

Vestry House
21 Paradise Road
Richmond TW9 1SA

Design, Access and Heritage Statement
24 July 2024



North elevation of Vestry House, facing Paradise Road

Vestry House

Description of the property

The property is a two-storey, detached, red-brick building located prominently in the heart of Richmond and comprises the former purpose-built Petty Sessions / Magistrates' Courthouse, designed by architect W.J. Ansell, opened in 1896.

Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner notes in his publication *Buildings of England: London 2: South* (1983) that Paradise Road is within the 'part of the town most affected by C20 developments, and is rewarding only in patches. "Vestry House is fleetingly referred to as 'the former Magistrates Courts' (now Citizens Advice Bureau and Vestry Hall), 1895 by W.J. Ansell, small, informal, with shallow bow-windows' (Pevsner, 1983).

The (London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT) Central Richmond Conservation Area (CA17) Study more optimistically notes that although many office buildings in this area have a particularly negative impact in the character of the conservation area, 'The Vestry Hall, originally the Old Courthouse, is a modest brick-built building retaining an air of civic importance and stands out as a positive element' (LBRuT, 2012).

The property is much altered internally and is currently in mixed use, mainly commercial offices, with the front ground floor of the building trading as a charity shop and the first floor above as a yoga bar. The central room, the original courtroom, has been let as a community facility, but is considered dark and unwelcoming; the air conditioning no longer operates and there are no windows to provide natural light and it remains unused.

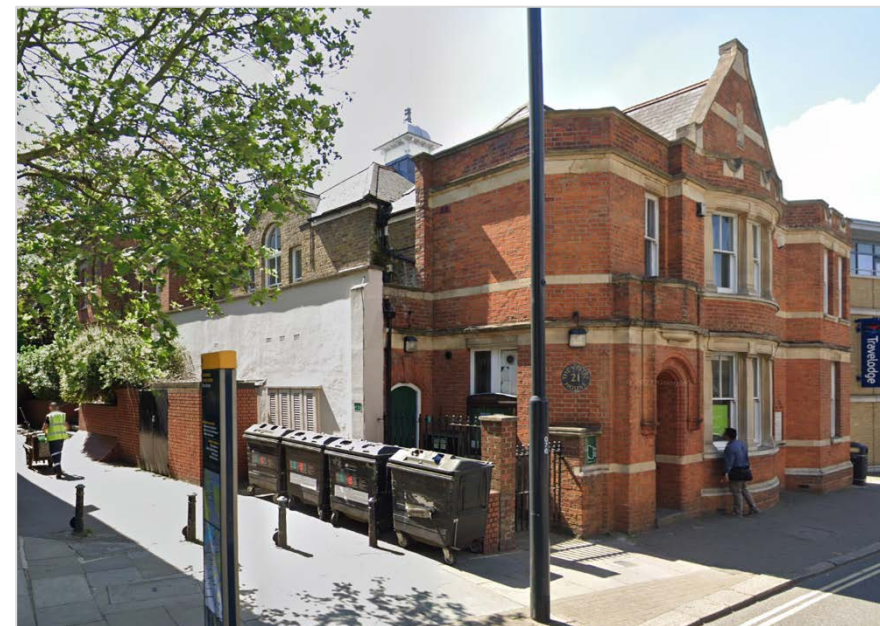
The north facade is the principal elevation a finely detailed with well-crafted integrated brick and stonework with ornamented parapets, balconies and a projecting segmental and square bay. Fine carved stone copings and string courses define window lintels on ground and first floor. Expressed gable with sloping lower coping blocks in natural stone gathering to a gable apex with a stone block and flat head termination and blind recess central on a horizontal stone string course. Stepped projecting plinth with low-level profiled stone detailing.



'The New Justices Court, 1896'; pen and ink drawings.
RPLC archives compiled by local historian John Cloake: source not recorded.



Map of the Central Richmond Conservation Area (CA17) taken from the LBRuT Conservation Area Study. Not to scale. (LBRuT; 2005)



Corner of east and north elevations of Vestry House, viewed from Paradise Road.

