



## Renovation and restructuring of the Tholsel

Kilkenny County Council

Architectural Design Statement  
Submitted with Part 8 Planning Application

Renovation and restructuring of the Tholsel Building  
(Town Hall) on High Street, Kilkenny

11th January 2019  
Reddy Architecture + Urbanism

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FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY



The arcades of the Tholsel

## 1.1 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Reddy Architecture + Urbanism on behalf of Kilkenny County Council for a Part VIII Planning Application in accordance with the Planning and Development Acts 2000- 2013 and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 - 2018 and B1.1 of Appendix B of Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities.

The Tholsel is a Protected Structure included in the Record of Protected Structures for Kilkenny, Ref. RPS Ref B43 (NIAH Ref.1200061) and is located within the Kilkenny Architectural Conservation Area.

The design shown in the proposals has been reached after a consultation process with Kilkenny County Council and other State bodies which also included a Pre-Planning Meeting in September 2018.

The report follows the information requirements for Architecture Impact Assessment set out in Appendix B of Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

This Architectural Design Statement has been produced to explain the design rationale for the proposed development and to confirm the appropriateness and validity of the design proposal.

### The Brief

The brief provided by Kilkenny County Council outlined the requirements to renovate and remodel the building to ensure that the building can continue to play an important role in the administration and functioning of the city while also taking on a new role as a tourist destination within Kilkenny.

The brief includes a number of different areas:

- to convert the inner porch area at ground floor level to act as an entrance way to both the adjacent Medieval Mile Museum and the upper floors
- to remove the previously inserted floor at the half level to restore the Mayoral Office to full height
- to create a new reception/exhibition space at second floor level
- to provide access to the basement area of the building and to make the basement suitable for use as a tourism attraction.
- to renovate and remodel the existing building to improve accessibility and fire safety, providing a lift and new stairs to all levels
- the fourth floor will continue to house an open plan office and meeting room for the Council, also housed on this level are sanitary facilities and public access to the Cupola.

### Objectives

In clearly defining and subsequently delivering on this project, the team determined that the following objectives were paramount to achieving the combined aspirations of the project team and more importantly, Kilkenny County Council and the wider community in Kilkenny given the civic importance of the Tholsel in Kilkenny:

The reinvention of this iconic building at the heart of the urban fabric of the medieval city is a significant opportunity and change in terms of architectural design. The proposals serve to protect the integrity of the protected structure and ensure that it meets its new brief and requirements as one of the most important visitor centres for the city and county.

The core objectives of the design team are:

- to protect and enhance the civic function of the building.
- to improve public access to the building in accordance with the Disability Act.
- to create a worthwhile tourist attraction underlining the importance of the Tholsel's role in the history of Kilkenny.
- to create a sensitive intervention to a protected structure to improve the presentation of the rear of the building.



"The Tholsel" linocut print by Sue Greene

## 1.2 Project Team

In response to the location of the site, the protected structure status of the Athy Heritage Centre, the location of the site within a zone of archaeological potential, and the significance of the proposed development the applicant, Kildare County Council, have assembled a design team with a strong record in successfully delivering conservation projects within town centre environments.

The key members of the design team are:

Architect:	Reddy A+U 41 Dean Street, Irishtown, Kilkenny City
Conservation Architect:	Cathal Crimmins Architect The Courtyard, 40 Main Street, Blackrock, County Dublin
Structural Engineer:	Martin Peters Associates, Consulting Engineers, Ormonde Road, Kilkenny City
M&E Engineer:	Noel Lawler Consulting Engineers 7 Patrick St, Gardens, Kilkenny
Archaeologist:	Kilkenny Archaeology 12 Parliament street Kilkenny City
Exhibition Designers:	Bright Media Greenside House 25 Greenside Place Edinburgh EH1 3AA
Quantity Surveyors:	Nolan Construction Consultants 10 Ormonde Street, Kilkenny



Early 20th Century postcard of the Tholsel and the High Street

## 2.0 Brief History of the Tholsel

The earliest reference to a Tholsel is from 1308, the 14th Century building was located south of the current building, on the High Street. The present structure is the third Tholsel built on this site in 1761, it has been restored and extended several times over the last three centuries:

1579 - First Tholsel built on the current site

1695 - Second Tholsel built on the current site

**1761** - Third Tholsel built by Alderman William Colles. faced with Kilkenny Limestone

1812 - Kilkenny shield erected on the South facade

1829 - Curved extension built to house Mayor's Chamber

1951 - Substantial renovation and extension

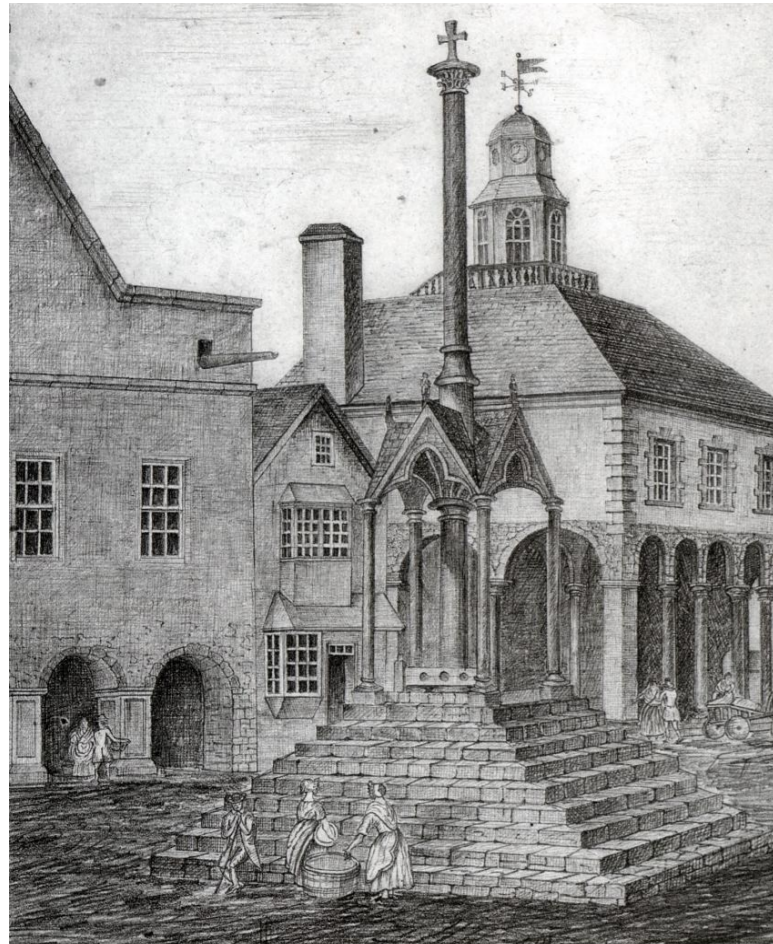
1985 - Upper levels of the building badly damaged by fire. Substantial refurbishment followed.



1841 OS Map: The basement was originally accessed by ramps from the street



ca. 1953: Renovation works



ca 1770: The Market Cross and Tholsel. The Market Cross was removed in 1771



1842 view from St. Marys. The Alms House is visible on the right



20th September 1985: Many people in Kilkenny clearly remember this event.

