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Blue Lion, Witherley: Historic Building Report



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
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Change History

Version	Date	Notes
1.0	11th Nov 2009	

1. Executive Summary

David Hickie Associates has been commissioned by HRB, on behalf of the Mr Vince Wetton, to undertake a historic building survey of the Grade II listed Blue Lion public house in Church Road, Witherley.

The house is a good example of a traditional late eighteenth century town house, with extensions to the rear and side added not much later than the 3-bay original building. Over the years the buildings has had several phases of internal alterations and external additions, but the front elevation facing Church Road has remained unaltered.

The five double-hung sash window frames and the central door with its pedimented doorcase appear to be original, but close examination of the sashes reveals that they have been replaced at least once. The glazing pattern is correct, but the timber sections, modern glass and few paint layers compared with the frames and internal architraves show that they are not original.

There is a certain amount of wet rot in some of the sashes and frames, but all the windows, both to the front and side elevations, are repairable. However, replacement of the sashes would not involve destruction of historic fabric, and new sashes could represent an improvement if obtained from a reputable joinery company, and traditional cylinder glass incorporated. Heat loss and draughts could be reduced by carefully-designed secondary glazing.

2. Introduction



This survey and report has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines for an English Heritage Level 2 report - 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice' (English Heritage, 2006) - providing a descriptive summary of the building and sketch plans of the layout and specific elements of historic significance.

Table 1: Building Conservation Listing

SP 39 NW WITHERLEY CHURCH ROAD (east side) 7.11.66 The Blue Lion Inn Grade II House now public house. Late C18. Red brick with plain tile roof and brick end stacks. 2 storeys. Regular 3-window front: 16-pane glazing bar sashes with rusticated wedge-shaped lintels with raised key blocks. Central 6-panelled door within a pilastered and pedimented surround containing fanlight with radiating glazing bars. C19 single-storey, 2-bay extension to left with glazing bar sashes. Further C19 extensions to rear. Interior remodelled in the 1980's.

The Blue Lion also lies in the Witherley Conservation Area.

A site inspection was undertaken on Wednesday 21st October 2009.

3. The Original House

The house was built in the second half of the eighteenth century in the style typical of town-houses of the period. It is a modest but elegant two-storey 3-bay building with attics and a central doorway, the front wall being set back by about 7 ft (2m) from the road. The original building had a simple plan of four rooms on each floor, and a central staircase.



The roof is a simple pitch, tiled, with eaves gutters, but no rainwater pipes on the front elevation. Fireplaces to each of the principal rooms on ground and first floors were positioned on the gable walls, with flues to one chimney stack at each end. On the frontage the red bricks are laid in Flemish bond with fine mortar joints, and the windows are double-hung sashes in box frames with projecting wedge-shaped rusticated stone lintels (the keystones projecting slightly further) and stone cills.

This town-house plan was reproduced many times all over the country in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and because it was both architecturally pleasing and functional, many examples survive and are happily occupied. Modern comforts in the form of kitchens and bathrooms are usually accommodated in extensions to the rear, as in this example.

4. Later Development

The original house did not remain unaltered for long. A substantial two-storey extension was added in the early nineteenth century, at right angles to the main house. The straight vertical joint between the two builds clearly shows that the extension is later, but the use of very similar bricks indicates a relatively short pause in building activity. The brickwork of the extension is a random bond, but so are the gable walls of the main house. The precision of the Flemish bond was reserved for the 'polite' elevation.



The windows of the extension are wider and flatter, with brick-arched lintels, divided into 3 with timber mullions, more typical of the nineteenth century.

The 1835 edition of 'Pigot's Directory of Warwickshire' (p. 498) lists the Blue Lion Inn, Witherley. with the landlord named as John Cook.

The 1889 edition of the OS 1/2500 map (Sheet VI.15) which was surveyed in 1886 shows a small extension which was probably on the ground plan of the first section of existing single-storey extension off the main house. From the Church Road side the various different aged brickwork sections indicate a number of rebuilding phases for this section of the building. The 1903 edition of the OS 1/2500 map (Sheet VI.15) shows the extension to be the current extent of the extensions off the main building. Therefore, sometime between 1886 and 1903 the single story extension was again extended to its current length.



From the Church Road side, the single-storey extension the left of the main frontage, again of similar brickwork and a tiled roof and two sash windows which stay in keeping with the main house.

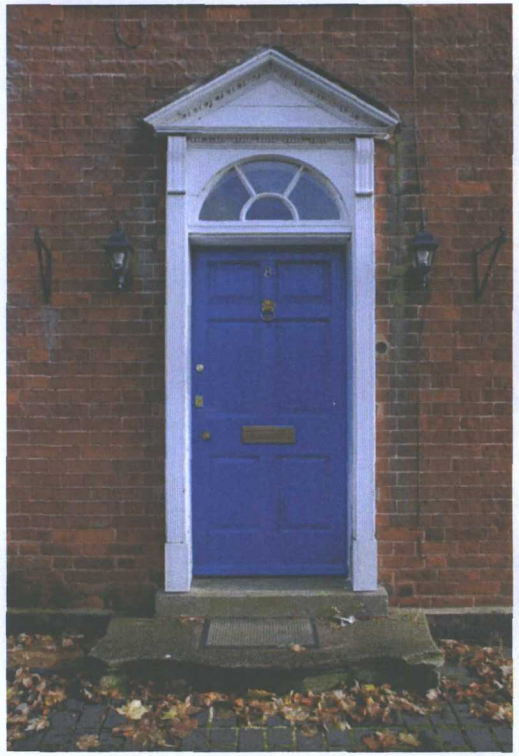
The single-storey extension has had the two panels infilled with brickwork which matches the brickwork on the lounge entrance porch. Section of red engineering bricks have been infilled around the windows on both the Church Road and inner courtyard side of the single-storey extension.