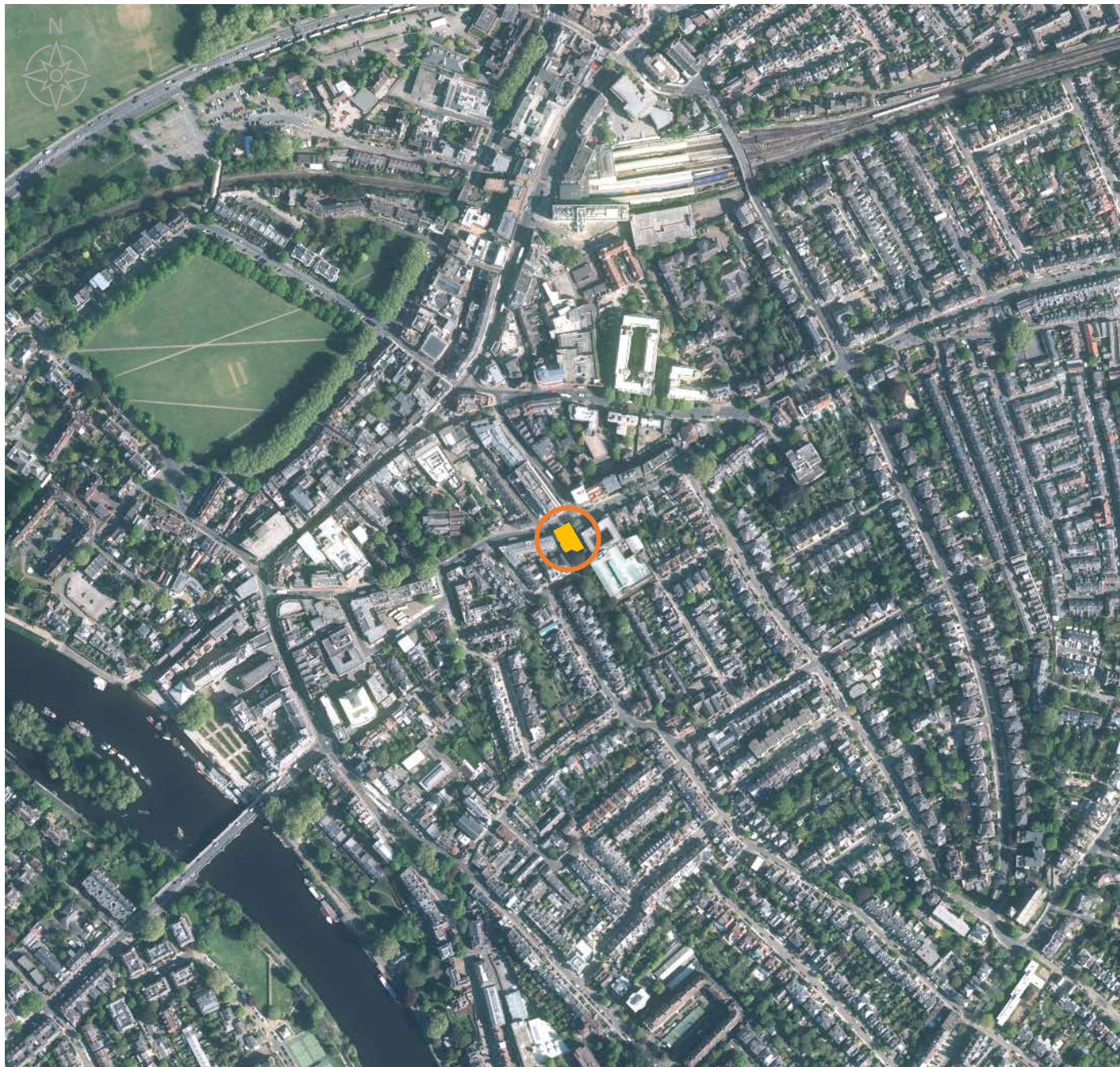
Vestry House

Location and Setting

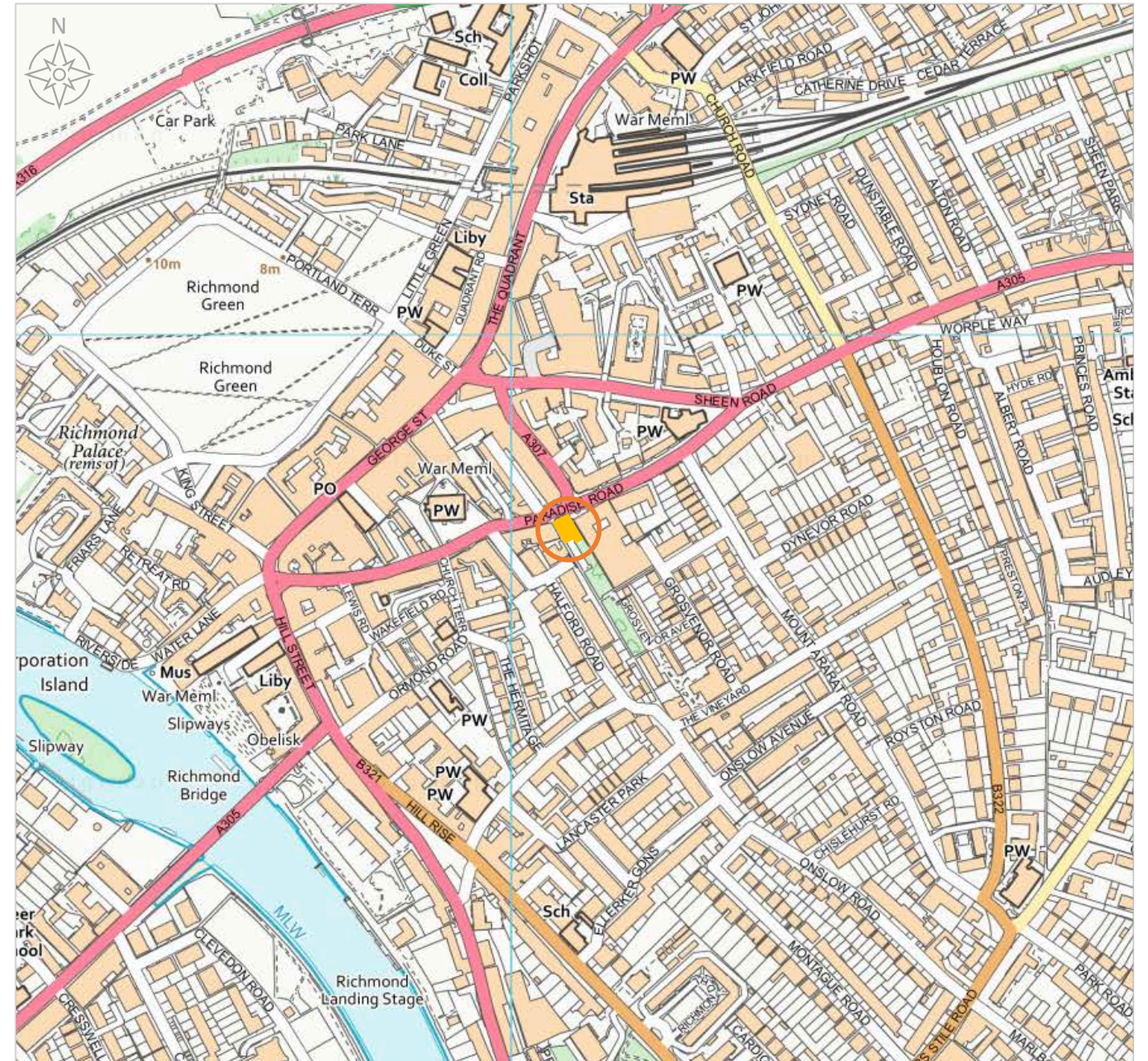
Vestry House is located in an urban setting and was the original location for the administration of the Parish of Richmond.

