

Astley Hall, Chorley, Lancashire



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BUILDINGS CONSERVATION

VERSION 1.3

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Overview

Maybank Buildings Conservation LLP (MBC) has been commissioned by Chorley Borough Council (CBC) to undertake a strategic overview ahead of proposed works at Astley Hall, Chorley. This Grade I listed gentry house is owned by the Council, which in 2019 have committed funds towards a range of proposed works, including:

- Major conservation repair, including to the south elevation render and windows.
- Improved visitor experience
- Creation of a Retail Opportunity
- Repairs to Ackhurst Lodge

Geoff Maybank, director of Maybank Buildings Conservation (MBC), has been working with Chorley Borough Council at Astley Hall since 2001. As a director of Ryder & Dutton, he carried out Condition Surveys at Astley in that year, and again in 2011. These have provided a baseline condition of the structure over the past 18 years.

As a result, a range of problems were observed within the building, including subsidence to the west wall of the Great Hall. In 2015 MBC specified and oversaw the major repair of this internal timber-framed wall, which supports the unique C17th plaster ceiling. In 2016 MBC worked with CBC on the first HLF lottery bid for undertaking major conservation repairs, including the creation of budget figures, which form the basis of the proposed repair programme.

This document seeks to establish / review the current understanding of the scope of proposed works, setting them within a set of wider principles and ambitions for the sustainable future of Astley Hall.



Astley Hall and Coach House sit within its parkland context

Aspirations

Astley Hall and Park is a major historic site, owned and operated by CBC. The Hall and its parkland represent both a significant responsibility and an enormous opportunity for the council to develop a major heritage and amenity attraction for the people of Chorley and the North West. The focus of this strategic review will be on the fabric and visitor experience in Astley Hall, however it is important to stress that the Hall's setting and relationship with the Coach House facilities and the wider parkland context must be considered as a single entity. The following are a series of proposed ambitions for developing the Hall within its wider site context as part of a holistic heritage and amenity offering.



1 Making Astley Hall a key Heritage Tourist Attraction in the North-West

Astley Hall is uniquely endowed with potential as a sustainable heritage tourist attraction. Its accessible urban location, complex architectural fabric, varied collections, status as a war memorial and connections to the Chorley Pals, come together to form a site with stories to tell and lots of visitor appeal. It currently suffers from deteriorating condition, limited opening times, and little financial sustainability, all of which might be addressed through the current proposals.

2 Improved integration of the Astley Hall and its Parkland

Astley Hall and its Parkland have become increasingly disconnected to the detriment of both. The recent restoration of the walled garden and has been a huge success, but the Hall has lost its formal front garden. Instead modern vehicular access to the front of the Hall cuts off any connection between the house and its setting.

Proposal: The commissioning a new garden to the front of Astley Hall. A new (low-maintenance) garden would:

- create an additional visitor attraction
- significantly improve the aesthetic appeal of the newly-restored house.
- provide a desirable setting for wedding photography, and improve the Hall's 'Instagram/Pinterest appeal'.
- Evoke the earlier setting of the Hall, re-connecting it to the Parkland.



3 Improving the public realm and connections between Astley Hall and the Coach House

Proposal: The development of the path to the rear of the Coach House into a service road would enhance access for deliveries and provide a new location for bin storage (presently in the main courtyard). This would visually improve the courtyard, enhance visitor safety and improve the connections between the Coach House courtyard, Astley Hall and the rose garden, creating a unified public space.

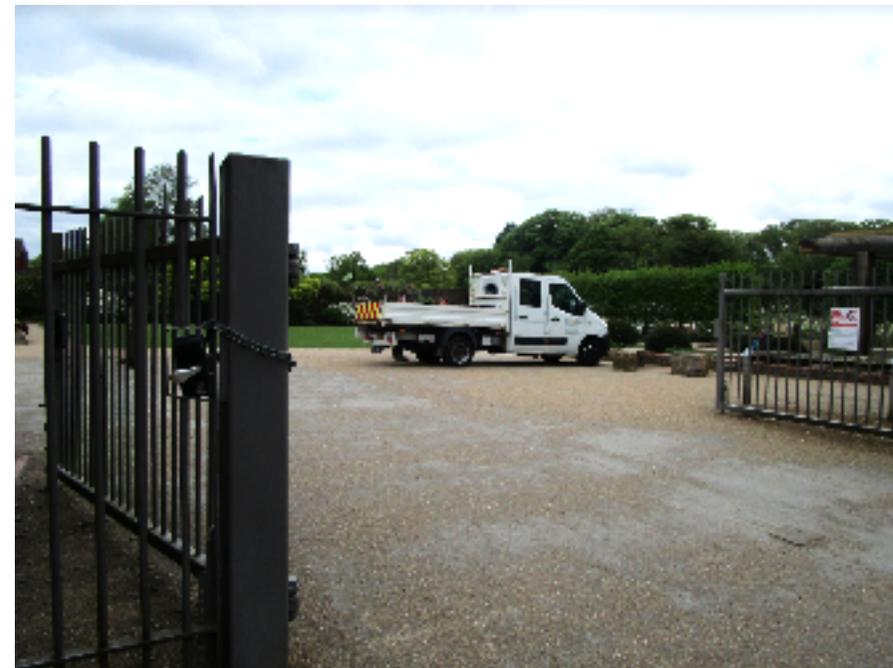
Historic use of the area in front of the new stage has been used in the past for council vehicles accessing parkland for management and maintenance purposes and is still used by park staff who pass through this area. A new road at the rear of the Coach House would remove the need for this access altogether.

With the large metal gates closed except for emergencies this would better establish the defined visitor route from the proposed new Coach House Shop and ticket point towards the entrance to the Hall. The new timber gate to the east of the inner metal gate is ideal for pedestrian access into the park for anyone not wishing to visit the Hall itself.



4 Coach House Retail and Amenity Hub

The Coach House has already been developed to provide a valuable Cafe for the site, and for flexible exhibition and retail spaces. CBC have plans to further develop this site to include a gift shop and ticket point for Astley Hall, and for more permanent exhibition space and a farm shop. The proposed development of this site, combined with Aspiration 3 (above) have the potential to turn the Coach House into a major retail and amenity hub for both Astley Hall and its Parkland, and for Chorley more generally. Creating a retail destination will positively contribute to the creation of a major heritage attraction at Astley Hall, while having little impact on the fabric or historic integrity of the Hall itself.



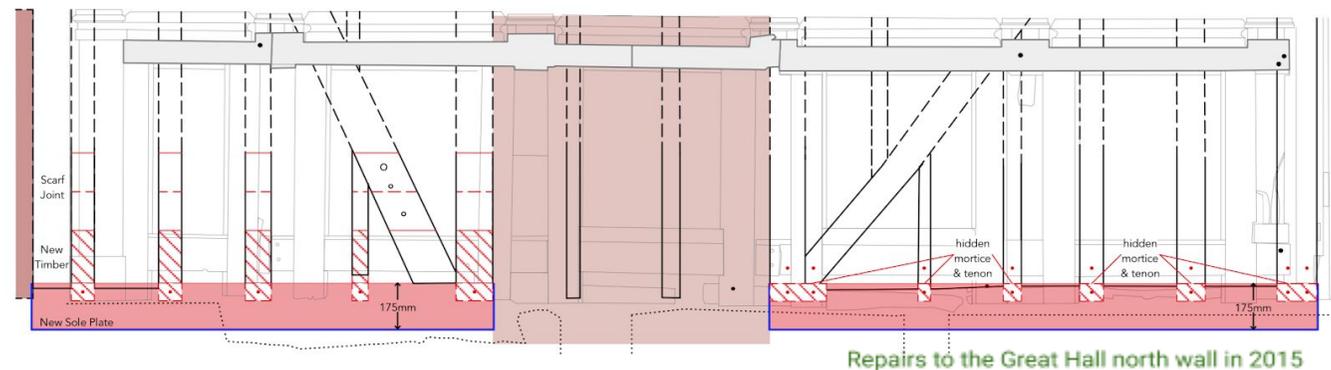
Conservation Repair

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

For almost 100 years Chorley Borough Council (CBC) have looked after Astley Hall and grounds, keeping both open to the public and providing a marvellous facility for visitors to enjoy. The staff and Chorley residents are rightly proud of Astley Hall and its Park. Ongoing maintenance has introduced some inappropriate materials over time, however the Hall has been kept generally dry and open. However, older materials are starting to reach the end of their effective life and more significant repairs are now required. Since coming into council ownership, there have been a number of Condition Surveys carried out on the Hall, first by Herbert Cescinsky Esq. in 1922, then by Buttress Fuller and Partners in 1982, and most recently by Ryder & Dutton in 2001 and 2011.

Remedial works were undertaken to the courtyard facades in 1952, which saw the insertion of many modern materials. After the 1982 survey, major work was undertaken to the roofs, and to the re-supporting of the long gallery floor and Great Hall ceiling through the insertion of a lattice beam. Since its construction in the late 15th century, Astley Hall has been continually altered and repaired by successive owners, and minor repair works have been ongoing throughout the 90 years of CBC's ownership. The front façade, built in the early part of the 17th century, was externally rendered in the 19th century, covering the earlier lime wash finish to the brick facade. This render is now failing and the higher-levels of the south facade are presently netted. The timber casement windows to the front facade were also likely added in the 19th century, have been much repaired, and are also failing. Together these have a significant detrimental effect on the aesthetic value of the Hall and present safety risks for staff and the public.

The 2011 condition survey provided a base level for a review of condition in 2015 to inform a budget repair cost for an unsuccessful HLF grant bids in 2017 and 2018. These condition surveys highlighted a range of important issues of ongoing disrepair at the Hall. Several of these have a major impact on both the condition and aesthetic of the site. Over the past four years CBC have undertaken major urgent repairs to the Great Hall west wall, Morning Room fireplace and walls, and a first floor landing, representing significant investment in the fabric. Despite this, Astley Hall requires significant investment in the fabric to replace failing materials (historic and modern) and to secure the evidential and aesthetic significance of the building, and to provide an improved visitor experience at the site.



Conservation Repair

VISION STATEMENT

Repairs and Alterations to Astley Hall should be guided and driven by the following factors:

- Ensuring the structure is safe and fit for purpose
- Preserving and better revealing the significance of Astley Hall
- Providing protection and an appropriate environment for the interiors and collections
- Enhancing the aesthetic appeal and visitor experience
- Providing a financially sustainable future for the Hall

Conservation Repairs should be prioritised according to:

- **Public Safety** is of paramount importance. Recent cases of falling roof flags, loose render, and rotten timber window frames all require further investigation and immediate repair to ensure public and staff safety at the site. A Fire Safety review should also be undertaken.
- **Conservation Principles** require a balance between well-performing materials and the preservation of the historic development of the structure. Solutions also need to balance historic integrity with affordability and sustainability.
- **Structural Integrity** - the Hall will always require effective monitoring of specific areas to ensure these are kept safe and stable. Astley Hall has shallow footings resulting in ongoing slight movement throughout the building, and the building experiences significant pressure due to footfall, both of which may require repair in future years.
- **Providing a watertight shell** is crucial to ensure the protection of the historic fabric, interiors and collections. This also ensures subsequent repairs and visitor experience enhancements are fully protected. Timber frame repairs are now required throughout the building and will be required as an ongoing repair as timbers fail.
- **Significance of affected historic fabric** - where disrepair, poor alteration, or inappropriate materials are causing damage, or are likely to cause damage, to historic fabric or historic interiors, their repair or alterations should be prioritised.
- **Inappropriate materials** inserted during schemes of repair and maintenance - where these are failing, negatively impacting on the historic fabric,, they should be replaced with more appropriate materials. Where inappropriate materials are not negatively impacting on the structure, they should be replaced only when they fail, unless their replacement can be more cost-effectively timed with essential repair work.
- **Stopping the Rot** - Ad hoc repair is often the default solution for large old buildings. Where not undertaking minor repairs may lead to exponential future problems of disrepair and cost, then repair should be given a higher priority to ensure long-term cost-effectiveness and to preserve the historic fabric.
- **Complimentary work packages** - the phasing of works should take into consideration not only critical repairs, but also less urgent works that can utilise the same professionals, access scaffolding, or environmental conditions. These can be balanced between cost saving work and overall budgets available.
- **Visitor Experience** is a crucial element in creating a financially sustainable future for Astley Hall. Where disrepair or inappropriate materials has a significant negative impact on the aesthetic significance of the Hall's interior or exterior, particularly in publicly-accessible areas, their repair or replacement should be prioritised.