Local residents remember when the front room of the main house was still a domestic room and separate from the pub. In the late twentieth century the building was converted into a larger pub with, internal walls removed and other alterations, and further extensions to the back and side. The later extensions have unfortunately not been built with the same elegance of their predecessors, but the front elevation has remained substantially unaltered. The pub is entered from the rear, and although there is a connection from the hallway to the bar, the front door is used only for access to the first floor living accommodation.

The single-storey range of nineteenth-century outbuildings to the rear has several enlarged doorways which have compromised its original simple functionality. All but one of its original windows has been lost. There are some original timber trusses and it has been reroofed in the recent past.



5. The Front Elevation



The front elevation of the original house has a central doorway with a painted doorcase. It has ribbed pilasters and scrolled brackets supporting a timber pediment with a semi-circular fanlight below, with simple glazing divisions. This is all original apart from the plinth blocks, which have recently been renewed. The door has 6 raised and fielded panels, and could also be original.

The front step is stone and elegantly curved. It has unfortunately been covered in concrete in recent times.

The 3 equally-spaced windows on the first floor (the central one above the door) are double-hung sliding sashes, divided in the Georgian manner, 6 panes on 6. The ground floor windows, one each side of the door, are 8 on 8, and consequently wider than the first floor sashes, with proportionally larger lintels.



It is likely that the attic floor originally had dormer windows. The original staircase extends to this floor, and although the doors to the two rooms are not panelled but planked, these rooms were clearly designed as bedrooms. Visible clues for the existence of dormers have been obliterated, and recent windows have been inserted in the gable walls. Oblique views of the front of the house are slightly compromised by these inappropriate insertions.

It is unusual for ground floor and first floor windows to be of different widths. The building is essentially a modest town-house (even the doorcase is of a modest scale) and it is likely that the ground floor windows were originally designed to be the same width as those on the first floor, and the sashes 6 on 6. Perhaps the owner decided that the principal ground floor rooms deserved more generous windows, and if the openings could be enlarged by one brick each side, the brickwork

bond would be maintained. The lack of scars indicates that if this was the case, the enlargement happened quite soon after the original house was built, or even during its construction.

This is an interesting speculation, but nobody is suggesting a change to the present arrangement.

6. The Windows

Until the early eighteenth century, opening windows were hinged at the side, opened outwards or inwards, and are known as casements. When glass-blowing techniques developed and larger panes became available, these were incorporated into sashes, with the panes divided by glazing bars. The design of two sashes sliding vertically, one in front of the other, was first devised in Holland in the 1680's, and became popular in England through the eighteenth century.

The basic design stayed essentially the same throughout the century, with the sliding sashes on ropes and pulleys, with cast iron counterweights hidden in the box frames. However, the glazing bars, which at the beginning of the century were relatively thick, gradually became more slender. In country houses and important buildings these were manufactured in hardwood, but the more usual material was softwood, painted. The glass fitted into a rebate and was puttied on the outside. The insides of the glazing bars were moulded to soften the contrast between the light coming in from outside, and the relative darkness inside.

The windows of the Blue Lion are examples of the relatively slender design of the late eighteenth century. However, the sashes are certainly not original. The moulding on the glazing bars, the stiles and top and bottom rails has a radius slightly shorter than would have been the case in the original windows, the horns at the bottom of the top sash and the top of the bottom sash (to strengthen the joint) are rather crude, the glass is modern float glass which was not widely available until the 1920's, and most of the sashes have a maximum of three coats of paint. Had they dated from the original build, it is likely that there would have been at least a few surviving panes of original glass, and far more layers of paint would have been evident.

In contrast, the frames, which usually survive much longer than the sashes, are very probably original (although repaired), and the internal architraves, 45mm x 27mm, with their small and simple ogee moulding covered in many layers of paint, are certainly of the eighteenth century.



The sashes are made up of standard mouldings which are readily available. Although not original, they are a close approximation to how they would have looked when first installed.

The rear extension windows are of the nineteenth century, divided into three by heavy timber mullions, with casements of three panes. The frame has a moulded architrave internally, similar to that on the front windows which raises the question, was there a more elegant earlier form? It is difficult to imagine a different pattern, however, since the shape of the opening is wide and squat. So this was probably the original nineteenth century arrangement, albeit with replaced casements.

