

Bridgwater Town Hall
Report on Options for the Rooms Above the BOS Cafe
July 2022



REV A – July 2022



1. Background/ Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared by Philip Hughes Associates who have been appointed by Bridgwater Town Council. The aim of the report is to assess the rooms immediately above the BOS café.

1.2 The Town Clerk, David Mears, has briefed PHA of the need to look at this area and propose possible for uses for the spaces.

1.3 Separate reports have been prepared relating to the spatial use of the remaining office spaces of the Town Hall, in particular the means of creating level access through the building, and for improvements to the Town Hall Theatre. The proposals discussed in this report refer to these reports and they should be referred to.

2. Description of the Building

2.1 The Grade II listed building referred to as 34 High Street by Historic England (list entry number 1197389) forms the front part of the BOS café and the rooms above the BOS café. The listed building is composed of a four storey eighteenth century building and contains two rooms with heavily moulded beams and cruck framing on the ground and first floors.

2.2 The adjacent Town Hall and Theatre is also listed Grade II.

2.3 The BOS café occupies the ground floor of the buildings that front on to Mansion House Lane to the east of the Town Hall with the exception of the room at the far north east corner.

2.4 The rooms above the BOS café include the first, second and third floors of 34 High Street and the first floor of the building to the rear.

Chronology of 34 High Street

15th century – early buildings on 34 High Street including the two rooms on the ground and first floor with moulded beams and cruck framing respectively.

17th century – Noah's Ark Inn (with associated brewhouse and cider and beer cellars) sited on 34 High Street. Associated brewhouse and cider and beer cellars

18th Century – No. 34 as we see it today is believed to be built.

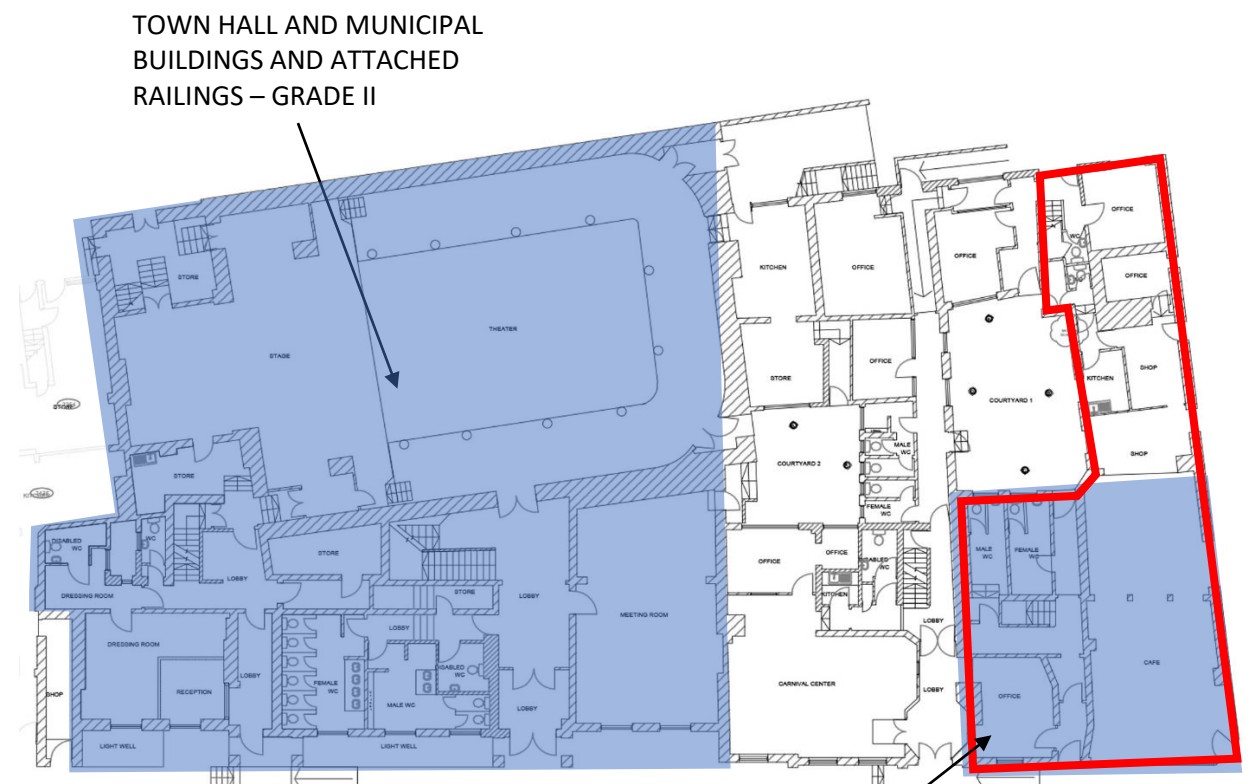
1824 – The neighbouring buildings (nos 38 and 40 High Street) are rebuilt by Richard Carver. No. 34 is also re-fronted at this time in brickwork.

Mid-19th century – The inn on 34 High Street closes and the buildings are converted to retail use including a saddlery in the mid-19th century. There is an attached cottage and stable to the rear.

1929 – No. 34 High Street is in the ownership of the Bridgwater Corporation.

1950s – A limestone fronted building of new town hall offices is built on the former site of 38 and 40 High Street next to 34 High Street.

The ground floor plan below shows the boundaries of the two listed buildings as identified by Historic England with the outline of the rooms above the BOS café in red.