Over time the surrounding buildings have been replaced and the modest two-storey building has become dwarfed by 20th and 21st century commercial and very modern buildings to the north, east and west. These compromise the setting of Vestry House, which is often overlooked and unappreciated as traffic sweeps round from Eden Street.

The Vineyard Passage Burial Ground to the south / rear affords respite from the highway and large commercial buildings. Closed for burials since 1874, it was transformed into a woodland garden in 1964, and Vestry House can be viewed through its picturesque landscape.



Aerial view of Richmond upon Thames. Not to scale. (Google Maps, 2023)



Ordnance survey of Richmond upon Thames: Not to scale. (Google Maps, 2023).

Vestry House

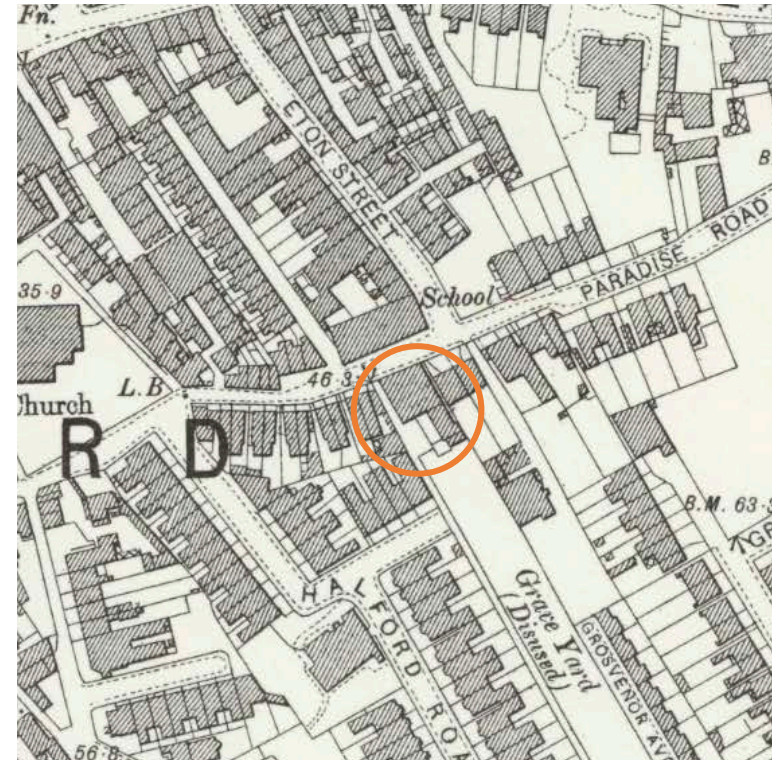
Historic map regression



1761: John Rocque: An exact survey of the city's (sic) of London Westminster, XV. Evidence of building on the site, but use not identified. Not to scale.



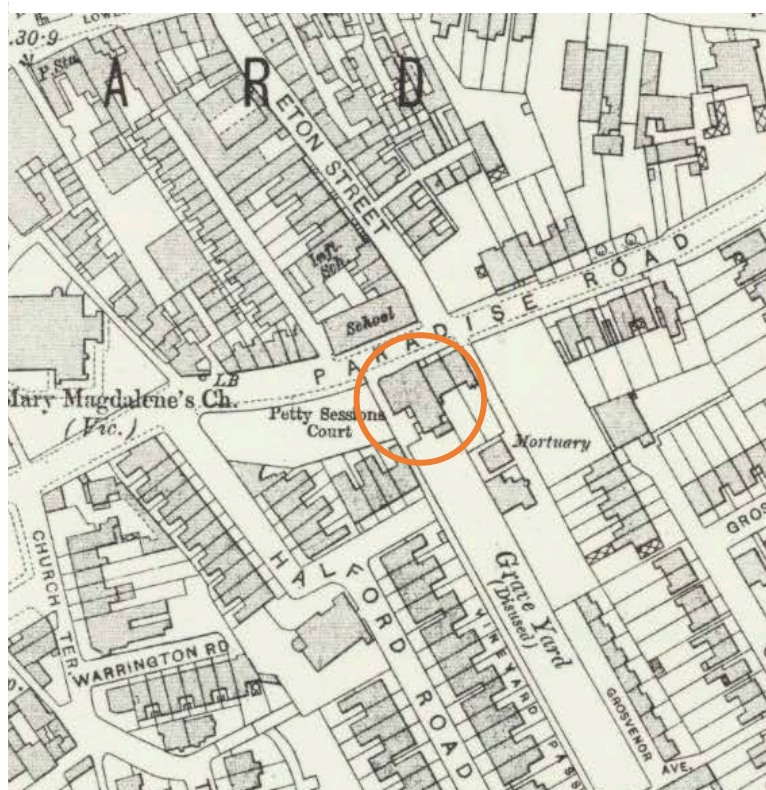
1894: Ordnance survey: London-London IX.60. Revised 1893. Adjoining Victorian villas in evidence to east, paired villas to west, school to north. Published 1894. Not to scale.



