

PROPOSED BASEMENT WORKS AT 803 WILMSLOW ROAD

DIDSBURY, CITY OF MANCHESTER



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER

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GARRY MILLER HERITAGE CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is a heritage consultant, architectural historian and published author who has spent more than 35 years studying and working with buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. The book was described as ‘scholarship as its best’ by *Country Life* (June 2003), and ‘well analysed and presented’ in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); and was widely cited in the 2006 *Buildings of England* volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire. Extensive research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings, in particular the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment. His area of operation encompasses the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and North and West Yorkshire. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and reports on more than 150 buildings or sites are produced annually.

THIS REPORT

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CONTENTS

1: Executive Summary	5
2: The Site	7
3: The Proposal/Scope of this Report	9
4: The Application Building	11
5: The Conservation Area	18
6: Summary of Significance	20
7: Planning Policy Context	22
8: Impact of the Proposal	23

1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed works at number 803 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, in the City of Manchester. Number 803 stands on the north side of Wilmslow Road amid a suburban setting and is the westernmost of a pair of 19th century semi-detached villas adjoining and belonging to The Grove, a cul-de-sac of Victorian houses.

The application property is designated at Grade II, forming part of a single listing along with number 805. An attached cottage, 801 Wilmslow Road, is separately listed at Grade II. The adjacent houses in the Grove – numbers 1, 3 and 5, 7 and 9, 11 and 13, 15 and 17 – are each also listed at Grade II, as are the semi-detached numbers 807 and 809 Wilmslow Road which also belong to The Grove. The properties all stand within Didsbury St James Conservation Area.

Proposals are being submitted to Manchester City Council for conversion of the redundant basement of the application property to living space. The principal heritage consideration arising is therefore the proposal's potential impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the listed building. The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and assess how the proposal will affect it. A secondary matter, in respect of the external works only, is the potential impact upon the conservation area. Owing to the nature of the proposal, it is considered the setting of the attached number 801, along with the listed houses in The Grove and numbers 807 and 809 Wilmslow Road, is unaffected.

The Grade II designation of the application property denotes it is of national importance for its special architectural and historic interest. Its significance essentially derives from this special interest and can be summarised as follows:

- Its architectural interest as a mid-status semi-detached villa of distinctive appearance, with Victorian Gothic/half timbering details
- Its historical role and rarity as part of the 1870s villa development at The Grove, intended for North German settlers and a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of 19th century Manchester society
- Its collective role with these houses and also its unusual relationship with the attached cottage at 801 Wilmslow Road
- Its historical associations with the developer of The Grove, James Watts, an industrialist and Lord Mayor of Manchester

This significance is primarily embodied in the external envelope of the building given alterations to the interior which took place during renovations approved in 2015. The significance of the basement, which contains two main rooms, a coal store and the remains of steps to the ground floor, derives primarily from its historical role as the former service area of the building. This significance has been compromised by being shut off from the rest of the house during the 2015 works, meaning its historic role as an integral and important part of the dwelling is now obscured. The principle of the proposal is therefore favourable as it will return the basement to a sustainable use and therefore enhance its significance in this respect.

As regards the works themselves, the existing layout will remain unaltered. No historic features survive in the basement, with the exception of chimneybreasts and steps, which will remain. Externally, the principal effect will be to create a new access to the basement by downward extension of an existing window in the right main room (proposed lounge) to form a door and provision of steps and railings. However a lightwell to this and the left room once existed and have now been covered by modern paving. The proposal essentially involves reinstatement of these lightwells. The physical changes will therefore be minimal, essentially being enlargement of the right lightwell window and the steps to it. A railing, which is likely to have existed originally, will enclose the lightwell. Given that for the most part these features will be below ground, they will not be visually prominent in the public realm views that capture the significance of the listed building and will not impair or detract from its qualities.