34 HIGH STREET - GRADE II



3. Rooms over the BOS cafe

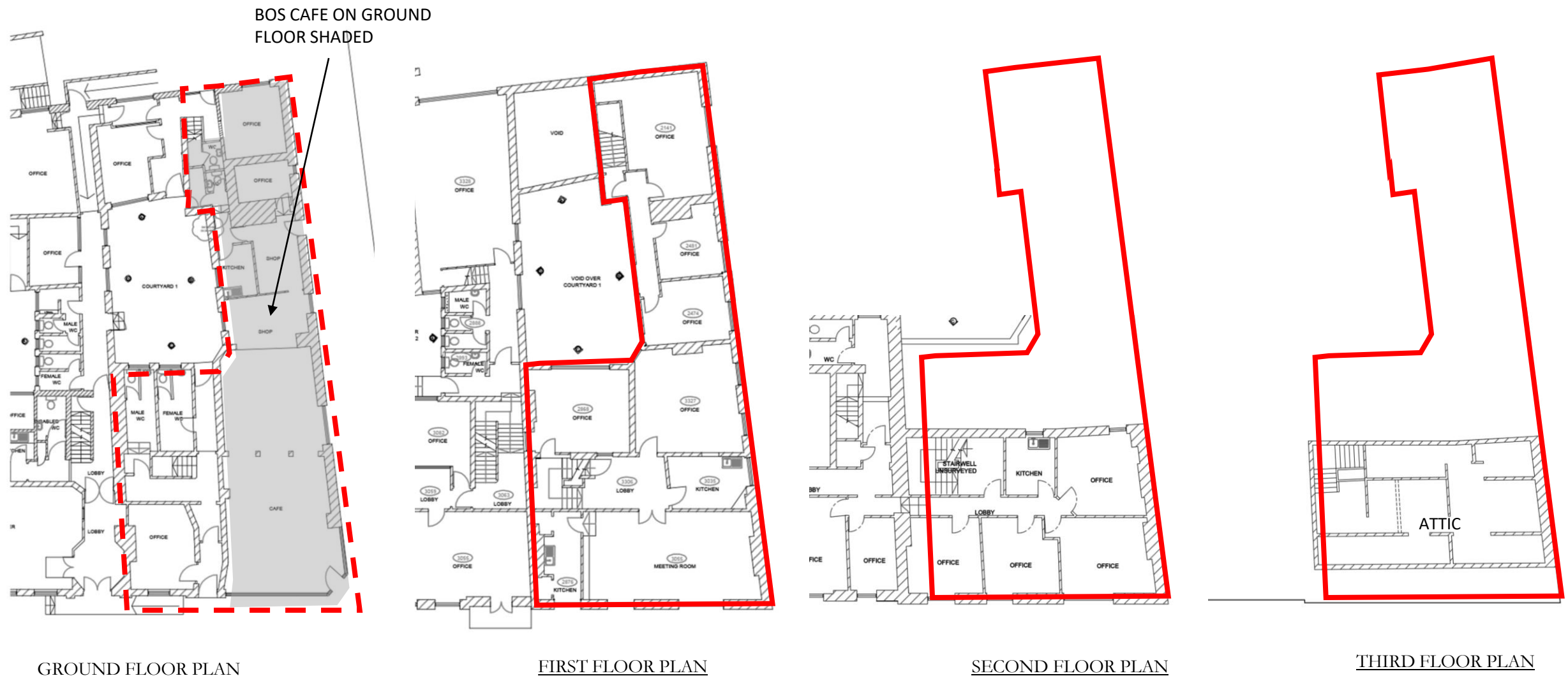
3.1 The rooms over the BOS café are arranged on the first, second and third floors of 34 High Street and on the first floor of the buildings to the rear of 34 High Street.

3.2 At first floor in 34 High Street there are former council offices with the Cruck framed room accessed on a half landing between ground and first floor. The first floor rooms are used by a local charity caring for vulnerable people and are split in to two offices and a large room to the front with a kitchen in-between. The large room has a raised former stage area at one end which is now laid out as a kitchenette.

3.3 At second floor in 34 High Street there are vacant former offices with a further kitchen. At this floor the corridor continues and connects to the second floor of the 1950s section adjoining to the west. There is a level change of approximately 850mm here.

3.4 At attic level in 34 High Street there are semi-derelict rooms accessed by a small timber stair off the main stairwell.

3.4 At first floor in the buildings to the rear of 34 High Street there are office spaces that are currently occupied by the local Labour Party. These rooms are accessed via a single stair from the rear entrance lobby.



4. Accessibility

4.1 Accessibility across the site and the provision of a passenger lift is discussed in more detail in a separate report entitled *Report on Options for a New Reception and Lift for Level Access Through the Building*. The report identifies two positions for a passenger lift in this part of the Town Hall buildings and 34 High Street; one within the courtyard within the 1950s section to the west of 34 High Street (labelled 2 on the plan opposite) and the other within the courtyard to the rear of 34 High Street (labelled 3 on the plan opposite).

4.2 The lift within the courtyard of the 1950s section does not provide access to any part of the rooms above the BOS café.

4.3 The lift within the courtyard of 34 High Street potentially provides access to the first floor of 34 High Street and it may also be possible to get access to the second and third floors of 34 High Street but this can only be achieved with a proposal that has a significant negative impact on the listed building. For this reason we do not think that it is reasonable to proceed with the provision of a passenger lift in this location.

5. Means of Escape and Fire Separation

5.1 Options for use of the space in the rooms above the BOS café that have been considered are residential or commercial office space or a mix of the two.

5.2 The rooms above the BOS café are a total of three storeys above ground floor.

Approved document B Volume 1: Dwellings says

Para 3.76 - In buildings with a maximum of three storeys above the ground storey, stairs may serve both flats and other occupancies, provided that the stairs are separated from each occupancy by protected lobbies (minimum REI 30) at each storey.

It is therefore permissible to have both residential and commercial properties sharing the same staircase providing that the stairs are separated from each occupancy by protected lobbies.

5.3 At ground floor level the stair should lead to a final exit either directly or via a protected exit passageway. The existing staircase descends within the middle of the building and then the exit is from the front entrance on to the High Street. The corridor leading to the entrance must therefore act as a protected exit passageway and must be separated from any other accommodation on the ground floor. In practice this means that the meeting room at the front and the corridor leading to the rear courtyard will need to be separated from the exit corridor.

5.4 In accordance with Approved Document B Volume 1 where the top storey of a building is a maximum of 11m above ground level a single escape stair is allowed for a building that has residential accommodation only provided that it is no more than three storeys above the ground storey. Openable vents are required at each level or a single openable vent is required at the head of the stair. If there are no more than two flats per floor then no lobby is required between the stair and the flat accommodation.