3.1 External Photographs of the Existing Building



View from the High Street looking South



Part of rear facade from St. Mary's Lane



Rear of the Tholsel from St. Mary's Church

View of the railings and main entrances



View of arcades and railings



3.2 Internal Photographs of the Existing Building



Current trapdoor access to basement from arcades

Basement: Steps to trapdoor



Basement: Door into South-East cellar

Basement: Brick vaults looking South

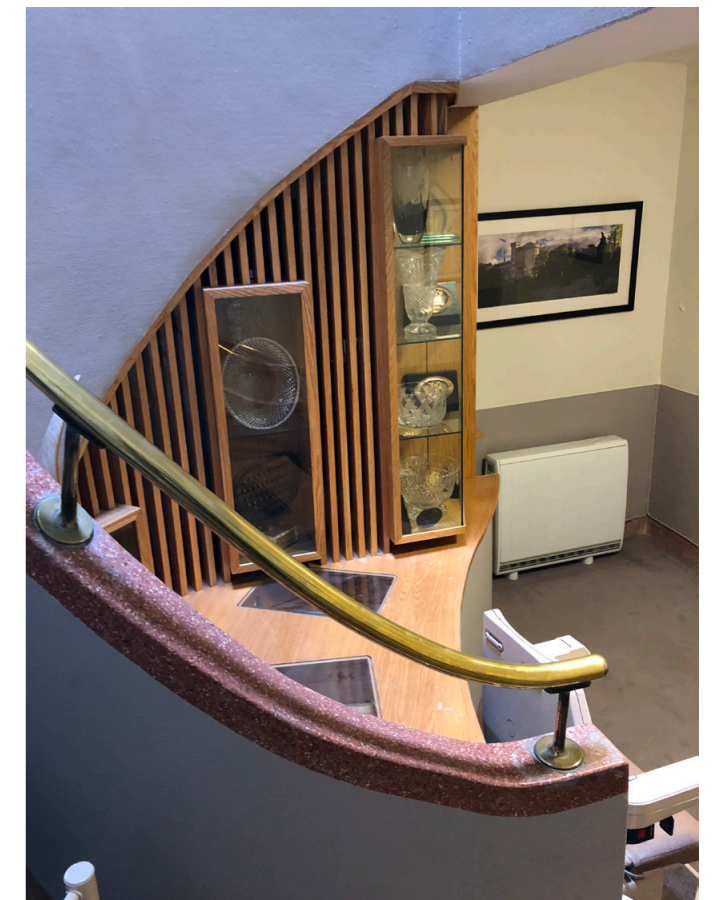


Staircase in ground floor return

Ground floor: Ceremonial Staircase



Ground floor: Ceremonial Staircase and entrance area



3.2 Internal Photographs of the Existing Building



First floor: Ceremonial Staircase