7. Condition

Painted softwood when exposed to the weather will gradually deteriorate unless carefully maintained. These windows have some decay, particularly at the bottoms of the frames and in the bottom rails of the sashes. They are all in need of at least an overhaul, but they are repairable. They have been badly painted recently, the paint having spread well onto the glass. This gives the glazing bars the appearance of being thicker than they really are.



If the sashes were totally replaced, there would be no danger of discarding any original material, and the opportunity could be taken to glaze with hand-blown cylinder glass, to give them back the authentic look of the eighteenth century. Several specialist joiners exist who can produce timber windows to the correct pattern and profiles.

It is difficult to double-glaze sliding sashes, because the rebate would have to be increased in depth to accommodate a double thickness of glass, and the extra weight could not be balanced by the counterweights within the restricted size of the box frames. However, heat loss can be reduced by secondary glazing on the inside, provided it is designed so that no new construction interferes visually with the existing glazing pattern.

Some timber window manufacturers offer double-glazed sashes, but they should be approached with caution because the counterbalancing could not be achieved in the traditional way.



Appendix 1: Timber Window and Glass Suppliers

Traditional sash windows:

The Original Box Sash Window Company, Windsor
www.boxsash.com

Mumford & Wood Ltd, Tiptree, Essex
www.mumfordwood.com

The Sash Restoration Co., Hereford
www.sash-restoration.co.uk

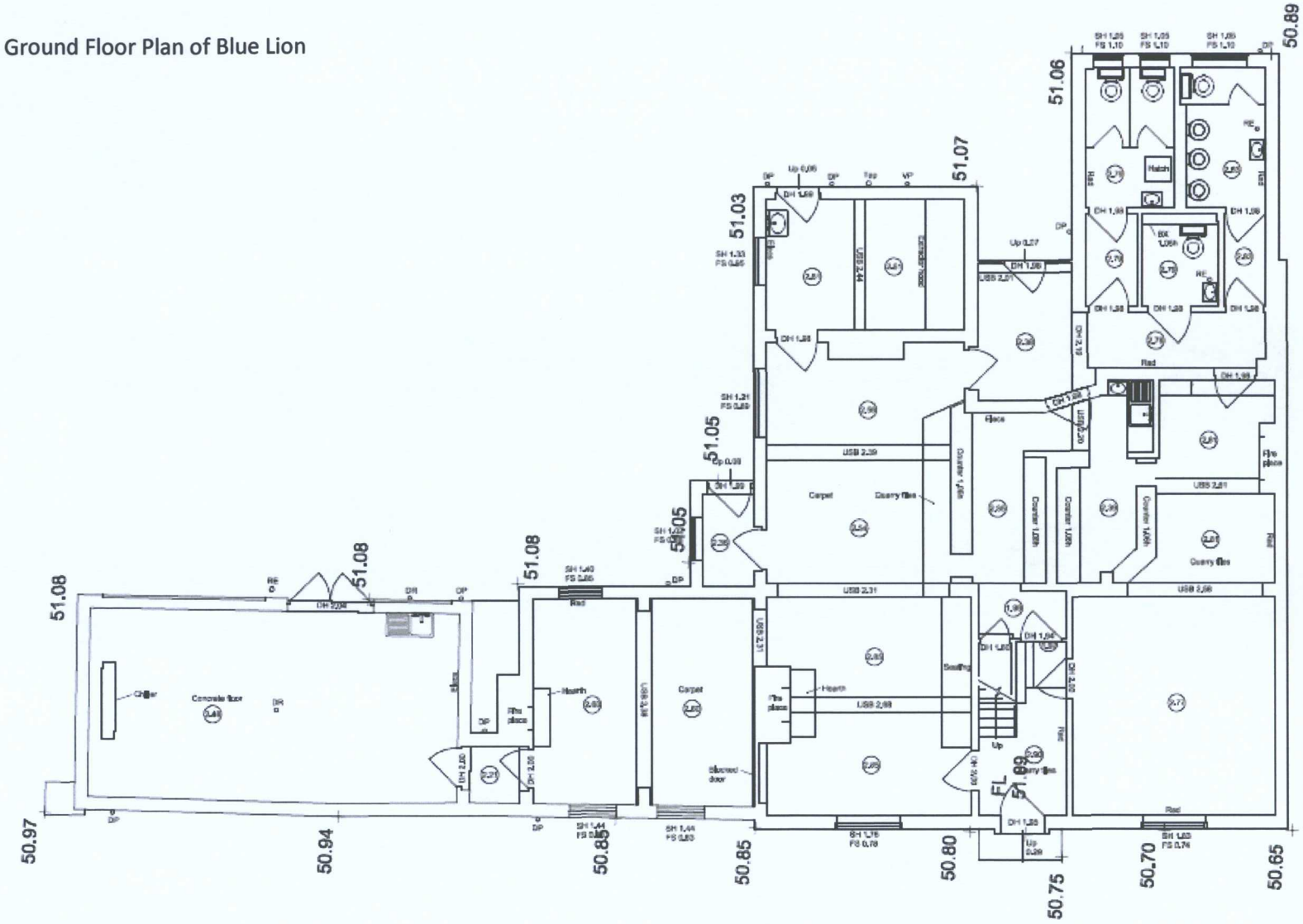
Sashcraft of Bath
www.sashcraftofbath.co.uk