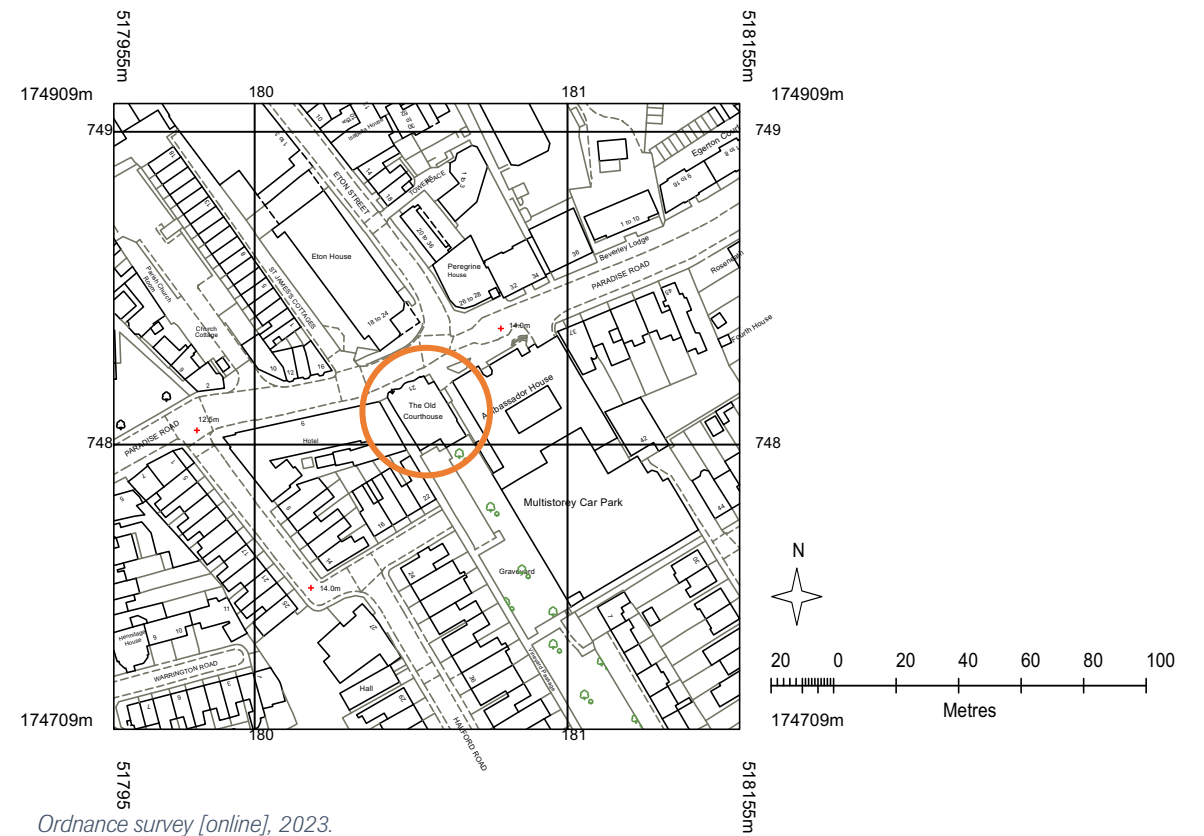
1898: Surrey VI.4: Revised 1891 to 1894, Published 1898. Adjoining Victorian villas in evidence to east, paired villas to west, school to north. Not to scale.



Surrey VI.4: Revised 1910 to 1911, Published 1913. Adjoining Victorian villas in evidence to east, shops to west, school to north. Not to scale.



Surrey VI.4: Revised 1933, Published 1936. Adjoining Victorian villas in evidence to east, vacant land to west, school to north. Not to scale.



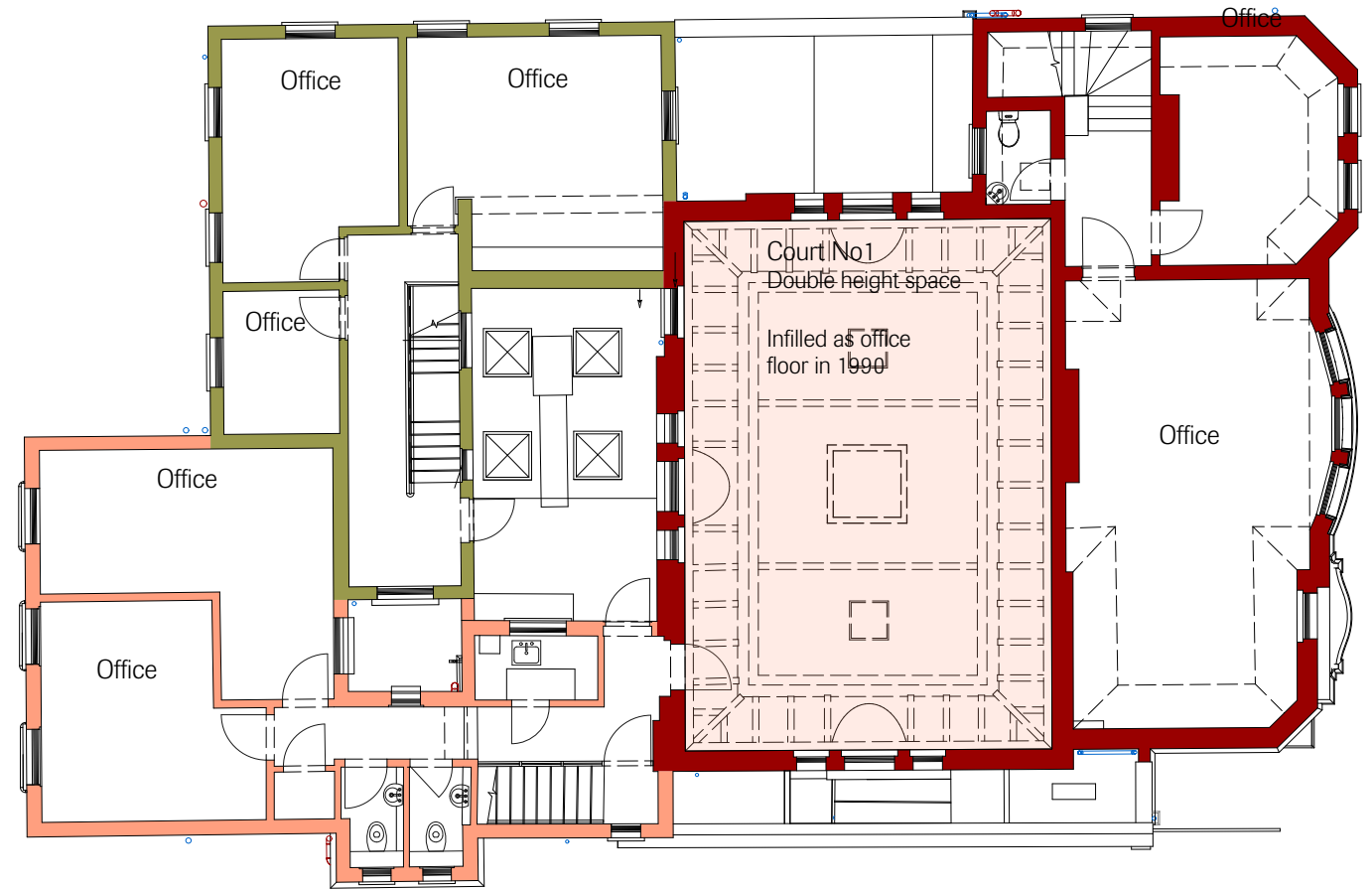
Ordnance survey [online], 2023. Offices and car part to east, hotel to west, offices to north. Not to scale.