Second floor: Mayor's Parlour



Second floor: Corporate Affairs office



Third floor: Suspected window surround

Second floor: Council Chamber



Second floor: Lobby



Third floor mezzanine: Office





3.2 Internal Photographs of the Existing Building



Fourth floor: Open plan office

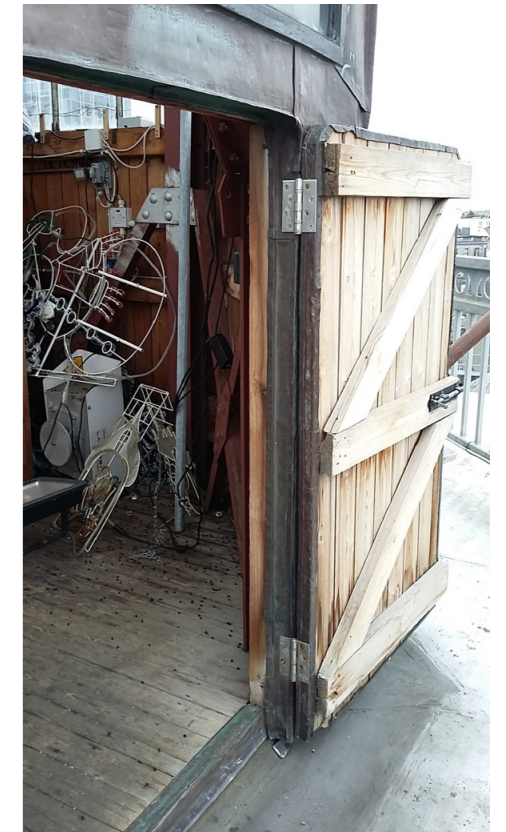


Fourth floor: Office in return

Fourth floor: Spiral stair to Cupola



Cupola: Stair housing



Cupola: Door to balcony

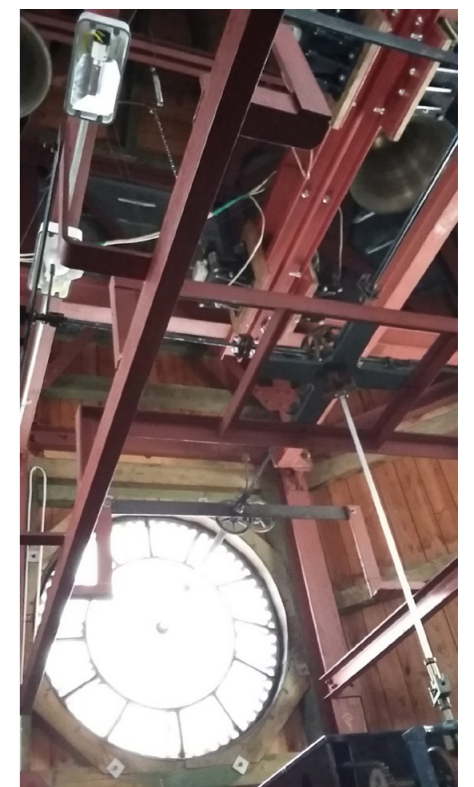
Fourth floor: Open plan office



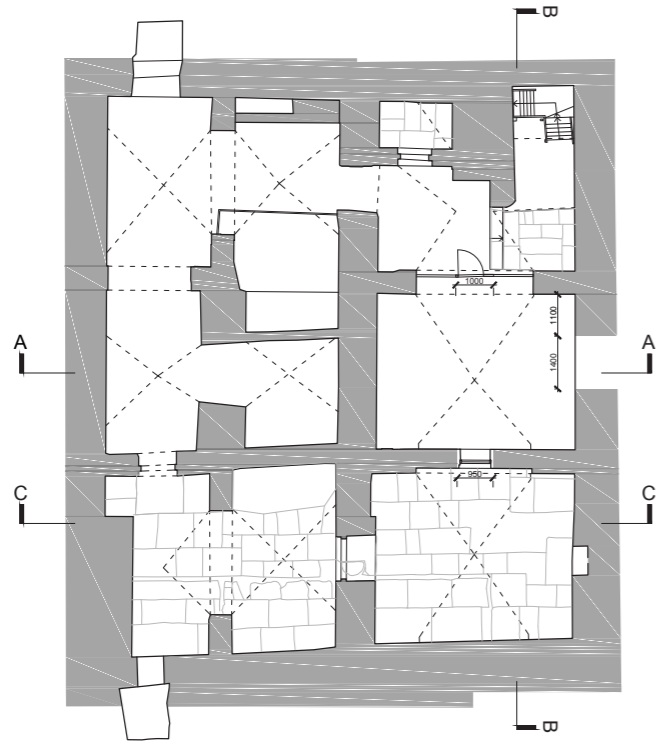
Cupola: Looking up towards bell chamber



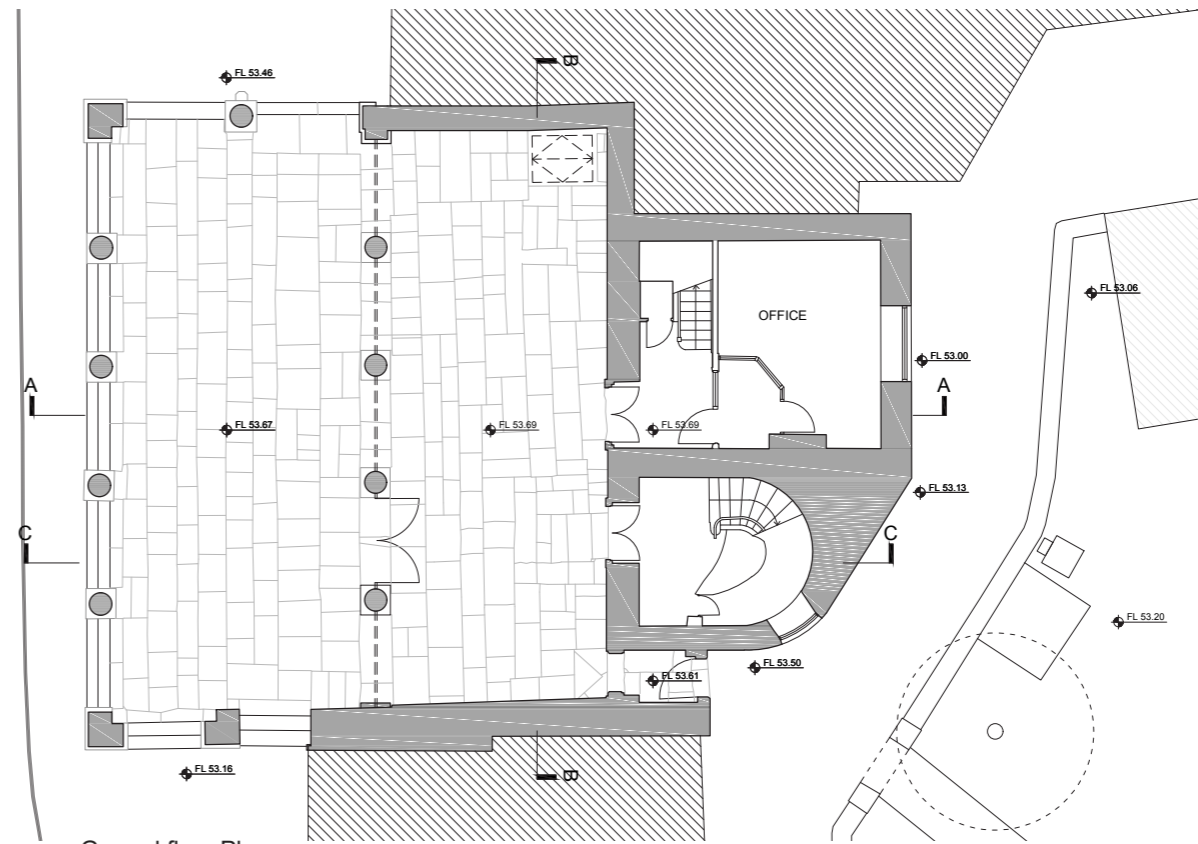
Cupola: Inside the bell chamber