Traditional hand-blown glass:

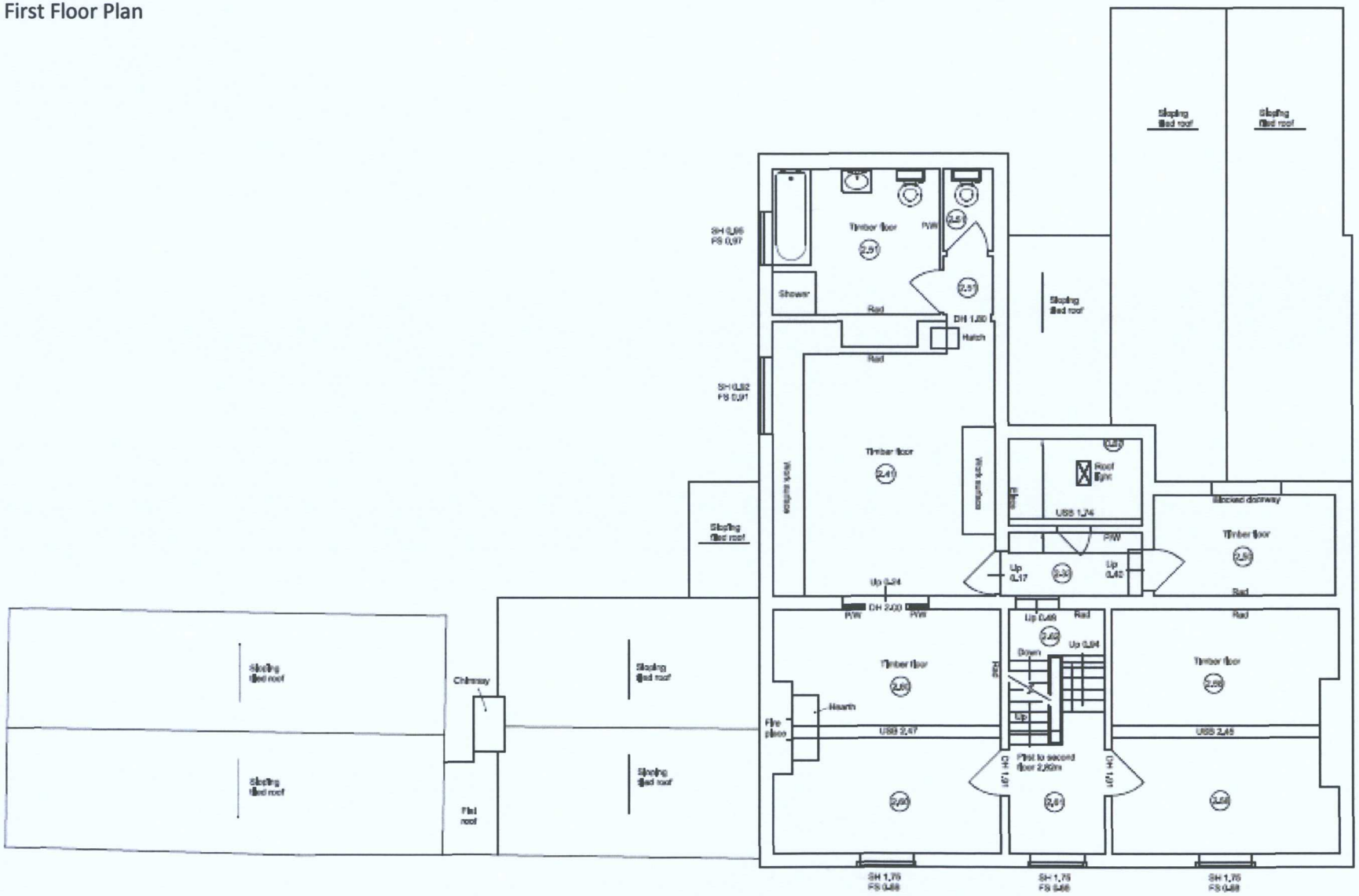
English Antique Glass Ltd., Redditch
www.englishantiqueglass.co.uk