Visitor Route

There is presently no planned visitor route at Astley Hall, and visitors enter the site through the principal south doors into the Great Hall before wandering freely through the house. This presents a number of issues, including :

- Visitors start the visit in the most impressive space
- Multi-directional traffic along all routes, resulting in bottle-necks
- No interpretative progression
- Heavy and uncontrolled loadings on historic staircases and floors.

It is proposed that a new visitor route be created that provides a structured visitor route and experience through Astley Hall. Factors for consideration for a new visitor route:

- route to site through Park from the Town and the rear car park
- connections and public realm between Coach House, Walled Garden, access routes, and Astley Hall
- route from proposed shop and ticket point in Coach House to Hall
- entry point and control into Hall (ticketing etc.)
- Maximising retail opportunities
- visitor experience themed zones
- visitor flow
- loading and wear on historic surfaces and stairs
- route across internal courtyard
- management of access to the Great Hall and Long Gallery
- exit point and connectivity with the walled garden
- Projected Visitor Numbers
- Events traffic and routes
- Proposed Space Use



Proposed Ground Floor Visitor Route
(see main drawing in appendices for detail)

Retail Opportunities

Astley Hall is presently free to visit and there is no CBC-owned retail on the site. The introduction of affordable entry ticketing represents an important step in making Astley Hall a sustainable heritage attraction. The addition of retail in the form of gift shops and a potential farm shop offer another opportunity to invest in the Hall's ability to fund its activities as well as the site's ongoing maintenance and repair. CBC already lease part of the Coach House to Cafe Ambio, who provide the catering facility at the site. The following site's have been identified for providing gift shop opportunities, linked to the proposed visitor route. The proposed retail space in Astley Hall may need to be reconsidered if the visitor route changes significantly.

1 Coach House

Proposal: Creation of a major new gift shop and ticketing point in the Coach House. The ground floor space closest to the Hall is presently under-utilised and would provide the ideal location for a new retail and ticketing space, including an eastern exit door directing visitors to the proposed Hall entrance. Fully wheelchair accessible, this site would provide space to purchase tickets, and importantly, provide retail opportunities for visitors irrespective of whether they pay to enter the Hall itself. This large and flexible space would also allow for an introductory site history, offering public amenity, and temporary small exhibitions.



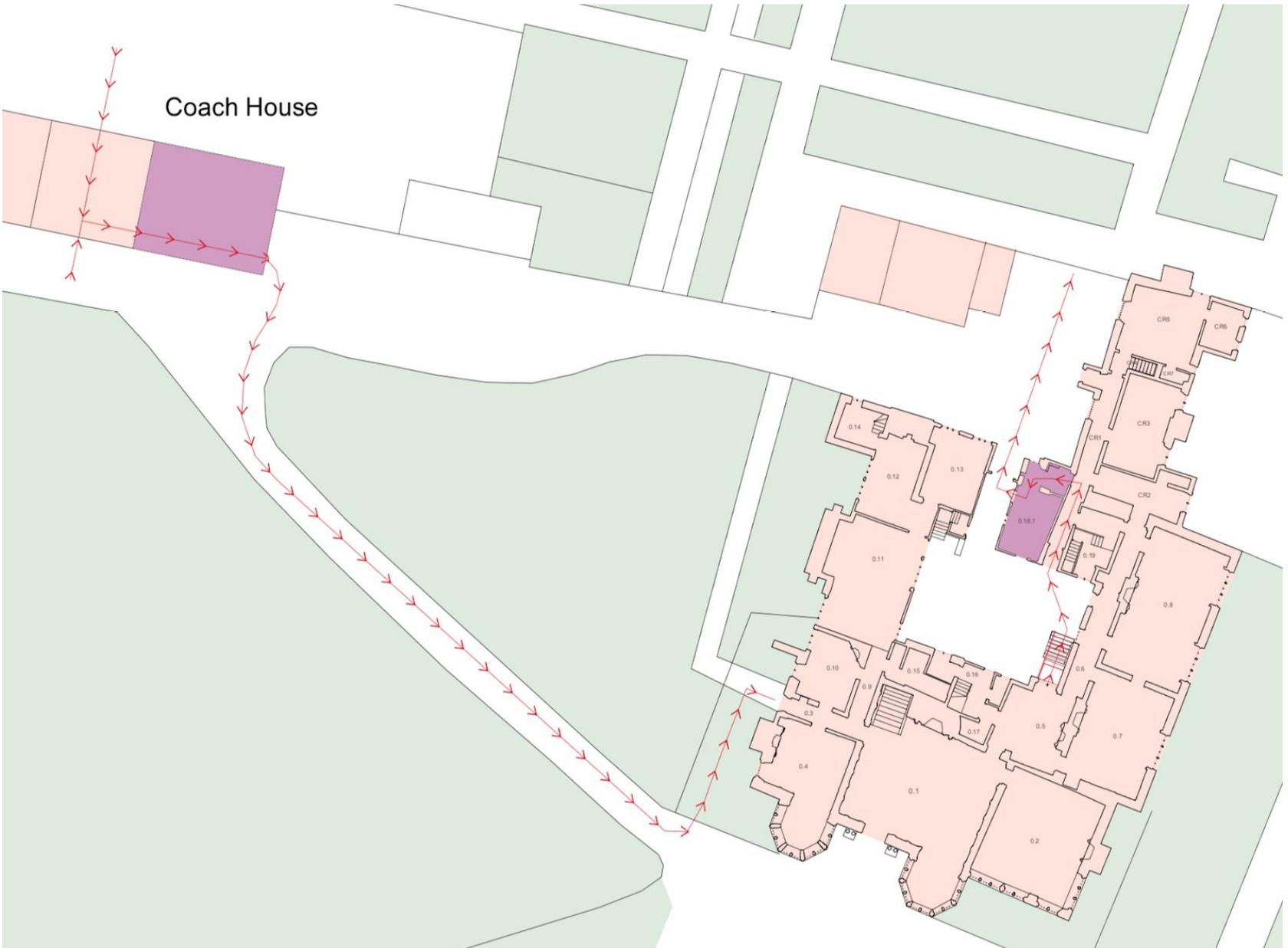
2 Astley Hall

Proposal: Locate new retail space within Room 0.18.1 within the Ground Floor of Astley Hall. Based on the presently proposed Visitor Route, this room represents the end of the visitor experience and all visitors would be funnelled through the gift shop before existing Astley Hall into the kitchen garden. A smaller shop, this site would only be accessible to paying visitors. Due to its lack of wheelchair accessibility, the shop should not sell any items not also available in the larger coach house shop.

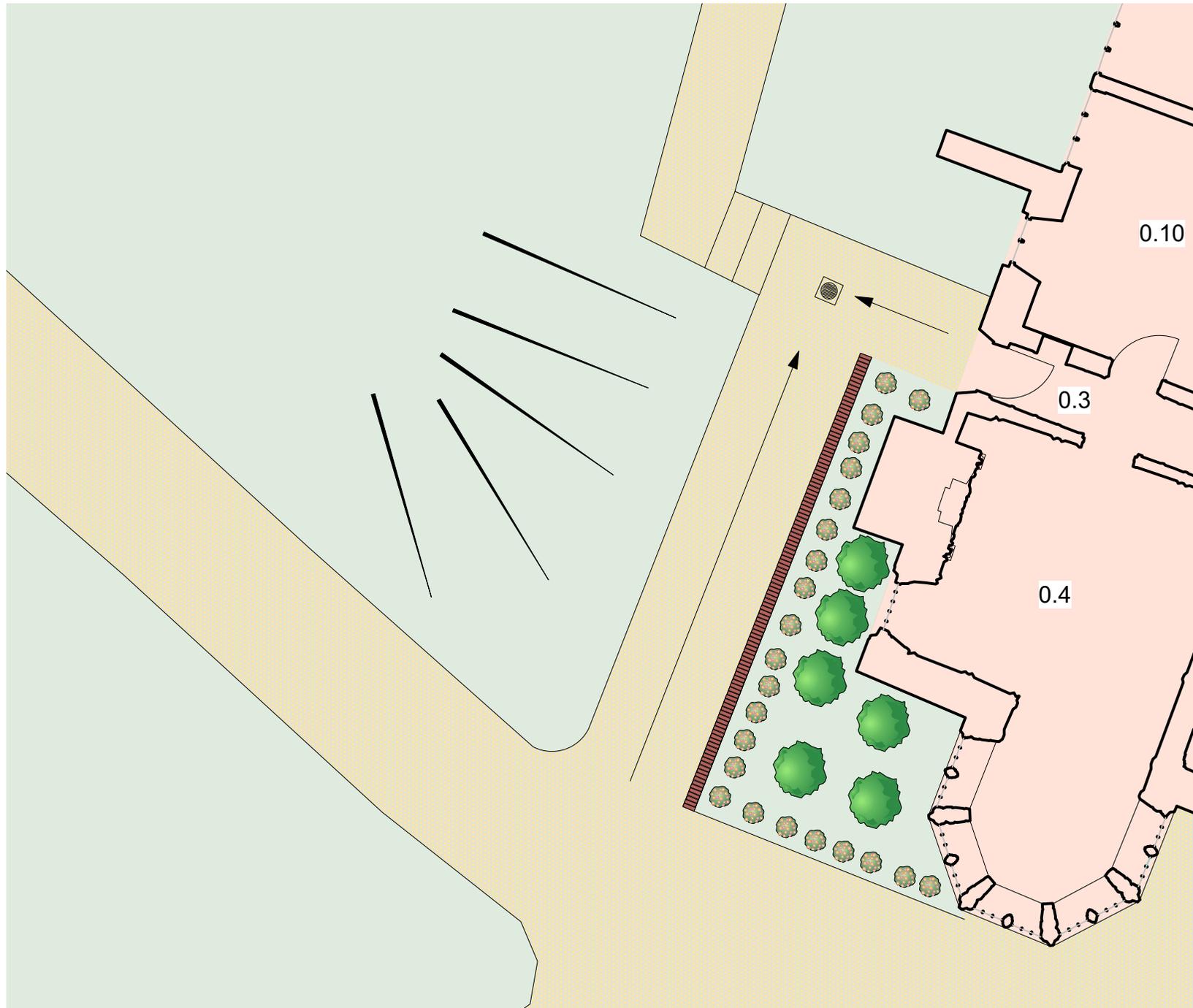


Examples of National Trust site shops

Astley Hall should also consider investing in the production and sale of a high quality visitor's guidebook for the site.



Proposed Visitor Entry and Exit Routes and Retail Opportunity Sites (shown in Purple).



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Project:

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Job Number:

MBC/3148

Title:

Indicative Entrance Landscaping

Date:

22-05- 2019

Scale:

1:100 at A4

Drawing Number:

AHC-076

Revision:

-

Drawing By:

Dav Smith

Visitor Experience

A new Visitor Experience is an important element of the proposed works at Astley Hall. This is to be created through the conservation repair of the fabric, along with a new visitor route, room decoration and collection display, and new interpretation and signage. Below sets out the broad principles that CBC should consider when proposing and commissioning an affordable and cost-effective new visitor experience. This should be read in conjunction of the associated review of the existing Visitor Experience proposals.

1 Branding and Signage

CBC and Astley Hall should consider adopting a singular branding for the Hall (graphic and colour scheme), which should be utilised across the site's signage and interpretation. This would help create a cohesive and readily-identifiable visitor attraction at the site and through its print marketing and online presence. Specialist advice should be sought to inform the development of any new branding.