In summary, the proposal will secure the continued use of the basement and enhance its significance by reinstating its historical function as part of the living space of the dwelling. The works will also reinstate the lost lightwells and will not dilute or detract from the building's special interest and group value as a distinctive Victorian villa that forms part of The Grove development and is the essence of its designation and of its significance. The proposal thereby satisfies the requirements of national planning guidance, along with those of the local development plan, and hence merits approval without delay.

2: THE SITE

The application property is located on the southeastern edge of Didsbury village, part of the city of Manchester. Number 803 stands on the north side of Wilmslow Road and is the westernmost of a semi-detached pair of 19th century villas adjoining and belonging to The Grove, a cul-de-sac of Victorian houses. It stands within a suburban setting and is also attached, somewhat unusually, to the west side of number 801, an late 18th/early 19th century cottage, beyond which is modern housing on Skylark Close.



Map 1. The application property



1. The proposal building, 803 Wilmslow Road



2. Westward view along Wilmslow Road showing 803 and its neighbour 805 (foreground)

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Designations

The application property is designated at Grade II, forming part of a single listing along with number 805. The attached 801 Wilmslow Road is separately listed at Grade II. The adjacent houses in the Grove – numbers 1, 3 and 5, 7 and 9, 11 and 13, 15 and 17 – are each listed at Grade II, as are the semi-detached numbers 807 and 809 Wilmslow Road immediately east of The Grove. All the properties lie within Didsbury St James Conservation Area.



3. The application property forms a single listing together with number 805 to its right, while the attached 801 (left) is listed separately

3.2 Proposed development

Proposals are being submitted to Manchester City Council for conversion of the redundant basement of the application property to living space.

3.3 Heritage impact

The principal heritage consideration arising is therefore the proposal's potential impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the listed building. A

secondary matter, in respect of the external works only, is the potential impact upon the conservation area. Owing to the nature of the proposal, it is considered the setting of the attached number 801, along with the listed houses in The Grove and numbers 807 and 809 Wilmslow Road, is unaffected.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 194 of Chapter 16 (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*) of the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised July 2021) states local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is to describe the significance of the listed building and conservation area and to assess the proposal's impact in the context of relevant heritage planning policies. It is considered the level of detail is, in accordance with paragraph 194, proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and no more than is necessary to understand the proposal's impact. The report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation supporting the application.

3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

1. Analysis of the application building (Section 4) and of the conservation area (Section 5)
2. Evaluation of the significance of these heritage assets (Section 7)
3. A summary of the relevant planning policies against which the application will be assessed (Section 8)
4. Evaluation within this policy context of the impact of the proposal upon the application building and conservation area (Section 9).

4: THE APPLICATION BUILDING

4.1 Overview

Distinctive semi-detached villa of circa 1870 with redundant basement.

4.2 Historical context

The property was part of a small villa development named The Grove, built by James Watts of Abney Hall, Cheadle (1804-1879), an industrialist and former Lord Mayor of Manchester. The houses are said to have been intended for immigrant North German settlers and earned the name 'Watt's Folly'. The Grove itself is a cul-de-sac of detached and semi-detached houses, with numbers 803 and 805 adjoining its western side and the corresponding pair of 807 and 809 to the east. Numbers 803 and 805 were each L-shaped internally, interlocked in the 'Cheshire Key' formation as Map 2 shows (below). It has been noted already how, somewhat oddly, 803 is attached to the cottage that is now number 801 Wilmslow Road, which pre-dates the villas by possibly as much as a century.



