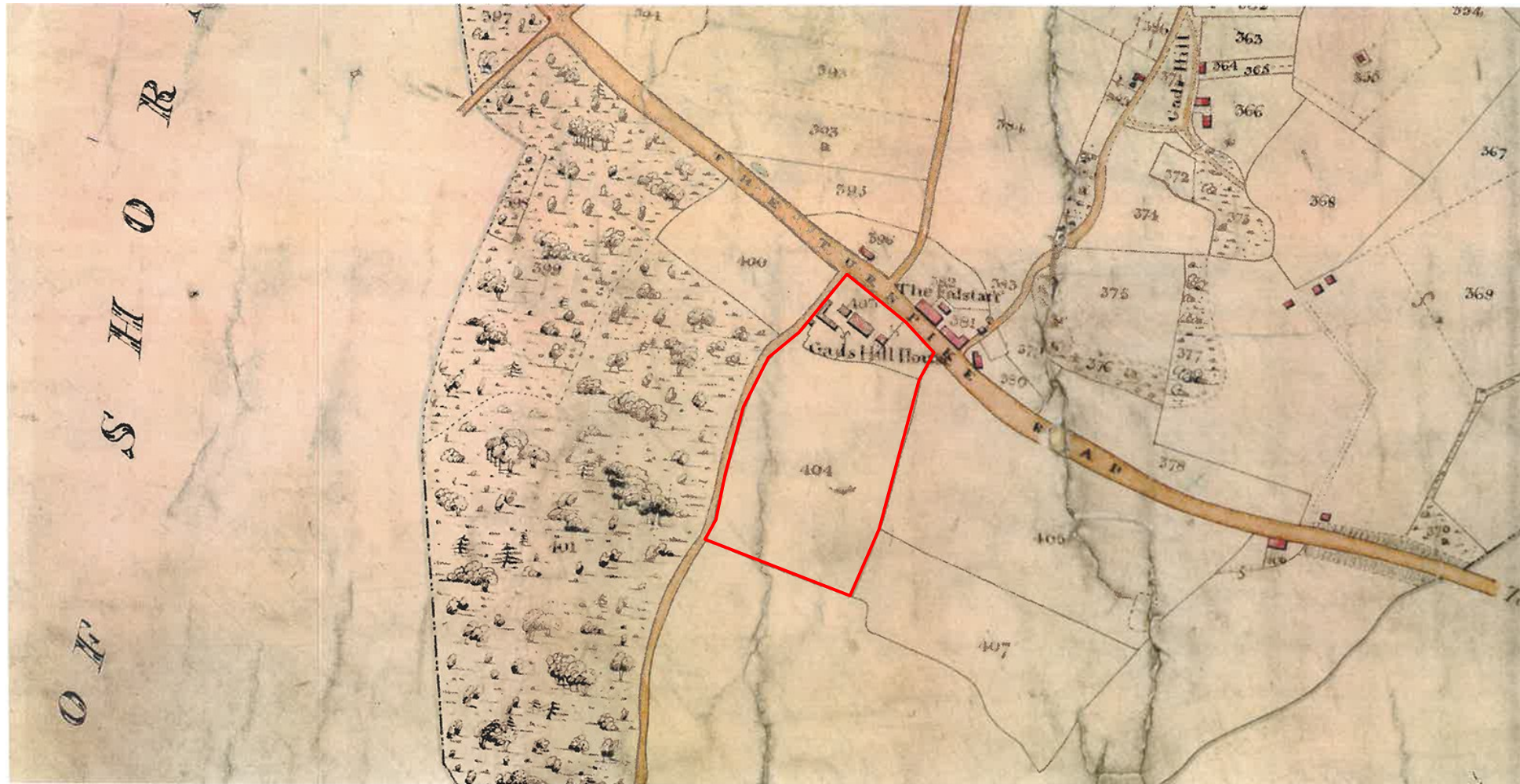
The building is Grade I Listed.

A short note on Gad's Hill Place / Gad's Hill House

Up until 1863, the house is referred to in maps as "Gad's Hill House". From 1863 onwards, it is referred to as "Gad's Hill Place".

It is important to make this distinction because there is a house across the road, which was originally called Mount Prospect, which since 1893 has been named as "Gad's Hill House" on ordnance survey maps.

For brevity, Gad's Hill Place is referred to in this document as "the house".



Tithe map 1841

Tithe map of 1841

Shows Gad's Hill House bounded by two roads: Turnpike Road (now the Gravesend/ Rochester Road) to the north, and a smaller road (now called Crutches Lane) to the west. To the east and southeast are open fields. To the northeast is The Falstaff with open fields beyond. To the north is Forge Lane with one building and open fields to the northwest. On the other side of Crutches Lane is a large field and woodland.

Dickens had long admired the house since he was a boy, when his father first drew his attention to it as they walked from Chatham to see it.

What Dickens would have clearly seen as a child walking up Turnpike Road with his father would have been the house on the rise of the hill as it stood alone on the south side of the road surrounded by farmland, except for one building near an escarpment at the lower end, with woodland beyond.

The views from the house would have been open to countryside towards the south.

9th February 1856

Dickens wrote in a letter that the house had a “noble prospect at the side and behind, looking down into the valley of the Medway”.

March 1856

Dickens purchases the house in March 1856 for £1,790 from Eliza Lynn. It was tenanted until he moved in in June 1857.

1857 to 1870

Dickens lived at Gad's Hill Place until his death on 8 June 1870. During his time at Gad's Hill Place, he made several changes to the house, these include:

- A single-storey extension to the drawing room (marked on the plans as the Library HGFX002)
- Possibly the front bay windows— bays were popular Victorian home improvements so may have been added during or before his time
- The addition of the glazed conservatory (paid for with the proceeds of a successful American tour)
- Raising the ceiling of the Old Dining Room (HGFX04), and the floor of his bedroom (H7) above. These works may have been carried out at the same time as the conservatory

7 February 1812

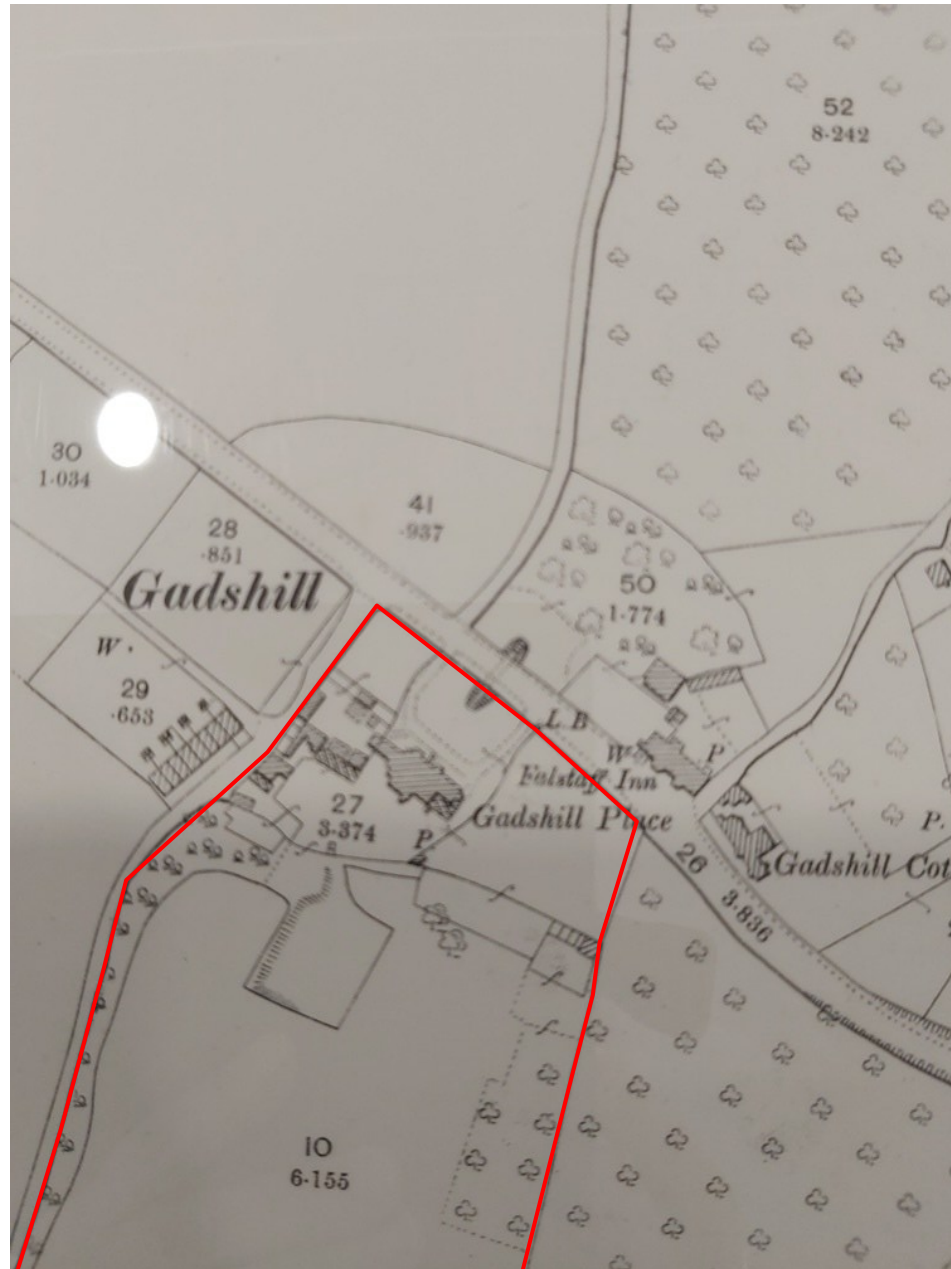
Charles Dickens is born in Portsmouth. His father John Dickens was a clerk in the Royal Navy Pay Office at the time. John Dickens was recalled to London in January 1815.