2 Identification of Audience and Style of Interpretation

To inform the commissioning of an affordable new visitor experience for Astley Hall, CBC should give consideration to:

- Target Audience(s)
- Desired type(s) of Visitor and Visitor Experience
- Type(s) of Interpretation (e.g. traditional, digital-focussed, mixed, sensory)

3 Affordable, Flexible, and Minimal Impact

Elements of the proposed new visitor experience should be affordable, upgradeable, and be designed to have a minimal impact on the fabric of the building. Costs associated with the installation, maintenance, and future upgrading should be considered and factored into the cost of any works. Schemes that require significant investment in IT hardware and software should be considered in terms of future-proofing before being commissioned.

4 Zoned & Targeted Visitor Experience

A visitor experience at Astley Hall should seek to provide a logical and cohesive narrative for all visitors. Factors for consideration:

- Visitor Route and Flow (see above)
- Accessibility
- Management of access to 'wow' spaces, such as the Great Hall
- Narrative progression based on zoned or grouped spaces, such as the kitchens and scullery for domestic 'below stairs' narrative
- Branding and material palette for interpretation scheme.
- Style of interpretation, including extent of digital versus traditional engagement. Digital interpretation requires consideration of technology and accessibility.

Ackhurst Lodge

This small Regency gate lodge was built to resemble a Tudor timber-framed cottage, although it was extended in the mid 20th-century. Long closed to the public after flooding the lodge remains empty and presently without use. The structure was last surveyed (as far as known) in 2001. A recent viewing showed it to be in a similar poor condition now.

Located at one of the main entrances into the Park, its repair and re-use is important to secure the future of the building and to prevent further vandalism or even loss. It represents a significant opportunity for regeneration. The council has provided a budget for its repair in 2019. A long-term sustainable use for the building will ensure its ongoing maintenance following repair and should provide a small rental income as well once in use.

Opportunities might include residential, office, commercial or community use, and an options appraisal and market research should be considered first of all.

Taking these works forward will require a full understanding of the following:

- A Heritage Statement to advise on significance prior to any reuse or repairs taking place.
- A full Building Survey to properly ascertain the condition of the building.
- An assessment of the condition of the timber framing using a micro drill.
- Understanding and repair of the leaded windows and consideration of the need for secondary double glazing.
- A design methodology to upgrade insulation internally to walls an element which was absent in the original design but will be required now if a proper reuse is to be found.
- A decision on services and heating and on the standard and location of any proposed kitchens and bathrooms.



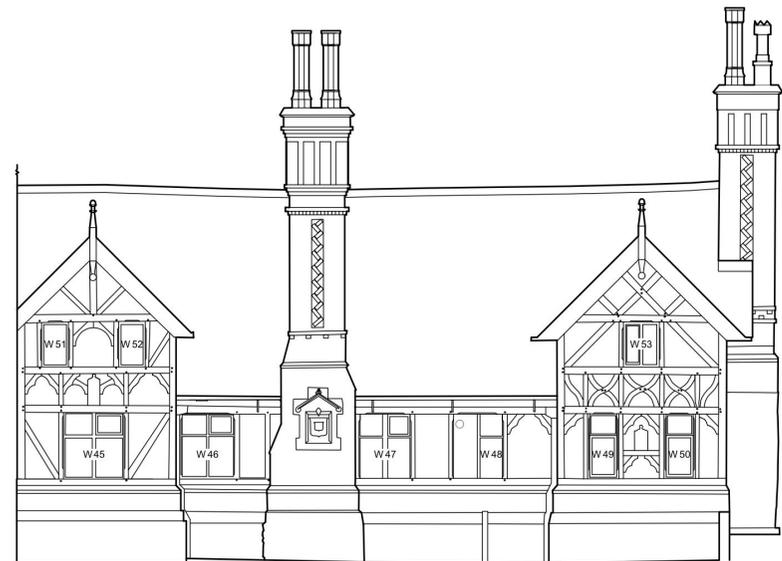
Cottage Roof Repairs

The stone and brick Cottage attached to the north of Astley Hall might well contain material from the earliest period of the site, although Tudor-style timberwork to the rear wall dates from the 19th century. In both recent building surveys, it became clear that the Cottage roof had been poorly recovered, with consistently slipping stone flags due to the use of poor quality pegs to hold the flags in position. We understand that a budget for the re-roofing work to the Cottage has been set aside so that this can be carried out within the first phase of repair.

The worsening weather, where heavy storms are becoming the norm, now requires the improvement of all rainwater goods and lead gutters both to this building and generally across the whole site. To the lake side elevation of the Cottage timber framing, which is almost of structural size, has yet again succumbed to noticeable levels of timber rot, in part due to small gutters and poor water runoff from roofs. If work to this building is included into the main contract, staff could well be excluded by the Contractor for some or all of the duration of the Phase 1 works.

We recommend the work to the Cottage roof should now include the timber framing and associated infill panel repairs. If these all can be carried out at the start of Phase 1 works staff can return to the Hall before the main works are carried out. This is important so as to check the safe keeping of internal fixtures and fittings, artwork, and furniture in areas not being improved.

- The work will include re-slating of roof cover reusing existing stone flags wherever possible, with new underfelt but retaining internal ceiling plaster.
- Repair of timber frames and infill panels with oak frames and lime infill panels to the lake side (east and north) elevations.
- Upgrading of all rainwater goods with larger section cast iron gutters and downspouts.
- Replacement / Improvement to lead valley gutters soakers and flashing.
- Minor brick repairs to chimneys and the rear wall, including some repointing in lime mortar.



Strategic Overview Summary

This document, with its appendices seeks to establish a vision for the future of Astley Hall. CBC's proposed investment in the fabric and visitor experience at Astley Hall provides an exciting and important opportunity to consider the long-term aspirations for the site, its management, future use and users. This document has sought to outline the broad principles to approaching both the proposed fabric repairs and upgrading the visitor experience at the Hall. Together with its appendices (Phase 1 costings and Interpretation Review) it recommends a suite of preparatory actions, and frames a series of key questions around the phasing of conservation works, attainable outputs, and nature of the visitor experience.

Many of the decisions that need to be made now will be driven primarily by budgetary considerations, but should also be informed by a desire to:

- Improve accessibility
- Enhance the significance of the site
- Enhance public amenity

The importance of addressing the deterioration in the fabric has also been highlighted, with ongoing disrepair becoming a more significant and costly issue each year. Providing a safe and watertight building must be prioritised. Improvements to the visitor experience are key to improving the financial sustainability of the site and to achieving greater public engagement with the site. Financial constraints within the currently proposed budget for works suggest a longer-term strategic approach to funding both the conservation repairs and visitor route must be considered by CBC on a rolling basis (see appendices for more detail). The importance of phasing the conservation repair works, and of planning for the interpretation and visitor experience work, including the development of new branding and interpretation that is effective, flexible, low impact and cost efficient, will be important to deliver the maximum benefit from the current works.



Phase One Work Proposals

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Introduction

Chorley Council has provided the following budgets for the Phase 1 work.

- £700K for repair of the windows and render to the front of the building,
- £200K for further building conservation works,
- £200K for improving the visitor experience
- £250K for the repair of Ackhurst Lodge.

The breakdown of Budget Costs provided by T Sumner Smith, Quantity Surveyors, Manchester, were initially provided for the Lottery bid of 2017 figures prepared months earlier than that, and are well over 3 years old. By adding a 5% increase to the cost of works for each year since they were first collated, an upgraded total for the budget costs this year might be reasonably assessed.

Originally the budget costs were for the repair only of the main Hall building and attached cottage inside and out. It can be ascertained that presently to fully repair the Hall building a figure to include cost of work, contingencies, preliminaries, reasonable professional fees, but excluding vat would equate to a budget figure of just over **£ 2.0 million**. In addition to this figure, a budget for the works associated with the improved 'visitor experience' work is required.

It was originally assumed that timber windows would be replaced to the front of the hall to match the existing. However more recently we have spoken to Historic England who have indicated that they would be prepared to consider metal frame windows to be fitted to the hall front elevations, perhaps a better solution here, although these have not been designed or costed. We have been advised by the Council that they will be able to recover VAT and if so this cost becomes a cash flow item and not an outgoing. This needs to be confirmed now.

The phase 1 budget repair/conservation of **£900k provided now by the Council** will only cover part of the overall works now urgently required. It will provide funding for the replacement of windows to the C17th front facade (dependent on type), removal of render and repair/decoration of the brick facade and improvement to leadwork above to parapets. However, to put the building's external envelope into a repaired condition, taking into account its nature and present state, would require at least a further **£400k** to be added to the phase 1 budget figure at this time, giving a phase 1 repair total of approx. **£1.3 M** now. These works we see as being essential.

Any specification prepared for the works will require the temporary opening up of areas seen to be in disrepair and this process might then add to these costs, dependent on the construction and size of timber framing and infill panels found around the building.

Additional External Repair Work

Breaking down the above budget figures we see that after £900K has been spent mainly on the front of the building, undertaking external repairs to the roof and back wall of the attached cottage would increase the budget figure over the existing phase 1 budget by some **£170K**. Once the cause of the failure of the cottage roof slates has been ascertained, the main hall roof should also be inspected. At present, the main hall roof flags appear in better condition than the cottage and the provision of a metal safety guard set above the gutter line to hall roofs might provide sufficient health and safety assurance and allow time to budget for these works over a number of years should work here be found to be necessary. It should be noted that the provision of guards will require LBC (listed building consent). We do not have figures for any main roof work presently and these would be extra to any figures provided here.

The work to the chimney and external timber repairs to the west elevation of the Hall some of which are in a very poor condition and require urgent attention add **£70k** to the figure. In addition, improving the size of cast iron gutters and downspouts with larger section goods to help prevent overflowing and damp ingress into the structure in heavy rains to timber framed areas of the structure should also be included. This adds **£55K** to the phase1 works.

Additional Internal Work

The other cost issue relates to improving the circulation within the Hall. The timber constructed west side wall in the Great Hall partly holds up the main stairs. The wall and stairs are not structurally robust and we consider that two-way foot traffic up and down these stairs would be best avoided. There is a limit to how many people can be on the stair at any time. This then leads to a decision regarding a circulation route and final access from the first floor.

The circulation drawing provided in the strategic overview shows our preferred exit from the building at first floor. This would require a new stair to be built into the courtyard. The initial budget figure included an allowance for a new internal stair but further investigation has shown that this would be too disruptive. Listed building consent will be required for a new external stair, but its proposed location follows the pattern of intervention and change in the central courtyard over the centuries and could be considered as a continuation of this theme. With new external stairs in place proper circulation through the building can be achieved and two-way traffic on the main stair avoided. Importantly it would allow an excellent visitor experience through the building and a proper progression through these spaces and historic periods. Given the projected increase in visitor numbers after the work has been carried out, this alteration might reasonably be seen to be essential and is included in the expanded phase 1 work.

A budget figure should be assessed at **£60k** for the stairs presently subject to any design input by Historic England.

Summary

The remainder of works associated with external envelope repairs or where internal damp is seen, cannot be left for many more years before more serious problems arise. This also applies if Phase 1 funds cannot be increased presently. If this became the case then serious consideration might have to be made regarding which of any of the works is prioritised. Internal redecoration which is much needed in many rooms are now poor throughout most principal rooms. These works need to be considered on a rolling programme over the next 10 years.

The cost of the additional work set out above could be split into two separate contracts falling across 3 or more financial years.

At present, no allowance has been included for any upgrades to the mechanical or electrical installations in the building or for any works associated with asbestos surveys and removal. We recommend that a fire risk assessment for the building is undertaken and this is likely to recommend: the compartmentation of roof voids, upgrades to fire compartmentation around distribution boards and along the means of escape routes, and potentially an upgrade of the smoke/fire detection system in the building.

The figure of **£200k** for improving the visitor experience can at least provide a shop in the coach house and some proper signage and information material as visitors walk through the buildings. A worked up scheme will be required in the next phase, in order to assess the physical impact into the structure to implement the chosen scheme and its attendant cost. Obviously the simpler the scheme the lower the potential intervention required.

Ackhurst Lodge work can be carried out at any time and again a known cost will be seen once a full specification is provided. The budget of **£250K** will provide considerable levels of repair now.

All the costs will need to be updated once the full scope of the phase I work has been agreed and the detailed specification prepared. The costs set out above are therefore only a guide to the approximate costs that must be expected to repair the hall. It should be stressed that not addressing the envelope and damp repairs at the Hall will lead to exponential costs in the medium term.