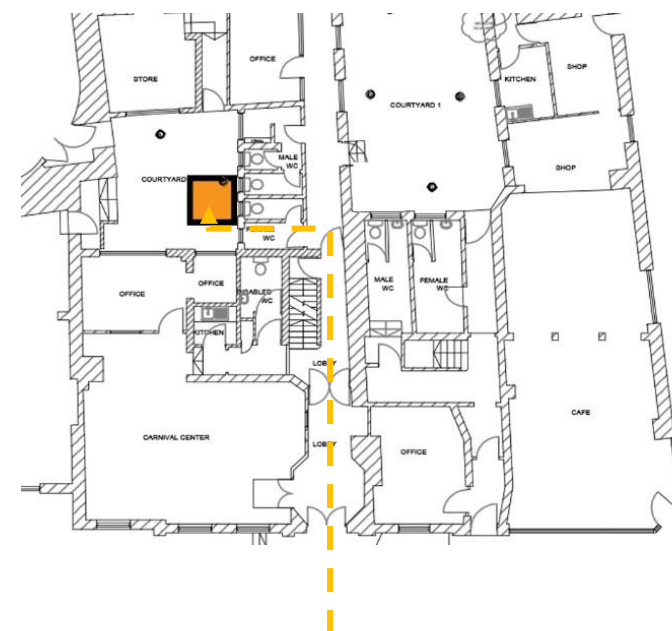
If the venting described above cannot be achieved then each flat must be separated from the protected stair by a fire protected lobby.

5.5 Where a multi-storey flat/ maisonette is provided Approved Document B Volume 1 places extra provisions (para 3.21) which must be provided within the flat which can be that alternative exits are provided from habitable rooms or storeys, a protected stairway and sprinkler system is provided or a protected stairway and additional fire detection is provided.

5.6 In accordance with Approved Document B Volume 2: Buildings Other Than Dwellings a single escape stair is allowed for a building that has office accommodation only provided it is a maximum of five storeys above the ground storey and that the travel distance from every point on the plan does not exceed the limits set out in table 2.1 of Approved Document B2 (generally 18 m in one direction and 45m in two directions) as well as every storey with a floor level above 11m having an alternative means of escape.

5.7 Refuge spaces must also be provided on each floor where used for office space.

Ground floor plan showing proposed lift location to rear of the 1950s building



6. Use of rooms for residential only

6.1 If the rooms above the BOS café are used for residential accommodation only this simplifies the arrangement of the accommodation in relationship to the staircase. As described in the previous section if only residential units are provided and providing the requirements of Approved Document B Volume 1 are complied with then the stair does not need protected lobbies and flats may open directly in to the stair provided it is constructed as a protected stairway.

6.2 For the stair in 34 High Street to achieve the required 30-minute fire resistance it would need to have fire doors that are 30-minute fire and smoke resisting and the wall construction investigated to ensure that it can also achieve 30 minutes fire resistance.

6.3 The small staircase leading up to the 3rd floor attic in 34 High Street is faced with timber boards and will not achieve this level of fire resistance without encasement – eg with fire resistant boards. The stair is a notable part of the listed building and this last flight up to the attic is an integral part of the stair and we think this is therefore unlikely to be granted listed building consent

6.3 The plan area of the first floor of 34 High Street outside the staircase is 115m² and could be arranged as a single flat.

6.4 The plan area of the second floor of 34 High Street is 66m² and could be arranged as one flat.

6.5 The plan area of the third floor of 34 High Street is 27m². The small space available and arrangement of the third floor as one long space split by timber partitions in conjunction with the difficulty of improving the fire performance of the stair suggest that it is not possible to arrange this floor as a single residential unit.

6.6 To make use of the third floor the top two floors could be arranged as a two storey maisonette with the third floor accessed via an internal staircase. The existing timber stair to the third floor in the stairwell would need to be separated from the third floor accommodation which could be achieved by introducing a fire resistant partition at third floor.

6.7 Some walls on the first and second floor of 34 High Street are lath and plaster partitions while partitions on the third floor are timber boarded and likely date from the original construction. Any proposal should seek to retain these and only make minimal changes to them where this can be justified.

6.8 The plan area of the first floor of the rear building is 67m². It is accessed via the door from Mansion House Lane to the rear. There is a staircase up to first floor with a room (of 12m²) on its east side at ground floor.

6.9 It is therefore suggested that the rooms above the BOS café could be split in to residential units as follows:

34 High Street

- First floor – one two or one bedroom flat measuring 115m².
- Second floor – one two bedroom flat measuring 66m² and the attic left unoccupied or one three bedroom maisonette with an internal staircase measuring 93m².

Rear Buildings

- First floor – one one bedroom flat with access from the staircase at ground floor measuring 67m² or a two bedroom flat with a further bedroom provided at ground floor measuring 89m².

