

# Brocket, Boyn Hill Avenue, Maidenhead.

## *Comment by Cllr Claire Stretton on the Feasibility Study conducted by CSK Architects to ascertain its suitability for use as a residential scheme or mixed-use scheme with the Registrar's Office*

*Version 3 - 26 September 2016*

### **Introduction**

**Brocket** in Boyn Hill Avenue is a public building of great significance to Maidenhead, being recorded as a Grade II Listed Building for the following principal reasons:

- A substantially intact and decorative early C20 house displaying Arts and Crafts influences.
- Evidence for craftsmanship in the quality and use of materials in both the exterior and interior finishes.

It came into the ownership of Berkshire County Council in 1950 and has been in public ownership ever since. Because of its uses over the years, most recently as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and offices, it has a particularly offensive large fire escape on its eastern side to provide exit from the roof space.

We have very few public buildings with this history and quality in Maidenhead and it is unfortunate that over the past 66 years of public ownership, Brocket has not been seen by any but a select few of the residents who ultimately own it. It is my belief that, if possible, this building should now be restored and made accessible to the public so that its quality can be more widely appreciated, particularly by those recording the important moments of their lives.

Since the PRU moved out, I have been lobbied by local residents as their local Ward Councillor to find out what our plans for Brocket are, and to register a local need for meeting rooms and spaces for local community groups to run meetings and workshops. I believe that Brocket, in conjunction with use by the Registrar, would be most suitable for this purpose. It could also be used by RBWM or hired to local businesses as meeting or reception rooms.

### **Comment**

I note the Feasibility Study conducted by CSK Architects and, I am disappointed that each of the plans requires the demolition of the original "Winter Garden" and considerable reconfiguration of the internal rooms, both of which are specifically mentioned in the Grade II Listing text. I understand that this Feasibility Study was also to ascertain whether the building could provide for "Key Worker Housing". I also note the conclusion drawn, which is: *"Due to parking restrictions and the layout of the listed building, in particular the principal reception room and principal stair, we consider this building is best suited to a wholly residential conversion as opposed to a mixed use scheme"*.

Whilst Key Worker Housing may be a laudable aspiration for the council to seek to provide, Brocket is not in my view best suited for this purpose. If it were to be converted into flats, then how exactly does one decide which Key Workers would be given the privilege of living in this Grade II Listed Building? I suggest that we must accept that this scenario would likely lead to the building being sold.

However the invasive reconfiguration and extension of Brocket can only be described as detrimental to the fabric of the building and I believe it would be far better to work with the building and not against it.

I have read the Needs document supplied by the Registrar and also met with her to understand her requirements. They include: Three Private Offices to discuss the registry of Births and Deaths, Passport and Nationality services; Central Reception for 15/20 people; large Strong Room to store records out of sight of the general public with access from Reception, Kitchen, Ceremony Room for up to 50 with separate entrance and exit; Garden for photographs; Parking c 30 cars; Bridal Car access and parking; access by public transport. She also has an aspiration to hold weddings outdoors in the summer.

I demonstrate in this paper how Brocket can provide everything, and more, that the Registrar requires. By stripping out all the later additions, including the fire escape we can have a public building that local residents can use, enjoy and be proud of for years to come.

### **Alternative Future for Brocket**

Brocket can provide:

- 1 Registrar's Offices including:
  - a. Reception with access to Strong Room
  - b. Ceremony Room similar or potentially larger that is currently available
  - c. Three private offices
  - d. Disabled access and public toilets on both floors
  - e. Several opportunities for photographs
  - f. Drive-through and parking for bridal cars at front
  - g. Opportunity to offer short celebration drinks receptions after weddings in the Drinks Reception/ Winter Garden
  - h. Potential for Summer weddings outside by building a Pergola on the current play area.
- 2 Council/Community Hire Meeting Rooms including:
  - a. Three meeting rooms, two interconnected
  - b. Separate entrance if required
  - c. Public toilets/kitchen.
  - d. Access to the downstairs public rooms in the evenings.
- 3 Caretaker's one-bedroomed flat to enable the facilitation of the Meeting Rooms and provide on-site security.

### **Supporting Information**

The Staircase and Drinks Reception/Winter Garden would also provide an excellent photo venues when the weather is inclement.