Statutory Consents

Work to be carried out to any of the listed buildings on the Estate fall into two groups. Those like-for-like repairs which can, after discussion with the Conservation Officer be reasonably expected to be carried out without obtaining LBC and those works where a change of material, alteration or upgrade will require LBC. In addition, some works may also require planning permission. We have had a number of pre –application meetings over the last 3 years with Historic England regarding external changes to the front of the Hall. These works will require consent, but appear to be reasonably acceptable at this time subject to detailed specification being provided to Historic England. In addition the new courtyard stairs, timber frame infill panel material changes and rainwater improvements will also require LBC before work commences with these. Any changes to roof levels where roofs are repaired would also require consent.

In addition, Building Regulations Approval may be required for some elements of the work.

Once the Council has decided on the extent of work at the Hall now then a further pre application meeting can be undertaken with Historic England to provide an agreed position over change and alteration, which would then form the basis of the LBC (and Planning if required) submission for phase 1 works.

We anticipate that it will take three months to write a specification of the phase 1 works and submission for LBC would also includes a design and access statement and heritage statement. A period of 12 weeks should be allowed for the determination of the LBC (and planning) application.

Site Work

Given the above and the need to tender the professional team and contractor prior to the start of work, it is likely to be towards the end of this financial year before any work takes place.

It should be noted that any work requiring the use of lime mortar cannot be undertaken where temperatures are below 5C as this affects the ability of mortar to set. As such winter work can often prove problematic and slow.

Astley Hall Chorley

Appendix 2

Interpretation Review
2019



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Introduction

This document has been commissioned by Chorley Borough Council (CBC) as part of proposed investment in the fabric and visitor experience at Astley Hall, Chorley, Lancashire. It is intended as a review of the current situation and as a discussion document for commissioning work to update the visitor experience at the Hall. It aims to help the CBC and, in particular, the staff at Astley Hall to make strategic decisions by highlighting some of the challenges and opportunities presented by the Hall within the context of the proposed new works. This document should be read in conjunction with the Strategic Overview 2019, commissioned as part of the same suite of works from Maybank Buildings Conservation.

This document will first review the existing visitor experience at Astley Hall, highlighting its successes and opportunities for improvement, including the two recent proposals for a new visitor experience, commissioned as part of the HLF application process. This is followed by an overview of themes, issues and information that might be considered before commissioning a new visitor experience as part of the proposed 2019 works. Any new visitor experience will need to take into consideration a range of factors that will impact on the scope of the proposed works, the methods and techniques employed, and themes explored. These identified factors, which will be considered throughout this document are as follows:

Identified Factors for Consideration

- Budget
- Significance of the historic fabric and interiors
- Scale & Complexity of the Site
- Accessibility
- Existing Interpretation and Collections
- Aspirations of the Hall staff
- Educational & War Memorial role of the Hall
- Existing provision of services



1 The Current Visitor Experience

This section seeks to provide an overview of the present visitor experience at Astley Hall, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for change, as well as celebrating the successes of the Hall staff. Astley Hall is currently free to enter and is open from 12-4.30pm on weekends, bank holidays and school holidays from March to December. The Hall staff also run a successful series of events, exhibitions, and wedding venue hire, which are considered outside of the scope of this review, although they may be a material consideration in the design and implementation of any new visitor experience. Astley has a dedicated website which successfully highlights the site, it's events and activities and opening times (<http://astleypark.co.uk/>). The Hall staff actively engage with social media, through Facebook. The *Friends of Astley Hall* run a Twitter account, but there is currently no direct engagement with Instagram. Within Astley Park there is presently little information on the Hall, no opening time information, and no external interpretation within the direct vicinity of the building.

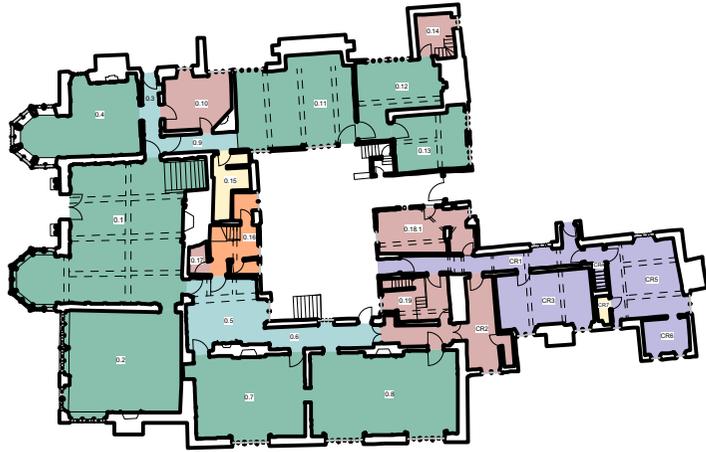
Current Room Use

Despite limited opening hours, when Astley Hall is open it has an impressive level of public access to the full range of spaces within Astley Hall, with 19 of the 38 major rooms (excluding corridors) open to the public. The current level of public access per floor (excluding cellars) is:

Current Room Use	GF	FF	SF	Total
Public	9	9	1	19
Storage / Services	3	3	-	6
Staff	6	6	1	13

This includes access to all of the principal spaces in the building and most ancillary spaces around the courtyard structure. The Astley Hall staff are currently in the process of opening additional rooms, including another servant bedroom, to provide even greater public access. When examined spatially, public access is provided to virtually all of the main courtyard building, with the ancillary Cottage representing the main restricted space. This is an admirable level of public access, providing numerous and varied spaces in which to explore the Hall's narratives through potentially varied interpretative themes and techniques.

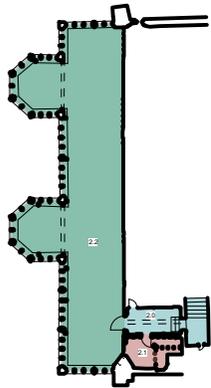
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



Current Space Utilisation

- Public Space
- Access Space
- W.C. Space
- Storage Space
- Staff Space
- Services Space



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Project:
Astley Hall
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PR7 1NP

Job Number:
MBC/3148

Title:
Current Space Use (April 2019)

Date: **April 2019** Scale: **1:500 at A4**

Drawing Number: **AHC-076** Revision: **-**

Drawing By: **Dav Smith**

Existing Visitor Route

- There is presently no organised visitor route through the house.
- Members of the public currently enter the house through the principal double doors directly into the Great Hall, the most arresting architectural space in the building.
- Following a welcome from staff, the public are free to explore the publicly-open rooms with no suggested routes or site map.
- The complex and unusual layout of the house results in visitors regularly retracing their route. Visitor traffic flowing in both directions throughout the house results in significant bottlenecks in narrow corridors and doorways, especially with family groups and prams. The principal staircase is currently the only means of access and egress from the upper floors, putting this historic inserted stair under considerable load.
- Those rooms with collections and set dressings have public access heavily restricted by moveable rope barriers.
- Ticketed access is provided within the Great Hall for visitors attending paid-for events and exhibitions within the building.
- Visitors currently leave the Hall via the same double doors within the Great Hall, exiting into the grounds away from the Coach House facilities and the recently rejuvenated gardens at the rear of the Hall.
- The present lack of defined visitor route has a significant impact on the visitor experience and on the fabric of Hall.

Existing Interpretation

1 Collections

Some rooms, such as the Drawing Room, Oak Bedroom & Dining Room have significant collections and reflect fully set-dressed spaces. Others, such as the Chapel and Butler's Bedroom presently contains no furnishings or collections, whilst most rooms and corridors contain some level of furnishing or decoration. There is also a variation in the architectural decoration of the spaces, with the principal rooms often being highly decorated with panelling and plasterwork, while many of the later and lower status rooms have little to no architectural decoration, instead presenting comparatively 'blank canvases'. Astley Hall also has a significant collection in storage, which is rarely on public display. There is presently a disparity between the levels of room dressing and collections display between the principal spaces and the lower-status rooms, particularly in the servant bedrooms.

2 Interpretation

Ad hoc development of the interpretation at Astley Hall has resulted in some variation in media and signage, which is predominantly information booklets on stands, wall-mounted panels, and roller banners. This reflects the hard work of the Astley Hall staff in implementing change and upgrades to the visitor experience in recent years. More recent additions, such as on the servants working at the Hall in the nineteenth-century, reflect recent trends in telling 'below-stairs' narratives. However, presently the interpretation is rather limited, variable between rooms, and there is an overall lack of cohesive narrative or presentation style.

Accessibility

The historic fabric of Astley Hall makes disabled-access challenging. Multiple changes to floor levels, narrow corridors and doorways, and sensitive historic fabric all present challenges for disabled access, particularly to the upper floors. Presently disabled access is provided to the ground floor spaces within the Hall only. The Hall presently has no interpretation or access in place for other disabilities, such as for the visually impaired.



2 Going Forward

Recommendations

A new Visitor Experience is an important element of the proposed works at Astley Hall, through the conservation repair of the fabric, as well as through a new visitor route, room decoration, interpretation, and signage. This section aims to set out the broad principles that CBC should consider when proposing and commissioning a new visitor experience. General recommendations are made for preparatory work to inform the creation of a detailed Interpretation Plan Brief to inform the creation of any new visitor experience. Any new visitor experience should seek to enhance Astley Hall's (1) Significance; (2) Financial Sustainability; and (3) Accessibility.

1 'Spirit of Place'

If not already established, before commissioning a new visitor experience CBC should establish the significance of Astley Hall and decide on what makes the site special. What the National Trust call 'Spirit of Place', these should inform the type of experience and interpretation offered at Astley Hall. This is perhaps a more challenging task than for many historic houses. Astley Hall is the product of over 400 years of incremental development and change, and presents no single over-riding architectural phase within or without the building. The house presently also serves multiple purposes for multiple audiences. It is therefore important that the Hall staff establish the 'spirit of place' to help inform the creation of a cohesive visitor experience. They should seek to reconcile the Hall's different aspects, including:

- Historic House Museum (Elizabethan, Jacobean, Regency, Victorian)
- Local History Collections
- Educational Resource
- Complex multiphase gentry house
- Astley Hall is rare, if not unique, in being both an historic house and WWI memorial.

"Central to all our thinking about how to present and tell the story of a place – house, garden, estate, landscape – is the concept of the "spirit of the place". Why have we got it, how did people live in it and how do people connect with it now?" Helen Ghosh, Director General, National Trust

See: National Trust (2008) *Conservation Principles*.

2 Audience

Astley Hall staff have recently carried out considerable research and public engagement regarding proposed changes to the Hall. This, and other existing research data, should be utilised to establish the present audience for visiting Astley Hall. Any new visitor experience should ensure it meets the needs of this existing demographic, as well as aiming for new target audiences. Consideration should also be given to establishing the types of audiences currently visiting and targeted. In recent years cultural heritage professionals have increasingly sought to understand and classify visitors to heritage sites, to help inform approaches to engagement and marketing. Below are two examples of such categorisation:

National Trust Categorisation of Audience:

- Young Explorer Seekers
- Live Life to the Full
- Curious Minds
- Out & About
- House & Family
- Kids First Families
- Explorer Families

McKercher (2002) proposes a more general classification of Cultural Heritage visitor as being either:

- Serendipitous, Purposeful, Incidental, Casual or Sightseeing

A similar exercise undertaken at Astley Hall would ensure any new visitor experience fully engaged with both existing and targeted audiences, addressing their requirements for visiting the site.

Explorer Families

Who Families that actively learn and play together, the adults will get as much out of their visit as the children.

When Weekends and school holidays; visits to our places tend to be very special, quality time for these families.

Where Most at home outdoors but happy to visit houses and gardens if they feel welcomed.

'It's chaos in the week, so it's really important that we escape and do something together as a family'

What Their focus is on time together in their family 'bubble'. They want to introduce new ideas and experiences and time to create family memories. They want to make their own choices about what to do and inject a lot of energy and imagination to make their own fun. They love authentic adventure and happy 'accidental' learning.

Why They visit because it's a safe place to introduce new experiences and be together.

Our challenge To stimulate both parents and children; providing 'a la carte' ideas that they can choose and make their own day from.