1816

The family moved from London to Sheerness and then to Chatham, where Dickens spent his formative years until the age of 11.

1828 - 1836

Left school at 12 to work in a boot-blackening factory when John Dickens was incarcerated in a debtor's prison in London. After three years, Dickens returned to school before beginning his literary career as a journalist. Literary success began with the 1836 serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers*.



Top left: Ordnance survey 1897

Right: The existing conservatory



- A lower ground floor and ground floor rear extension (HLGX06, and part of HLGFX03) with entrance steps to the rear (HCGFX03). The rear entrance originally had 2 toilets, one on either side
- A second-floor rear extension providing or extending 2 bedrooms HSF04 and HSF06
- Interior fit-out of Dickens' study (currently Head of Seniors HGFX01) with bookcases, timber panelling and door with faux bookcase

- Decorative infill panels (painted by Dickens' daughter) to the balustrade of the central staircase HSX02
- Installing a dumbwaiter between lower ground and ground floor

(Please refer to appendix for the conservation assessment.)

The glazed conservatory and Dickens' first floor bedroom (H7) with its raised floor on the southeast corner of the house command the aforementioned "noble prospect" of the Medway valley and are the focus of our assessment of the impact of the Hewlett Pavilion on the setting, views, and historic significance of the house.

Dickens died of a stroke a week after the conservatory was completed.

The current conservatory is a late 1990s reconstruction of the original conservatory. It consists of a central barrel-vaulted glazed roof with 2 lower glazed double-pitched roofs on either side of the barrel vault.

5th August 1870

Gad's Hill Place was sold by auction on 5th August 1870.

The sale document shows the house with a croquet lawn and coach house to the northwest, lawn in front and tunnel access to the shrubbery and wilderness on the other side of the High Road. There is a kitchen garden to the northeast, a lawn behind the house. Vinery, stables and gardener's cottage to the southwest. To the south is meadow parkland with a further field off to the southeast included in the sale. There are no buildings shown on the south side of the High Road, other than Gad's Hill house.

The sales plan indicates the odd clump of trees in the park and the eastern boundary of the park as having trees dotted along it.

Ordnance survey map 1897

Indicates the first appearance of small buildings to the south of the kitchen garden.

1920s

Gad's Hill Place becomes a boarding school for girls in 1924.

By 1929 a glass house and pigsty appear behind the wall south of the orchard. Gravesend Road has been widened past the corner of the old kitchen garden and a trough installed.

Changes Gad's Hill School made to the house include:

- Adapting the mansion house into a school building,

converting bedrooms into classrooms

- Adapting and extending a single-storey ground floor scullery and servants hall west of the mansion into a 3-storey 1920s extension with a second staircase HSX05, toilets, and additional rooms to the lower ground floor, ground floor, and first floor
- Connecting the extension to the entrance hall of the ground floor by forming a corridor (HCGFX04) and staircase (HSX03) through the rear west room HAFX03
- Connecting the extension to the central staircase of the house by forming a corridor (HAFX02) through the rear west room HAFX03
- Lowering the floor of the kitchen on the lower ground floor—to provide more height for the kitchen extract canopy
- Removing the toilets to Dickens' rear entrance extension
- Installing the armoury in the lower ground floor LAFX05 and LAFX06
- Installing partition walls on the lower ground floor to form rooms HAFX02 and HAFX03
- Installing partition walls on the first floor to form rooms HAFX02 and HAFX03
- Installing second floor WC HAFX05
- Adding a secondary balustrade to the central staircase to protect the decorative infill panels
- 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)
- Remodelling and reglazing of the conservatory circa late 1990s
- Installing a water tank on the roof

1935

Charles Dickens Avenue and Copperfield Crescent are developed to the southeast of Gad's Hill with houses bounding either side of the new roads. Strood expands along the edge of the widened Watling Street.

1998

The Wainscott Bypass, running down the middle of the valley, is completed.

September 2001

The school becomes fully co-educational.

2002

The school tries to purchase neighbouring property Dingley Dell in the hope of converting it into classrooms which are urgently needed for the summer of 2003. The school is frustrated by highways objections and a requirement that the school make several highway improvements, the cost of which make the project untenable.

2003

Temporary Planning Permission is obtained for the Hewitt Pavillion which is built to provide the much-needed classrooms. The 48m long single-storey black painted timber-clad building with terracotta composite metal roofing is built to the south of Dickens' kitchen garden.

2010 – 2013/2014

In 2010 the school obtained planning permission for a new Junior Block and Senior Block, and listed building consent for converting Gad's Hill Place into a Dickens Visitor Centre.

The Junior Block was completed in late 2013/2014 at a cost of £7.9m. The high cost of the build, coupled with the Credit Crunch, put the school under immense financial strain.

The planning approved Senior Block, which was meant to provide permanent accommodation for the classrooms replacing the Hewlett Pavillion, and to release Gad's Hill Place for the Dickens Visitor Centre, is not financially viable and was never built.

2022 - 2023

The school, under new leadership since 2018, has gone from strength to strength and is dealing with the cost of the Junior School build, but the planning approved Senior Block is deemed too much of a financial risk.

Clay Architecture are commissioned to develop an alternative phased masterplan for the Senior School, now renamed the Upper School.

The plan is to lease the historic house to a charity established to run the building as a heritage and educational resource, celebrating the life and work of Charles Dickens.

This masterplan was the subject of a lengthy pre-planning application with Gravesham Borough Council, pre-consultation with Historic England, and an initial Expression of Interest with the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

2025

The government introduced a standard 20% VAT on private school fees, effective from January 2025. The impact of this, together with the rise in National Insurance from April 2025, has made very necessary this application to retain and refurbish the Hewlett Pavilion.



Dickens at Gad's Hill Place

Charles Dickens

The house made such a lasting impression on young Dickens that he bought it when the opportunity arose, and he had the means, some 37 years after his father first pointed it out to him. The letter he wrote the month before buying the house captures something of what it meant to him— its “noble prospect at the side and behind, looking down into the valley of the Medway”.

He lived there ‘til his death in 1870. In those 13 years, he lavished much attention on the house and property, extending it, installing a well, a Swiss chalet within the “Wilderness”, added a conservatory and chose as his sleeping chamber the room on the southeast corner with the best views of the valley.

Charles Dickens is a writer and novelist of national and international cultural significance. His work is admired, loved, and are part of our culture and social consciousness— the word “Dickensian” is used to sum up the conditions he spent his life writing about and campaigning against.

He wrote arguably some of his greatest novels at the house, including *Great Expectations*, which is set in the landscape and environs of his walk from the house to Cooling Church, the Cliffe Marches, and the Thames Estuary; landscapes which capture the imagination and bookend the novel.

The house, the view and the setting are significant because they contribute to our understanding of Dickens the man, the writer, a celebrity of his day, and as a family man in a domestic setting. It adds to our understanding of the landscape that had a formative influence on his early life and inspired at least one of his major novels.

The conservatory is significant as a memento of Dickens’ time in America.

Dickens’ former bedroom is significant as one of the rooms he wrote in, and as the room with the aforementioned views.

The School

Last year, Gad’s Hill School celebrated its centenary on the site. The school and its alumni are woven into the local history of Gravesham and North Kent.

In WWII, pupils were evacuated to the Lake District for several years while Gad’s Hill served as a hostel for the Women’s Royal Naval Service, housing the 91 Chatham-based Wrens until December 1944. The single-storey admiralty extension was built during this period, connecting the 1930s gym block with the lower ground floor of the house. It is a fine example of brick-on-end or soldier course construction used during the war for rapid and efficient construction during an era of brick shortages.