Vestry House

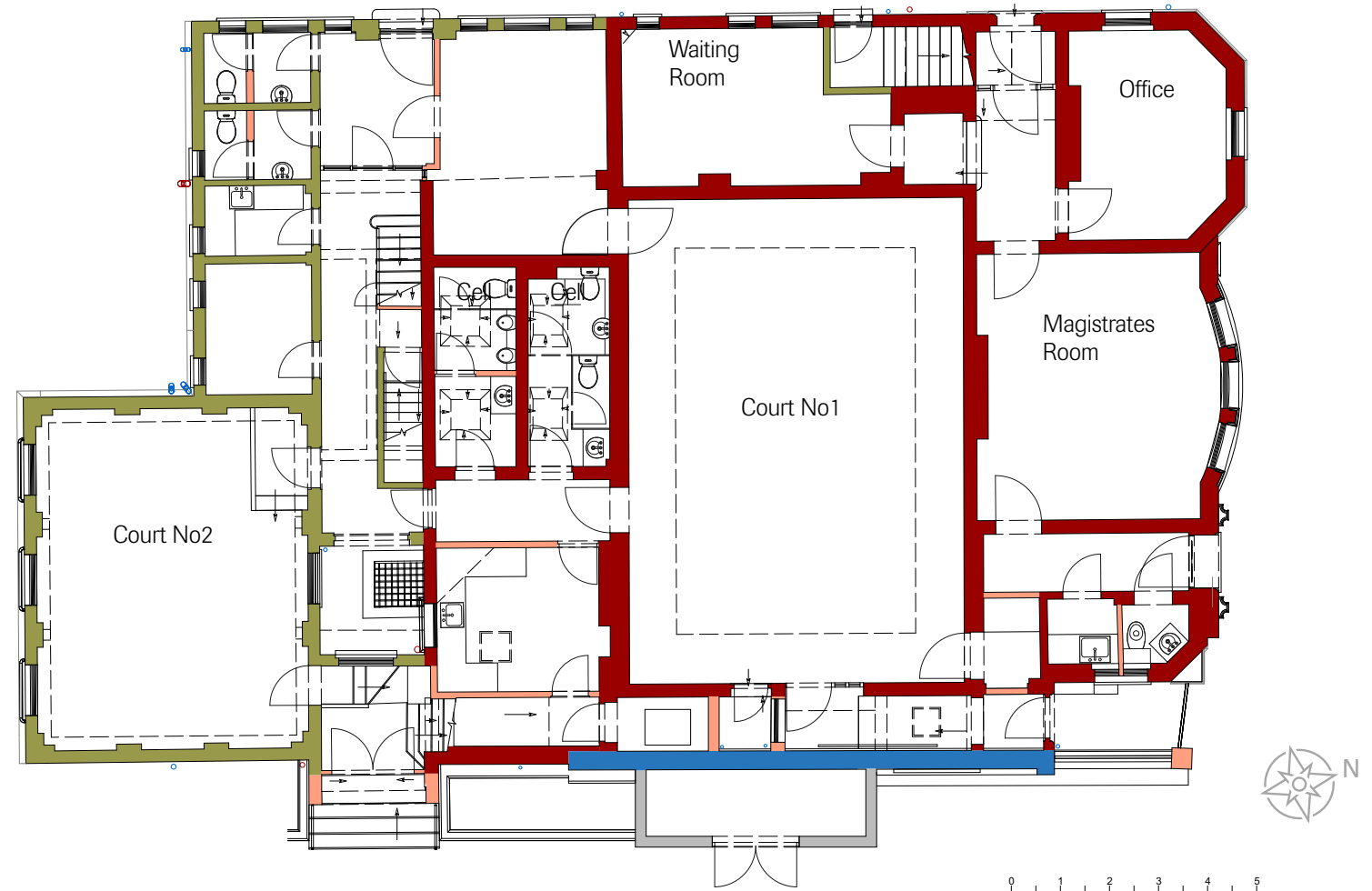
Evolution of the Property

- Retained wall of Victorian villa circa 1860
The adjoining semi-detached pair of 3-storey dwellings to the left / east, were demolished circa 1935, leaving the party wall (reduced to single storey height) as an enclosure to the side passage.
- New Magistrates Court building 1895
The new building provided a court room, offices and two cells at the rear. The upper floor offices were occupied by the Richmond Sewerage Company.
- Additional court, offices and amenities 1939
The building was extended circa 1939 to provide a second courtroom and ancillary office accommodation at first floor level to the south.
- Extension and conversion of building to offices 1990, including new mezzanine floor within Court No1
The property was acquired by the Richmond Parish Lands Charity and converted to offices with meeting rooms and a public hall. It was further and extensively altered internally in 1988-1990, including the addition of the first floor extension to the rear and the insertion of a mezzanine floor of office accommodation within the existing main courtroom.