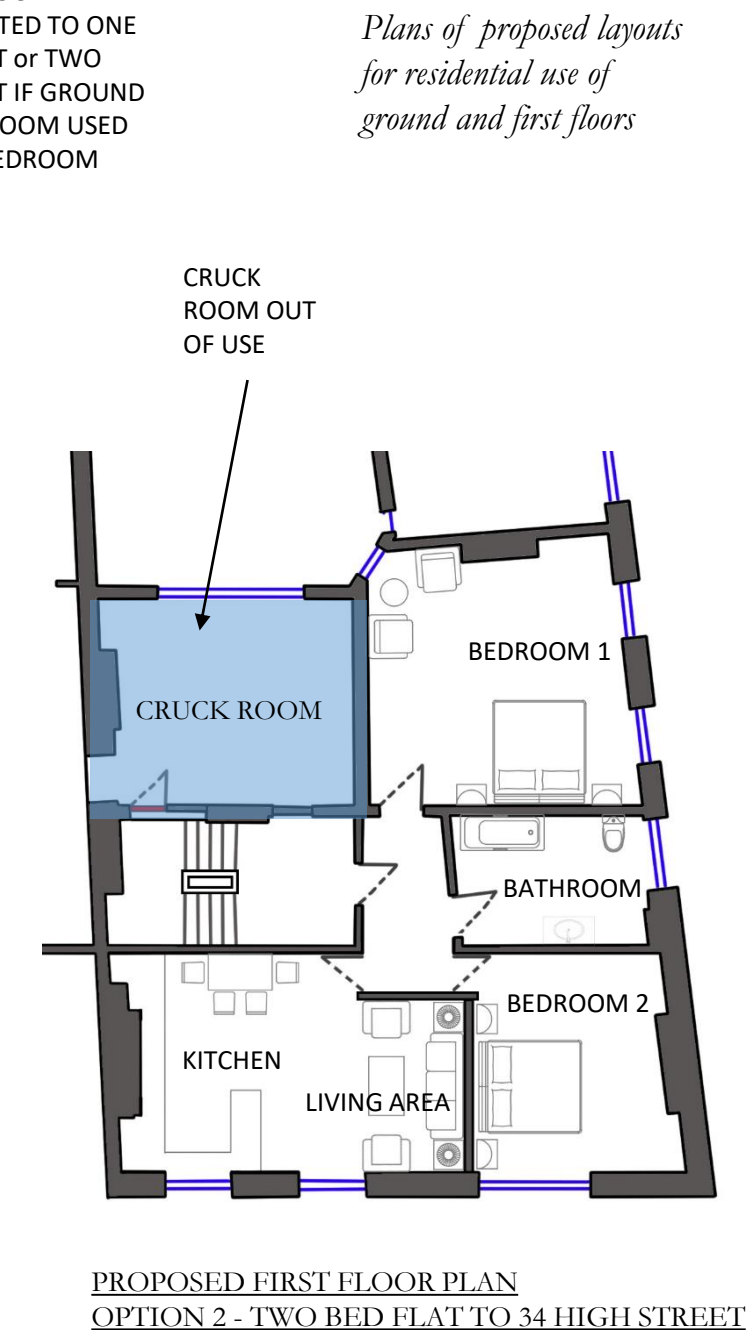
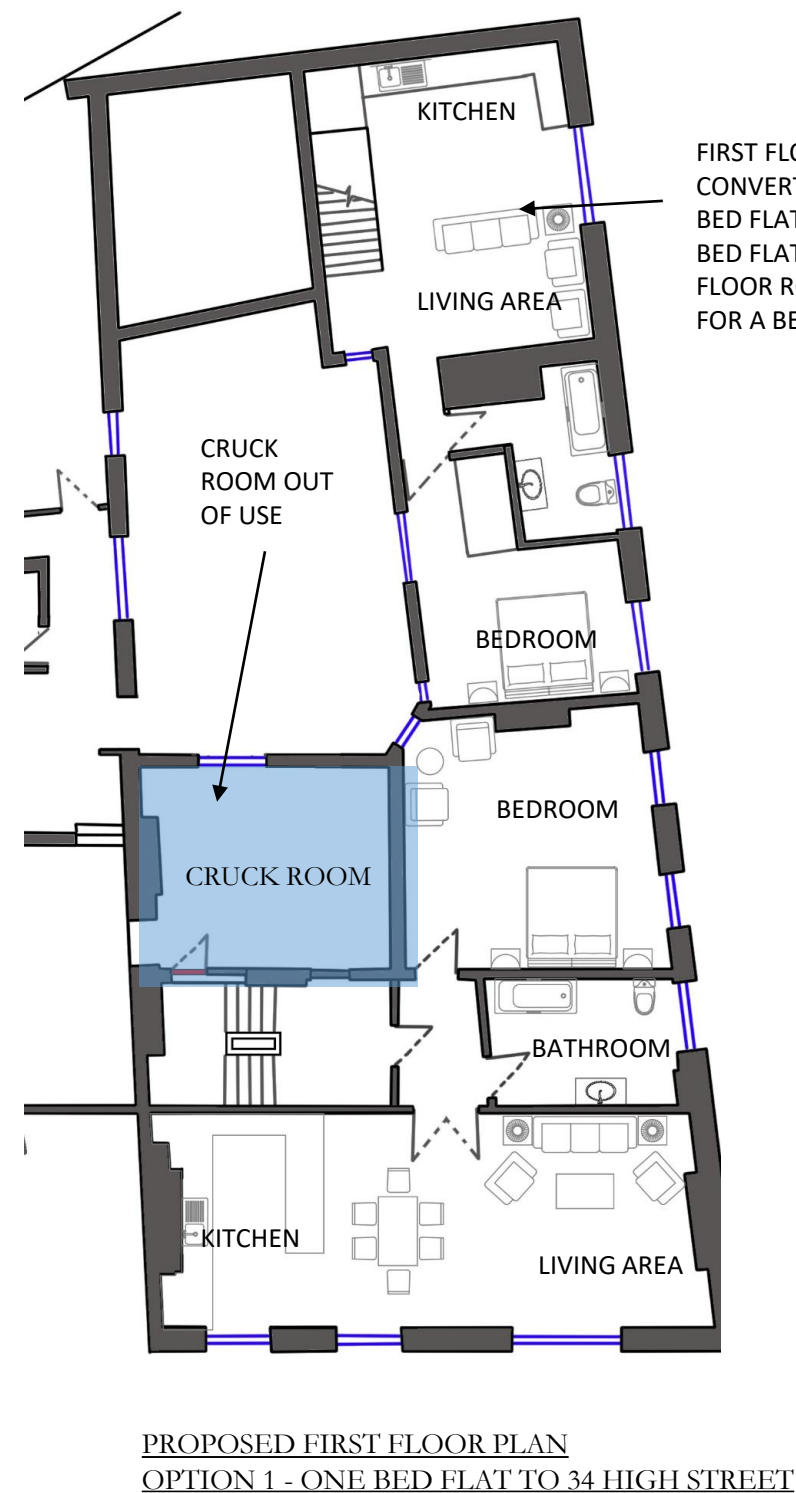
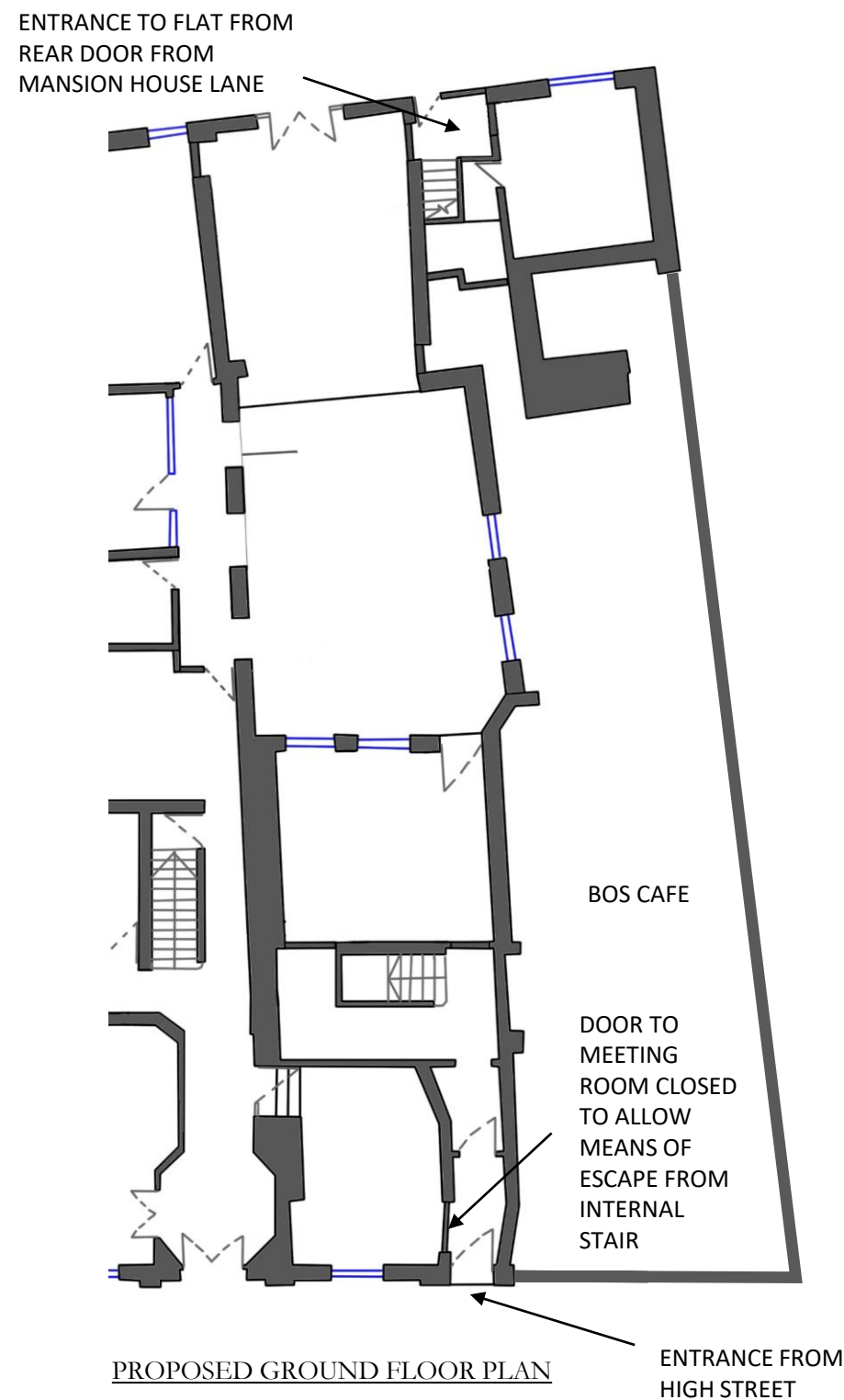
6.10 It would also be possible to convert the second floor of the 1950s building to residential accommodation with access from the staircase in 34 High Street via the doorway between the two buildings. However because of the longer travel distance a lobby may be required between the flats and the stairs which would potentially reduce the area for accommodation on the second floor of 34 High Street.