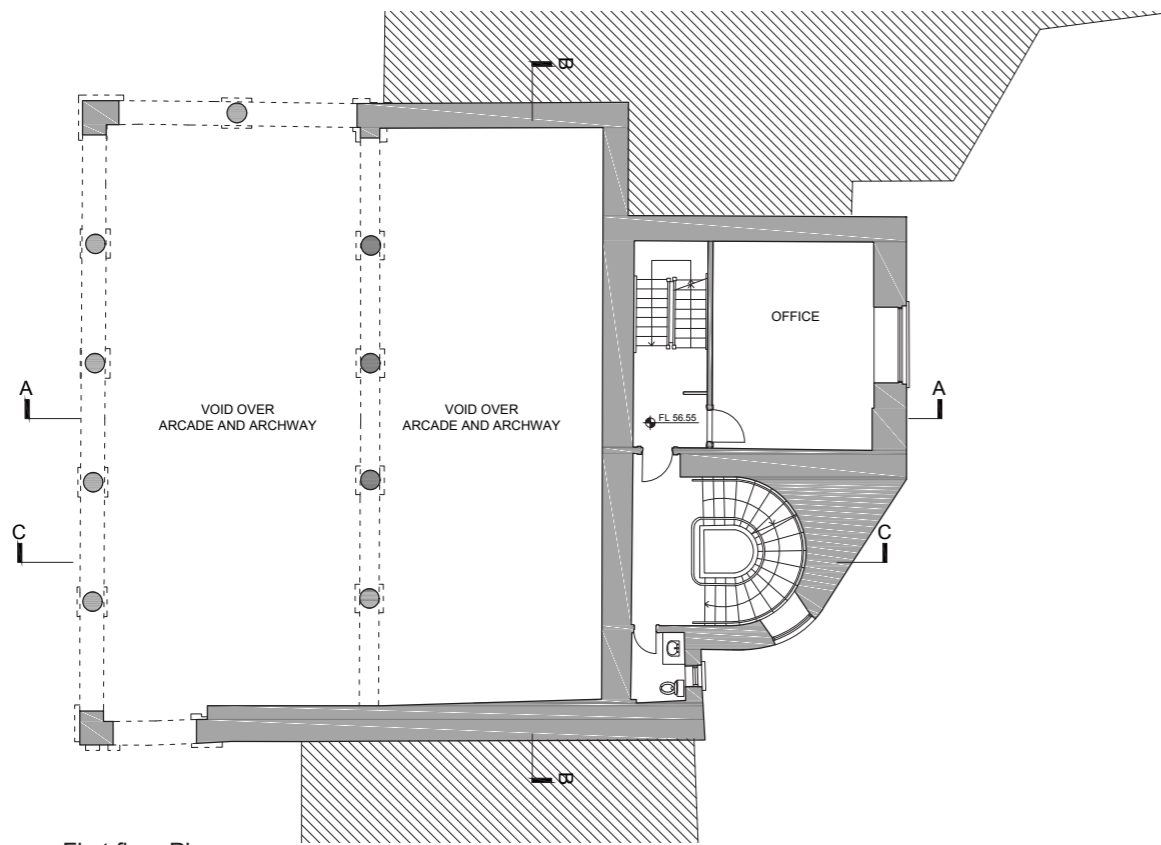
4.0 Drawings of Existing Building



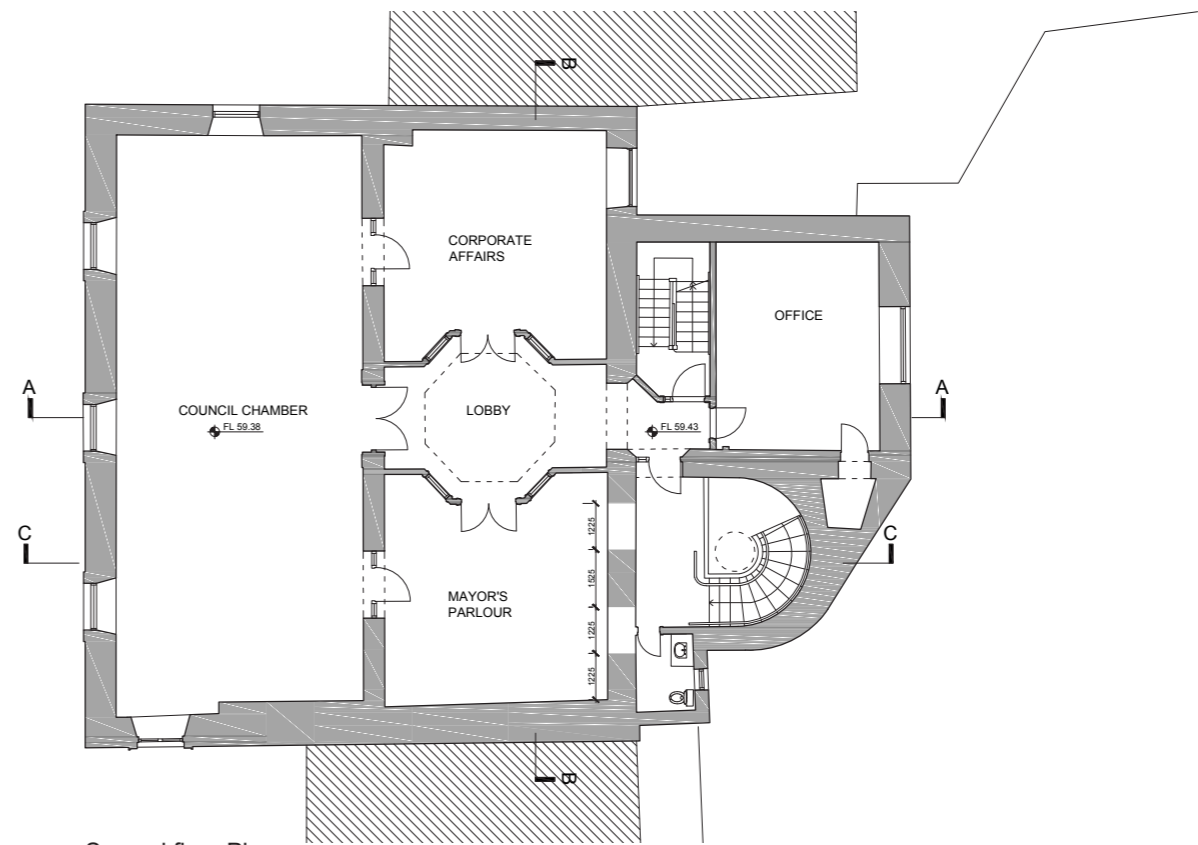
Basement Plan



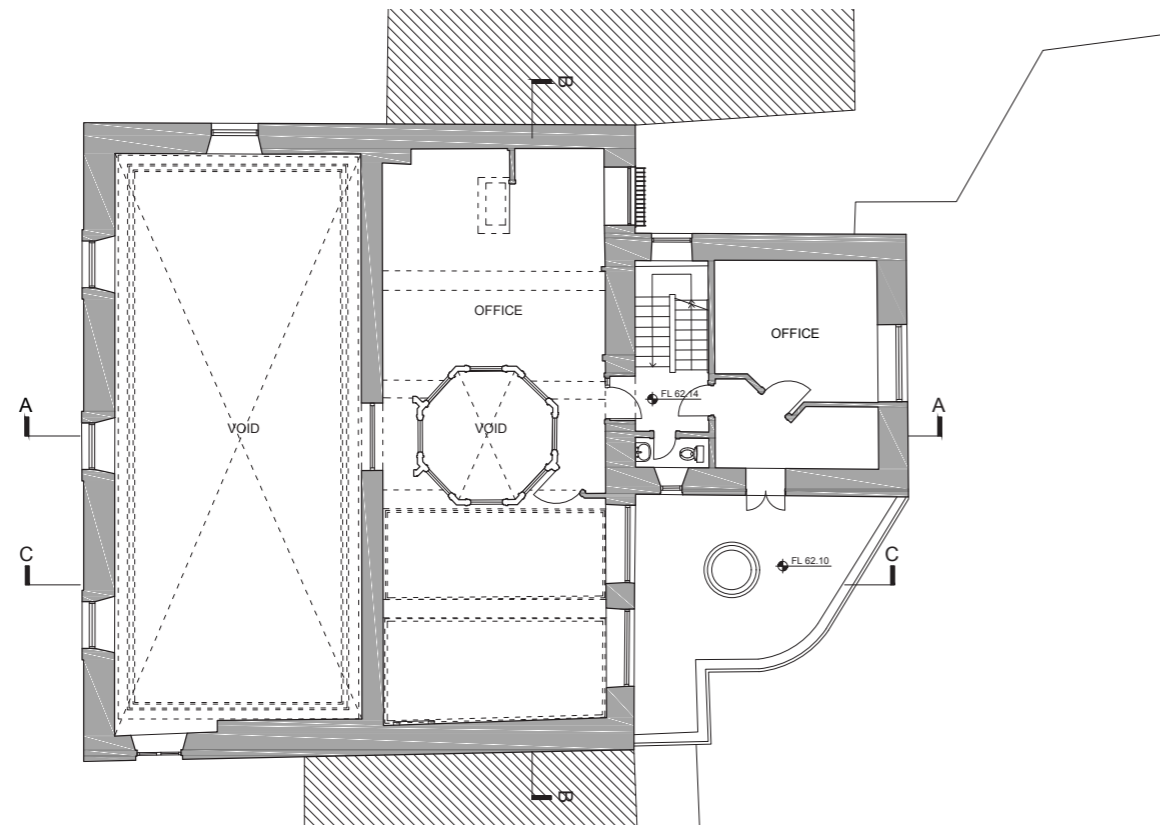
Ground floor Plan



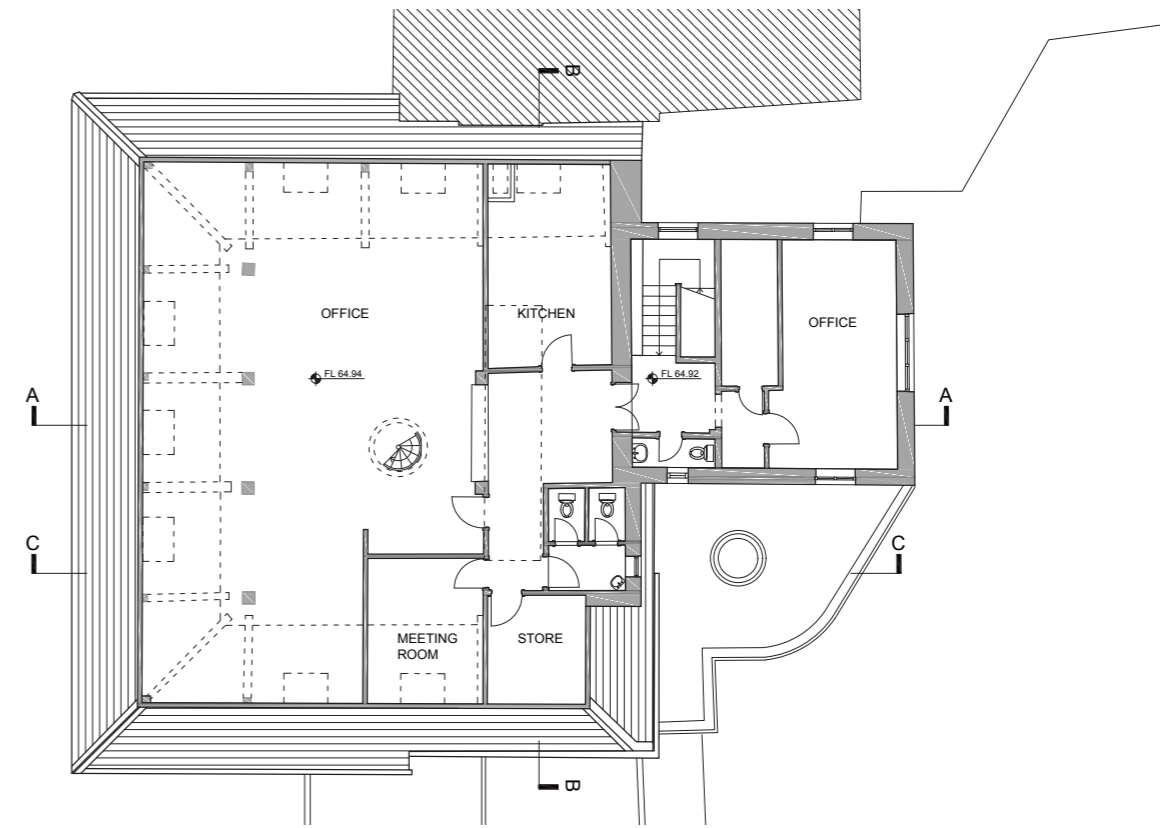
First floor Plan



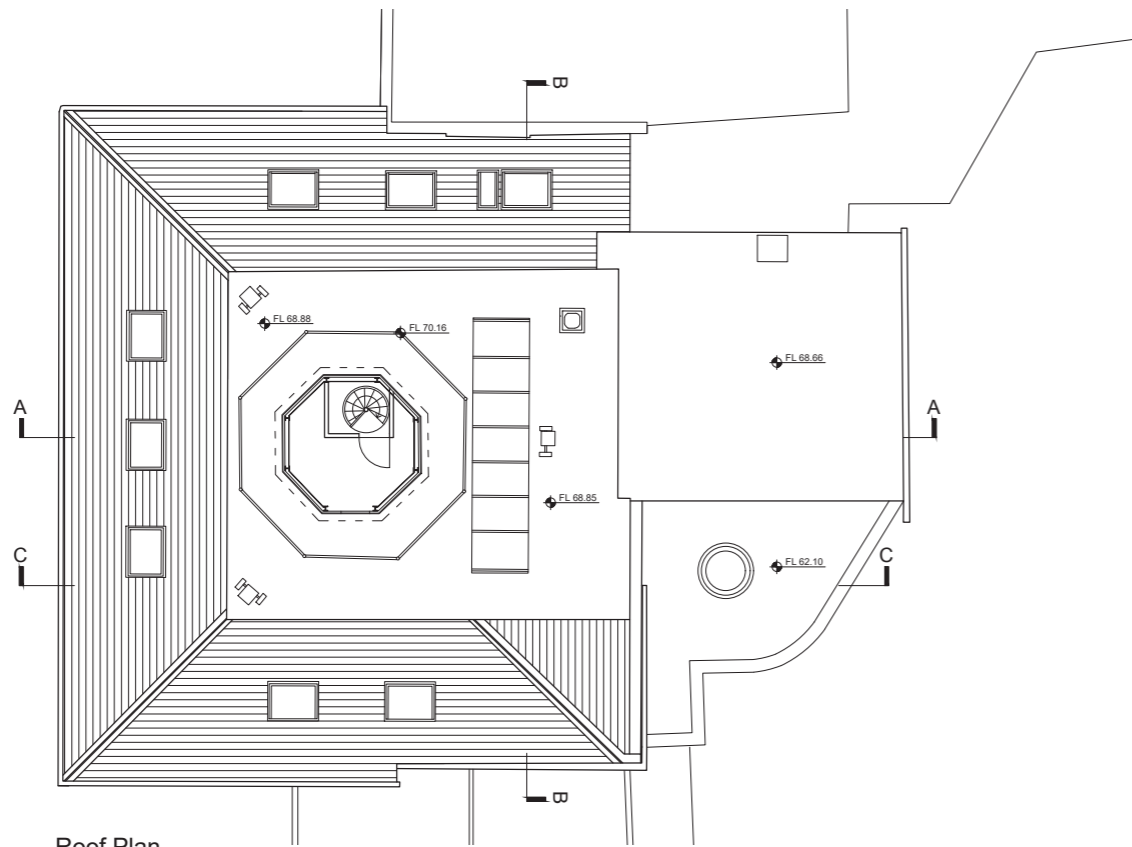
Second floor Plan



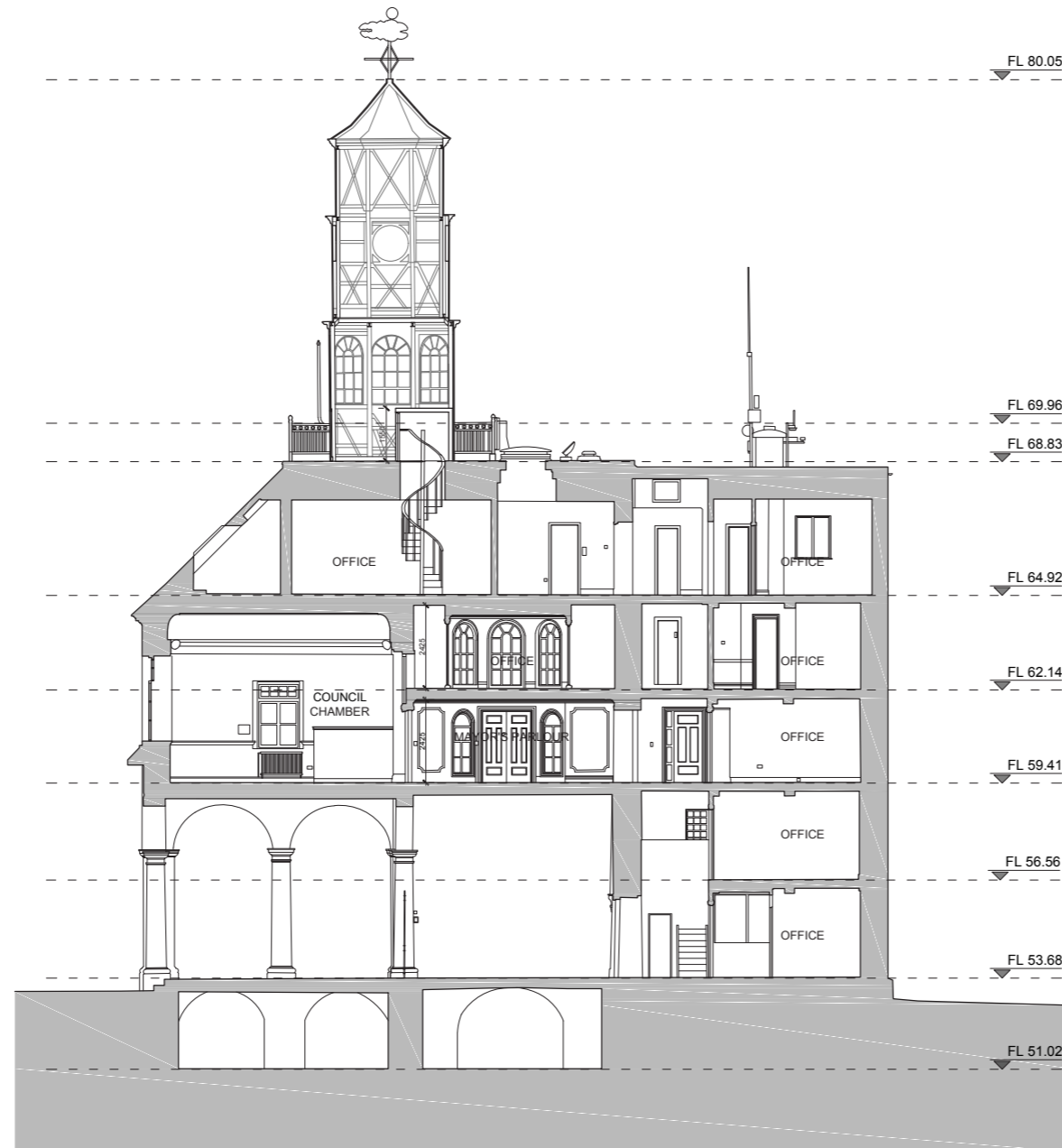
Third floor Plan



Fourth floor Plan



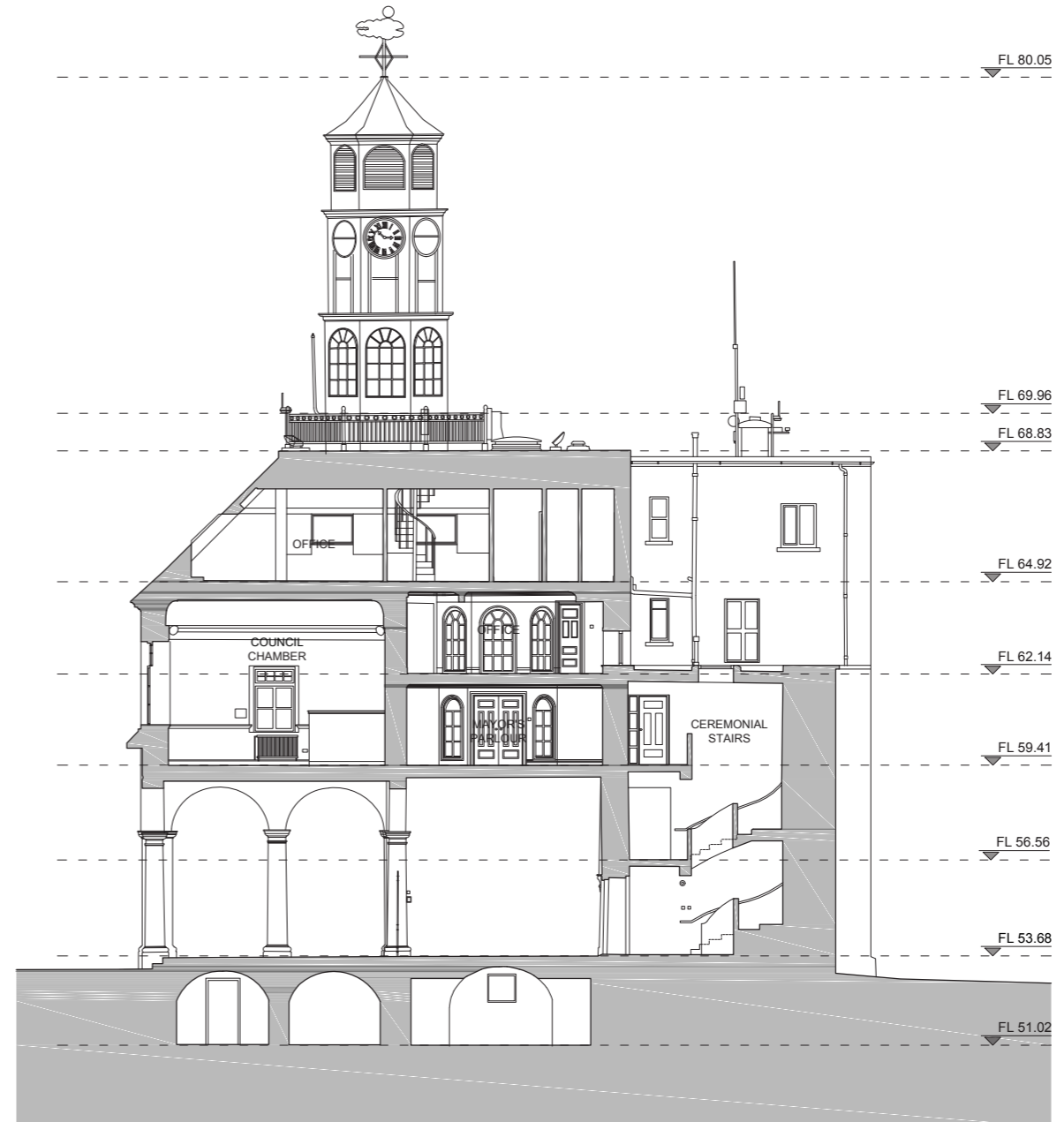
Roof Plan



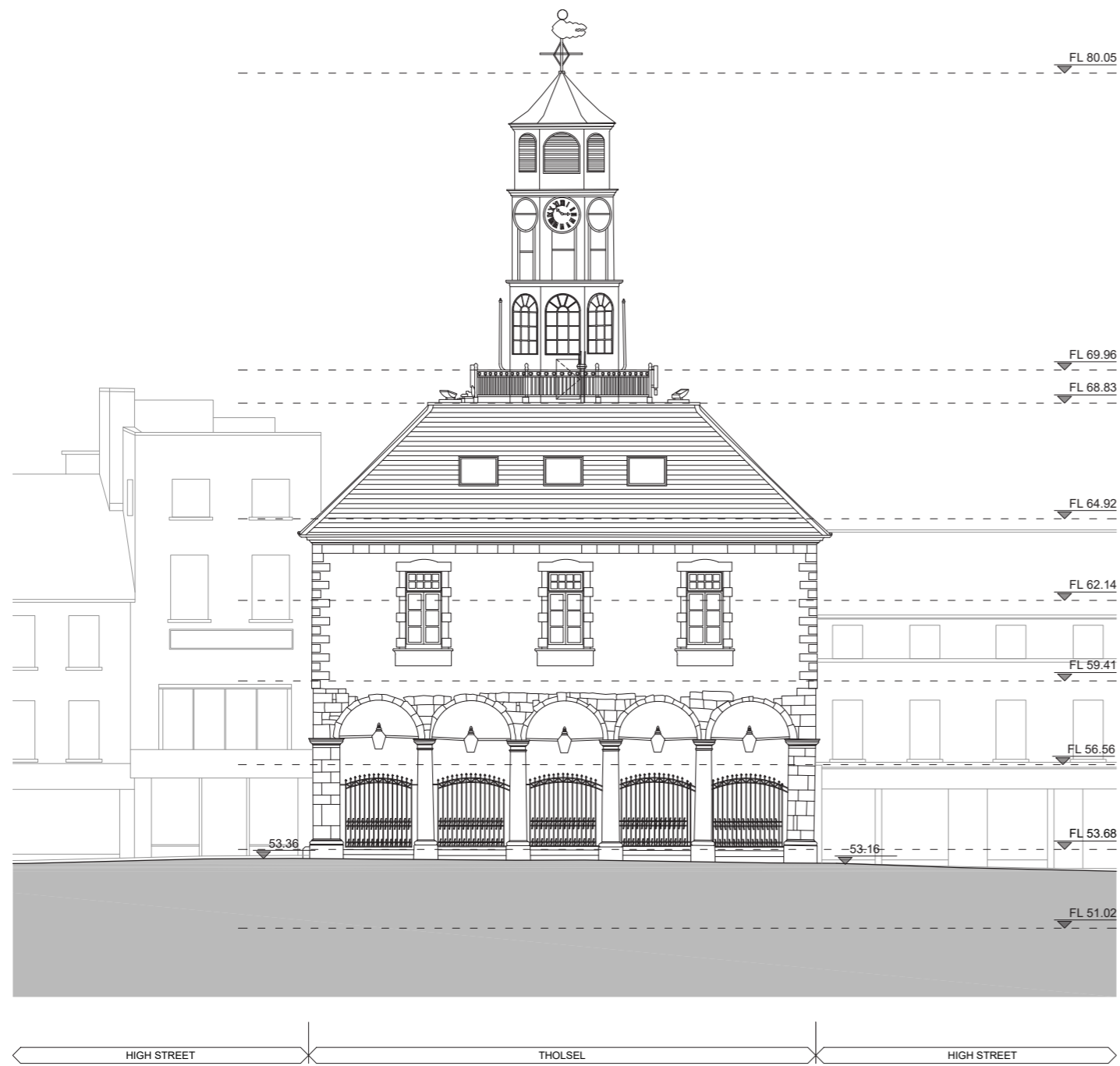
Section A



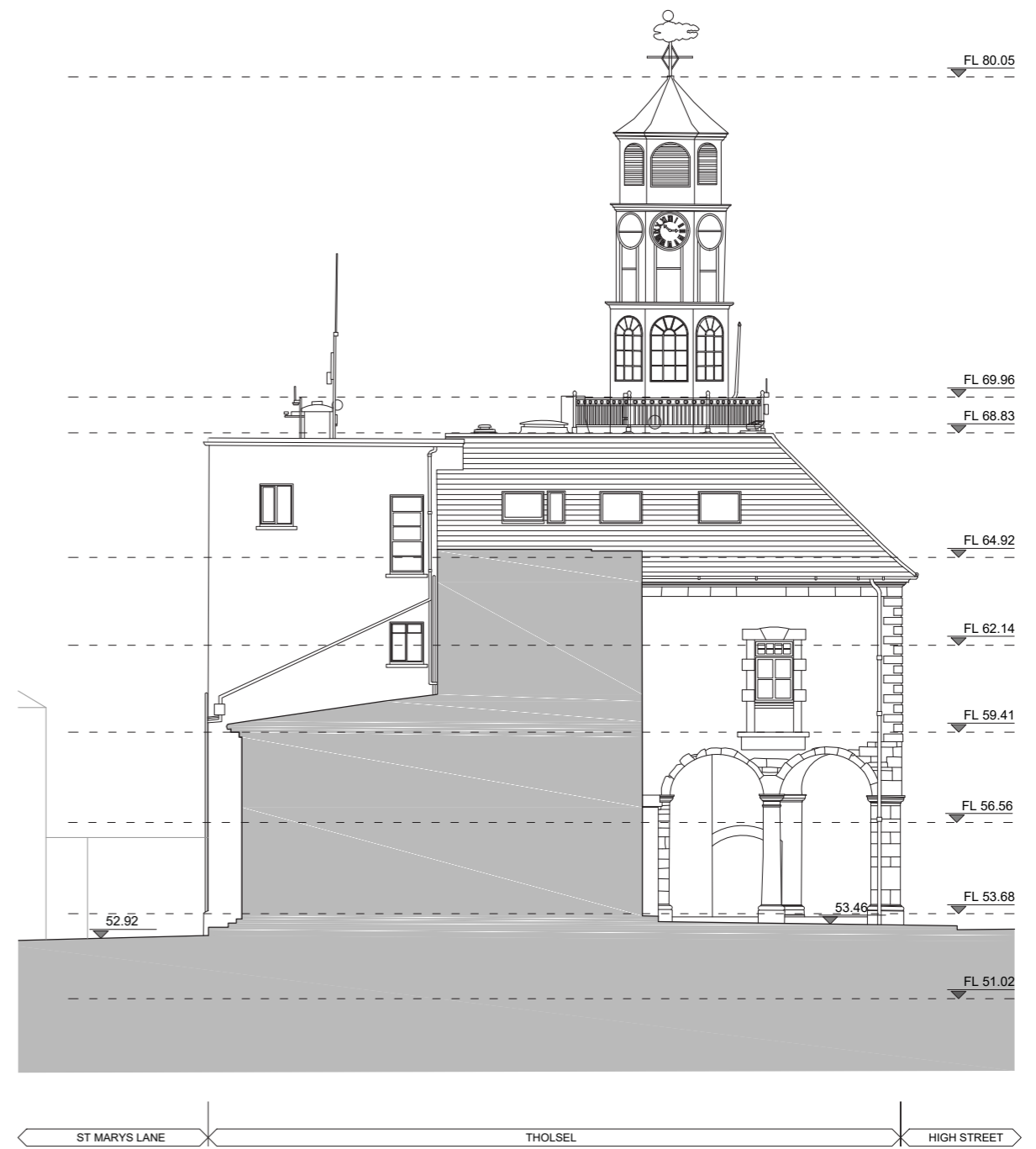
Section B



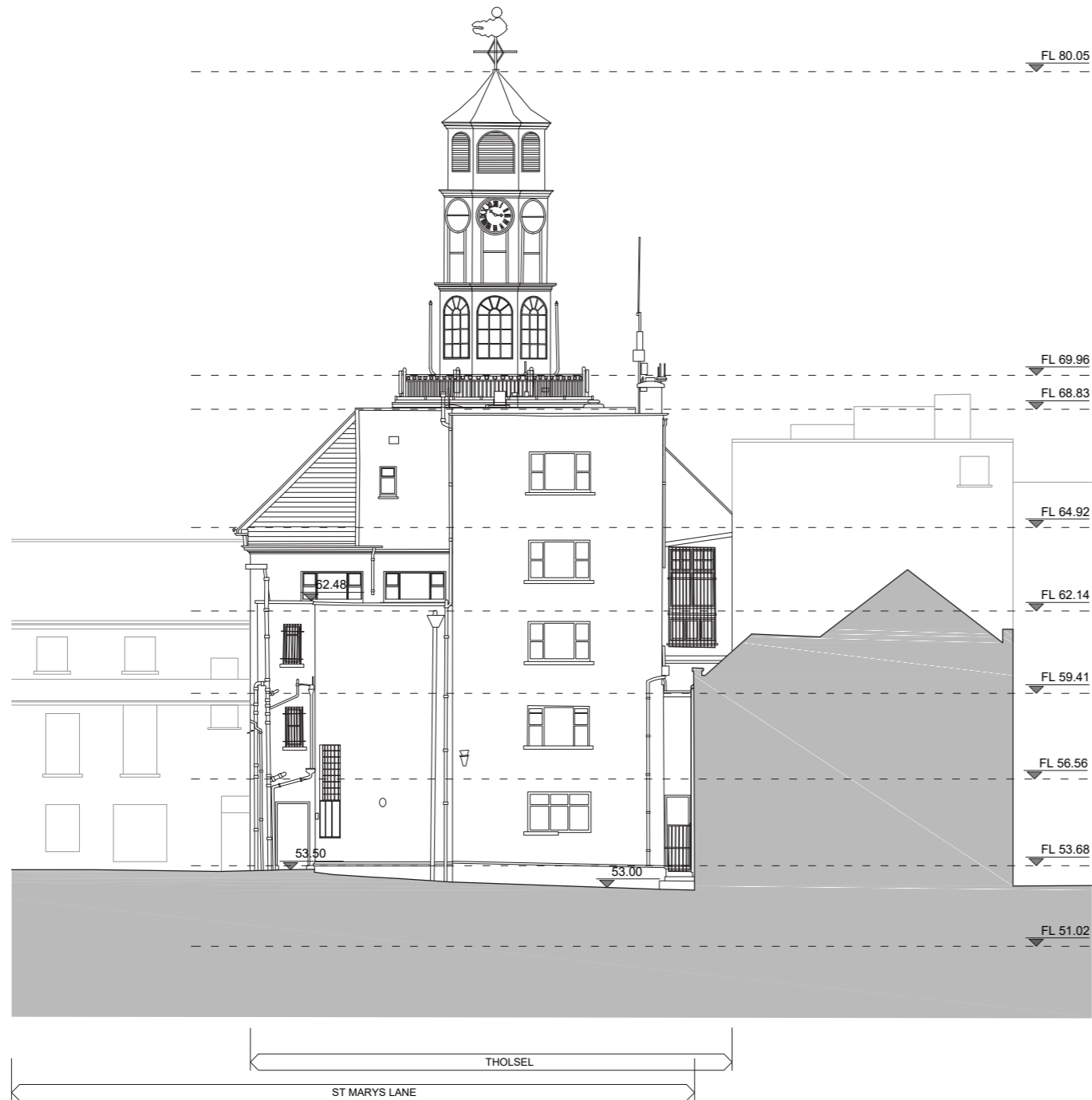
Section C



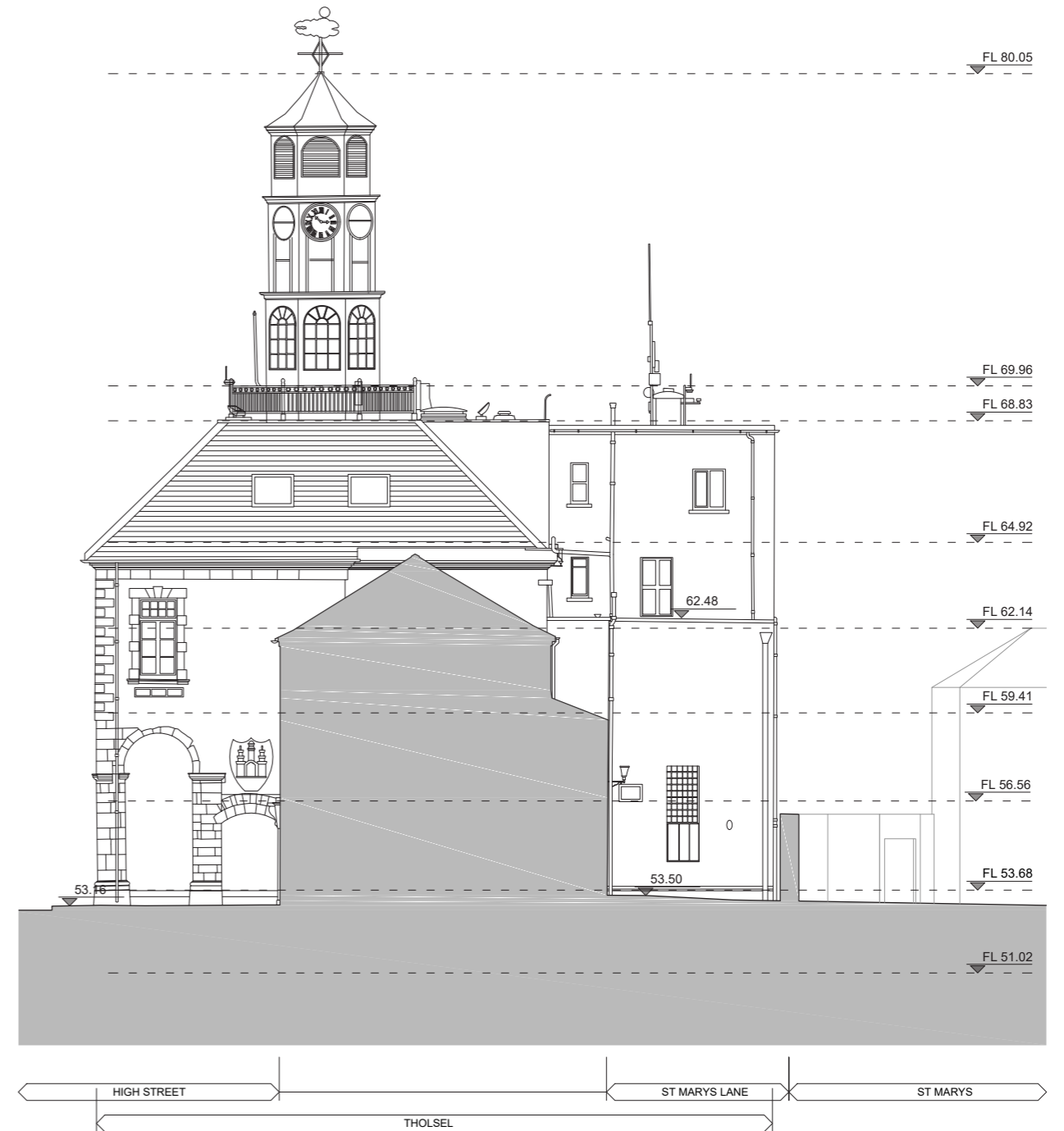
West Elevation to High Street



North Elevation



East Elevation to St. Marys Lane



South Elevation

## 5.0 Design Response and Approach

### Recorded Monument

The building is a recorded monument and a treasured landmark in Kilkenny city. The building is bounded to the east by St. Mary's Lane, the west to High Street and north and south by buildings. An extension is not possible. Any works to the building have to be respectful to the building itself, its historical and continuing use as a civic building, its proposed additional use as a tourist destination and a stop along the Medieval Mile.

The Tholsel backs on to St. Mary's Church and graveyard, separated only by a lane-way. Archaeology in the area has resulted in significant finds, including intact human remains.