National Trust graphic of a visitor category

3 Interpretation Themes and Methods

The identification of audience(s) and 'spirit of place' are important preparatory aspects of considering new interpretation for Astley Hall. Decisions regarding the format and type of proposed new interpretation will likely be driven largely by budgetary limitations, but should also be informed by:

- Significance
- 'Spirit of Place'
- Existing and Target Audience
- Accessibility

Together these should inform the overall vision and approach to the interpretation scheme, including the visitor route and type(s) of interpretation method (e.g. printed, digital-focussed, mixed, sensory etc.). The potential for digital interpretation to enhance accessibility, particularly given the lack of disabled-access to upper floors, should be prioritised in decision-making. Proposed new interpretation should aim to be subservient to its context to ensure it sits comfortably within its historical setting, and to ensure interpretation does not detract from the atmosphere and experience of the spaces. This is especially important in terms of events, e.g. wedding photography. Digital and sensory interpretations require consideration of their potential impact on the historic fabric and existing services.

4 Zoned or Targeted Visitor Experience

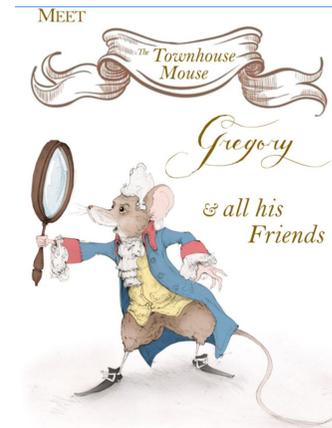
A visitor experience at Astley Hall should seek to provide a logical and cohesive narrative for all visitors. Given the complexity of the architecture and spaces at Astley Hall, zoned and targeted interpretations might be the most appropriate choice. Zoned interpretation might tell different stories of the house and its occupants at particular moments or explore different themes, but these should interlink to form a narrative progression that tells the wider story of the Hall. This makes the visitor route and an understanding of 'spirit of place' crucial to the commissioning of a new visitor experience. Targeted interpretation seeks to engage specific audiences, and relies on the identification of existing and target audiences.

Zoned Interpretation - Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation Museum

Located in Fayetteville, New York (US) this museum is located within the childhood home of Matilda Joslyn Gage, the C19th women's suffragist, abolitionist, and civil rights activist. The museum offers thematic interpretation within the rooms in order to explore the diverse aspects of Gage's work and influence.

Targeted Interpretation - Fairfax House, York

Given the observed number of family visitors to Astley Hall, consideration should be given to the production of a visitor experience tailored specifically for children and families. A good recent example can be seen at Fairfax House Museum, York, where a specific character and trail has recently been created to engage and entertain younger visitors: <http://www.fairfaxhouse.co.uk/visit/family-visits/>



5 Internal Lighting

Lighting is an important tool for creating and managing a safe and immersive visitor experience, as well as being an important consideration in the protection of historic interiors and collections. Consideration needs to be given to the natural lighting provision in the Hall, and UV-shielded translucent blinds should be considered for any room with fragile historic interiors or collections. Discrete modern lighting schemes may also be desirable as part of the enhanced visitor experience, for example to the principal rooms (Drawing Room, Great Hall, Morning Room). However any proposed new lighting scheme should seek to:

- Ensure all visitors can safely navigate the visitor route and engage with all interpretation
- Be appropriate and adaptable (e.g. dimmable) for the long-term stability and preservation of the collections (e.g. no UV).
- Low voltage, cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable.
- Avoid or minimise harm to the historic fabric of the Hall, including through installation or increased fire risk.
- Require minimal intervention to existing services (electrical).
- Seek to enhance the historic features of the space and/or the collections displayed within them.
- Be sympathetic to the historic setting and seek to enhance the aesthetic appeal and readability of the historic spaces.
- Avoid 'disneyfication' or inauthentic-feeling illumination, and instead seek to provide an immersive experience of the spaces.

6 Collections and Internal Decoration

Astley Hall has significant museum and local history collections, particularly artworks, that remain in largely in storage. Consideration should be given to permanent or rotating display of these collections within any new visitor experience, both in the form of room dressing and exhibition/display, including within proposed exhibition spaces in the Coach House. A review of existing environmental controls should be considered to ensure the long term stability and protection of the collections on display.

The internal decoration of the Hall is generally fair, but consideration should be given to how these are managed and approached in the future, both in terms of heritage significance and visitor experience. Paint analysis might inform the reinstatement of historic decorative schemes to provide a more authentic and immersive visitor experience.

7 Sensory Experiences

Sounds and smells can provide extremely evocative and cost-effective enhancements to an immersive visitor experience. Used sparingly to enhance individual rooms, such as a baking smell in the kitchens, or the chinking of glasses and cutlery in the dining room, these simple tools can bring a room to life. Recordings or scent generators can be placed on a timed loop or connected to motion sensors. Utilised cautiously, sensory interpretation can be budget-friendly and economically sustainable, and might be considered for key rooms in Astley Halls, such as. Kitchen, Dining Room, Drawing Room, Cromwell Room / Oak Bedroom.

8 Branding and Signage

CBC and Astley Hall should consider adopting a singular, simple branding for the Hall (graphic and colour scheme), which should be utilised across the site's signage and interpretation. This would help create a cohesive and readily-identifiable visitor attraction at the site and through its print marketing and online presence. Specialist advice should be sought to inform the development of any new branding. Any new branding should include an interpretation and signage Style Guide to enable refreshing and future development and rotation of the scheme. Greater engagement with social media, including Twitter and Instagram, should also be considered.

9 'Conservation in Action'

The proposed works to the Hall and its visitor experience provide an opportunity to engage the visiting public directly in the works, both during the repairs to fabric, and to the re-decoration of spaces, the creation of the visitor route, and the conservation and display of the collections. From providing interpretation of in-progress conservation work, to having painting conservators working on site in the building, there is significant scope to engage and educate the visiting public during the proposed works. This level of engagement can result in visitors feeling more invested in elements of the project and drive return visits once the project phase has been completed. The potential of asking visitors or businesses to sponsor or invest in individual aspects of the project, e.g. restoration of a significant painting or piece of furniture, might be considered.

3 Conclusion

This review is intended solely as a discussion document, which aims to highlight challenges and opportunities, identifying themes and activities that might inform the creation of a new visitor experience at Astley Hall, as part of proposed works in 2019. Before a new scheme is commissioned, work should be undertaken (if not already known) to establish the 'spirit of place' for Astley Hall, and to characterise and understand the current and target audiences. Together with an understanding of the significance of the site, an Interpretation Scheme brief should be commissioned and tendered. Given the limited budget available for the new visitor experience, any new scheme should maximise use of existing spaces and materials, and seek to maximise return - i.e. new works with the greatest overall impact. A phased scheme, might be proposed to enable long term transformation of Astley Hall and its visitor experience. The installation of new interpretation and signage, whether traditional or digital, will require careful assessment of their cost, sustainability and future-proofing, impact on the historic fabric, and loading on services.

Recommended Guidance:

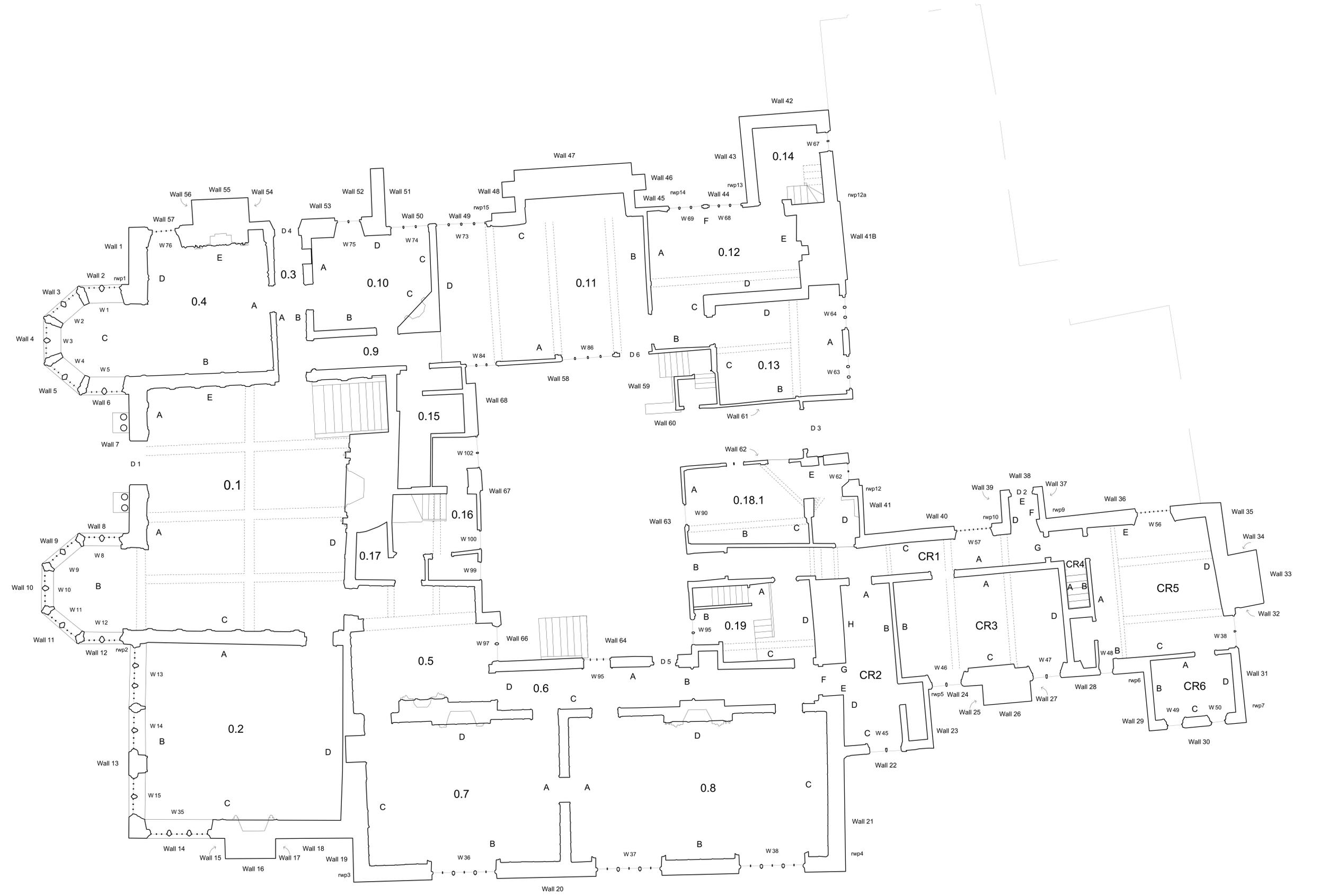
English Heritage (2008) *Presenting Historic Places, Conservation Bulletin 58*