The London Crown Glass Company, Henley on Thames
www.londoncrownglass.co.uk

Ground Floor Plan of Blue Lion

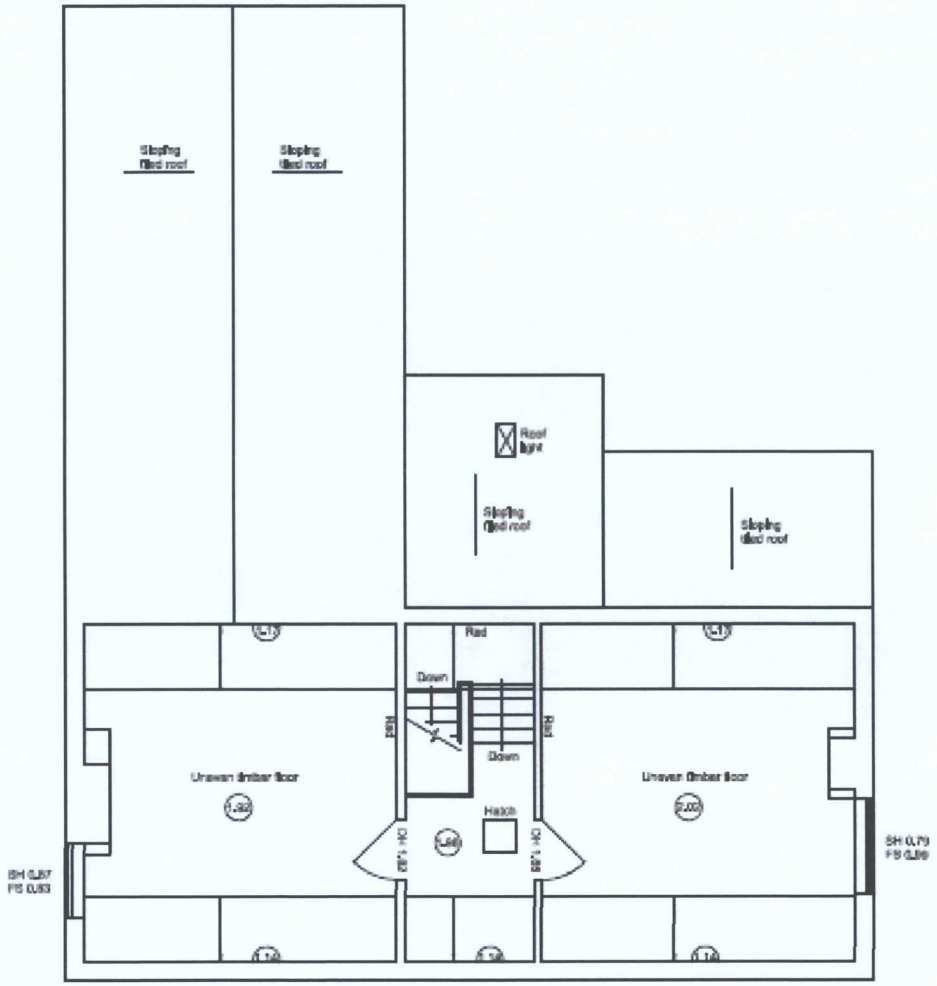


First Floor Plan