It is thought that the armoury was installed during this time— it is now used by the school’s Combined Cadet Force.

Gads Hill School are proud custodians of Dickens’ legacy and Dickens’ former home.

Cedric Charles Dickens, the author’s great-grandson, was a governor of the school until his death in 2006. Marion Dickens, the author’s great-great-granddaughter is a former pupil of the school and, as of 2019, is a Director of the school company.

The school recently completed a faithful reconstruction of the cupola which crowns the house— the existing cupola, which is not the original (except for the retained bell and weathervane) was in a very poor condition.

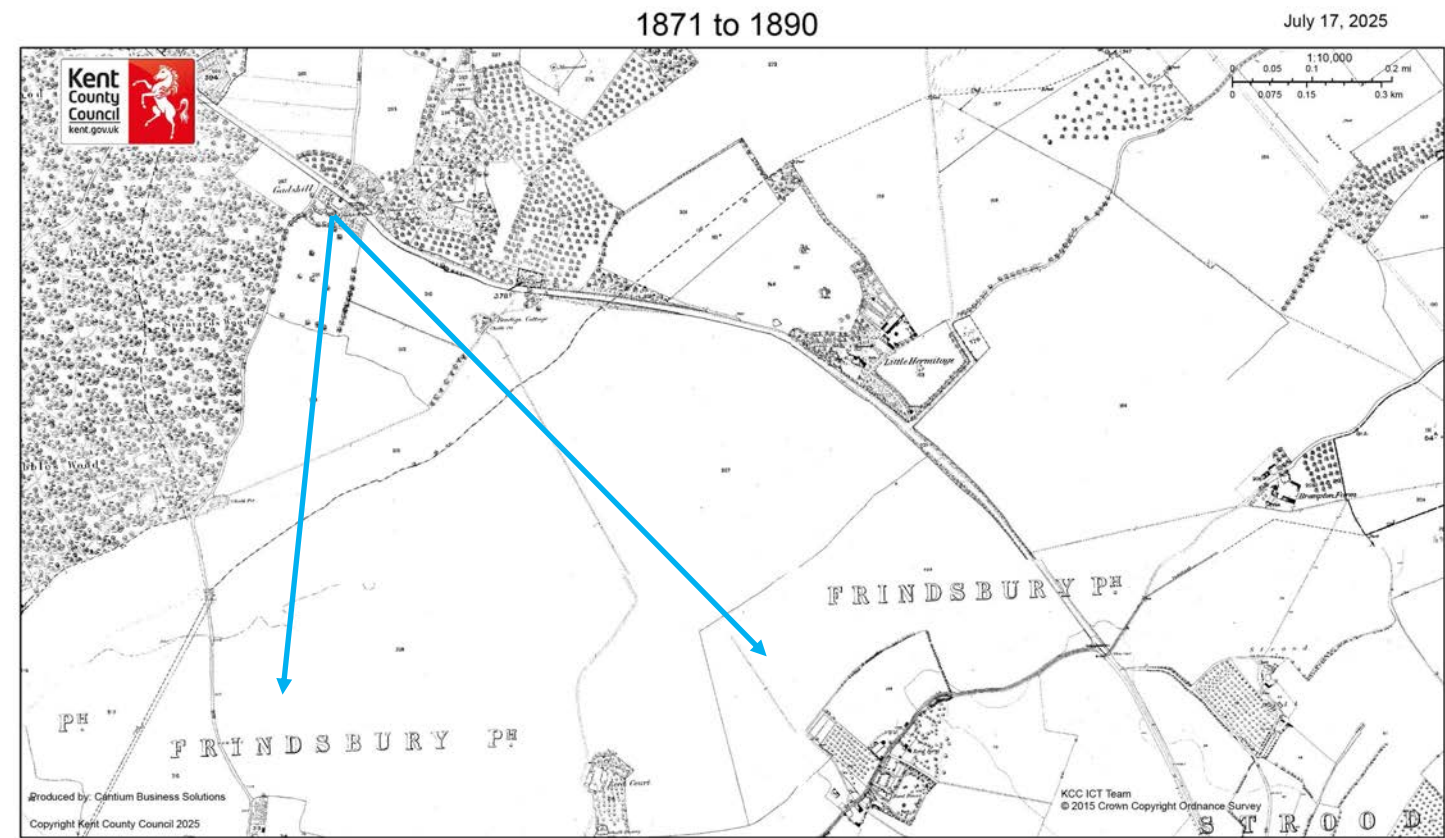
Structural investigations towards the repair of the historic floors and landings of the house are being carried out this summer as part of an ongoing listed building application.

Fittingly, English literature is taught in Dickens’ former bedroom.

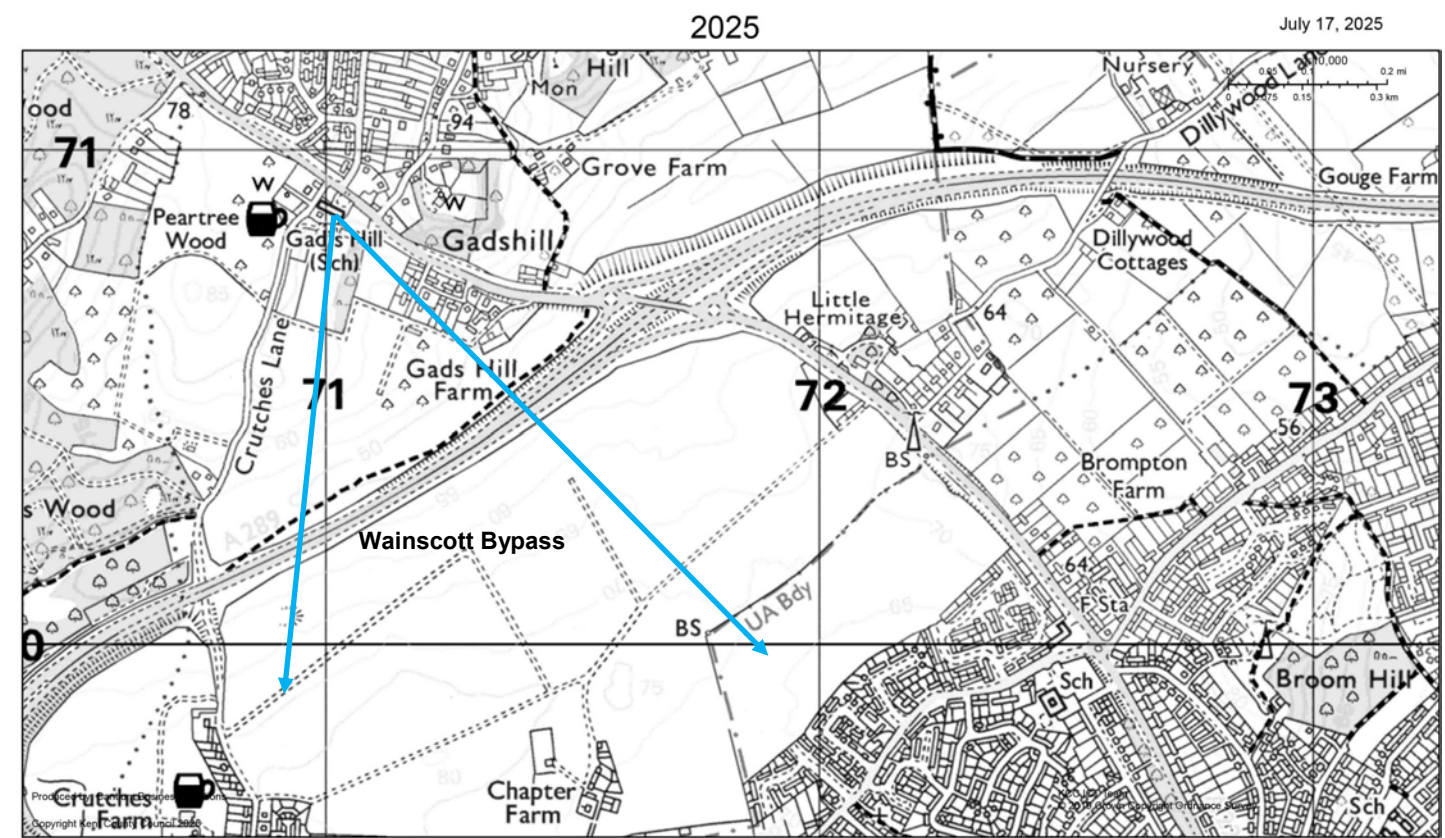
The Dickens Trust holds events and conducts tours of the house to the public.