With each alteration, mainly in 1939 and 1990, the building has been extended, with only relatively minor changes being made to the original plan form. The one major intervention is the insertion of a first floor within Court No 1, to create additional first floor office accommodation.



First floor plan - evolution of the building. Not to scale.



Ground floor plan - evolution of the building. Not to scale.

Vestry House

Heritage values and significance

This report is produced and the building is assessed in accordance with the guidelines and policy within the National Planning Policy Framework (2023), the London Plan (2023) and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Local Plan (2018).

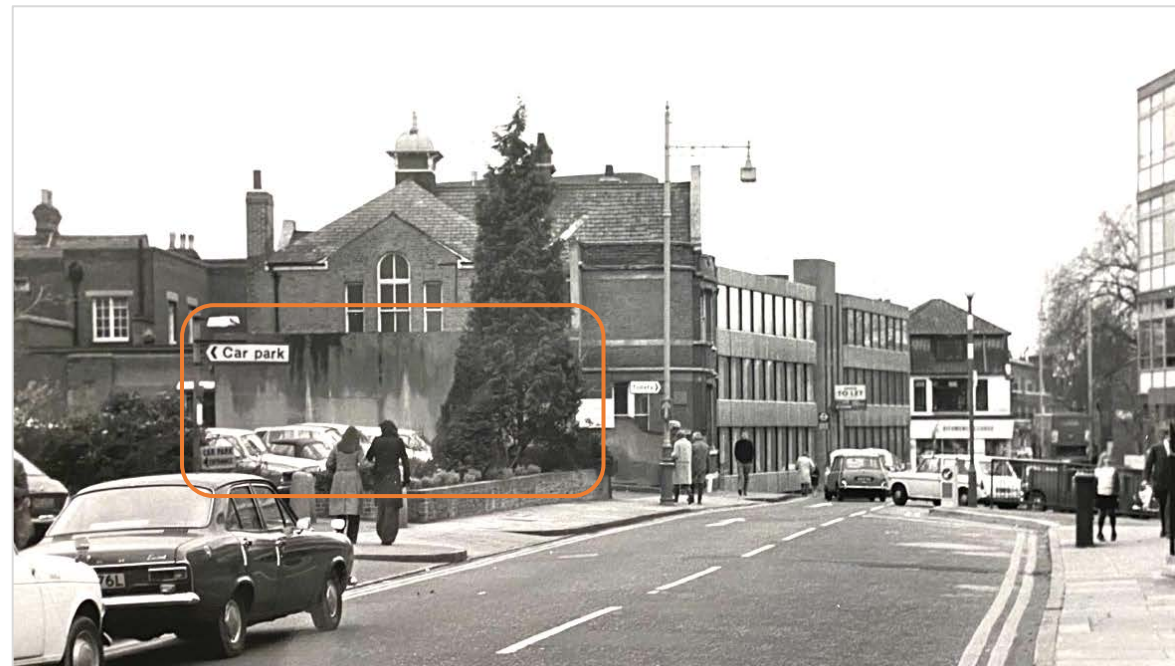
Guidance from Historic England (previously English Heritage), an executive non-departmental public body of the British Government sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, also informs the appraisal.

'Significance' in terms of heritage-related planning policy is defined in the Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework as *'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'*.

The National Planning Policy Framework definition further states that *'in the planning context heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic'*.

Vestry House has architectural and artistic values due to the design by a prominent local architect, and its relationship with the grander new town hall built at the same time. The stone and brick detailing are well considered and reflect its status as a civic structure. The building has evolved as needs have changed, with each extension complementing the original building, but also reflecting the style and architectural ideals of the time. The location of the property on the site of the former mortuary and its adjacent to the main burial ground for the town may also indicate that the site has archaeological values.

Historic interest lies in its previous function as a courthouse, with the various hearings recorded and housed within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames archives as well as its relationship with the town, as it evolved from a parish to a borough. The building's significance is due to its combined architectural and historic values and interest. It contributes to the setting of the burial ground gardens to the south, acting as a barrier between the tranquil gardens and the busy commercial areas. However, the surrounding office buildings to the west, north and east detract from its significance.



Paradise Road, March 1975, looking west towards the Magistrates Court (Vestry House).
Adjoining Victorian villas have been demolished and the area to the east of the Court is a car park, later to be built out as Ambassador House.
(Photo unattributed. LBRuT Local Studies Collection, 1975).

Design proposals – Mitigating harm for public benefit

The building was originally constructed alongside a pair of Victorian villas. These were demolished in the early 20th century, but a section of the party wall was retained, to maintain a passageway which in turn was integrated into the Community Hall during the 1990 works.