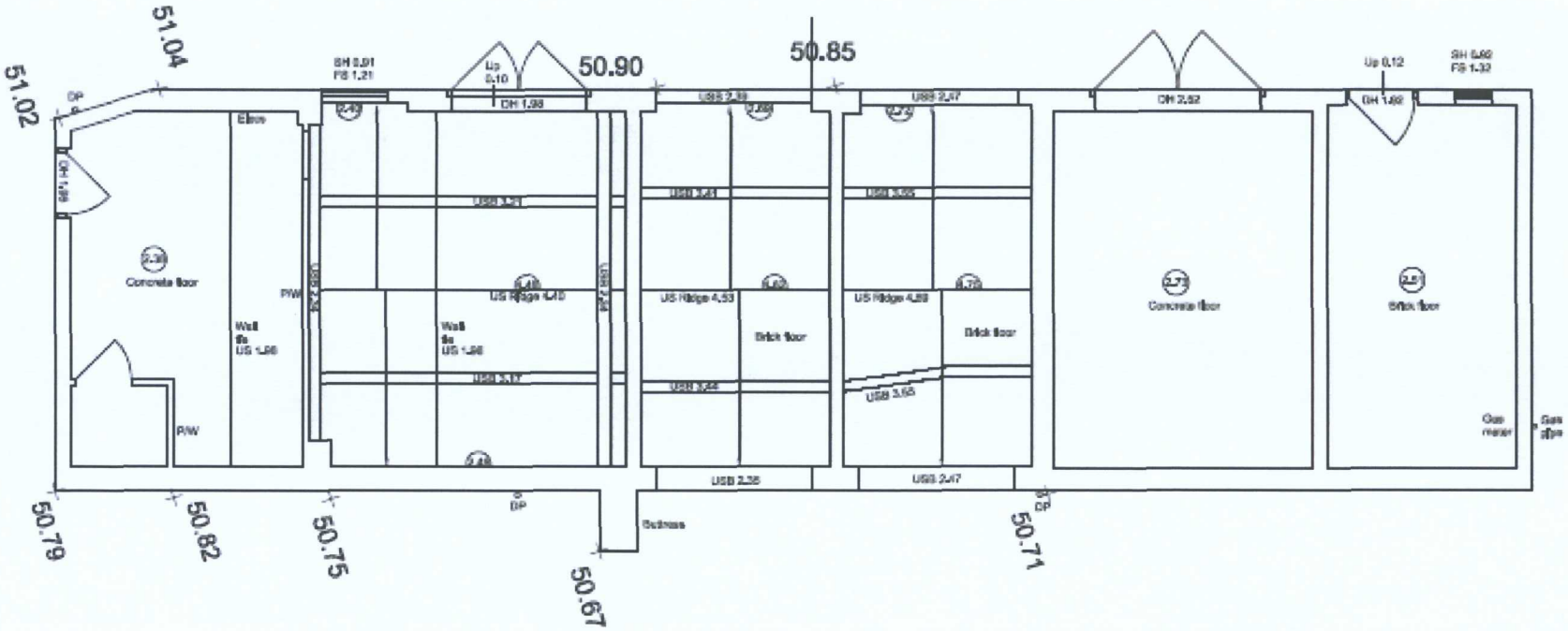
First floor plan

Second Floor Plan

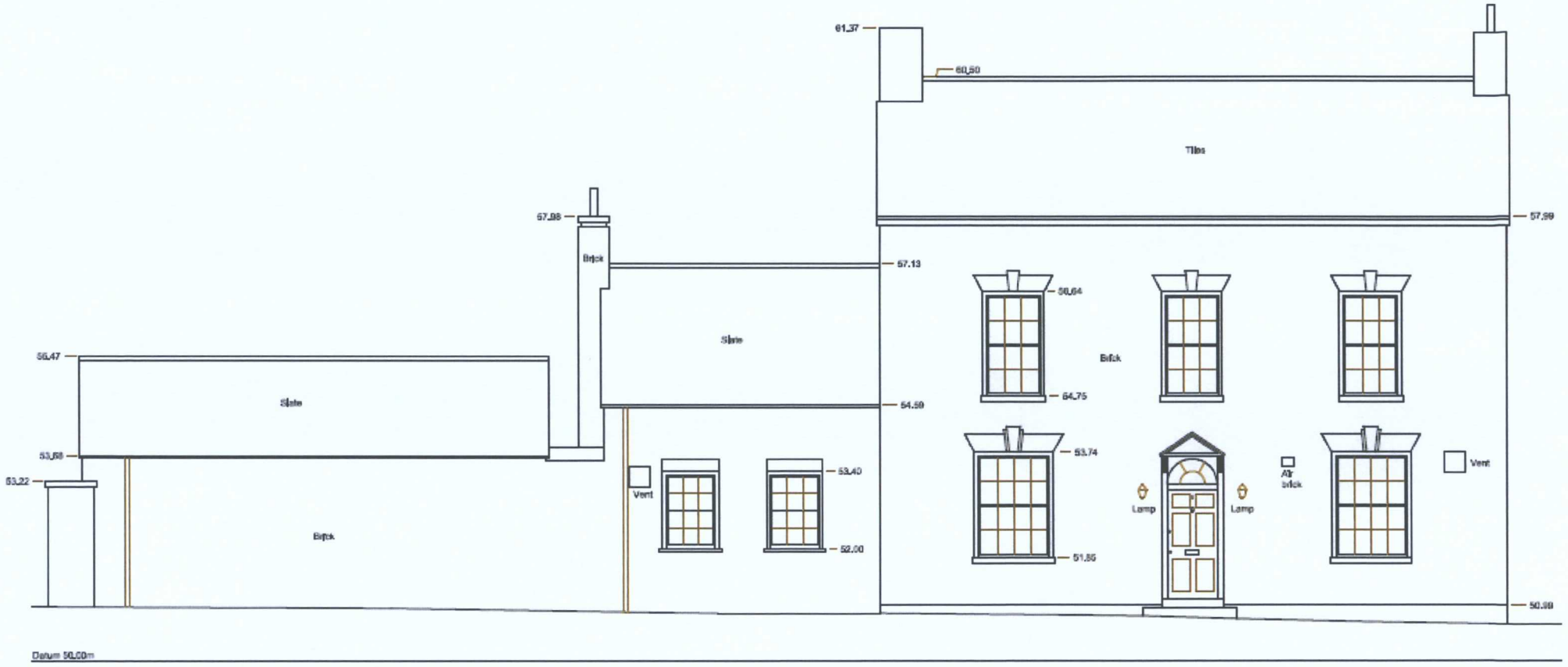


Second floor plan

Ground Plan of Outbuilding

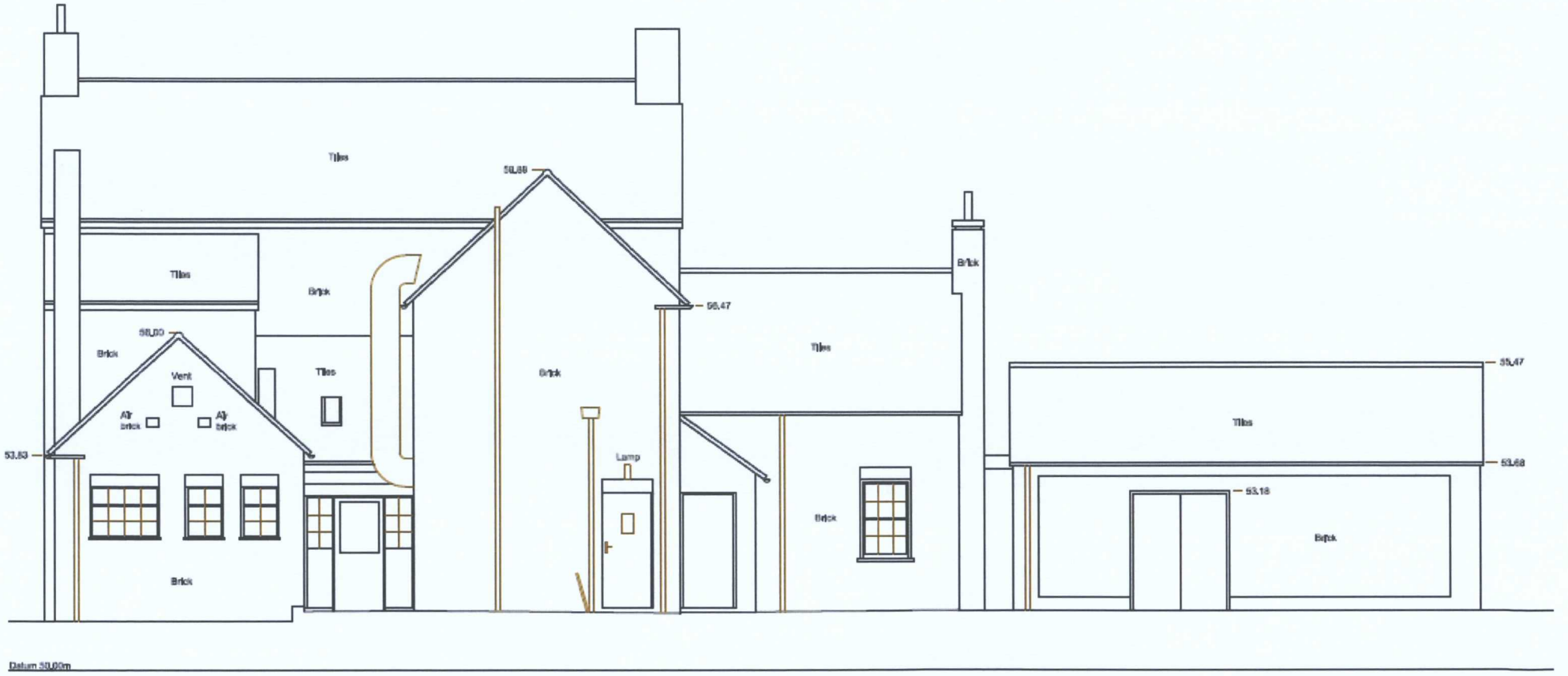