Comparative study mapping the changes between
1870 and 2025

clay architecture



Dickens' line of sight from Gad's Hill Place superimposed on the 1870s map



Dickens' line of sight from Gad's Hill Place superimposed on the 2025 map

This historical map of the Dickens estate, dated 1870, provides a detailed view of the property's layout. The map is oriented with a compass rose indicating North. Key features include:

- The Wilderness:** A large, wooded area in the upper left, marked with a large '1'.
- Swiss Chalet:** A building located in the upper right, near the 'The Wilderness' area.
- Dickens' bedroom:** A building located in the center, near the 'The Wilderness' area.
- View from bedroom:** A dashed line with an arrow pointing from the bedroom towards the 'The Wilderness' area.
- View from Conservatory:** A dashed line with an arrow pointing from the conservatory towards the 'The Wilderness' area.
- Other buildings and grounds:** The map also shows a 'GARDENERS' COTTAGE', a 'KITCHEN', a 'GARDEN', and a 'LAWN'.

The map is a color illustration, with buildings in shades of brown and red, and the grounds in green. The text is in a serif font, typical of 19th-century publications.

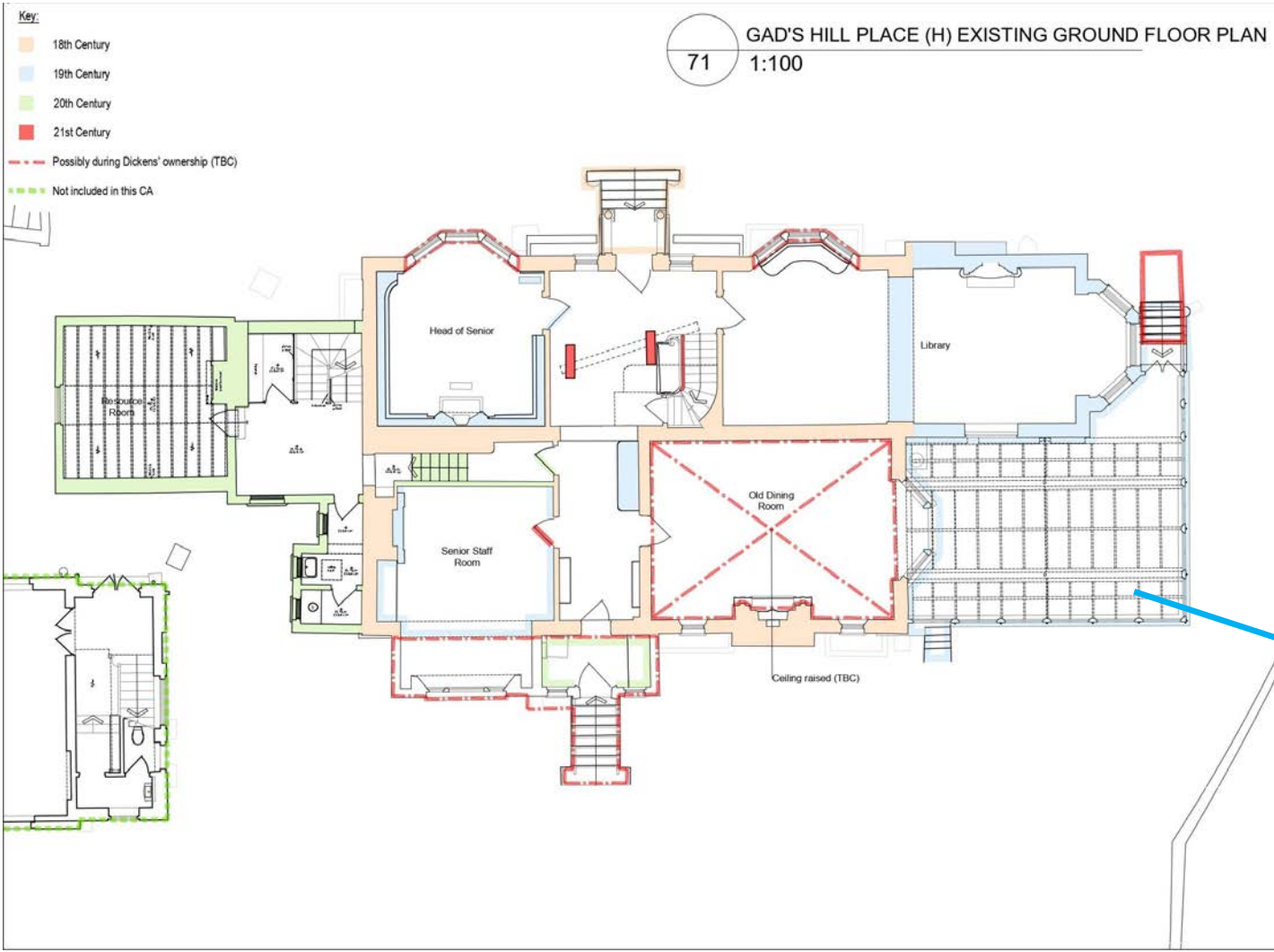
Contemporary GoogleEarth aerial photo

Sold between 1933 and 1961

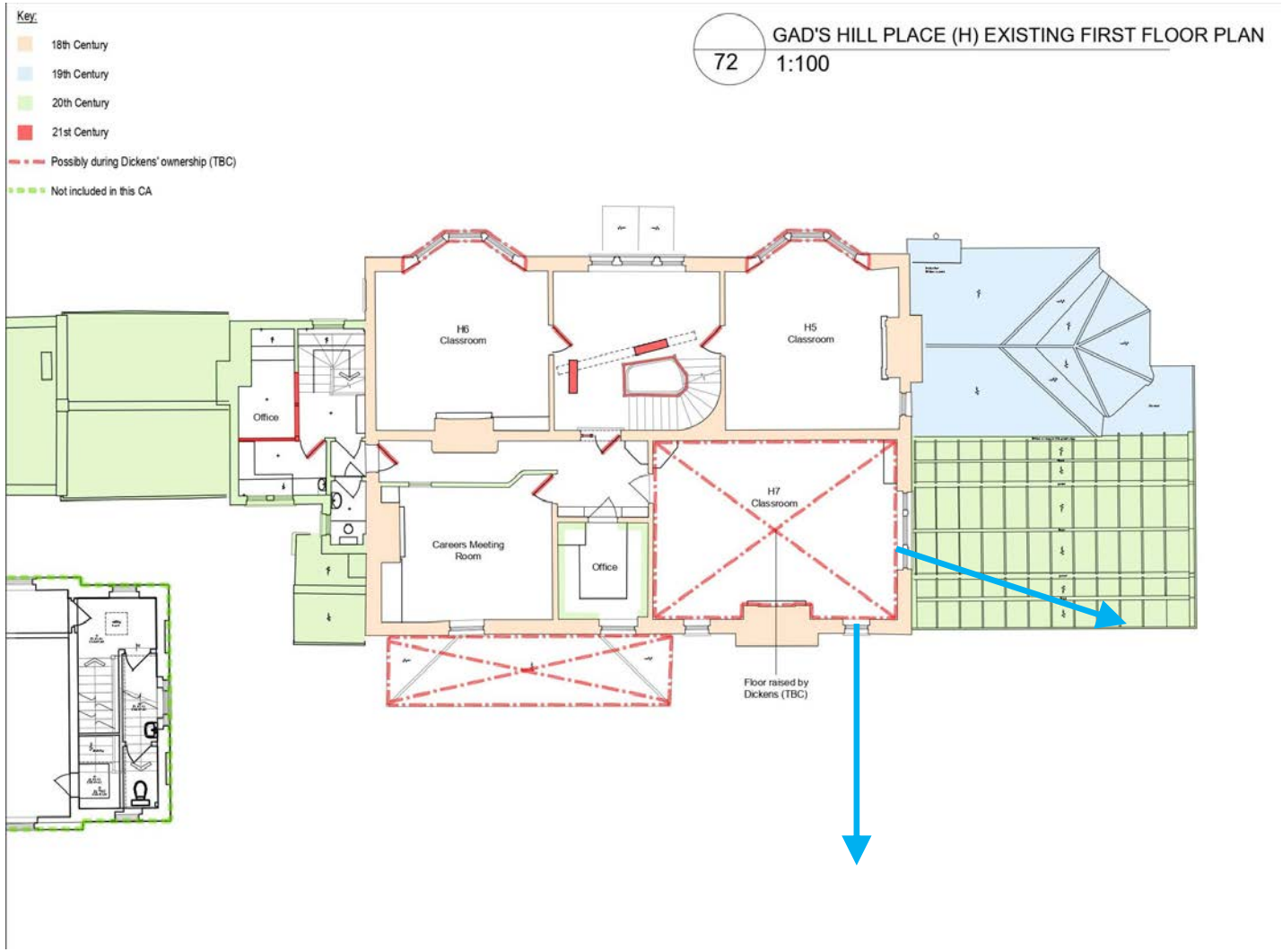
Gads Hill Place
H7

Pavilion

Mature trees and dense canopy cover shorten views from the house and conservatory



Line of sight from the ground floor conservatory



Line of site from Dickens' former bedroom on the first floor, now H7

Changes to the landscape and setting of Gad's Hill Place since 1870

As demonstrated in the Chronology, historic maps, and illustrated in the 1870 / 2025 Comparative Study, much has changed in the landscape and setting of the house in the 155 years since Dickens passed away.