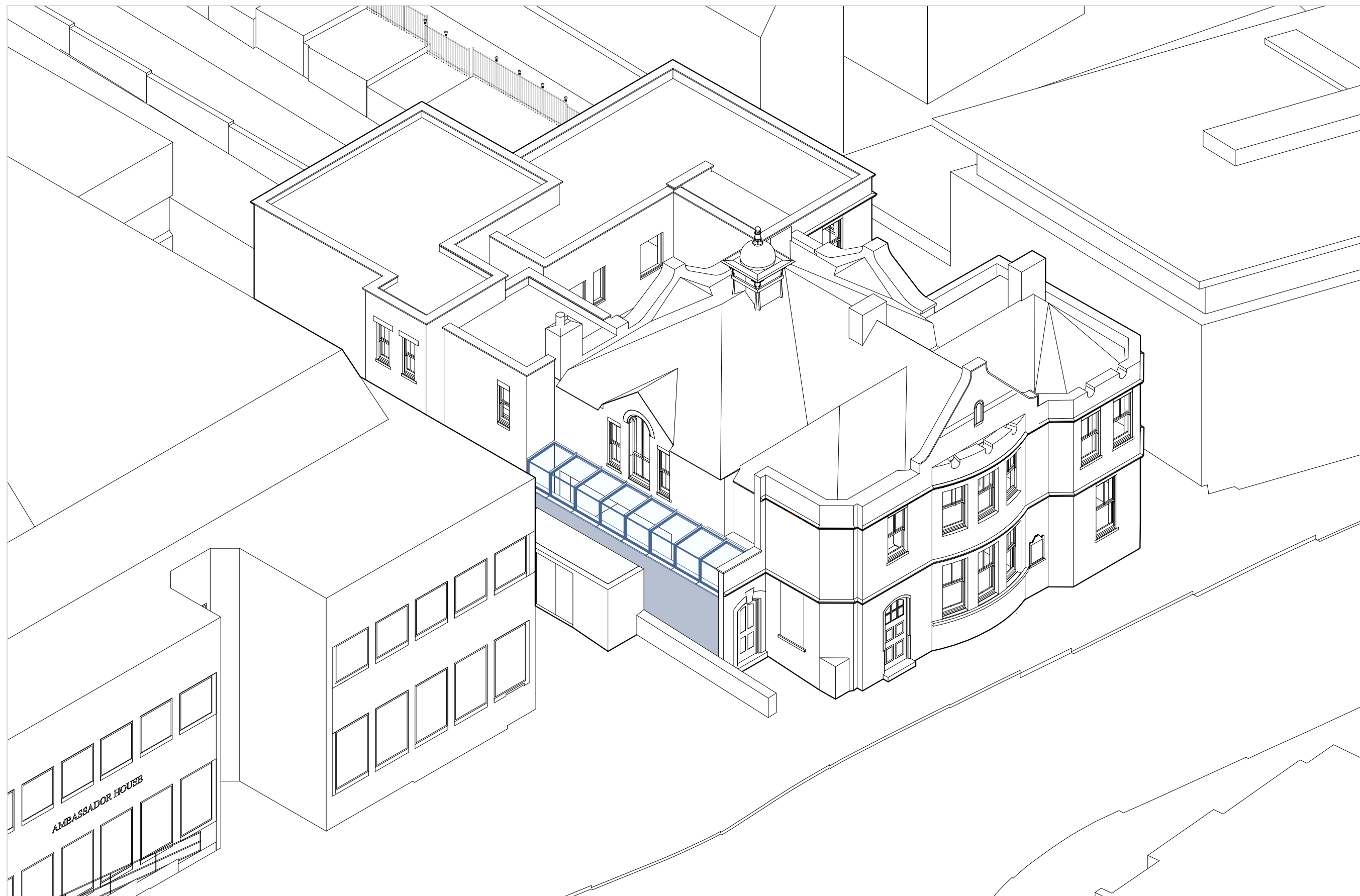
The east elevation of Vestry House is highly visible when approached from the north and east around the one-way traffic system. A bin store for the adjacent new Ambassador House office building, access doors to access incoming utilities and community recycling facilities, combined with a rough paint finish to the party wall all contribute to the unresolved facadal composition, which in turn causes harm to the conservation area (a designated heritage asset) and the locally listed building itself.

To mitigate this harm, the proposal is to re-order the elevation and enhance its appearance. An existing entrance will be enhanced to reinstate on-grade disabled access, which is currently not available elsewhere within the property, all doors having at least one step up to ground floor level. This will become the primary entrance to an enhanced interior space. The proposed high level, contemporary glazing will contrast with the historic fabric, signifying and differentiating the C21st alterations to the building, bringing natural light into the interior.

The interior will be amended to open the central space with a communal kitchen and to provide a disabled WC, ensuring beneficial use.



'New Magistrates' Court' Gascoyne, *Recollections of Richmond and its Institutions and their Development* c. 1899.
RPLC archives compiled by local historian John Cloake: source not verified.
Demolished villas to left. Now only part of flank wall remains.



Design proposal

Isometric view of proposed external modifications to east elevation of Vestry House. Not to scale

Design proposal – Compliance with policy

Local Plan polices considered relevant to this application have been addressed as follows:

- Policy LP1 / LP28 - 'Local Character and Design Quality' states that the Council will require all development to be of high architectural and urban design quality. Development proposals will have to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the site and how it relates to its existing context, including character and appearance, and take opportunities to improve the quality and character of buildings, spaces and the local area. Development must respect, contribute to and enhance the local environment and character.
- Policy LP3 / LP29 - 'Designated Heritage Assets' seeks to preserve and where possible enhance the significance, character and setting of designated heritage assets. This includes the conservation area within which Vestry House is sited.
- Policy LP4 / LP30 - 'Non-designated Heritage Assets' seeks to preserve and where possible enhance the significance, character and setting of non-designated heritage assets.
- Policy LP5 / LP31 - 'Views and Vistas' seeks to protect the quality of views and vistas... which contribute to the character, distinctiveness and quality of the local area.

The existing east elevation to Vestry House is considered detrimental and is a cause of harm to the conservation area and the non-designated heritage asset. The proposals are to modify the existing east elevation wall and the existing ramped entrance to the building. The works include remodelling the east elevation wall, by reducing its height and removing the recessed meter cupboards with incongruous louvred doors. The wall will be re-rendered and decorated.

A new rooflight will be added above the reduced façade wall, to bring beneficial natural light into the interior open-plan space.