6.11 The Cruck Room on the first floor is accessed from the landing on the stairs between ground and first floor. Because of its floor level and position it is not possible to incorporate it in to the residential accommodation on the first floor. It is also not possible to provide it with a lobby to separate it from the stair and it therefore cannot be used as office or meeting space.

If the rooms above the BOS Café are used solely for residential the Cruck Room therefore becomes unusable for any active use.



6. Use of rooms for residential only

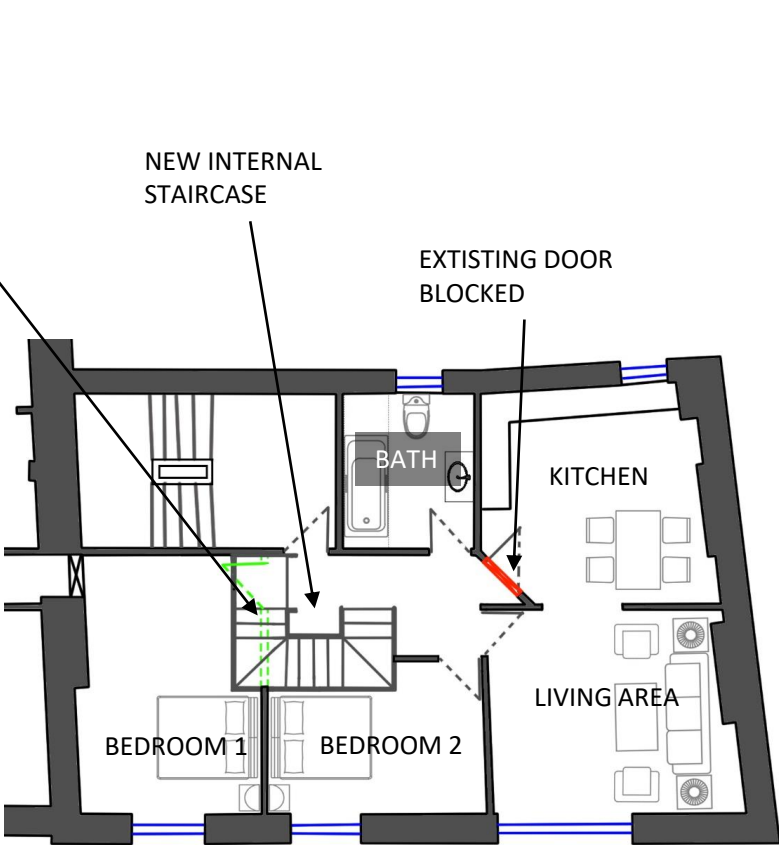


6. Use of rooms for residential only

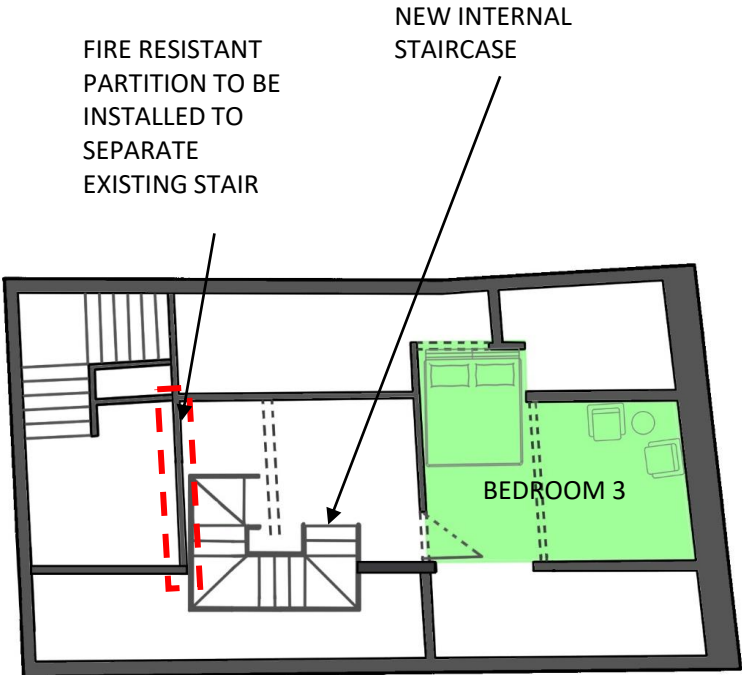
Plans of proposed layouts for residential use of second and third floors



PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR PLAN
OPTION 1 – TWO BED FLAT ONLY



PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR PLAN
OPTION 2 – THREE BED MAISONETTE



PROPOSED THIRD FLOOR PLAN
OPTION 2 – THREE BED MAISONETTE



7. Use of rooms as office space

7.1 As determined above it is not feasible to get lift access to the rooms above the BOS Café. The adjoining 1950s section of the building could potentially obtain level access from a new lift positioned in the light well there. However, there is a sizable level change between the adjoining first floors and second floors of approximately 850 and 600mm respectively which would prevent direct level access being taken from the 1950s section to the rooms above the BOS café.

7.3 The rooms above the BOS café do not have any toilets at present and if these were provided to the upper floors they would need new foul drainage inserted in to the building. The foul drainage would need to drop through the ground floor and these drops would need to be carefully considered to avoid damaging historic fabric and to manage how they pass through the BOS café. We have therefore proposed that the offices make use of the existing toilet provision at ground floor and second floor of the adjoining 1950s section.

7.4 The third floor is less than 11m above the ground storey (though this needs to be accurately confirmed on site with a measured survey) and a single stair could therefore be provided for access if the all floors are used for office accommodation. However, as described in the previous chapter the small stair to the third floor attic would require fire

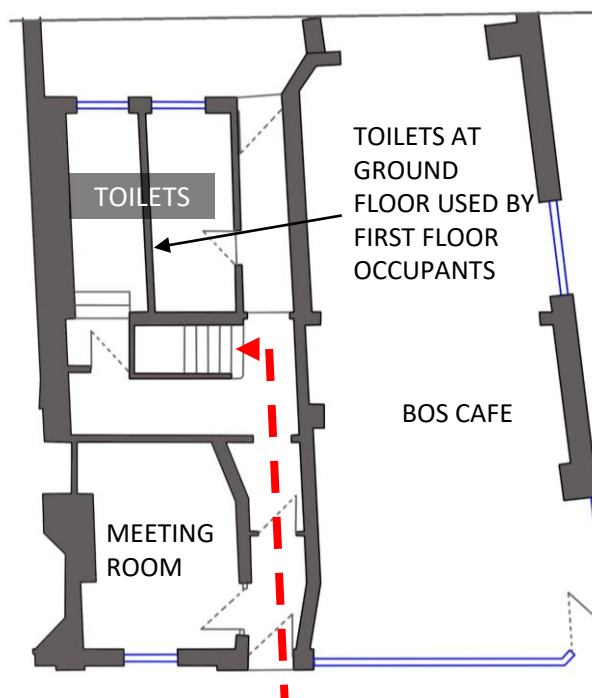
protection in order to be used for access and we do not think this is likely to gain consent. This floor would therefore require a separate means of escape.

7.5 As described previously any proposals should seek to retain the lath and plaster and timber boarded partitions and only make minimal changes to them where this can be justified.