It is important to acknowledge that the views out of the house during Dickens' life are not quite the views out of the house today.

In a pre-consultation on the alternative masterplan, Gravesham Borough Council's conservation officer remarked:

"A study of Google Earth aerial photographs shows there were no trees in this area in 1940, the woods being relatively modern and now obscuring the open views Dickens had from his writing desk/ first floor bedroom.

Clearly this is the largest divergence from Approved Scheme where the open view was to be re-established, albeit there could have been more tree clearance to open up those views."

There are some 36 trees to the south and east of the house, including 6 Category A (High Value) and 12 Category B (Moderate Value) trees.

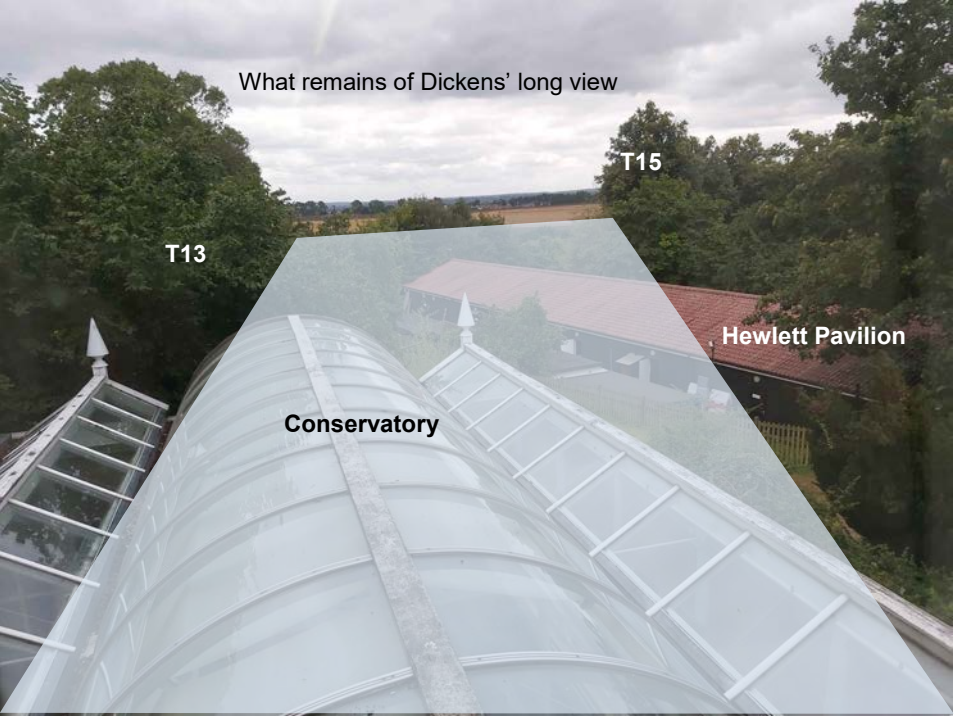
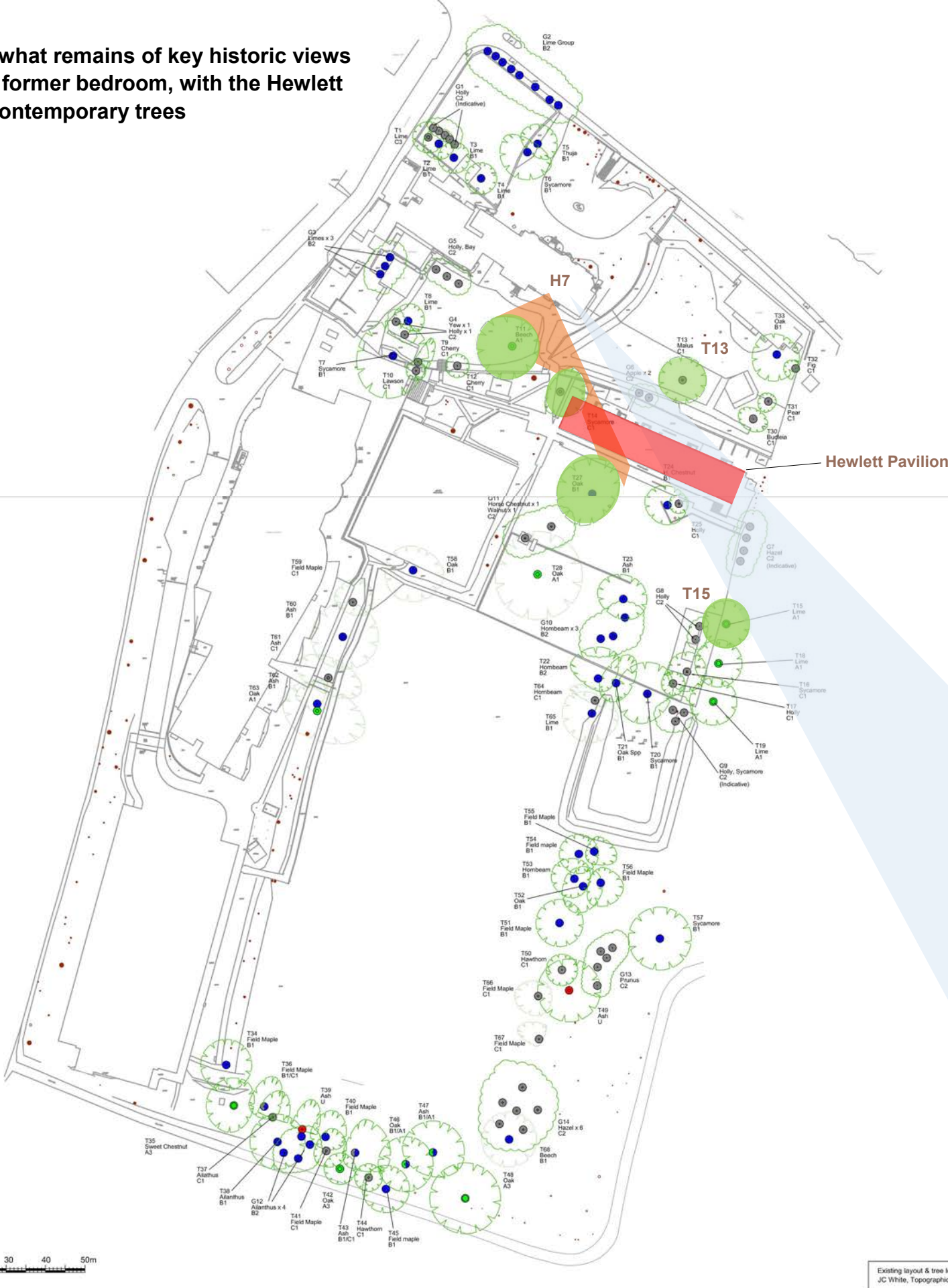
Considering the negative impact this would have on habitat, biodiversity and the character of the landscape, it is unrealistic to consider the removal of mature and significant trees to recreate the open views Dickens enjoyed.

These trees have some positive effect by screening the impact of 20thC developments such as the expansion of Strood from views from the house.

Today, what remains of the long view Dickens described in his letter, seen from his former bedroom window, is the gap between the trees numbered T13 and T15 on the tree survey.

The impact on significance assessment that follows focuses on this view.

Plan showing what remains of key historic views from Dickens' former bedroom, with the Hewlett Pavilion and contemporary trees



View from east facing window in H7 in summer



View from south facing window in H7 in winter



139 Bush Road
Coudon
Rochester
Kent
ME2 1E2
Tel: 01634 724023
Email: info@sylvanarb.co.uk
Web: www.sylvanarb.co.uk

TREE SURVEY PLAN

(Existing Layout)

Site Address:
Gad's Hill School
Gravesend Road
Higham
Kent
ME3 7PA
Client:
Gad's Hill School

By: C. Barkel
Date: 02 September 2022
Ref: GH/TSP-SB/2023-01-A
Scale: 1:400 @ A1

Key:

- Category A Tree (High Value)
- Category B Tree (Moderate Value)
- Category C Tree (Low Value)
- Category U Tree (Poor Condition)
- Unsurveyed Tree

1 Tree Number
Oak Tree Species
A1 Retention Category



The Hewlett Pavilion lies across the direct line of the long view to the Medway valley Dickens described in his letter.