The Ceremony, Drinks Reception, Winter Garden and Meeting Rooms could be hired out to local businesses and resident groups. These would all provide income.

Providing a Caretaker's Flat on-site, perhaps for one the RBWM Facilities Team, would keep the building secure and allows for the setting up of hires and access for hirers.

Additional benefits include the opportunity to absorb

the spaces occupied by the current Registrar's Offices back into the Town Hall, perhaps for much needed meeting rooms, or as part of the planned extension of the Desborough Suite to provide an Entertainment Centre in the town centre.

### Required Works (page 4)

The major works required to achieve this is significantly less than any of the Schemes suggested in the Feasibility Study. After stripping out all of the later additions, the following is required:

- 1 A new doorway from the Entrance Hall to the Reception and Waiting Area and installation of glass screen or door between the Entrance Hall and the Ceremony Room
- 2 Secure shutter between Reception and receptionists office with wall added to provide a Strong Room behind.
- 3 A small passenger lift to enable disabled access to the first floor, access from the Waiting Area.
- 4 Suitable toilets installed, including for the disabled on both ground and first floors.
- 5 Conversion of the roof space into a one-bedroom Caretakers Flat with suitable fire and acoustic separation in the floor.
- 6 Landscape the Gardens to improve the setting of the Listed building and provide for Photographs.
- 7 (Optional see page 4) Extending the Ceremony Room by moving one wall out to meet the existing roof.
- 8 (Optional see page 5) Make a new parking area at the rear of the garden with access off Lower Boyndon Road.
- 9 (Optional see page 5) Build a Pergola for outdoor weddings in the summer.

### Challenges raised by the Feasibility Study

#### 1 - Access and Parking Restrictions

Brocket is a 12 minute walk from the Station. Boyn Hill Avenue is served by Bus and I would recommend that the Bus Stop is relocated from its current position, by the now demolished College, to right outside Brocket. We are currently undertaking a consultation to remove the Commuter all-day Parking from Boyn Hill Avenue, which would mean there would be ample parking in the road.

If however is deemed that additional parking should be provided on site, say for staff, I have shown in the attached plans how the parking could effectively be doubled, from 12 to 24 by utilising the bottom strip of the large garden with access off Boyndon Road.

I have consulted our parking team who do not see any highways issues with doing this. I dispute the assertion in the study that *"New parking to the rear of the site accessed off Lower Boyn Road is unlikely to be acceptable in planning terms. It would blight the outlook from the properties to the rear"*. There is only 1 property at the rear, which would not be able to see any cars parked behind the 6 foot high existing fence. The outlook from Brocket should be improved by both removing the large play area currently there which served the PRU, potentially building a pergola there for outside weddings, and by suitable landscaping of the gardens, which could also screen the parking area. The amount of usable garden would only be reduced by less than a third, but the setting of the Listed Building greatly improved.

#### 2 - Principal Reception room size

I have demonstrated in the attached plans on page 3, that by utilising a more pragmatic layout, how 48 guests (including the bride and bridegroom) can be

accommodated, similar to the 'Ceremony Room' in the Town Hall, which currently accommodates up to 42. However, most weddings are considerably smaller than this number and with a subtle extension utilising the existing overhanging roof, the room could comfortably accommodate c60.

### Other "Disadvantages" referred to include:

A - *"It is difficult to see how marriages could be run back to back. Access to the main waiting area involves entering the main room where the service would be in progress."* This is only true because of where CSK Architects have chosen to put the Waiting Room. See Works Required and Plans.

B - *"The existing principal stair must be retained and it must lead somewhere. This necessitates commercial space at first floor."* I agree and this is not a disadvantage. See Works Required and Plans.