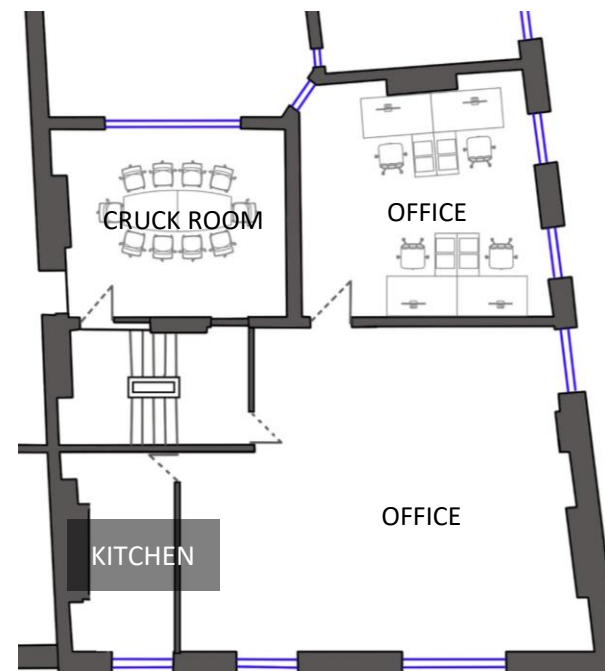
7.6 It is therefore proposed that the rooms above the BOS café could be formed in to office spaces as follows:

- Ground floor – the existing toilets at ground floor would be used for the first floor occupiers.
- First floor – arranged as office spaces broadly following the plan as present. A kitchen would be provided here
- Second floor - lath and plaster partitions would be retained and the modern partitions removed. The connection to the 1950s section could remain for use of toilets/ kitchen facilities.
- Third floor - either left unoccupied or as office space accessible from an internal stair from the second floor office spaces.

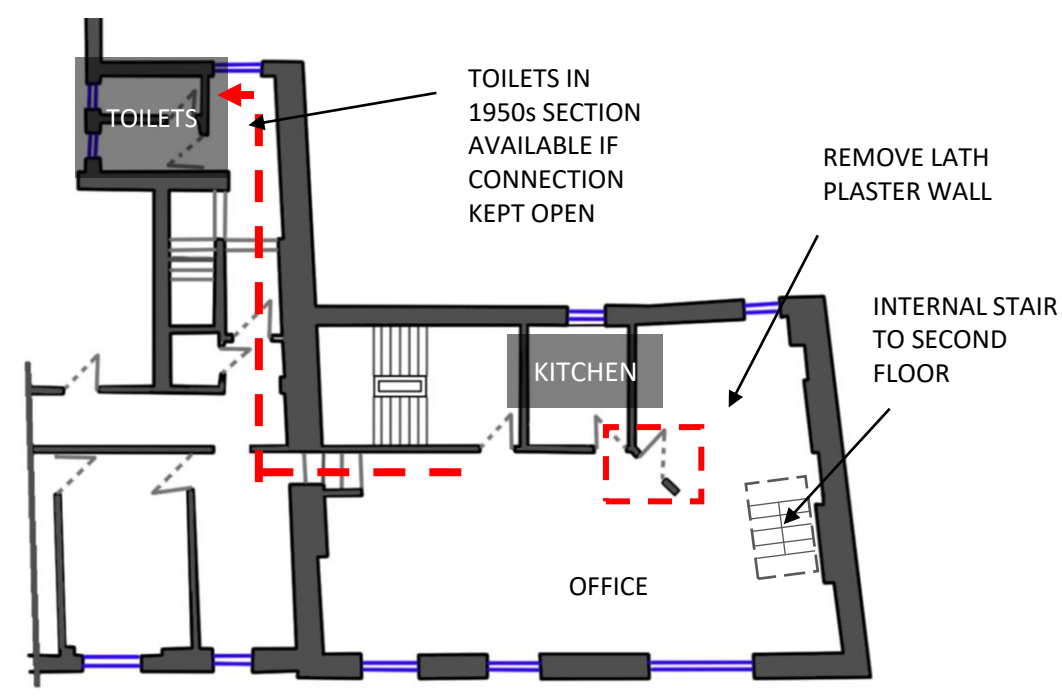
7.7 The Cruck Room is accessible and could be used as a meeting space.



PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN



PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR PLAN



8. Use of rooms as both residential and office space

8.1 As described above the use of a single stair by both residential and other occupancies, such as office space, requires that a lobby be introduced separating the stair from the accommodation.

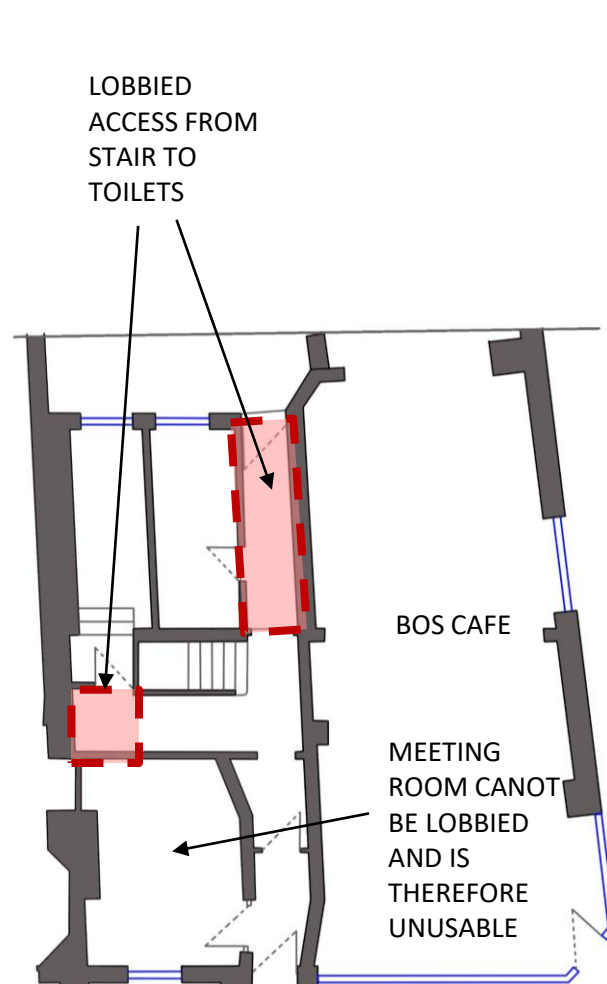
8.2 This could be achieved on the first floor by adding a lobby on the large landing.