What we describe as the Hewlett Pavilion consists of 2 groups of buildings:

A 48m long single-room-deep timber-framed system-build classroom block with a roofed open gallery on the south side. The pavilion houses 5 specialist classrooms, the IT office and main server for the Upper School, and toilets. A flat roofed extension built onto the east end of the pavilion has, at various times, served as a classroom and an office.

A line of low sheds north of the pavilion built into the retaining wall of Dickens' former kitchen garden. These ancillary buildings house the toilets, maintenance workshop, Combined Cadet Force office, science prep, chemical store, and kiln room.

The ancillary buildings are built on sloping ground, which at its highest point is 4.87m lower than the ground floor of the historic house. The roofs are partially screened from the house by the retaining wall they back onto.

The ancillary buildings cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the garden; their impact on historic views from the house is relatively low.

The flat roofed extension is concealed from the house by the pavilion. It causes less than substantial harm to the setting of the garden; it has no impact on historic views.

The ridge of the roof of the Hewlett Pavilion is less than a foot lower than the ground floor of the historic house. Views out of the windows to the conservatory on the ground floor and Dickens' former bedroom on the first floor look down across the roof and the back of the pavilion towards the Medway Valley to the east.

In its current form, by virtue of its size and proximity to the house, the dominant red of its roof covering, and the dominant black of its timber cladding, the pavilion draws the eye away and detracts from the views of the Medway valley.

In its current state, the pavilion causes a degree of less than substantial harm.

The school proposes to refurbish and renew the Hewlett Pavilion to prolong its useful life. The structure of the pavilion is sound, but the finishes are tired and need attention. The terracotta-effect Kingspan insulated roof panels are close to the end of their useful thermal and structural life and are not in good condition.

A scheme is proposed to renew and refurbish the pavilion using materials which reduce / mitigate the impact of the pavilion on the setting and historic views of the house:

- The lightweight terracotta-effect Kingspan roof panels will be removed, and the roof structure strengthened, to enable the trusses to take the additional weight of a warm flat roof with a sedum cover.
 - The sedum roof will be chosen to blend in with the surrounding vegetation, making the roof much more regressive and subordinate than the existing tile effect red roof .
 - The Sedum mix will be evergreen, drought resistant and low maintenance.
- The black shiplap cladding will be replaced with vertical board-on-board timber cladding in a natural finish; insulation will be upgraded to current standards. The boards will be fire-retardant timber to Euroclass B-s1, d0.
 - The natural finish timber boards will gradually oxidize and turn silver-grey, a more regressive and subordinate colour and tone than the existing black cladding.
 - Vertical board-on-board timber cladding adds a finer grain of texture to the pavilion compared to the more monolithic black shiplap boards, this will help to break up the visual mass of the wall.
 - Timber specie to be confirmed.

The visualisations on the pages that follow illustrate and compare the harm caused by the Hewlett Pavilion before and after mitigation :

Visualisation_1

- Existing and proposed views from H7 (Dickens' former bedroom) in winter

Visualisation_2

- Existing and proposed views from H7 (Dickens' former bedroom) in summer

Visualisation_3

- Existing and proposed views from the conservatory in winter

Visualisation_4

- Existing and proposed views from the conservatory in summer

CONCLUSION

The proposed mitigation measure of changing the roof and cladding finishes to sedum and natural timber will more than halve the harm of the existing Hewlett Pavilion to the setting of Gad's Hill Place and whilst this would still fall within the definition of "less than substantial" it would be a significant reduction in harm to significance.

Visualisations_1

View from H7 in summer



Existing

A degree of less than substantial harm



Proposed

Significant reduction in less than substantial harm

Visualisations_2

View from H7 in winter



Existing

A degree of less than substantial harm



Proposed

Significant reduction in less than substantial harm

Visualisations_3

View from conservatory in summer



Existing

A degree of less than substantial harm



Proposed

Significant reduction in less than substantial harm

Visualisations_4

View from conservatory in winter



Existing

A degree of less than substantial harm



Proposed

Significant reduction in less than substantial harm

Key:

- 18th Century
- 19th Century
- 20th Century
- 21st Century

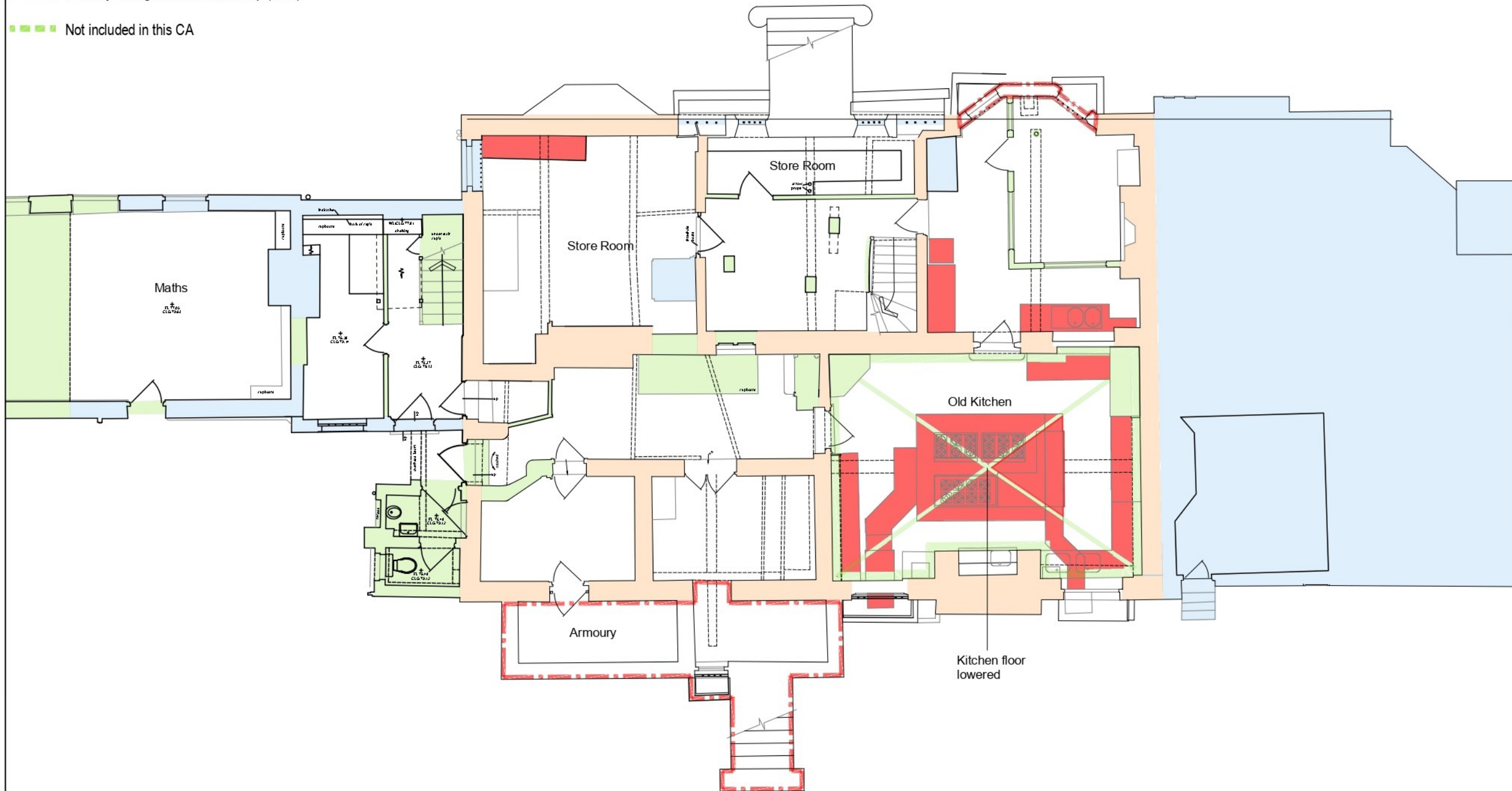
Possibly during Dickens' ownership (TBC)

Not included in this CA

70

GAD'SHILL PLACE (H) EXISTING LOWER GROUND FLOOR PLAN

1:100



Rev. Date By Notes

Client: Gad's Hill School
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Project: Gad's Hill School
Proposal for Senior School & Creative Arts Hub

Scale 1:100 @ A3 size
Date 22/2/00
Drawn GEN
Authorised KG
Revision /

clay architecture
Great Lines Studios, Marlborough Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 5HB

T: 01634 573 017
www.clayarchitecture.com
E: design@clayarchitects.com

Title: Gad's Hill Place (H)
Existing Lower Ground Floor Plan
Drawing No. 5266/CA70

Key:

- 18th Century
- 19th Century
- 20th Century
- 21st Century

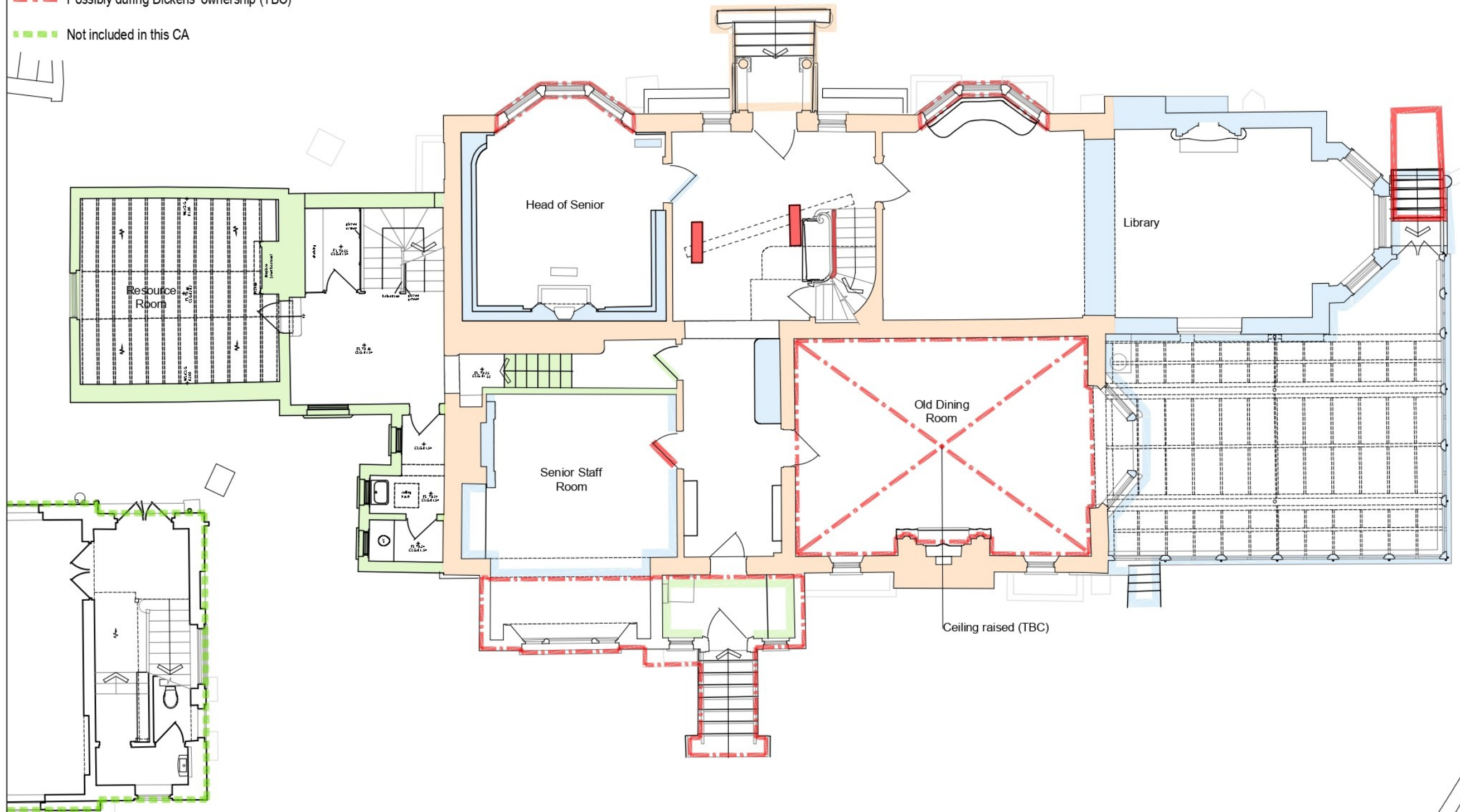
--- Possibly during Dickens' ownership (TBC)

--- Not included in this CA

71

GAD'S HILL PLACE (H) EXISTING GROUND FLOOR PLAN

1:100



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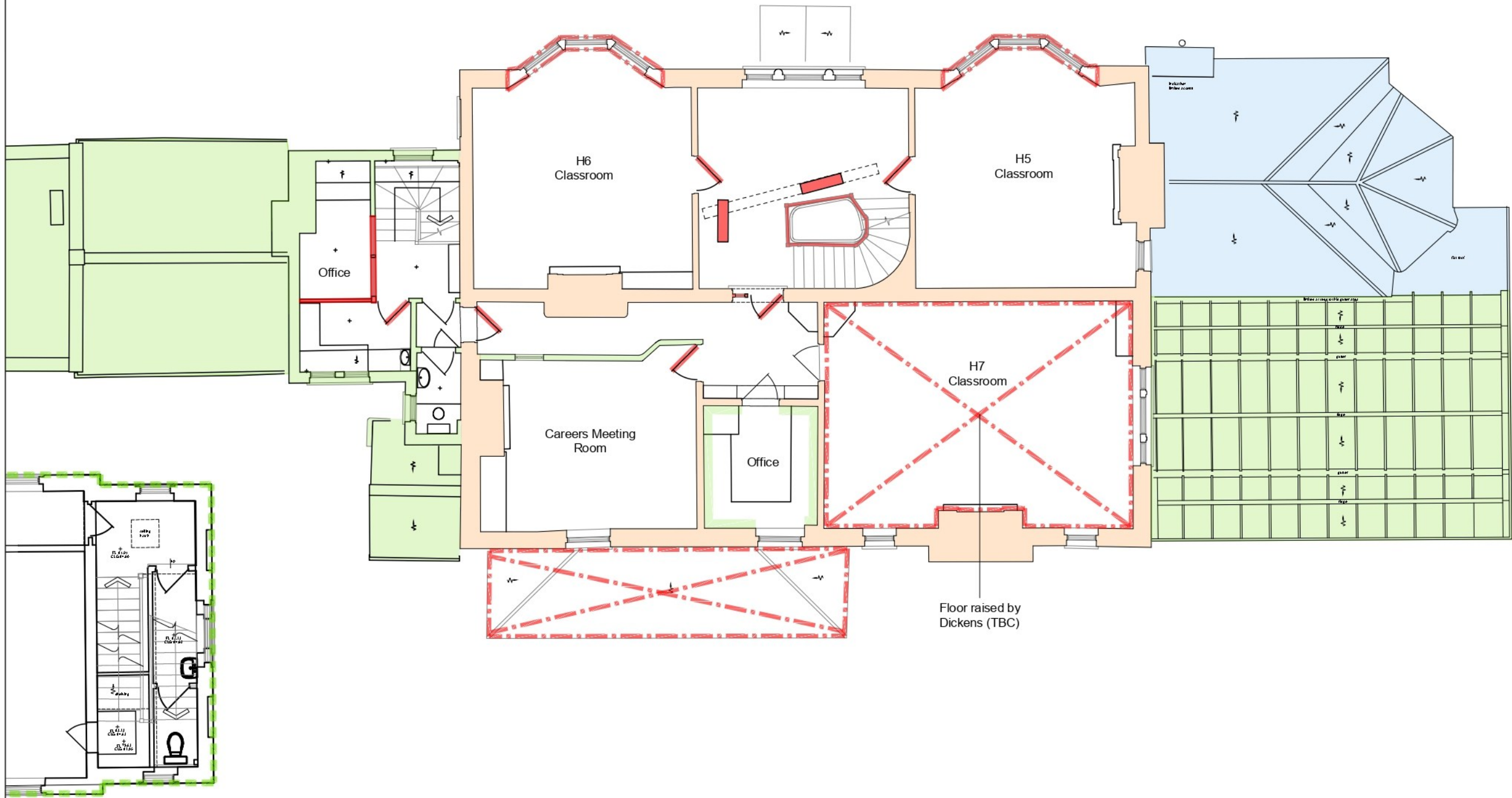
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Date 22/2/00
Drawn GEN
Authorised KG
Revision /

clay architecture
Great Lines Studios, Marlborough Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 5HB
T: 01634 573 017
www.clayarchitecture.com
E: design@clayarchitects.com

Title: Gad's Hill Place (H)
Existing Ground Floor Plan
Drawing No. 5266/CA71

- Key:
- 18th Century
 - 19th Century
 - 20th Century
 - 21st Century
 - Possibly during Dickens' ownership (TBC)
 - Not included in this CA

72 GAD'S HILL PLACE (H) EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1:100



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T: 01634 573 017
www.clayarchitecture.com
E: design@clayarchitects.com