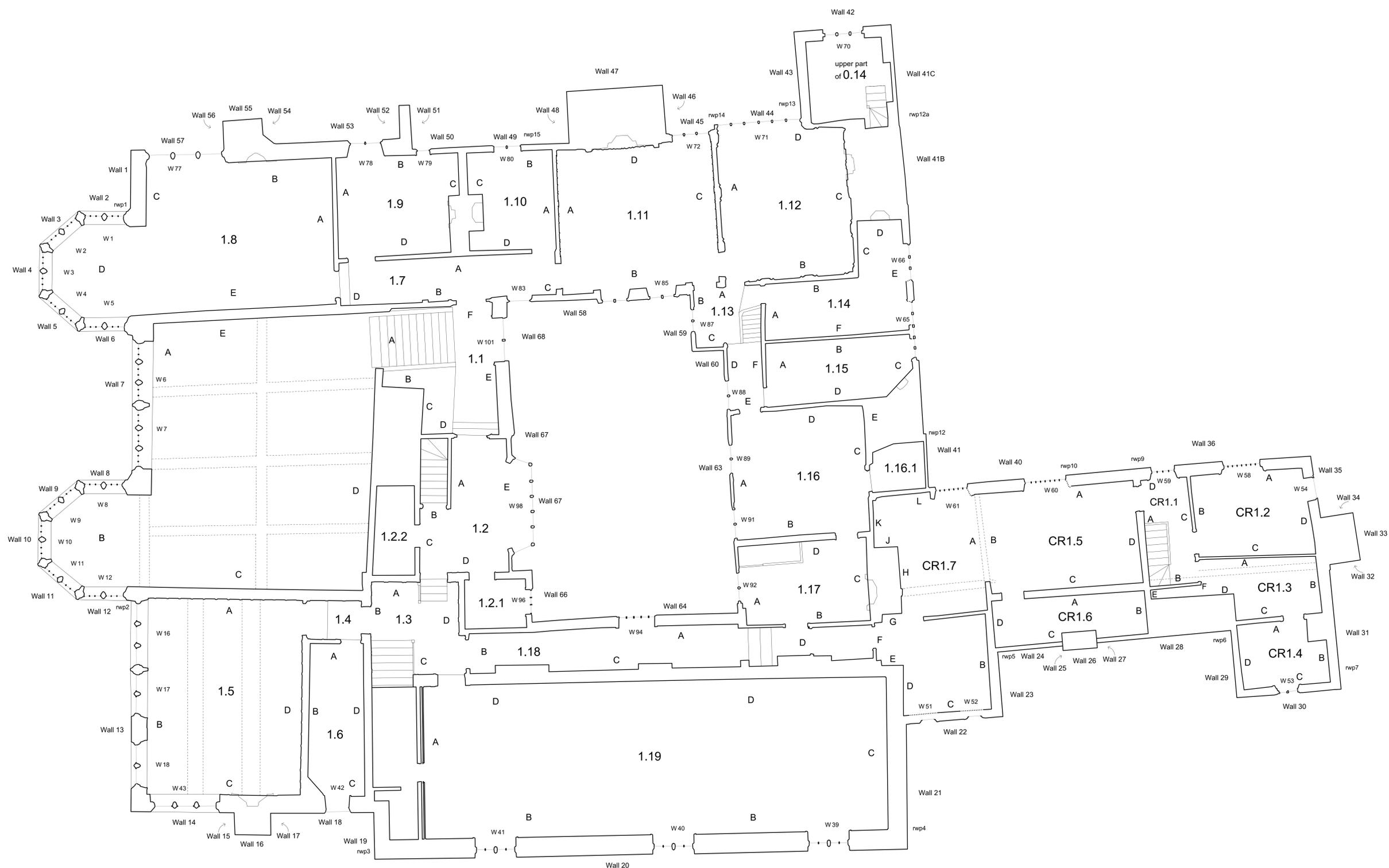
English Heritage (2010) *Marketing the Past, Conservation Bulletin 64*

National Trust (2008) *Conservation Principles*

National Trust (2011) *Manual of Housekeeping*

Hodge CJ and Beranek CM 2011 Special edition. 'Dwelling: Transforming narratives at historic house museums', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17: 97-101





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Project:
Astley Hall
Chorley, Lancashire
PR7 1NP

Job Number:
MBC/3149

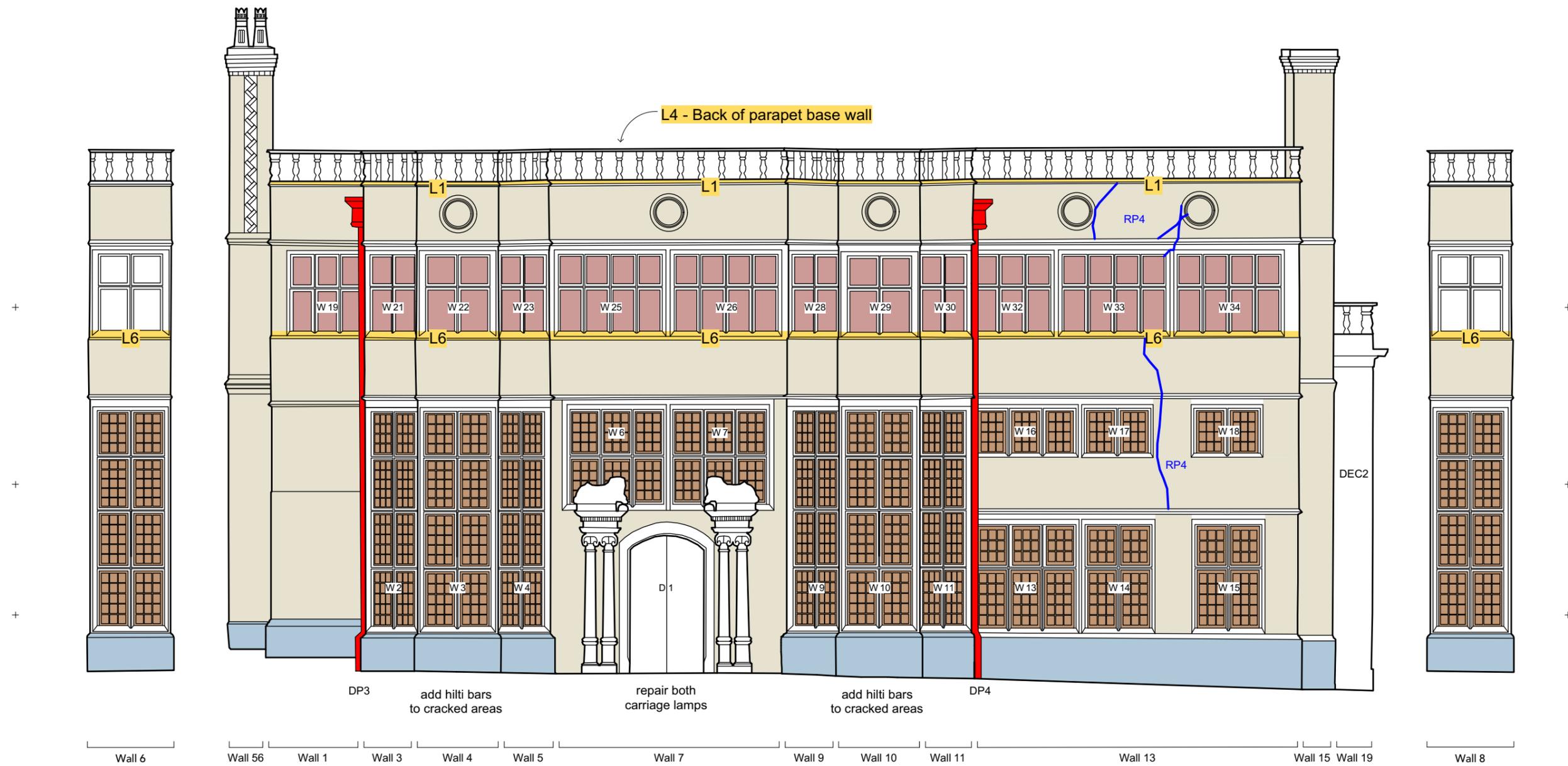
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First Floor Plan

Date: **April 2019** Scale: **1:50 at A0**

Drawing Number: **AHC-002** Revision: **A**

Drawing By: **David Smith**

- Leadwork
- Leaded Glass
- RP1 Render
- RP4 Repoint
- RP3 Repoint Stonework
- Surface Water Drainage
- Replace Windows



DP3 add hilti bars to cracked areas repair both carriage lamps add hilti bars to cracked areas DP4

Wall 6 Wall 56 Wall 1 Wall 3 Wall 4 Wall 5 Wall 7 Wall 9 Wall 10 Wall 11 Wall 13 Wall 15 Wall 19 Wall 8

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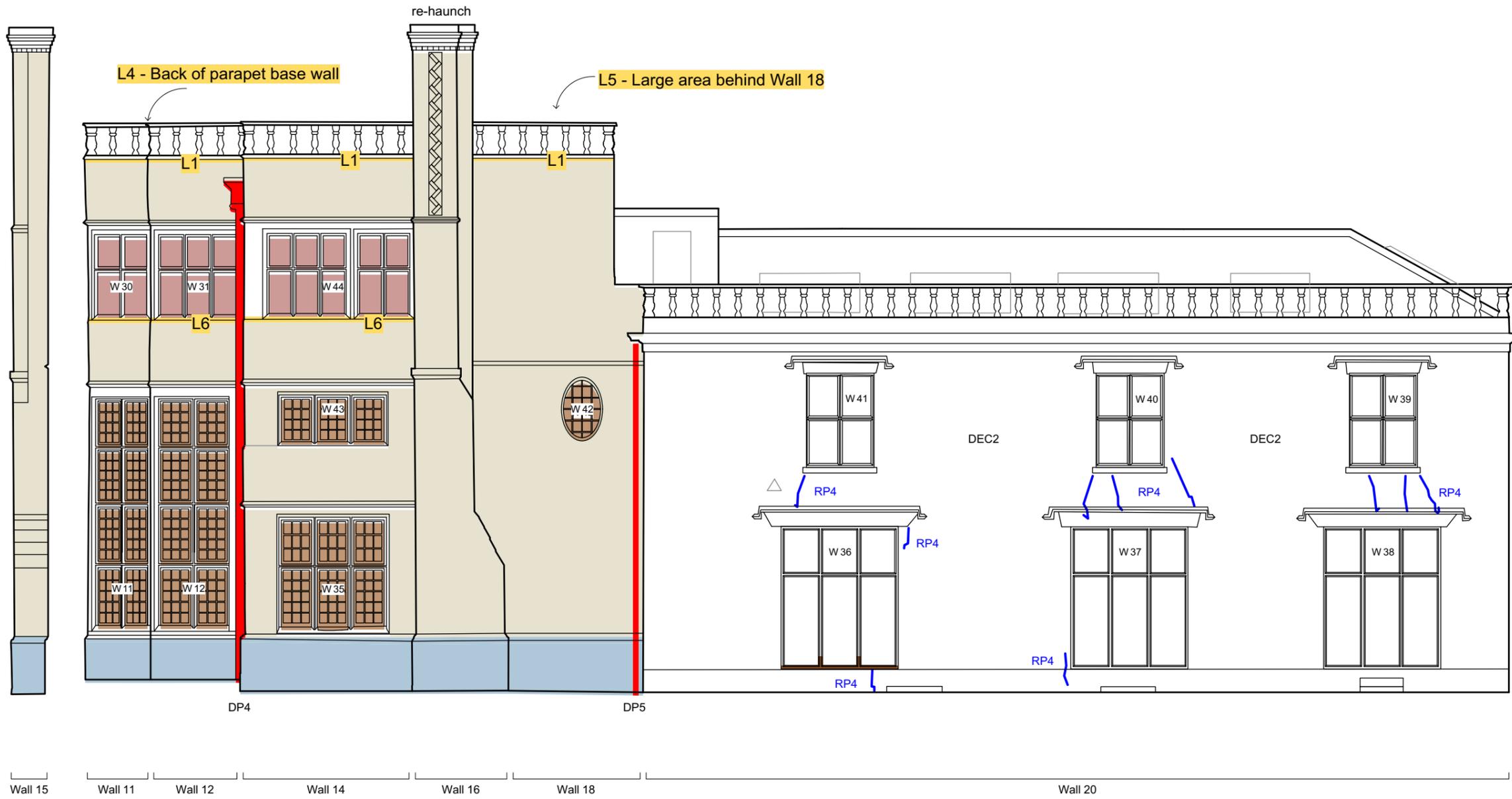
Project:
**Astley Hall, Chorley,
Lancashire, PR7 1NP**
Job Number:
MBC/3148

Title:
Phase 1 Repairs South Elevation

Date: Scale:
May 2019 1:100 at A3

Drawing Number: Revision:
AHC-P1-001 -

Drawing By: Dav Smith



- Leadwork
- Leaded Glass
- RP1 Render
- RP3 Repoint Stonework
- RP4 Repoint
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- Replace Windows
- Timber Repair / Replacement