The Tholsel's location on the High Street is unusual in that it forms part of the main public thoroughfare along the main street in Kilkenny. Innumerable visitors pass under the structure each year, and with the current layout, most pass without realising the significance of the building. It is visible from many different areas around the city and serves as a natural landmark.

### Role of the Tholsel: Existing and Proposed

The Tholsel has served many civic roles through the centuries, it has functioned as a Customs House, City Chambers / Town Hall, Mayor's Court, Guild Hall, and covered market place.

It has also served and continues to serve as a performance venue: The Tholsel's arcade is a traditional meeting point and is often used by carol singers or buskers, It is used as a temporary exhibition space during Kilkenny's annual Arts Week and at Christmas time it traditionally houses the Christmas Crib.

The Tholsel currently houses the Council Chamber for the Municipal District of Kilkenny, as well as the corporate affairs office and offices for the Engineering department. It also holds important historical municipal documents.

The building has been re-imagined enabling it to continue its use and significance as a civic building as well as function in its new role as a tourist destination along the Medieval Mile. Historically the Tholsel has a strong connection with St. Marys, this heritage will be reaffirmed with the proposed works to the building.

The building will maintain its civic function: The fourth floor office is retained and the Municipal District of Kilkenny will continue to convene in the Council Chamber. The Mayor's Parlour will be retained and the proposal provides a formal civic entrance and reception for the building.

### Deficiencies and Response

If the Tholsel is to function harmoniously with both a tourism and civic role, the following issues must be resolved:

- Vertical circulation and accessibility
- Provision of sanitary facilities
- Quality of internal spaces
- Rear façade and visual impact

#### Vertical circulation and accessibility

Assessment: The existing Tholsel does not have a lift. The Ceremonial stairs only goes from the ground floor to the second floor – Council Chamber level. The stairs in the rear annex goes from the ground floor to the fourth floor but does not comply with Part M of the Building Regulations or the requirements of the Disability Act. The basement can only be accessed via a small trapdoor in the ground floor arcades. The building is therefore not accessible to all, particularly wheelchair users and ambulant disabled.

Response: The vertical circulation must be prioritised to allow access for all. A new lift and stairs should be provided to serve all floors and comply with the Building Regulations and the Disability Act.

#### Sanitary facilities

Assessment: There are currently 6 No. WCs in the building spread between the first – fourth floors. None of the WCs however are wheelchair accessible or are enlarged cubicles for ambulant disabled.

Response: The sanitary facilities must be reconfigured to consider all users of the building.

#### Quality of internal spaces

Assessment: The basement has been largely forgotten in the last century and currently is not used. Access is limited, brickwork / masonry show signs of delamination and water is penetrating through the ceiling.

Response: The basement should be reconnected with the building and function restored.

Assessment: The current Mayor's Parlour and Corporate Affairs office are dark spaces with limited or no natural daylighting. A mezzanine level was built in the 1980s when the building was refurbished after the fire. These spaces are no longer appropriate for their use and feel disconnected from the neighbouring Council Chamber. The former (now vacated) offices on the Mezzanine (third floor) level have very low ceilings and lack natural daylighting.

Response: The mezzanine level should be removed to restore double-height spaces and allow for more natural daylighting via restored window openings.

#### Rear façade and visual impact

Assessment: The rear façade appears incongruous to the front of the building. The extension in the 1950s involved removing the pitched roof and raising the height of both annexes – the four-storey flat roofed annex presents a negative visual impact of the building viewed both from St. Mary's and from afar. The Mansard roof also has substantial flat roof areas to the rear. The fenestration is unorderly, uses different materials (steel / timber / glass block), and some have unsightly metal bars. The drainage has been adapted over the years, it is haphazard and dominates visually.

Response: The Tholsel should reflect its significance as a civic building and role as a tourist destination both in terms of materiality and form. Many visitors would approach the building from St. Mary's or the laneway, the rear elevation should therefore be re-imagined taking into consideration its history and visual impact. The Mansard roof should be reinstated as should the pitched roof to the rear annex. The fenestration should be coherent and the drainage minimised.



The Kilkenny Coat of Arms on the South facade of the building, erected 1812



## Basement

Currently the sole access to the basement is via a trapdoor in the north-east corner of the ground floor arcades. Access has therefore been limited and many people may not even be aware it exists.

As part of the works to the Tholsel, the basement is to be opened to the public as an exhibition space. Bright Media have been working together with Kilkenny County Council and Kilkenny Archaeology to produce a narrative concept for the Tholsel in general, in particular for the basement and the second floor.

The basement is very atmospheric with its groin and barrel vaulting – and many layers of the building’s history are clearly evident here.

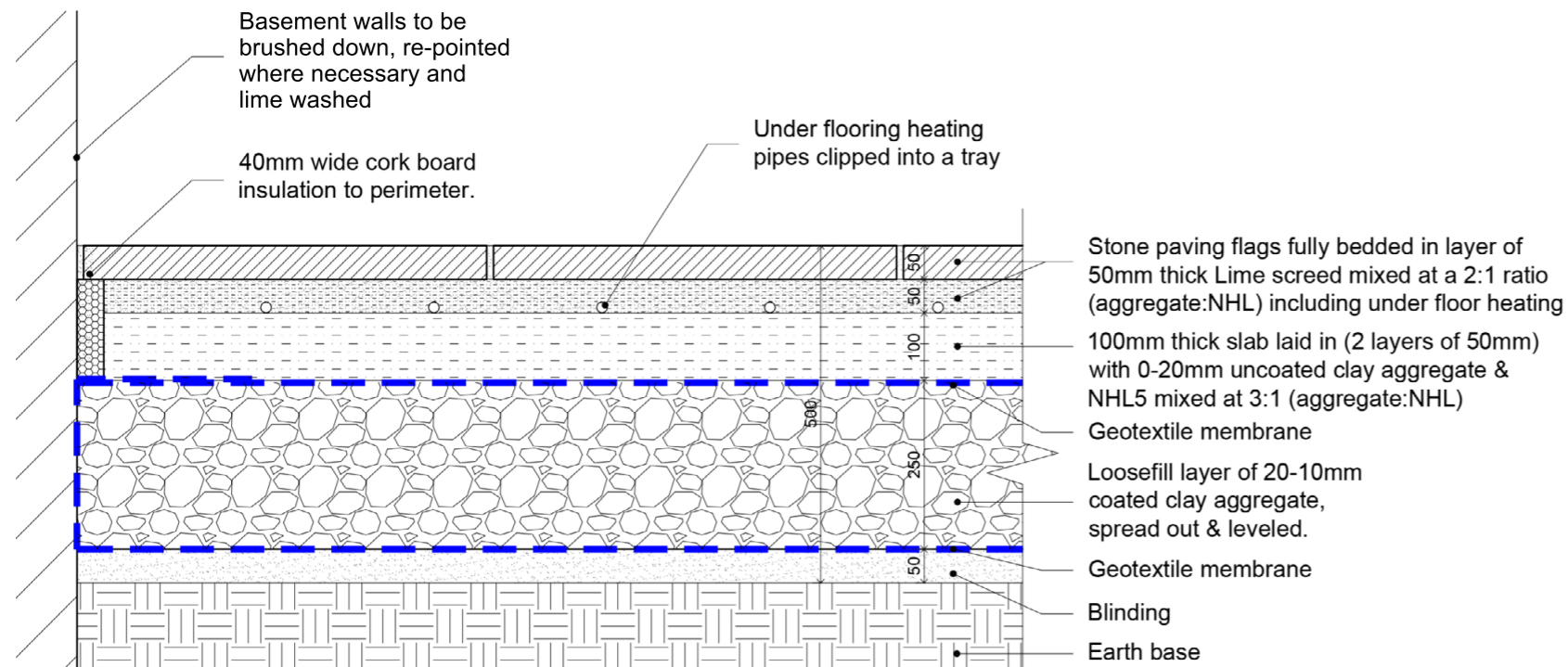
The Museum will be linked to St. Mary’s Medieval Mile Museum and will address the theme of the Mayors and Aldermen of Kilkenny who were responsible for laying down the laws, passing judgements and doling out punishments. The Basement exhibition focuses on some of the more insalubrious characters involved such as Anthony Blunt and Daniel Axtel, and their legacies. The Tholsel has been central to civic life in Kilkenny and been witness to more than its fair share of dramatic events.

To achieve a functional exhibition space, it is proposed to provide level access to the entire basement. The rear annex will be excavated to allow access via a lift and stairs in the rear annex. A new limecrete floor is proposed throughout with under-floor heating and services, this would assume an excavation of 500 mm to be reinstated to original level. The stone flags – where existing – will be re-laid. The remaining floor area will have a stone finish throughout.

The groin and barrel vaulting is in a poor state in many places. The Conservation Architect has proposed brushing down the brickwork / masonry, re-pointing with lime mortar and finishing with a limewash. The brickwork / masonry may require some local structural reinforcements - and replacement of lintels subject to the Structural Engineer’s specification.

One new opening is required from the proposed new access to the basement – under the existing rear annex. This opening is 1400 x 2100 mm. Another opening (South – East cellar room) will be enlarged to 950 x 2100 mm. The existing trapdoor access will be glazed, the imprint therefore remains as part of the building’s history.

The basement was formerly accessed from the street – these openings remained in use by merchants until the 19th century but were later partly blocked up. It is proposed to use these openings to restore natural ventilation from the street to the basement. The vents on the street will be discreet; waterproofing and drainage measures will be integrated.