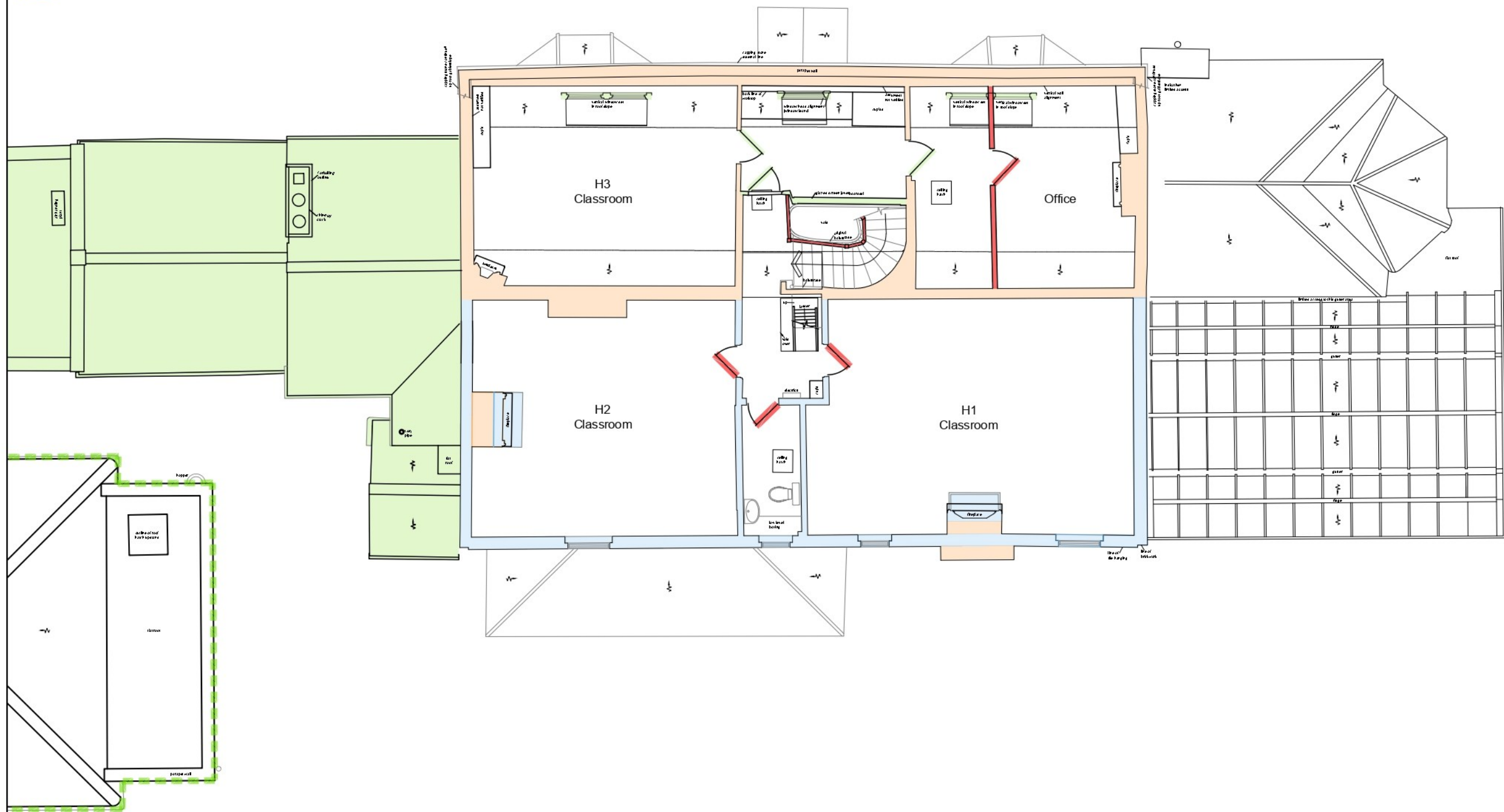
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Existing First Floor Plan
Drawing No. 5266/CA72

Scale 1:100 @ A3 size
Date 22/2/00
Drawn GEN
Authorised KG
Revision /

- Key:
- 18th Century
 - 19th Century
 - 20th Century
 - 21st Century
- Possibly during Dickens' ownership (TBC)
- Not included in this CA

GAD'S HILL PLACE (H) EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN

73 1:100



Project	Client	Rev.	Date	By	Notes
Gad's Hill School	Gad's Hill School				

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E: design@clayarchitects.com

Title
Gad's Hill Place (H)
Existing Second Floor Plan
Drawing No. 5266/CA73

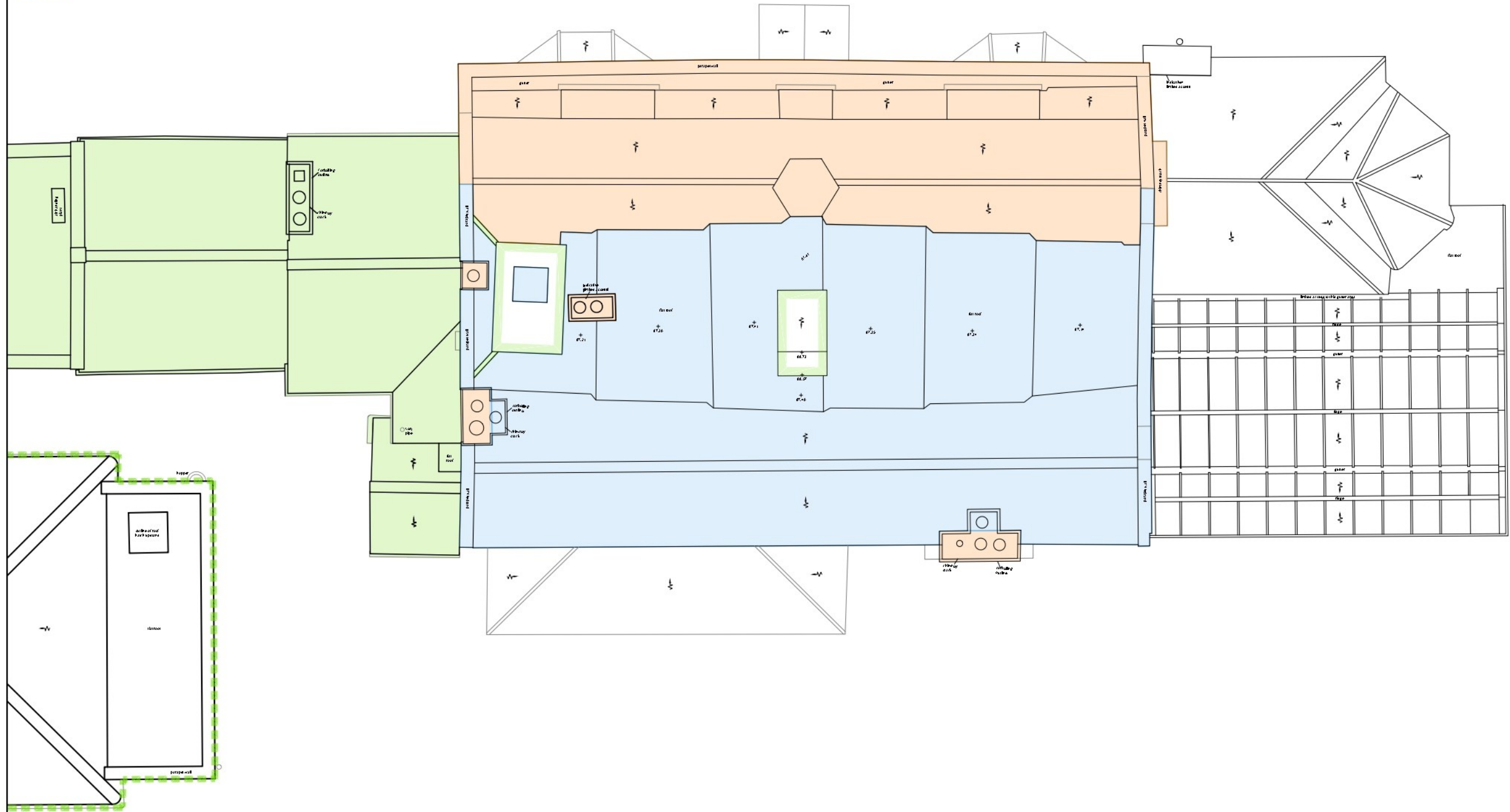
Scale 1:100 @ A3 size
Date 22/2/00
Drawn GEN
Authorised KG
Revision /

- Key:
- 18th Century
 - 19th Century
 - 20th Century
 - 21st Century
 - Possibly during Dickens' ownership (TBC)
 - Not included in this CA

74

GAD'S HILL PLACE (H) EXISTING ROOF PLAN

1:100



Project
Gad's Hill School
Proposal for Senior School & Creative Arts Hub

Client
Gad's Hill School

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Rev.

Date

By

Notes

Title
Gad's Hill Place (H)
Existing Roof Plan
Drawing No. 5266/CA74

Scale 1:100 @ A3 size
Date 22/2/00
Drawn GEN
Authorised KG
Revision /