Map 2. The application property (indicated) belongs to a semi-detached pair of villas that stands on the western side of The Grove, as the 25-inch OS map of 1916 shows



4. The property is part of the The Grove development, whose houses are of similar appearance

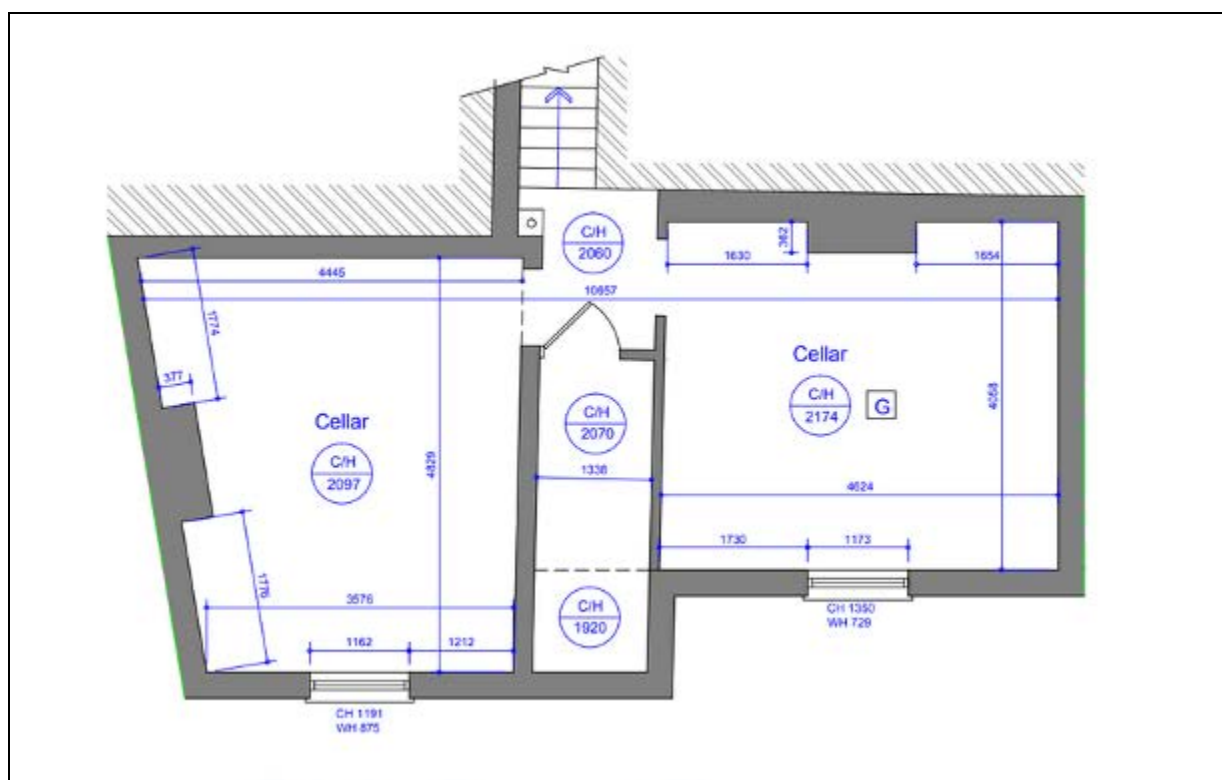
4.3 Description

- a. **Summary.** 803 and 805 belong to the 19th century extension of the village along Wilmslow Road. They form a property of distinctive appearance, broadly sharing the same architectural vocabulary as the adjacent houses in The Grove with a mixture of Victorian Gothic and timber-framed details. 803 is especially notable in the streetscene for its slender square tower above the entrance and adjoining gable with saltire pattern timber-framing.
- b. **List description.** The National Heritage list for England description of 803 and 805, compiled at the time of their designation in 1994, describes the exterior only:

Pair of houses. Probably c.1870. Brown brick in header bond, with some dressings of sandstone and red brick, and some applied "half-timbering"; slate roofs. Irregular plan. Two storeys plus a narrow 3-storey tower, a 7-window range including a square-topped wing to the left, a square-topped tower next to this, and 2 steeply-pitched gables with ornamental half-timbering and projecting verges with bargeboards; square-headed doorway at base of tower, another doorway to right of 3rd window, with gabled porch; mostly 2-light windows on both floors, but a 3-light window between the doorways, and another at 1st floor to the left, with ornamental cast-iron balcony. Part of the settlement known as The Grove, said to have been built for immigrant North German community. Rare example of domestic architecture reflecting cosmopolitan nature of C19 Manchester society. Forms group with items in The Grove and with No.807 Wilmslow Road.