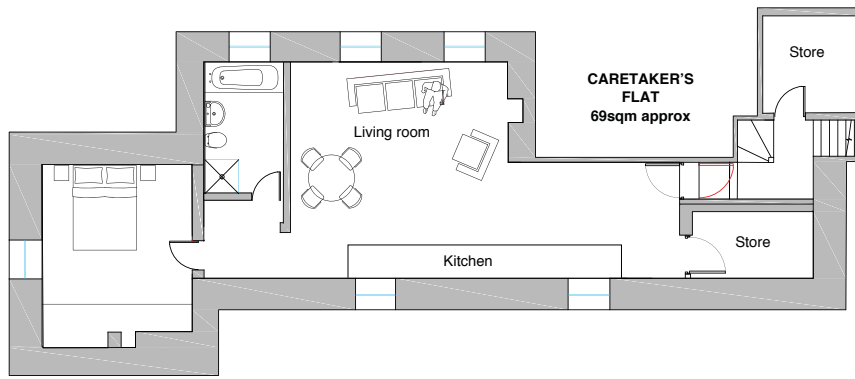
C - Mixed scheme - *"There is both a vertical and horizontal overlap between commercial space and residential accommodation with complicates both the acoustic and the fire separation."* Residential scheme: *"There will need to be robust acoustic and fire separation between each flat - at first floor where there are listed features and this will be less straight forward than on the upper floor"*. By only utilising the roof space as residential, which does not contain any listed features, the Feasibility Study recognises that this would be more straight forward.

### Conclusion

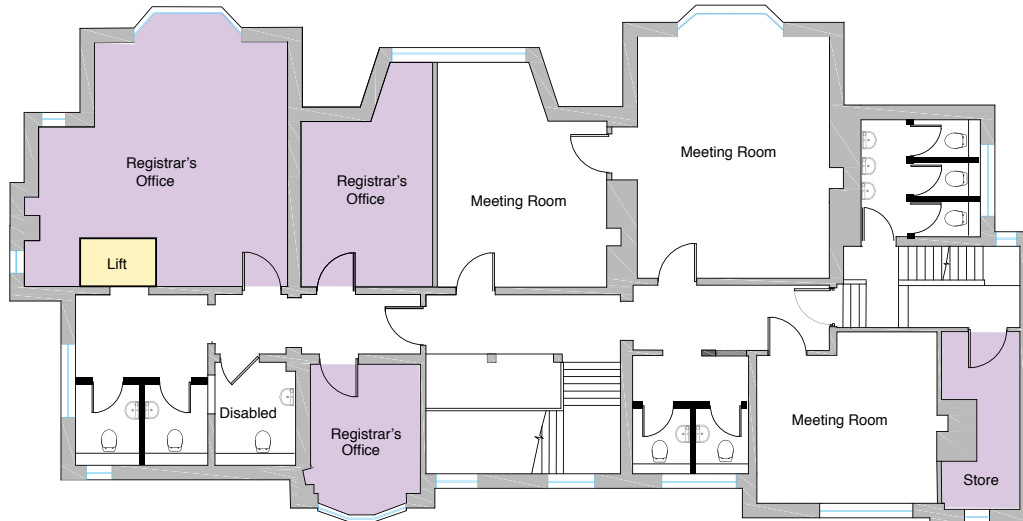
I can see how it might be financially appealing to redevelop this site into entirely residential accommodation, particularly if they were to be later sold on the open market, however either way the building would be lost to the public. This scheme would provide an ongoing income, with the benefit of both keeping this asset in public ownership and opening it up to the public. There is also space to accommodate any expansion of the Registrar's activities.

It has also been proven by other studies that to make use of the Town Hall to deliver the cultural aspirations of the town centre regeneration by redeveloping the Desborough Suite is significantly the most cost-effective solution to deliver an Entertainment Centre in Maidenhead town centre. As this does require the relocation the Registrar to another suitable building, these projects cannot be viewed in isolation. We must seek to make the best use of our resources across the town, both practically and financially. Where would we look to build a new Registrar's Office in Maidenhead that could provide a similar ambience? On the Waterway? And at what cost? Or would we seek to relocate to another area of the borough, forcing the large population of Maidenhead to travel?