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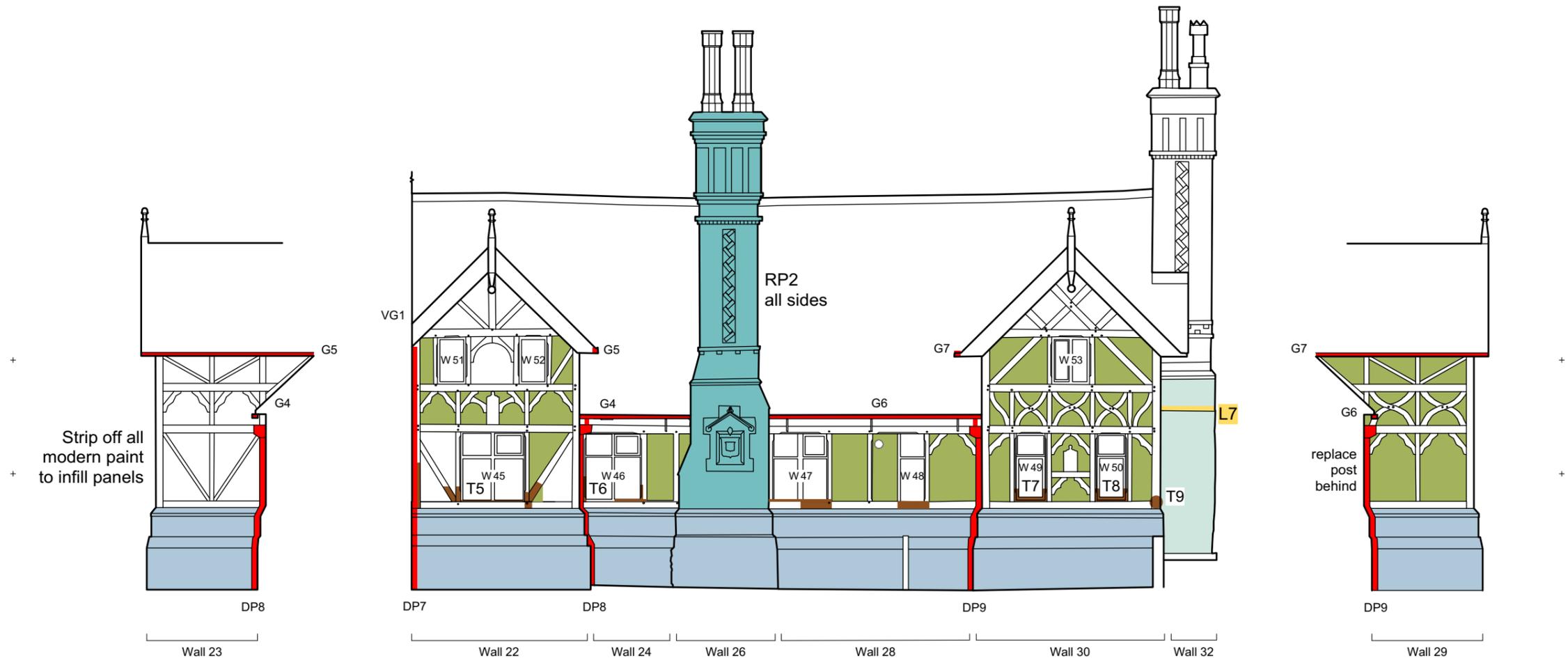
Project:
**Astley Hall, Chorley,
 Lancashire, PR7 1NP**
 Job Number:
MBC/3148

Title:
Phase 1 East Elevation Repairs

Date: **May 2019** Scale: **1:100 at A3**

Drawing Number: **AHC-P1-002** Revision: **-**

Drawing By: Dav Smith



- IF1 Infill Panels
- Leadwork
- RP2 Repoint Brickwork
- RP3 Repoint Stonework
- RP6 Repoint Stonework
- Surface Water Drainage
- Timber Repair / Replacement

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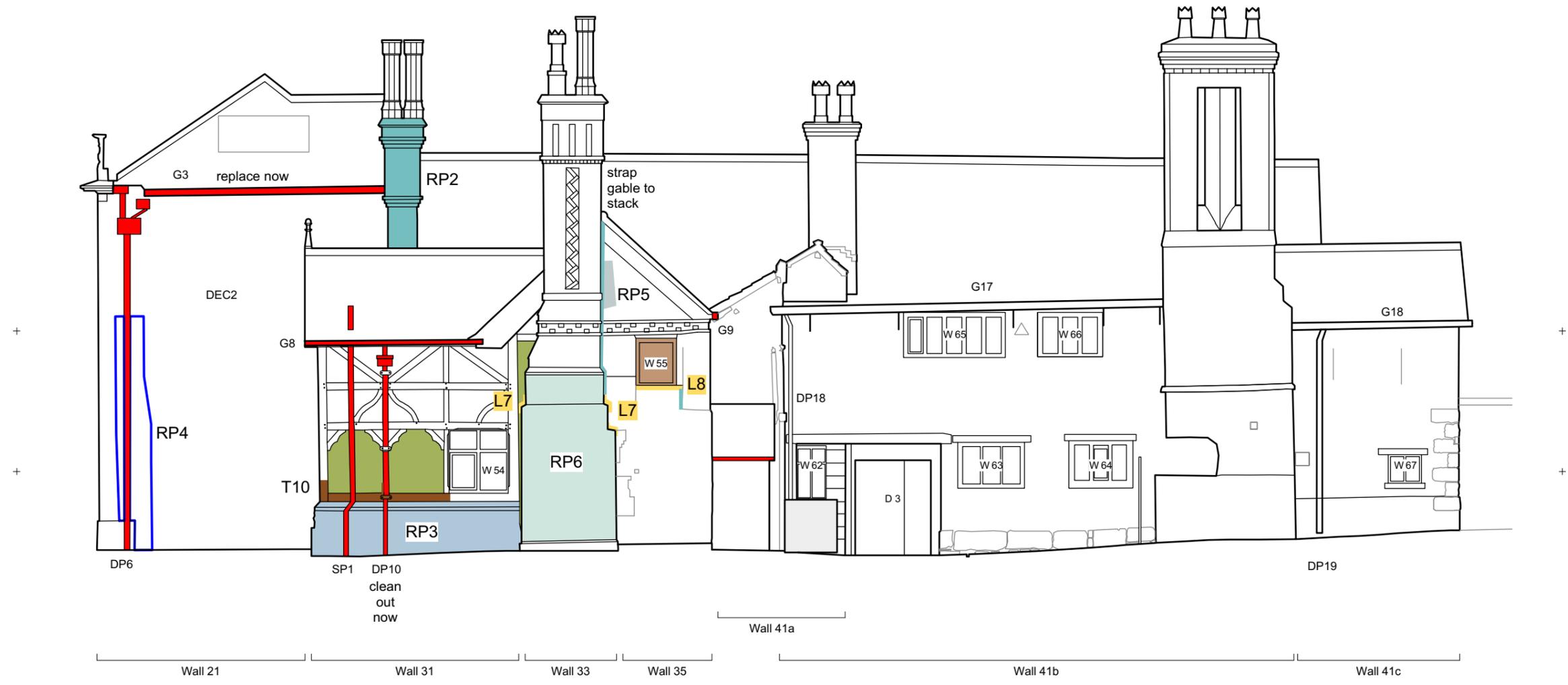
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 Repairs**

Date: **May 2019** Scale: **1:100 at A3**

Drawing Number: **AHC-P1-003** Revision: **-**

Drawing By: Dav Smith

- IF1 Infill Panels
- Leadwork
- RP2 Repoint Brickwork
- RP3 Repoint Stonework
- RP4 Re-render
- RP5 Pin Brickwork to Chimney
- RP6 Repoint Stonework
- Surface Water Drainage
- Timber Casement Windows
- Timber Repair / Replacement



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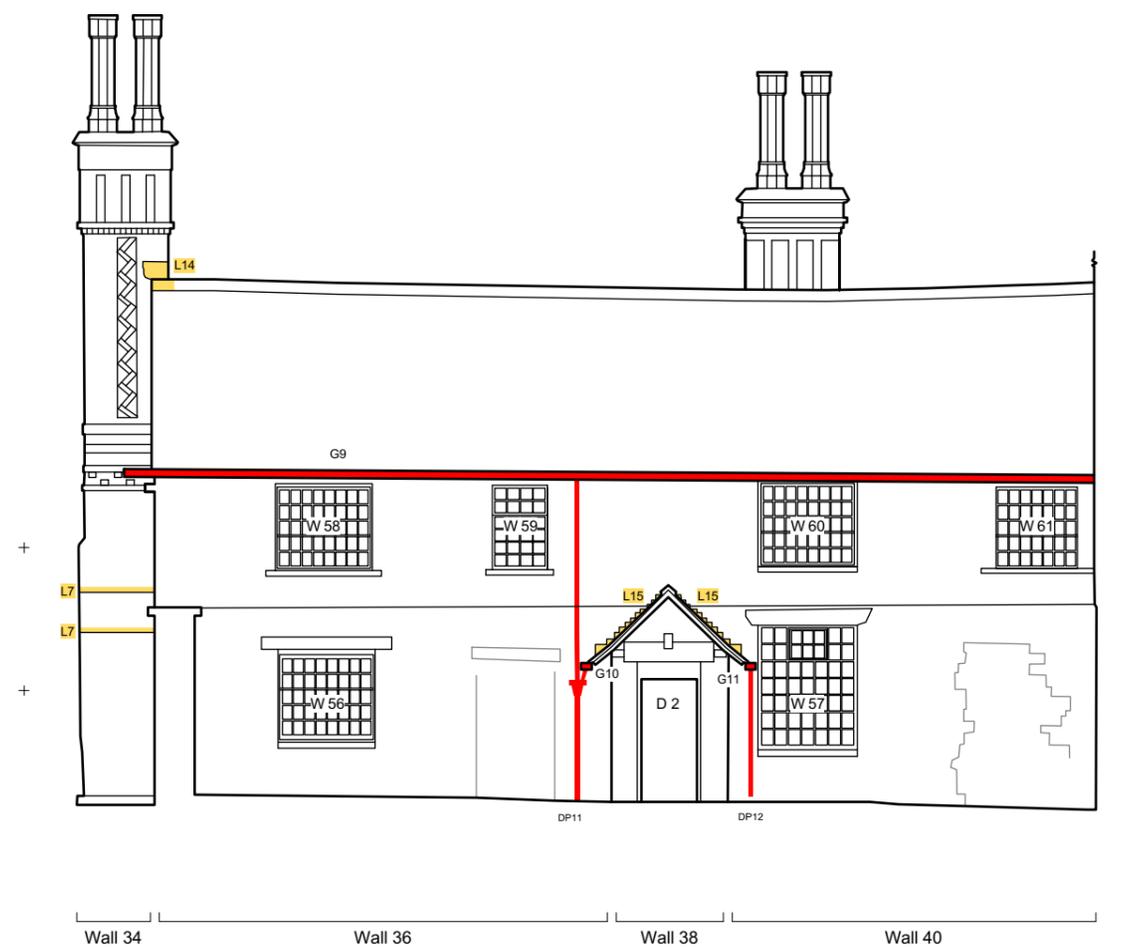
Title:
Phase 1 North Elevation Repairs

Date: **May 2019** Scale: **1:100 at A3**

Drawing Number: **AHC-P1-004** Revision: **-**

Drawing By: **Dav Smith**

- Leadwork
- Surface Water Drainage



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Project:

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Job Number:

MBC/3148

Title:

**Phase 1 Cottage West Elevation
Repairs**

Date:

May 2019

Scale:

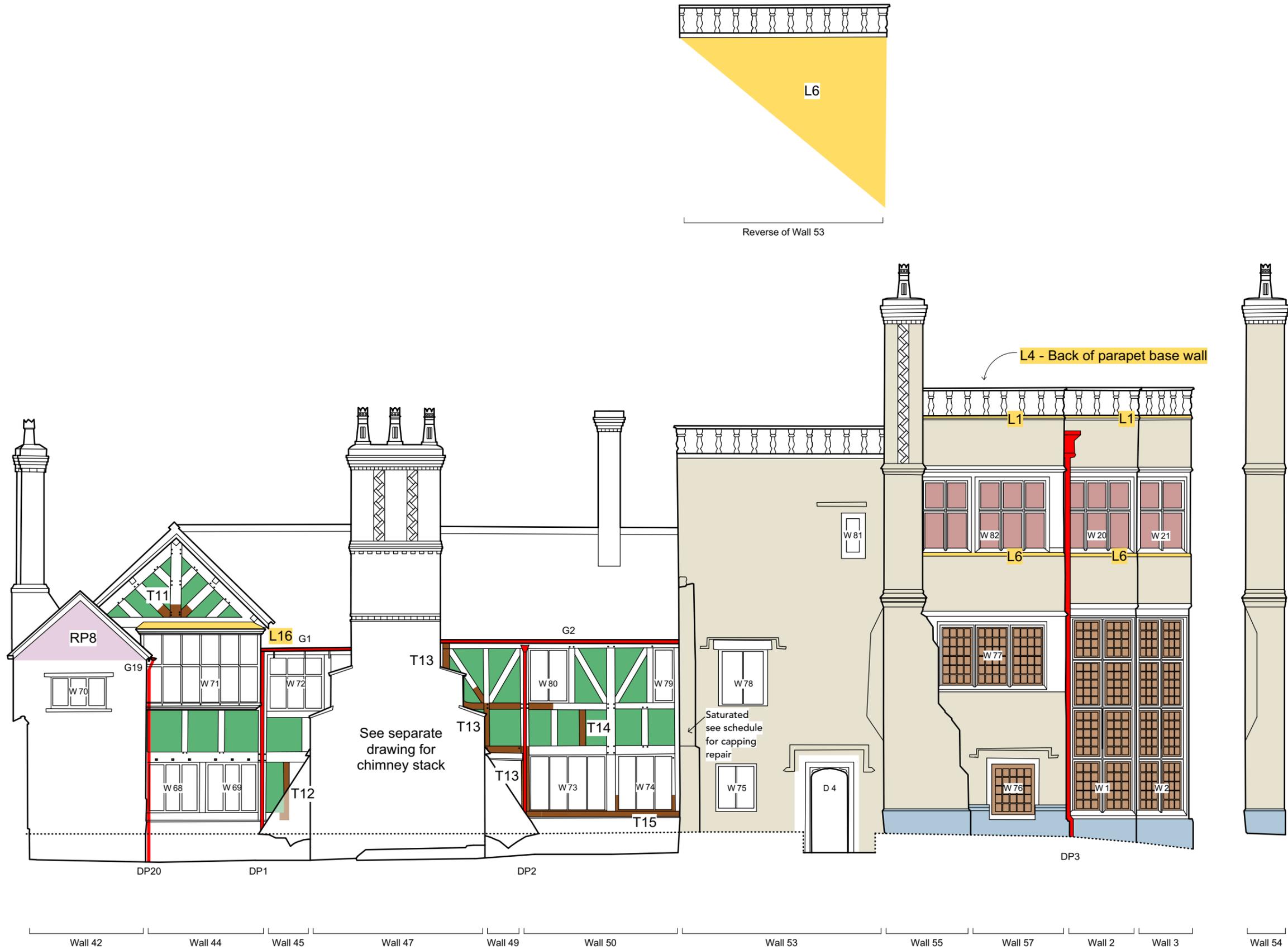
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Drawing Number: Revision:

AHC-P1-005

-

Drawing By: Dav Smith



- Surface Water Drainage
- Leadwork
- Leaded Glass
- IF2 Infill Panels
- RP1 Render
- RP3 Repoint Stonework
- RP8 Repoint Brickwork
- Replace Windows
- Timber Repair / Replacement

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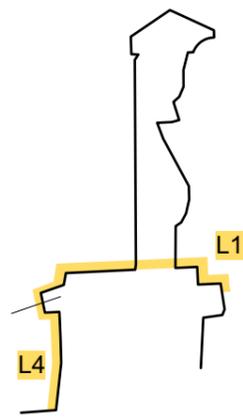
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**Astley Hall, Chorley,
 Lancashire, PR7 1NP**
 Job Number:
MBC/2017

Title:
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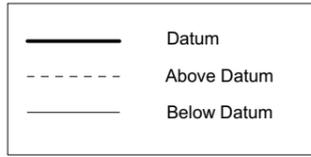
Date: **May 2019** Scale: **1:100 at A3**

Drawing Number: **AHC-048** Revision: **A**

Drawing By: Dav Smith



Parapet cross section at 1:50



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Project:
**Astley Hall, Chorley,
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Job Number:
MBC/3148

Title:
Phase 1 Roof Plan Repairs

Date: **May 2019** Scale: **1:100 at A3**

Drawing Number: **AHC-P1-007** Revision: **-**

Drawing By: **Dav Smith**



Loose Render



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Project:

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Job Number:

MBC/2017

Title:

South Elevation (Loose Render)

Date:

May 2019

Scale:

1:100 at A3

Drawing Number:

AHC-079

Revision:

-

Drawing By: Dav Smith



Loose Render



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Lancashire, PR7 1NP**

Job Number:

MBC/2017

Title:

East Elevation (Loose Render)

Date:

May 2019

Scale:

1:100 at A3

Drawing Number:

AHC-080

Revision:

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Drawing By: Dav Smith



Loose Render



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Project:

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Job Number:

MBC/2017

Title:

West Elevation (Loose Render)

Date:

May 2019

Scale:

1:100 at A3

Drawing Number:

AHC-081

Revision:

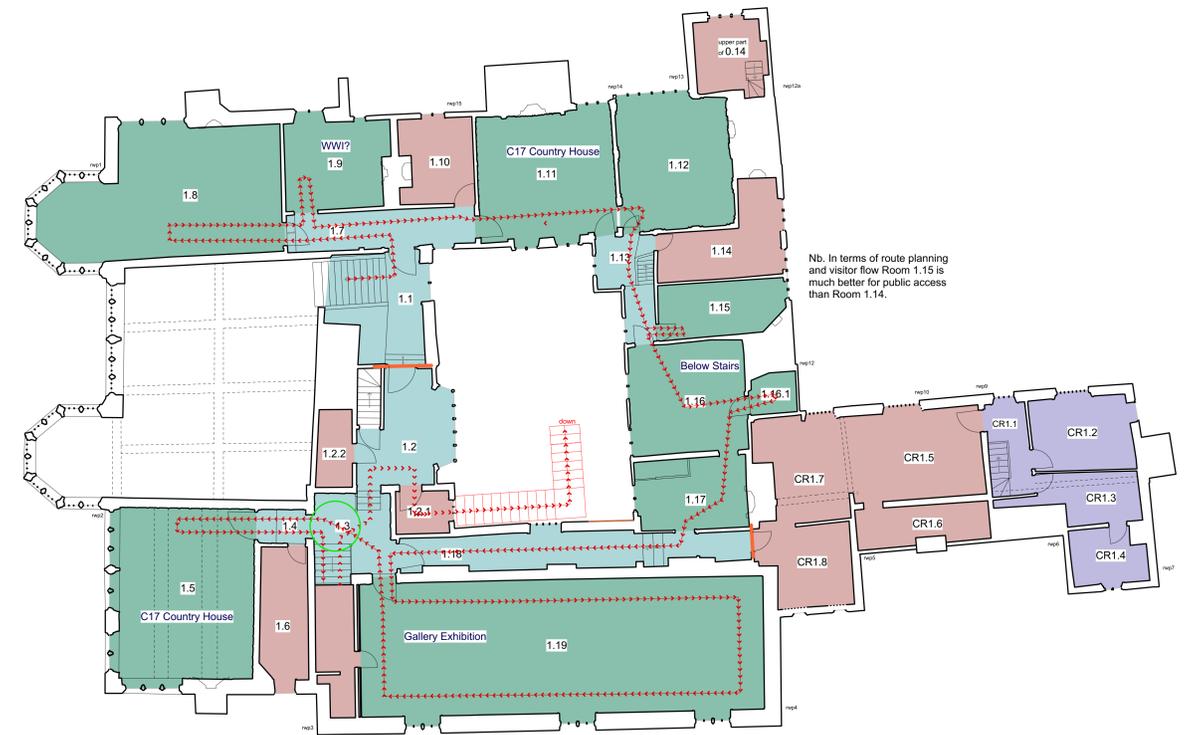
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Drawing By: Dav Smith

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

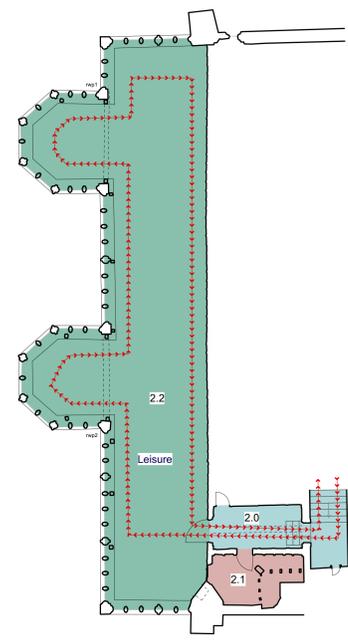


FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Nb. In terms of route planning and visitor flow Room 1.15 is much better for public access than Room 1.14.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN



RATIONALE FOR PROPOSED VISITOR ROUTE

The evolution of the house has resulted in a jumble of rooms with a complicated access pattern, including the lack of external ground floor access across the rear (north) of the building. Consequently, the house does not lend itself to a linear visitor route. The visitor route proposed here seeks to provide a logical visitor circuit with a minimum of retrograde movements and which addresses the known constraints and issues outlined below.

ADVANTAGES

- Provides distinct entry point that is visible from the coach house and from the park, reducing the need for signage and creating a good visitor first impression on entering the site.
- Creates a clear visitor circuit with distinct interpretative zones and minimised overlaps and retrograde movement.
- Saves the 'wow' factor spaces of the Great Hall and Dining Room to the end of the ground floor route.
- Provides a retail opportunity in an under-utilised space near the visitor exit, which leads directly to the market garden.
- Requires minimal intervention in the historic fabric.
- Incorporates additional WCs including an accessible disabled WC near the entrance.

ISSUES FOR RESOLUTION

- The current access to the proposed entry point has steps and does not presently allow disabled access. A landscaping solution will be required to facilitate this, which will have aesthetic and budgetary implications.
- The proposed route requires the installation of a new external staircase in the courtyard. A new staircase is deemed necessary to allow egress from the building and to manage and limit the loading on the present staircases. The existing servant stairs are not appropriate for visitor use (structurally or in terms of volume), meaning only the principal staircase may presently be used. Utilising this single historic stair for travel in both directions would subject it to excessive wear and loading, as well as resulting in a muddled visitor route with significant replication of the route to egress. The proposed new staircase - **shown representatively only** - would have minimal impact on the historic fabric and represent a minimal visual intrusion on the experience of the space, while allowing a safe new means of egress and fire exit from the first floor.

Known Constraints / Issues Considered

- Entrance and ticket checking
- Provision of WCs
- Location of Retail Opportunities
- Ground floor circuit, including across north range
- Loadings on main staircases between floors
- Use of servant stairs
- Accessibility
- Doorway connections between 1.11 - 1.12 - 1.13
- Function and route planning to 1.8
- Route pinch points @ 1.3 and 1.7
- Exit point at end of visitor route.

Potential Route Zoning of Narrative Interpretation

FLOOR	Room	Interpretation
GROUND FLOOR	0.4	Introduction to the wider Estate
	0.11 - 0.13	From Estate to Kitchen - Domestic Life at Astley
	0.8 - 0.7	Living at Astley (C19) / Townley Parkers?
	0.2 - 0.1	C17 Bling / Aspirational Astley
FIRST FLOOR	1.9	WWI / Chorley Pals Diversion
	1.10 - 1.12 + 1.5	Living at Astley (C17)
SECOND FLOOR	2.2	Leisure in the Country House
FIRST FLOOR	1.1.9	Gallery Exhibition
	1.1.7 - 1.1.5	Below Stairs at Astley

xExit to rear via Shop in 0.18.1

- Public Space
- Access Space
- W.C. Space
- Storage Space
- Staff Space
- Services Space
- Retail Space
- Visitor route
- Route barriers
- Pinch points
- Proposed Narrative Themes



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Job Number:
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Title:
Proposed Space Use & Visitor Route (Scheme 1)

Date: **24-05-2019** Scale: **1:100 at A0**

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Drawing By: **Dav Smith**