Reinstatement of the use of an existing entrance door to the east side of the property as the main entrance to the building will bring activity to the pedestrian entrance passageway leading to the Paradise Road car park. The brick corner pier and railings to the outer curtilage of the site are to be removed, making the entrance more welcoming.

The proposed modifications to Vestry House will enhance the character and appearance of the property, its setting and associated views and vistas, located at a key transportation junction within the town centre and they will make a positive contribution to the historic environment of the borough.

- Policy LP8 / LP46 - 'Amenity and Living Conditions' requires development to protect the amenity and living conditions for occupants of new, existing, adjoining and neighbouring properties. This includes ensuring adequate light is achieved, preserving privacy and that proposals are not visually intrusive.
- Policy LP16 / Policy 42 - 'Trees, Woodland and Landscape' requires development to protect the amenity and living conditions for occupants of new, existing, adjoining and neighbouring properties. This includes ensuring adequate light is achieved, preserving privacy and that proposals are not visually intrusive.

There is no landscaping to the east, north or west of Vestry House. There is one street tree in front of Ambassador House, but of sufficient distance away so as not to be impacted by the proposals: the works are modifications to the existing superstructure and are now below ground, so will not impact on any tree roots.

Accommodation schedule

No additional accommodation is provided as an outcome of the proposals.

Access

The use of the property will remain as existing. Transport access is unaltered by the design proposal.

While acknowledging the constraints of the historic building, the reinstatement of the main entrance on the north-east corner of the building, where the existing ramp access is retained, avoids discrimination.

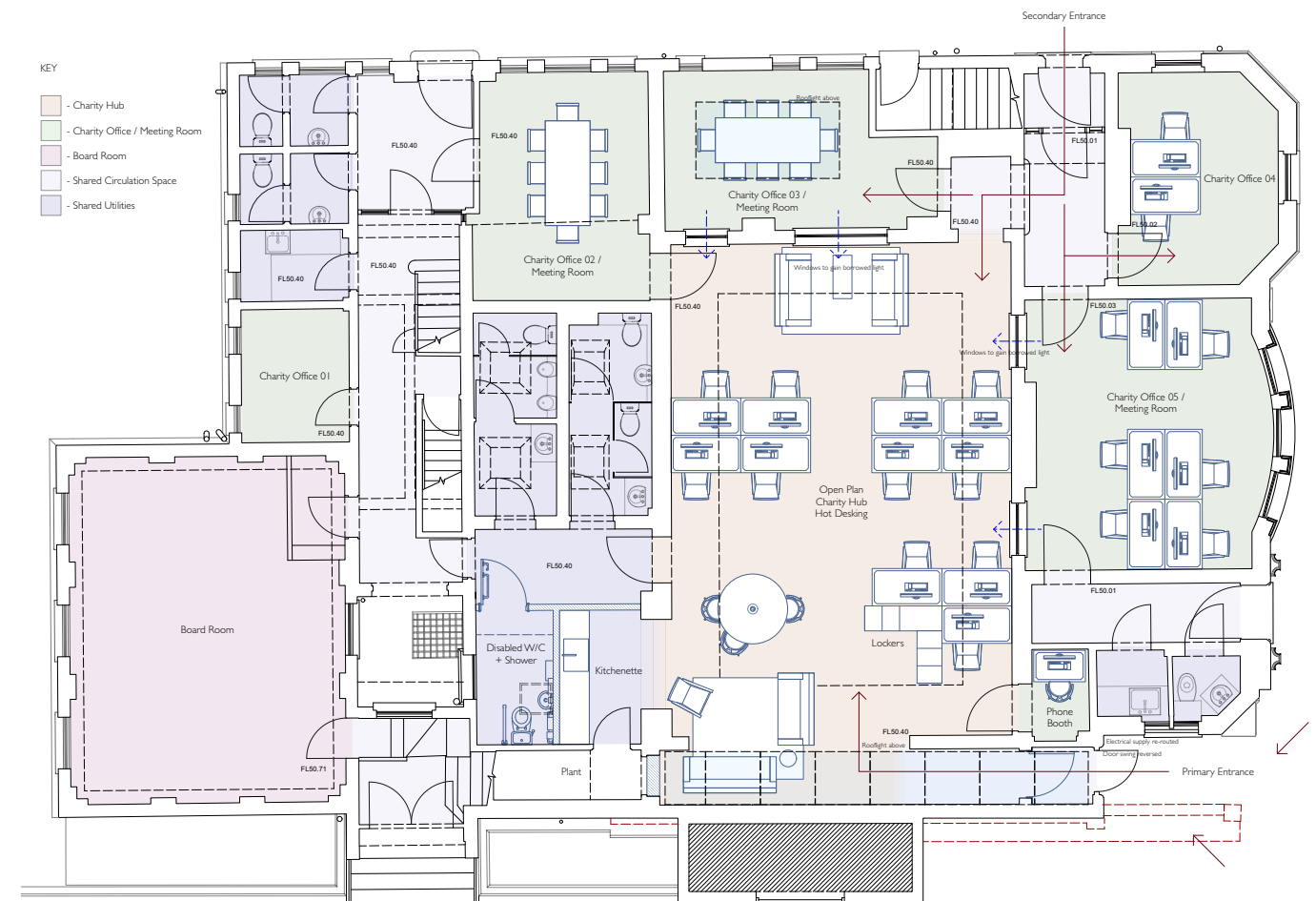
Interior modifications include the provision of a self-contained wheelchair-accessible unisex toilet. The new kitchenette in the open plan area will also be accessible.

Building Regulations

Technical construction issues will be addressed post planning (RIBA Stage 4 Technical Design) and a submission will be made for Building Control approval.

Flood Risk

The property is within flood zone 1, which has a low probability of flooding from rivers and the sea. A flood risk assessment accompanies this application.



Design proposal

Proposed ground floor plan. Not to scale