Typical detail for Limecrete floor with underfloor heating



Bright Media plan of basement

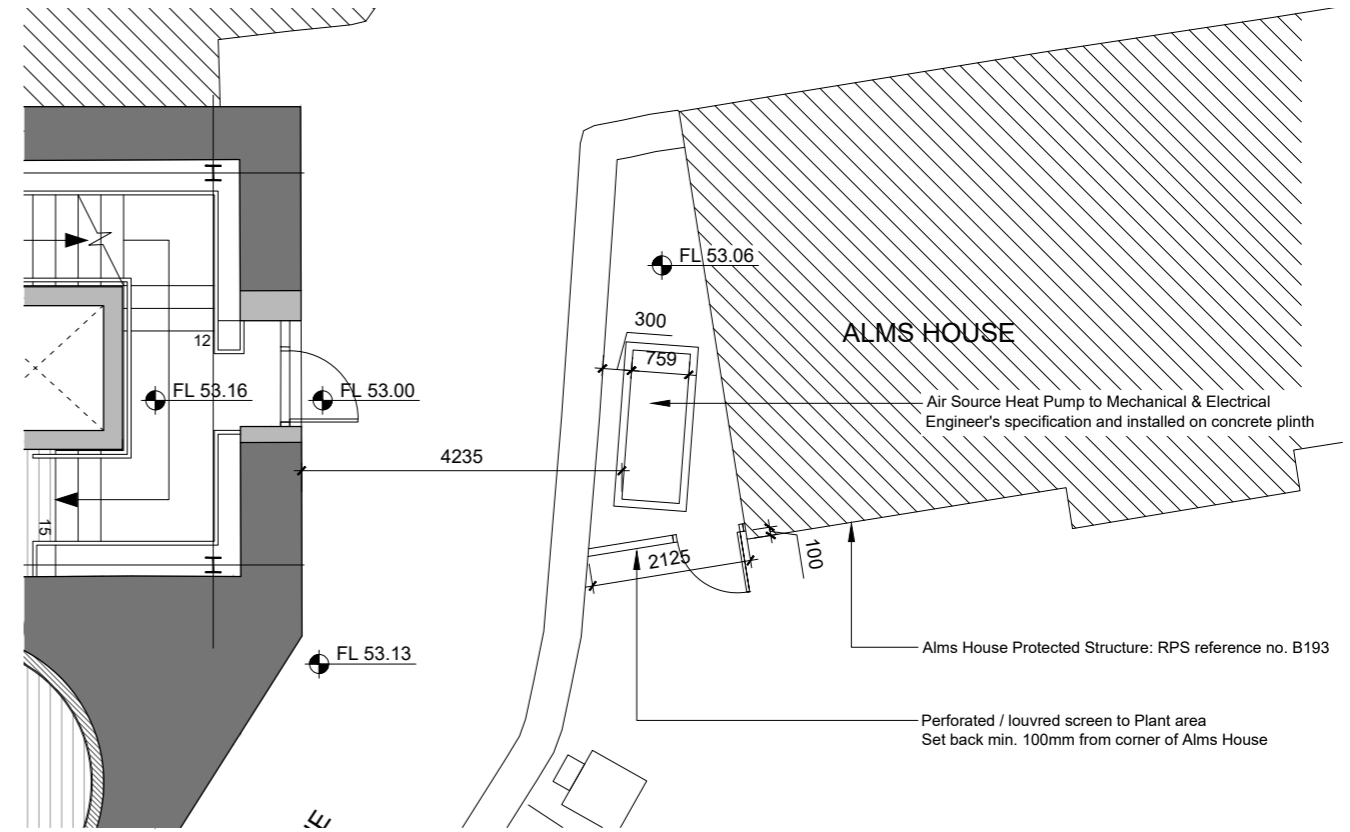
**Plant in St. Marys**

During the Design Process the Design Team assessed the pros and cons of three heating options. In the end it was decided to pursue the more sustainable option of Air Source Heat Pump rather than a gas boiler or replacing the current electrical radiators. This option is environmentally friendly and represents significant economic savings on energy bills in the long term.

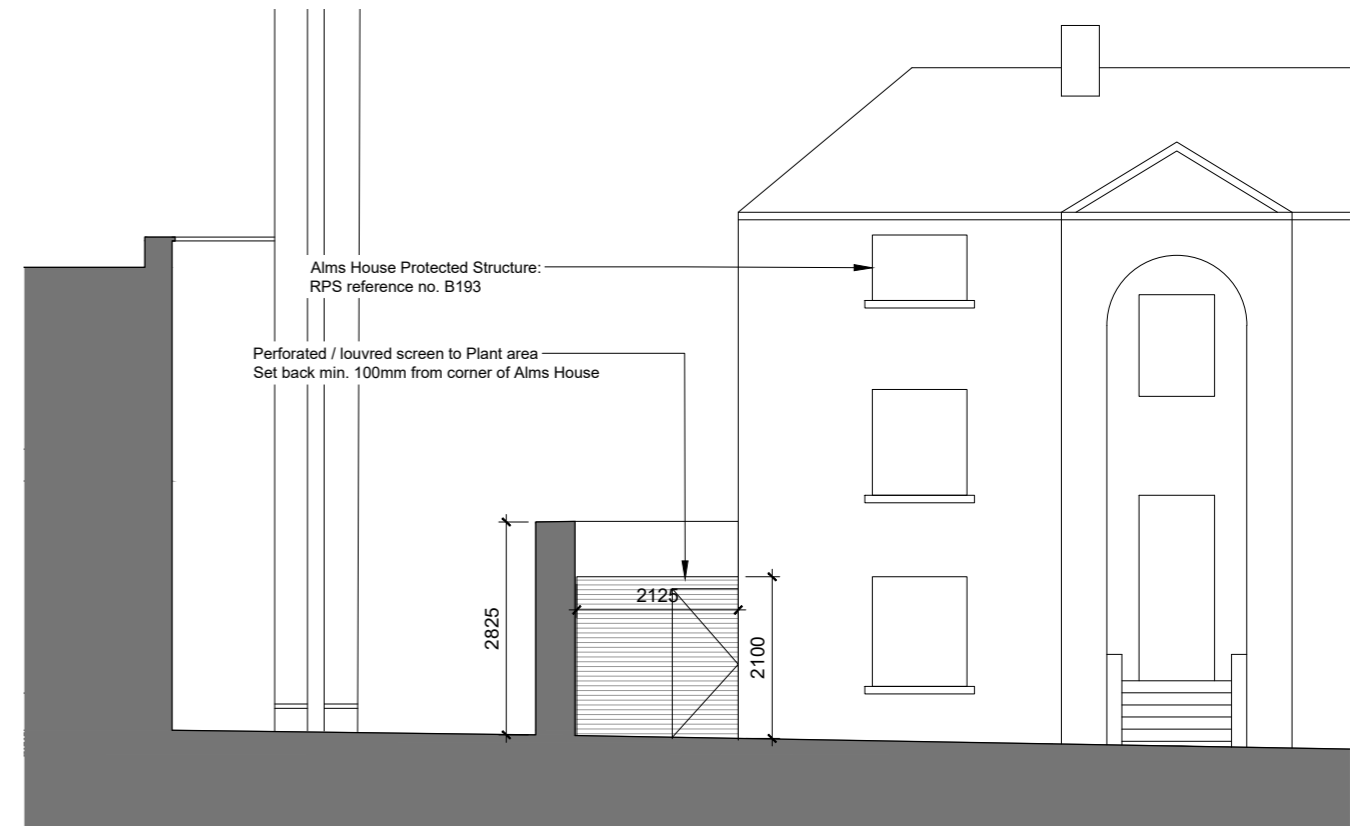
It is proposed to locate the plant for the Air Source heat pump in the grounds of St. Mary's Church, in the North-West corner between the gable wall of the Alms House (Protected Structures, Ref RPS B193 (NIAH Ref. 12000128/KK and 12000129/KK)) and the wall to the laneway.

The plant area will be screened off by a 2.1m high louvred metal screen.

Sketch showing the screen to the plant area beside the Alms House in St. Marys



Plan and Elevation of plant area beside the Alms House



## Ground Floor

The Tholsel has been performing as a civic building across many centuries, but is not universally accessible to the public currently. Many people walk through the arcade but never see inside the building. Part of the brief from the client was to look at a new use for the building that allows it to remain as a building with a civic role in Kilkenny life, but also to allow visitors, both local and from further afield, to experience the entire building from basement to the rooftop. The ground floor becomes the introduction to the building for people passing by and must be a welcoming space.

The ground floor arcade of the building forms part of the main pedestrian route along High Street. This space is currently divided by railings parallel to High Street which form both a physical and visual barrier to the rear of the arcade. These railings were added in the 1950s as a result of 'the abuses which had existed' (Reference: Archaeological Impact Report by Kilkenny Archaeology, refer to Appendix 3).

From at least the mid 18th century, this open ground floor area would have been a single space, used as a market areas, with timber stalls used by merchants to sell their goods. The rear of this space is now rarely used, except as a route to enter the building, or to use the shortcut through to St Mary's Lane. Only one section of the railings open, and only during Council working hours.

There are currently 2 entrances to the building, one used to access the curved 'ceremonial' stairs, which is only used for Council Meetings and ceremonies. The other public entrance brings the visitor to a narrow stairs, accessing a number of council offices and the main reception for the Council Chamber level.

Away from the street edge, the space is dark. An existing trapdoor which forms the only access to basement is located in the north east corner. The project brief is to bring a museum experience to the Tholsel, and to give the use of the Tholsel a visible presence on the street. The rear section of the arcade is to be subdivided into an approximate 3/5 to 2/5 split, with the larger section enclosed and providing an entrance and reception area for the museum. The smaller section remains open, allowing direct access to a dedicated civic entrance to the building and the council reception. The shortcut to St Mary's Laneway is retained, allowing movement between the Medieval Mile Museum and the new Exhibition in the Tholsel.

The proposed design is a lightweight interlocking timber structure. An earlier design included interlocking arches, however following a consultation with the National Monuments Service, the arches were deemed to be too distracting from the existing building. The design has since being simplified: the timber structure is subservient to the existing building and the volume of the space has been emphasised.

The timber structure is independent of the existing building and is intended to be interpreted as a piece of "furniture". The impact on the existing building is minimal, the timber structure also eliminates the need to impact on the existing building fabric to provide services to the space. The timber and glazing is located behind the line of the stone columns, to further minimise the impact on the structure. The inspiration for the choice of timber came when we learned the original trading shops in the space would have been of timber construction. Timber is naturally a warm material, and gives a contrast against the dark grey limestone of the Tholsel.

The building will retain two entrances. The main entrance is for people who are visiting for Council or civic purposes allowing Kilkenny County Council to retain a significant presence in the building. The second entrance into the glazed structure will be the public entrance to the tourist exhibition, and will house a ticketing and information area. The ground floor lighting scheme will be reviewed at detail design phase. Existing lighting will be replaced with discreet and energy efficient fittings to enhance the character of the arcade spaces.

View of proposed ground floor entrance area from the High Street colonnade

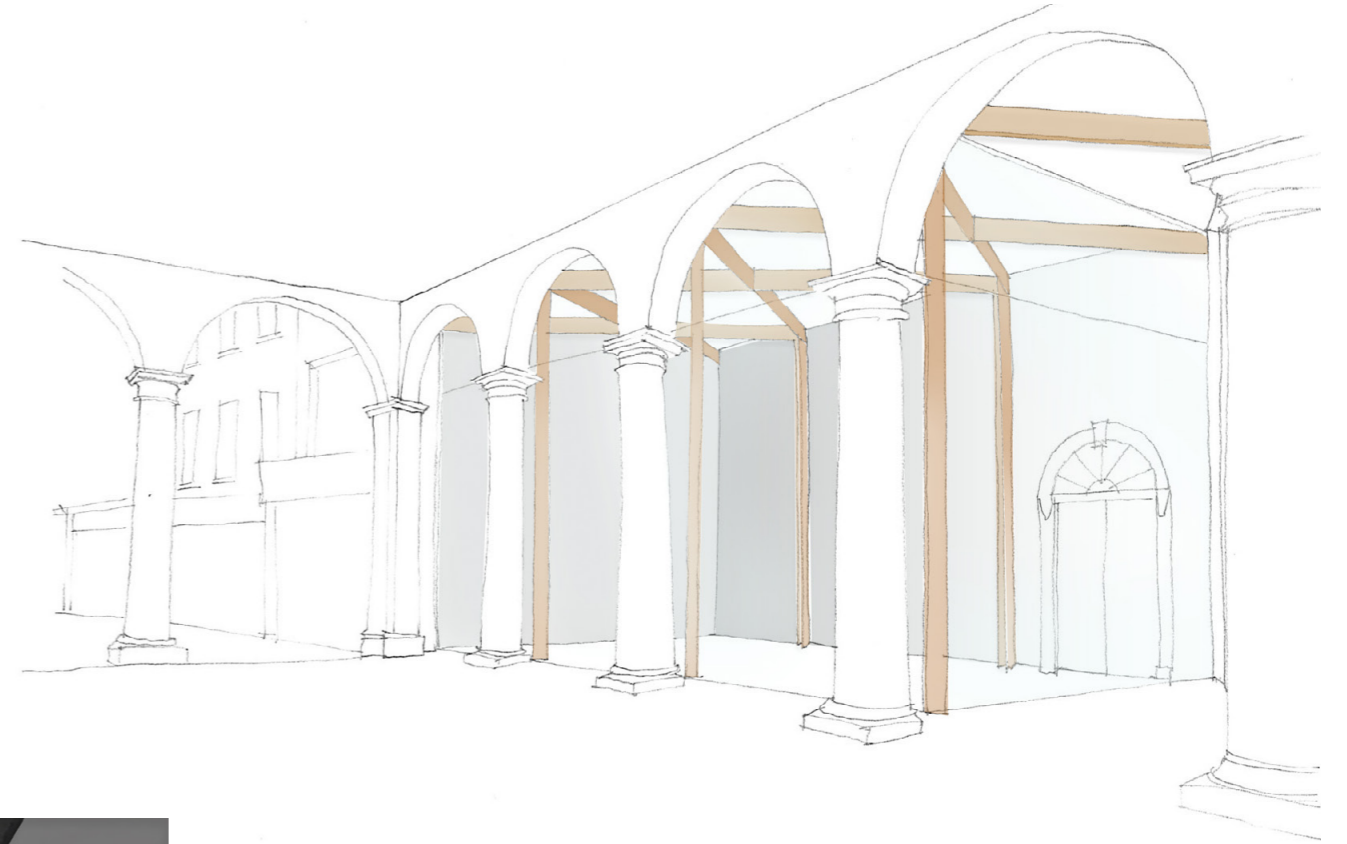


Bucholz McEvoy: Leinster House Siopa





Bucholz McEvoy: Leinster House Siopa in context



View of proposed from the High Street looking North



Colucci and Partners - Mandarino Caffè Bistrot



### Mayor's Parlour

The curved annex was originally built as the "Mayor's Court" in 1829. It consisted of a ground and first floor with a spiral staircase connecting them. The Mayor's office was then relocated to its current position in 1856. In the 1950's, works to the Tholsel entailed raising the height of the rear curved annex and installing a curved Terrazzo staircase to serve as a ceremonial stair to the Council Chamber. This change in height meant that the rear windows to the Mayor's Office were reduced in size, and presumably rendered the room rather dark.