8.3 On the second floor this would need to be achieved by adding a lobby outside of the stairwell as the stair landing is not large enough. This would reduce the size achievable for the flat or office space.

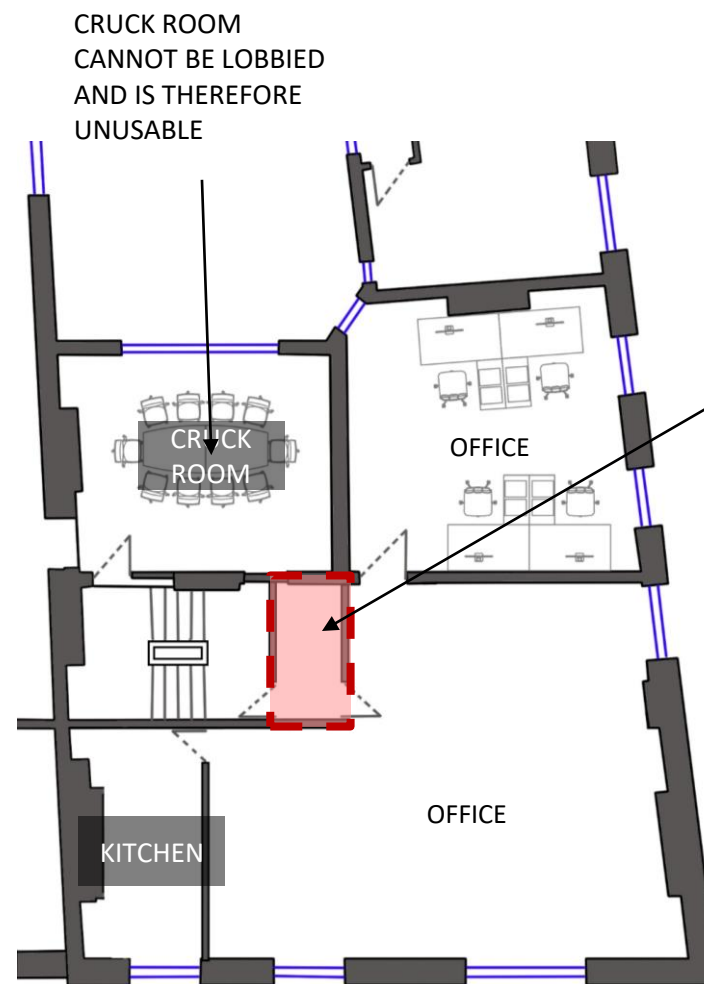
8.4 As described previously it is not be possible to provide a lobby for the cruck framed room and this room would therefore become unusable.

8.5 The creation of a protected exit passageway at ground floor for means of escape from the residential units would mean that the toilets at ground floor would also need to be lobbied which could be achieved by using the corridors alongside.

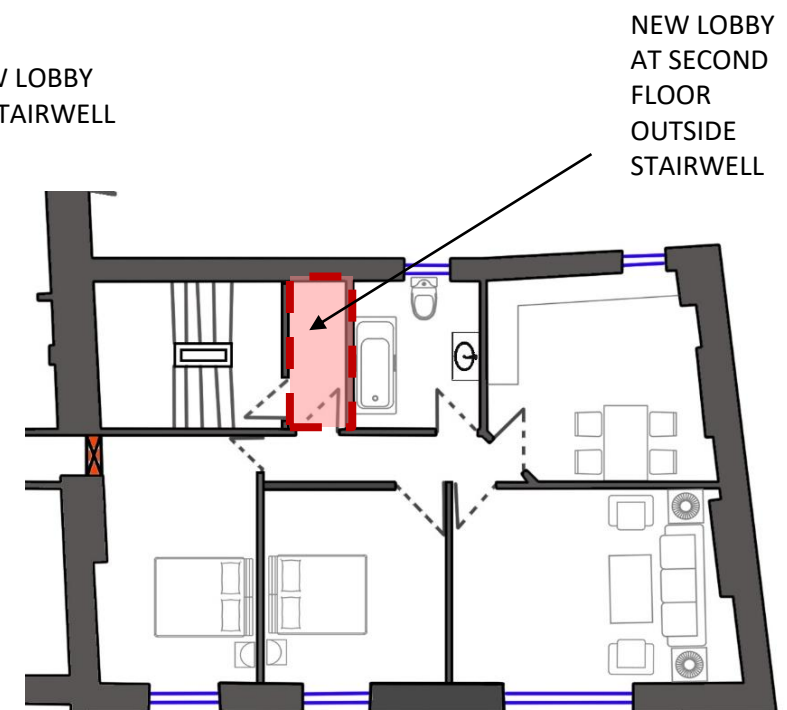
8.6 The ground floor meeting room cannot be lobbied and it is therefore not usable.



PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR PLAN



9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Rooms over the BOS cafe

9.1 The use of the rooms over the BOS café have been proposed as either solely residential, solely office space or as a combination of residential and office space.

9.2 The combination of residential and office space is not considered as the preferred approach to the building because of the complications that it places on the conversion and layout of the spaces and the commercial viability of the building. Although Building Regulations does permit this approach it does require that lobbies are introduced to separate each accommodation which would have a detrimental effect on the planning of the spaces. The overlap of residential and commercial office space in a small building like this with a shared stairwell is considered to be a poor fit and would potentially make the letting of the spaces difficult.

9.4 The use of the rooms above the BOS café as either residential or office space is feasible and both are potentially viable approaches. The preferred approach out of the two will, however, be dependant on what the greatest need or demand is for in Bridgwater.

9.5 The use of the rooms for residential can potentially bring a benefit to the area by increasing the amount of residential units in the town centre.

9.6 The use of the rooms above the BOS café as office space can potentially be linked to the 1950s section at second floor via the existing opening between the two buildings. Unfortunately the level change between the two buildings does not make it possible to have level access between these two buildings. Similarly none of the upper floors are able to have level access and all WC facilities are proposed to be on the ground floor.