West Elevation – Existing



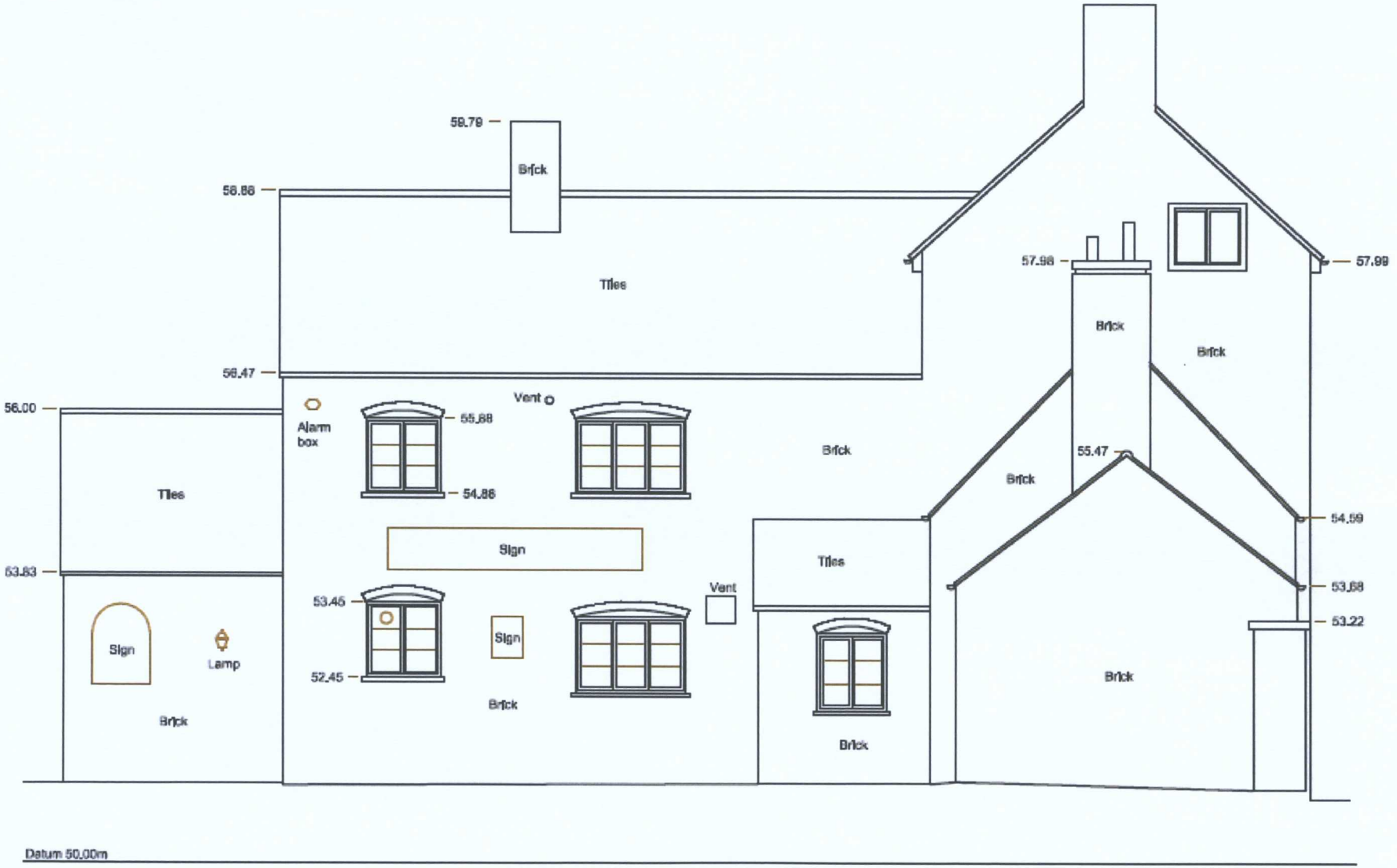
West elevation

East Elevation – Existing



East elevation

North Elevation



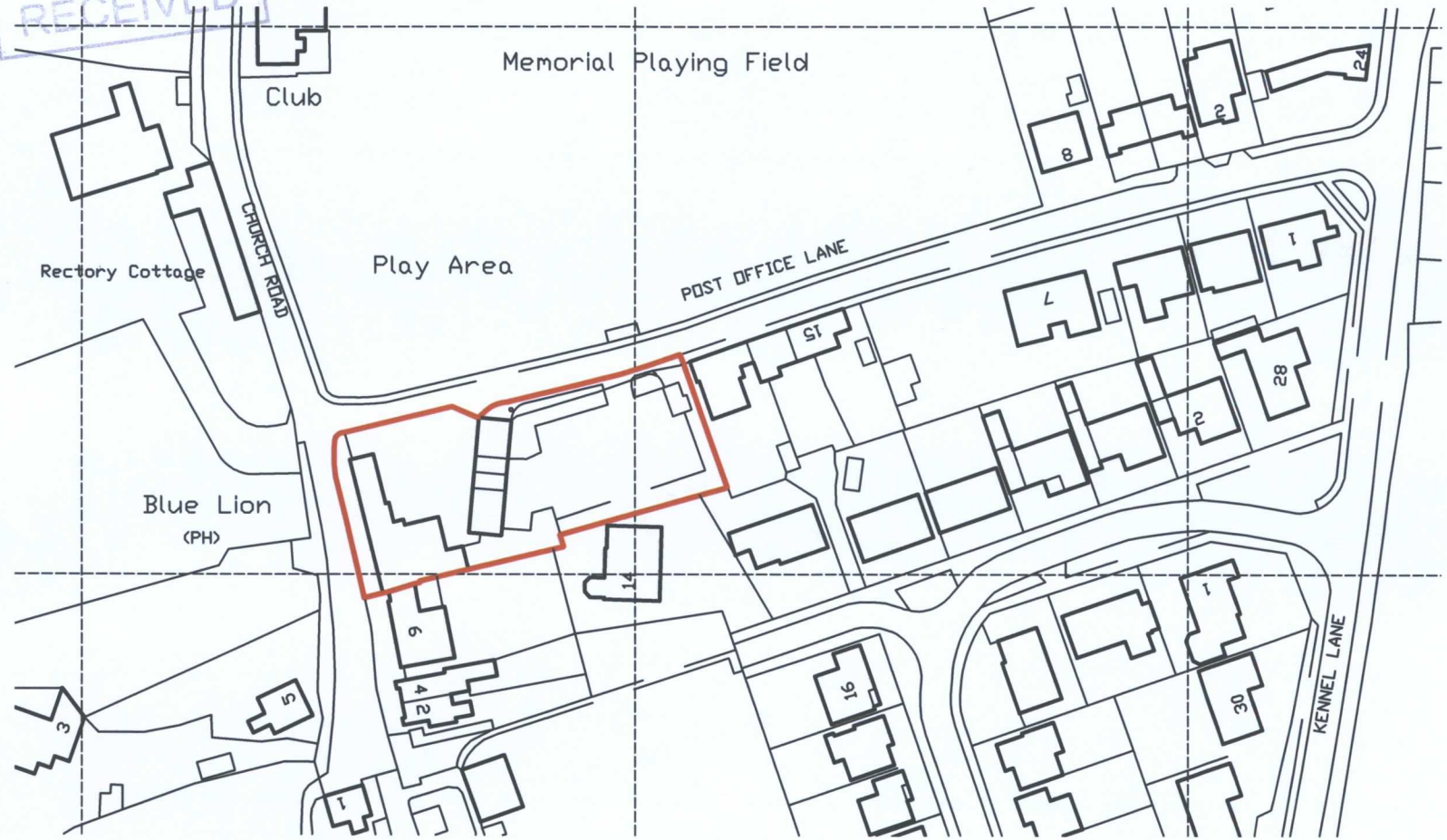
North elevation


THE BLUE LION


Witherley.

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BLUE LION PH, POST OFFICE LANE, ATHERSTONE.



SITE LOCATION PLAN. Scale 1/1250.