4.4 The basement

- a. **Interior/arrangement.** The basement would have been used originally as either service rooms or servants' quarters, but is now accessible only by ladder from a trapdoor beneath the entrance lobby of the property. The original access was beneath the main staircase, but this was sealed off during renovations of the property consented in 2015 in connection with its conversion to a single dwelling (planning reference 108546/LO/2015/S2). The basement consists of two unequally-sized rooms to right and left separated by a passage beneath the entrance hall of the building. The latter has the remnant of the stairs (possibly rebuilt) from the ground floor at its inner end and a coal store at the outer. The rooms have brick chimneybreasts with blocked fireplaces, and along with the staircase, are the only historic features evident. The ceilings of the rooms have all been rebuilt/reinforced with steel joists.
- b. **Exterior.** The main rooms were originally lit by lightwells, now paved over (perhaps during the 2015 works) but with their form still discernable. It is possible these were enclosed by a railed area. Each room has a single window, now fitted with a modern louvred frame.



5. Existing plan of the basement



6. Room on the right of the basement



7. Room on the left side of the basement



8. *Remnant of original steps to ground floor*



9. *Coal drop at the outer end of the basement passage*



10. Paved over lightwell to right basement room

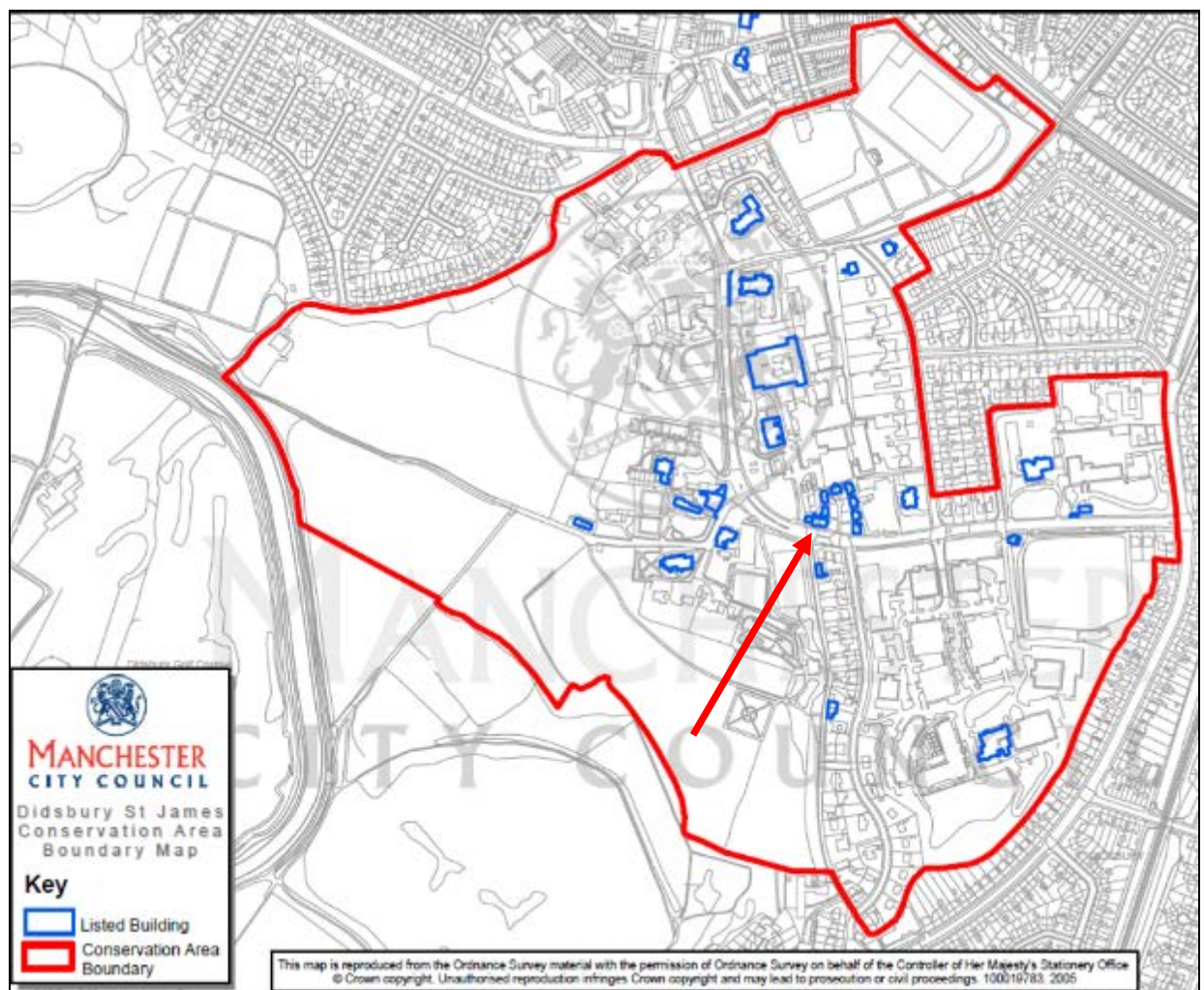


11. Similar lightwell to left basement room

5: THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.1 Boundaries

Didsbury St James Conservation Area was first designated in November 1970 and is located nine kilometres south of Manchester City Centre. It covers an extensive area centred on the ancient core of Didsbury village, at the junction of Wilmslow Road and Stenner Lane. The conservation area boundary also takes in adjoining later development along Wilmslow Road and its environs, as well as surrounding open space and woodland. The application building stands within this later Wilmslow Road development.



Map 3. Conservation area boundary with the application building indicated

5.2 Character and appearance

A character appraisal, which would guide development within the conservation area and form a material consideration in determining planning applications affecting it, has not yet been produced by Manchester City Council. However the qualities of the conservation area that are the basis of its special interest are described in the city council's internet pages as follows:

- The original historic centre of the village stands on a pronounced bend in Wilmslow Road where it meets Stenner Lane, and where a green formerly stood. Two public houses and a restaurant are located here, and in the past a number of shops also existed
- The conservation area contains the greatest concentration of listed buildings in Manchester, outside the city centre
- The Church of St. James, which replaced an earlier church, is the oldest building, with parts dating from 1620
- Architectural styles vary from the Perpendicular of St James to the Classical and Gothic of public buildings and of the more grandiose houses. Older and more modest houses meanwhile have a simple vernacular character
- There is a great variety of building materials, the most common being red brick for walls and blue slate for roofs. Stone dressings are used extensively, and several buildings are built entirely of stone, notably the two churches. Several buildings are finished in stucco or roughcast render
- The grounds of the Shirley Institute, originally parkland to the Towers, have recently been developed with glass office blocks. The large variety of building materials to be found in the area is not as discordant as would first appear
- The whole of the conservation area, with the exception of playing fields, is well-wooded, the trees screening groups of buildings from each other and providing a unifying, leafy backdrop to the whole area. The trees are therefore of paramount importance in establishing the character of the conservation area
- Most existing buildings are characterised by vertically-proportioned sash windows, and entrance doorways help to create the character of the area
- There is a variety of boundary treatments, including railings, brick or stone walls and some cobble-paved forecourts, and these make a significant contribution to the character of the area
- Road re-surfacing means that very few original setts or flags survive

6: SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

6.1 Rationale

Paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

6.2 The listed building

The Grade II designation of the application property denotes it is of national importance for its special architectural and historic interest. Its significance essentially derives from the special interest that has warranted its designation and can be summarised as follows:

- Its architectural interest as a mid-status semi-detached villa of distinctive appearance, employing Victorian Gothic and half-timbering in its design
- Its historical function and rarity as part of the 1870s villa development at The Grove, intended for North German settlers and a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of 19th century Manchester society
- Its collective role with these houses at The Grove and also its unusual relationship with the attached earlier cottage at 801 Wilmslow Road
- Its historical associations with its developer James Watts, industrialist and Lord Mayor of Manchester

This significance is primarily embodied in the external envelope of the building given the modern alterations to the interior which took place during the renovations of 2015, and which is also the basis of its positive contribution to the conservation area. The significance of the basement derives principally from its historical role as the former service area of the building. However this significance has been compromised by being shut off from the rest of the house during the 2015 works, meaning its historic role as an integral and important part of the dwelling's living space is now obscured.

6.3 The conservation area

The significance of Didsbury St James Conservation Area derives from its character and appearance as the ancient core of the village and surrounding later development along Wilmslow Road along with adjoining open spaces and woodland. Its built character is embodied in a variety of buildings and styles from its two churches to former country houses and modest cottages and from Perpendicular Gothic to Neoclassical. The extensive woodland of the conservation area is also a defining element of its character. The significance of the conservation area is therefore embodied primarily in these houses and their relationship to each other amid the streetscene and spaces. While the significance of the conservation area primarily extends to the city-wide context, it contains a number of buildings which are listed and therefore of national importance, including the application property. In this regard, the conservation area is notable for containing the greatest concentration of listed buildings in the city outside Manchester.

7: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

7.1 Statutory duties

Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to give special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Section 72 (1) requires LPAs to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of a conservation area.

7.2 Relevant policies

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how the statutory duty is to be put into practice. Paragraph 197 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

Regarding designated heritage assets, paragraph 199 states that ‘*great weight*’ should be given to their conservation and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; and that significance can be lost through development within its setting.

In the local planning context, policy EN3 of the City Council’s Local Development Framework Core Strategy, adopted July 2012, requires new development to preserve or where possible, enhance the historic environment. Saved policy DC18 of the city’s Unitary Development Plan specifically applies to conservation areas, which are to be preserved and enhanced. Saved policy DC19 states the council will have regard to the desirability of securing the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use of listed buildings

8: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

8.1 Summary of the scheme

The proposal seeks consent for conversion of the disused basement to additional living space within the property, thereby bringing it back into active use. The works, along with details of materials, methods and specifications are fully detailed in other submitted documentation.