In the 1980s a mezzanine level was built in the double-height spaces of the Mayor's Parlour and Corporate Affairs – leaving the Mayor's Parlour windowless excepting the glazed door to the Council Chamber. The rooms on both levels lack sufficient natural daylight and the ceiling heights are very low.

It is proposed to remove the staircase and the top floor of the curved annex, reinstating the ground floor and first floor rooms as offices – the ground floor office will serve as the Council reception.



Existing rear elevation

The mezzanine over the Mayor's Parlour and Corporate Affairs Office will be removed thereby reinstating these as double-height spaces. The lowering of the curved annex means that the original fenestration to the Mayor's Parlour can be reinstated. The curved window will be extended in height to improve the natural daylighting in the offices.

### Rear Façade and Curved Annex

The rear of the Tholsel currently presents a poor façade incongruous to the front of the building. It is very visible from many points of the city and particularly from the grounds of St. Mary's Church. Reddy Architecture therefore explored several options to improve this façade taking into account the building's history and respecting its status as a Recorded Monument.

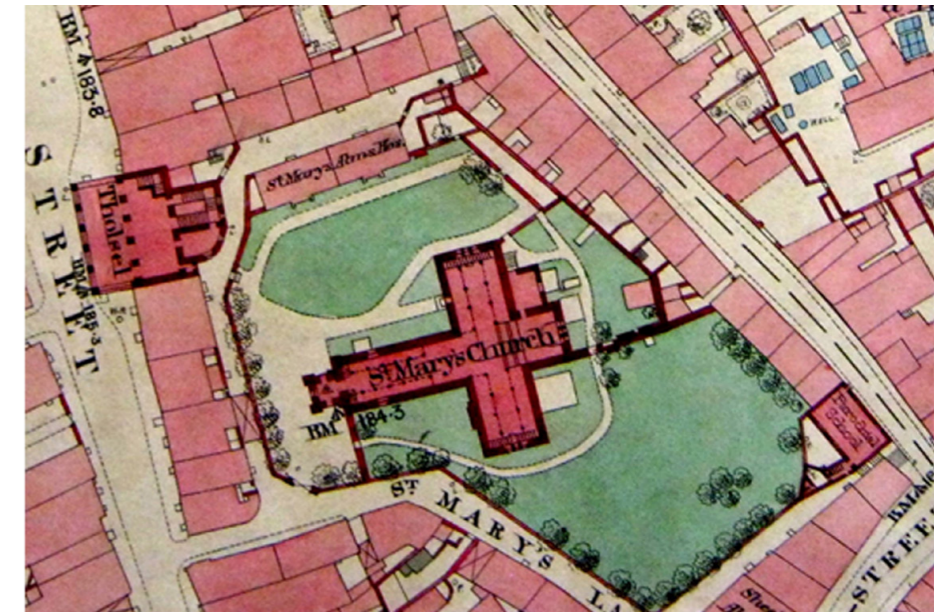
Overall the rear facade has been simplified, the fenestration and form of the annexes are more harmonious to the rest of the building and vastly improve the visual impact of the building viewed both from afar and from St. Mary's.



Proposed rear elevation

### Vertical Circulation

One of the greatest challenges faced by the Design Team was the provision of new vertical circulation routes of the stair and lift within the existing structure. When considering options it was imperative that the impact on architectural and archaeological heritage be reduced to a minimum. Several options were explored and assessed, in the end the option of concentrating all the vertical circulation in the rear annex was considered the best solution making the building accessible to all.



1872 OS Map showing the original location of the stairs

The existing offices and stairs in the rear of the building are being removed. The new stairs is proposed in the original historic location, as shown on the 1872 map. The proposed stairs will be more generous than the existing stairs and will be suitable for ambulant disabled and compliant with fire regulations.

The location of the stairs and lift in the rear annex entails excavating one floor to basement level, an in-depth archaeological excavation "preservation by record" will be carried out prior to the beginning of any works.

A new steel framework structure will be inserted into the rear annex, which together with the concrete lift shaft will support the new stairs and floors without affecting the existing walls of the annex. The top floor of the lift / stairwell will have a new pitched roof echoing the earlier form of the building prior to the works in the 1950s.

This new roof form improves the roofscape of the building, particularly viewed from St. Mary's. It also results in improved views from the now accessible balcony.



Photo from The Crawford Collection, 1947



Existing building photographed in 2018



View of the proposed rear elevation



View of the proposed rear facade as viewed from St. Mary's lane East (approach from St. Kieran's Street)



View of the proposed rear facade as viewed from the East bank of the Nore

**Access to the roof: Cupola and Railings**

An exciting part of the proposal is allowance for public access to the roof and Cupola. Access will be limited due to space limitations. The current spiral staircase to the Cupola will be retained, however a lobby will be provided at 4th floor level and a new housing will be constructed at roof level inside the Cupola to replace the current housing.

The new housing will consist of stud partitions to just below the level of the windows in the Cupola (1.5 m high), and the remaining height up to 2.1m will consist of a glazed “hat” – walls and ceiling. The rationale behind this is to reduce the visual impact of the housing within the structure and therefore conserve the transparent quality of the Cupola.

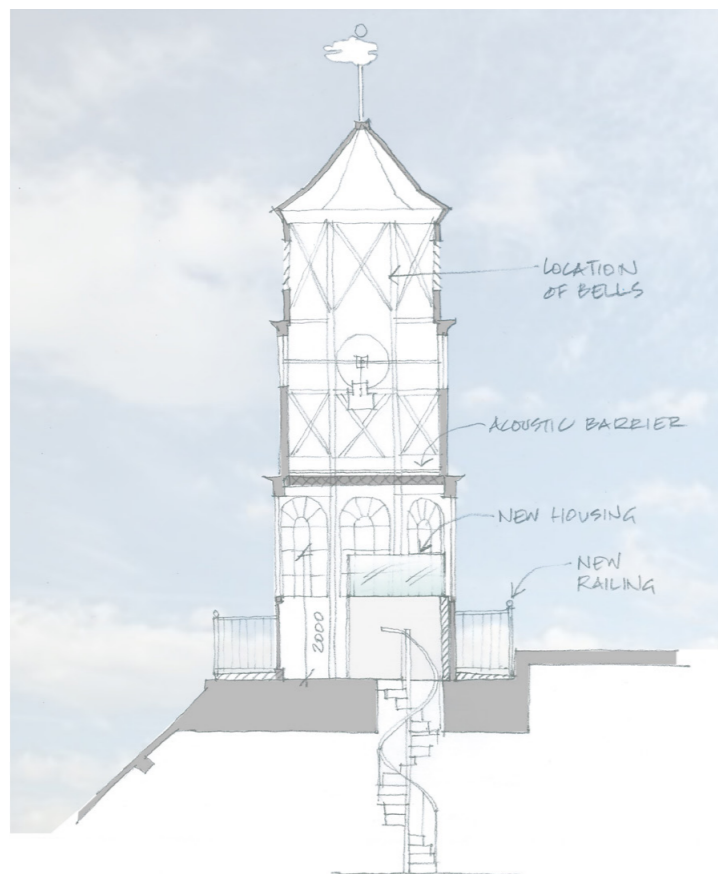
The Cupola itself houses four clocks and bells which chime every 15 minutes. This presents some problems acoustically as the bells are very loud when one is standing within the Cupola, the bell chamber being separated from the lower chamber merely by timber floorboards. It is proposed to install an acoustic membrane to the bell chamber floor, insulation to the underside of this floor, and provide an acoustically sealed access hatch to the bell chamber. These measures will significantly reduce the impact of the bells for visitors to the tower whilst not affecting the sound distribution of the bells to the city.

The balcony surrounding the Cupola will also be upgraded. Non-slip decking will be installed over the flat roof allowing for any wiring to be installed underneath. It is proposed to replace the railings with railings that are more sympathetically designed to a building of such standing.

The current railings are also not in compliance with the Building Regulations. The view from the balcony will be vastly improved with the removal of the flat roof area and reinstatement of a pitched roof to the annex and Mansard roof to the main part of the building.



Current view from balcony looking East



Section through the Cupola showing the new stair housing and acoustic barrier



Proposed view from balcony looking East



**Appendix 1: Architectural Drawings**

<b>Drawing number</b>	<b>Drawing content</b>
P16-336K-RAU-00-00-DR-A-31004	Site location plan 1:1000
P16-336K-RAU-00-00-DR-A-31005	Existing site layout plan 1:500
P16-336K-RAU-00-ZZ-DR-A-31003	Existing basement plan 1:100 Existing ground floor plan 1:100 Existing first floor plan 1:100 Existing second floor plan 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-ZZ-DR-A-31004	Existing third floor plan 1:100 Existing fourth floor plan 1:100 Existing roof plan 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-33005	Existing section A 1:100 Existing section B 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-33006	Existing section C 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-32009	Existing elevations 1 and 2 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-32010	Existing elevations 3 and 4 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-31001	Proposed site layout plan 1:200
P16-336K-RAU-00-ZZ-DR-A-31001	Proposed basement plan 1:100 Proposed ground floor plan 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-ZZ-DR-A-31002	Proposed first floor plan 1:100 Proposed second floor plan 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-ZZ-DR-A-31005	Proposed third floor plan 1:100 Proposed fourth floor plan 1:100 Proposed roof plan 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-33003	Proposed section A 1:100 Proposed section B 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-33007	Proposed section C 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-32005	Proposed elevations 1 and 2 1:100
P16-336K-RAU-00-XX-DR-A-32006	Proposed elevations 3 and 4 1:100

**Appendix 2: Architectural Heritage Impact Statement**

**Appendix 3: Archaeological Impact Statement**

**Appendix 4: Civil Structural Report**

**Appendix 5: Mechanical & Electrical Report**

**Appendix 6: Habitats Directive Project Screening Assessment**

**Appendix 7: Exhibition Proposal (FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY)**