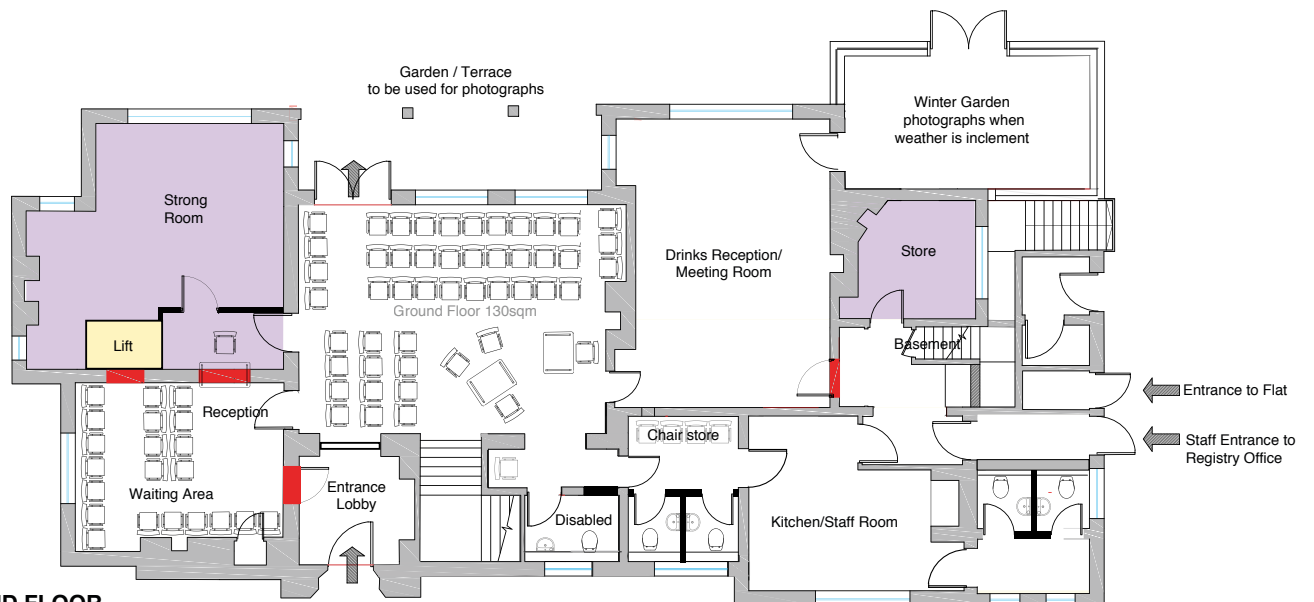
**I would therefore ask that this scheme is investigated as suggested on the following pages, which incidentally require neither the demolition of the Winter Garden or a vast invasive reconfiguration of the building. It also would not require additional new extensions variously suggested by the architects, but are achieved solely by respectful internal reorganisation. Not only would this allow the residents of RBWM to celebrate and commemorate the most significant moments of their lives in one of Maidenhead's very few historic public buildings, but provide others the opportunity to meet and hire it for the many various activities that local business and the community undertake.**






**SECOND FLOOR**



**FIRST FLOOR**



**GROUND FLOOR**

-  Demolition
-  New infill walls
-  Registrar secure areas
-  New glass wall/door

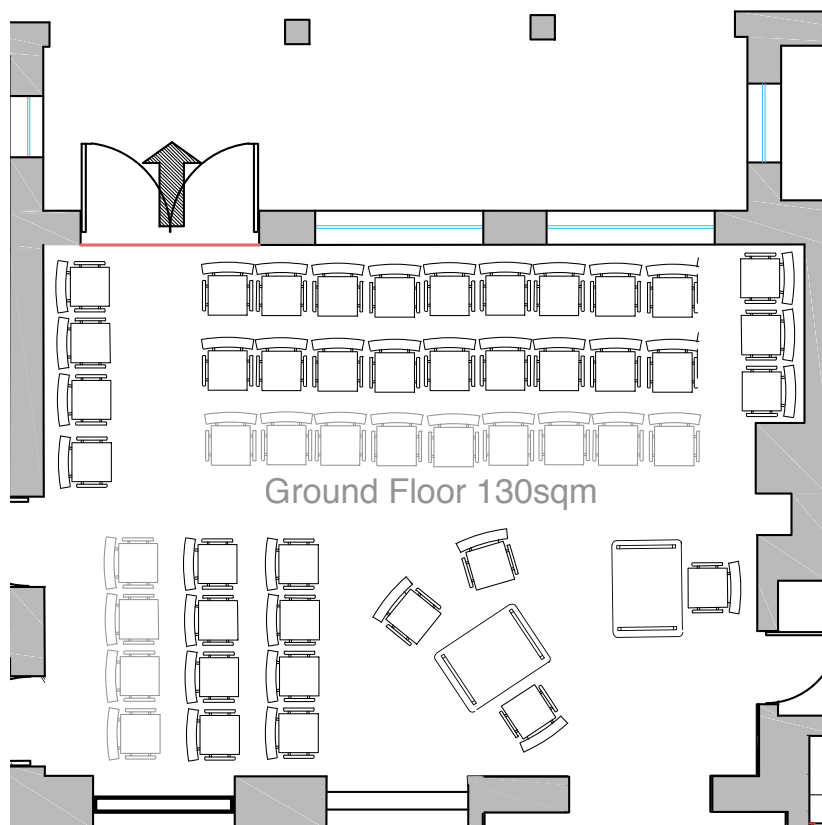
<b>BROCKET MAIDENHEAD</b>	1:125 @ A3	08/2016
<b>REGISTRY OFFICE, MEETING ROOMS AND CARETAKER FLAT</b>		