8.2 Principle of the scheme

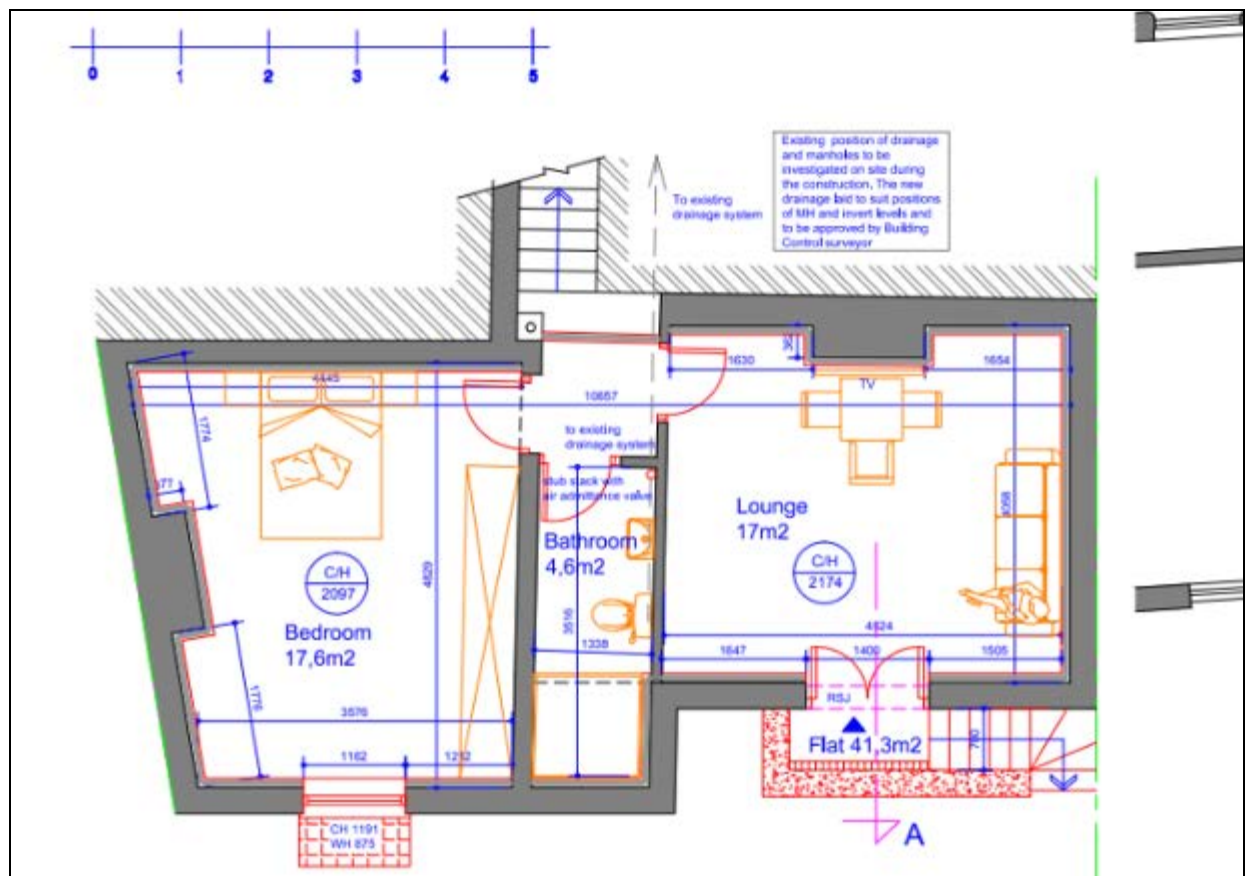
The basement originally functioned as an integral part of the house but is now redundant. It is evident from its appearance that it has not been used for many decades. The proposal is therefore favourable as it will return the basement to a sustainable use and therefore enhance its significance in this respect.

8.3 Effect of the works

- a. **Internal.** The intention is to create a lounge in the right room, bedroom in the left and a bathroom in the former coal store. The existing layout will therefore remain unaltered. It has been noted in this report that no historic features survive on this floor, with the exception of the chimneybreasts and stairs. None of these features will be lost as a result of the works.
- b. **External.** The principal effect of the proposal will be to create a new access to the basement by downward extension of the existing window in the right room (proposed lounge) to create a door and provision of steps and railings. It has been noted in this report that a lightwell here, and on the opposite side, once existed and have now been covered over by the modern paving. The proposal essentially involves reinstatement of this lightwell. The physical changes to the building will therefore be minimal, essentially being of the enlargement of the window and the steps down to the door opening. A railing, which possibly existed originally, will enclose the lightwell. Given that for the most part these features will be below ground, they will not be visually prominent in the public realm views that capture the significance of the listed building and will not impair or detract from its qualities. It will continue to be read as a distinctive Victorian villa that forms part of The Grove development. The lightwell to the left room will also be reinstated, without steps, and with a new window whose framing pattern is in keeping with those existing elsewhere in the listed building.



12. Proposed front elevation



13. Proposed basement layout

8.4 Conclusion

The proposal will secure the continued use of the basement and enhance its significance by reinstating its historical function as part of the living space of the dwelling. The works will also reinstate the lost lightwells and will not dilute or detract from the special interest and group value, as a distinctive Victorian villa and part of The Grove development, that is the essence of its designation and significance. The proposal thereby satisfies the requirements of national planning guidance as established in paragraphs 197 and 199 of the NPPF, along with those of the local development plan, and therefore merits approval without delay.