## Optional extension to the Ceremony Room

### Ceremony Room within the current room

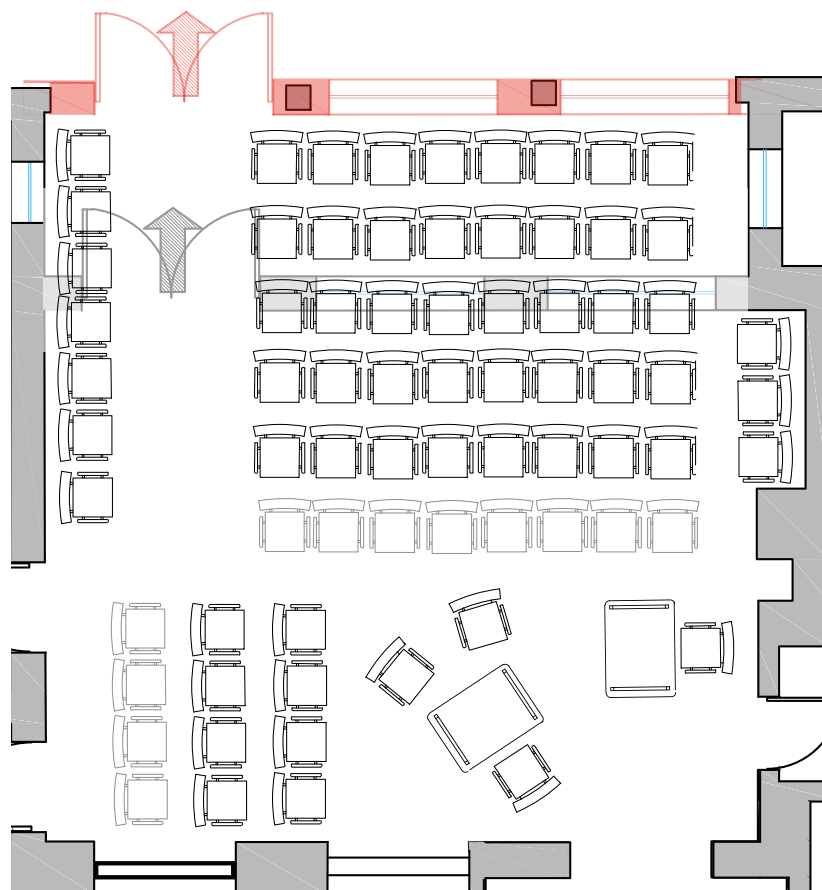
By turning the orientation around from the architects suggested layout, this area could comfortably seat 35 Guests with Bride and Groom, with a maximum of 48, by adding the rows shown in grey. Seating in a Church or similar is unlikely to provide much more leg room than this.

The signing of the Register takes place inside this room, as now.



### Ceremony Room with subtle extension

If the Conservation Officer felt that, to enable more public use of this building, it could be appropriate to extend by relocating the current wall and windows to where the pillars currently stand which support the overhanging roof, then this area could comfortably seat 60 Guests with Bride and Groom, with a maximum of 72, by adding the rows shown in grey.



## Optional additional parking spaces



**New vehicle entrance beside the gateway in Lower Boyndon Road, which I believe serves the garden of No 1 Woodcote. This could provide c12 parking spaces.**



## Optional Pergola in the garden for summer weddings to replace the current play area

