

The Amulet, Shepton Mallet Heritage Statement Prepared for Let's Buy the Amulet July 2025



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Cover image: Ian Chalk Architects

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Amulet is a theatre in the centre of Shepton Mallet, built in 1975 as part of a substantial redevelopment of the town centre. It has been closed as a theatre since 2011. The local community have created an organisation *Let's Buy the Amulet* to raise money to purchase the theatre from its current owner and restore it to theatre and community use. This document has been commissioned for *Let's Buy the Amulet* to support the recognition of the building as a community heritage asset, and to support funding applications to restore and repair the building.

1.2 Site and scope

The Amulet (originally named 'The Centre' and later 'The Academy') was designed by the architects Terry Hopegood, Paul White and Henry Alpass of the Wyvern Design Group as the key focus of a larger town centre rebuilding and regeneration programme including new shops, civic facilities, and retirement accommodation. The project was privately funded by Francis Showering, a local resident and one of the directors of the Showerings company who produced *Babycham*.

The theatre closed in 2011 and was sold to a private owner. The upper floors are currently in use as a gymnasium and preliminary work, now on hold, has taken place to create a private apartment on the 2nd floor. The ground floor is in public use exclusively for *Let's Buy the Amulet*. The adjacent building to the west, (which comprises many separate addresses but will be described in this document as 3-4 Market Place), was originally catering, function, and office space associated with the theatre with retail units at ground floor. The upper floors of 3-4 Market Place have now been extended and remodelled as residential accommodation.

This document will focus on the Amulet Theatre itself, as outlined in the site plan in [Figure 1](#), however the adjacent 3-4 Market Place will also be summarised because of its designed purpose as ancillary spaces for the theatre.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing the location of The Amulet [Aerial image source: Google Earth]

1.3 Planning context

Permission was granted on 25 January 2007 to convert the theatre building and 3-4 Market Place into a performing arts academy with associated accommodation in the former civic rooms and offices (reference 067900/023). The proposals included a substantial rear extension to the upper levels of 3-4 Market Place.

Permission was granted on 02 Nov 2011 for change of use of the ground floor and part of the first floor of the theatre building into a public house, leaving the performance spaces at first floor (reference 2011-2123).

Permission was granted on the 14 November 2012 to adjust the access, egress and openings of the theatre to prepare the building for use as a public house (reference 2012/2269). The works included the removal of the principal public stair and much of the partition walling at ground floor level, the raising of the ground floor level to afford level access, and the addition of extra external doors. The consented works were only partially carried out and the two pairs of double doors in the east elevations were not installed.

Permission was refused on 26 June 2014 to convert the theatre's former second floor committee room into a standalone flat (reference 2012/1785). This was overturned at appeal in a decision dated 10 February 2015 (reference APP/Q3305/A/14/2227902) and permission was granted.

An application was validated on 29 July 2020 (reference 2020/1414/FUL) to convert the theatre into seven flats and one retail unit. This application has not yet been formally decided.

The emerging Shepton Mallet Neighbourhood Plan, which is due to go to referendum in summer 2025, supports the proposed reopening of the Amulet as a key element in the regeneration of the Town Centre.

1.4 Methodology, sources and limitations

1.4.1 Methodology

This report broadly follows the suggested structure for heritage statements / impact statements set out in Historic England's *Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in the Historic Environment* (2019). Any variations from this structure reflect the specific circumstances and characteristics of the scheme and have been adopted to bring clarity to the reader.

Where relevant, the advice given in Historic England Advice Note 12 and *Advice Note 16: Listed Building Consent* (2021) and *Good Practice Advice in Planning: The Setting of Heritage Assets* (GPA3, 2017) has also been followed.

A site visit was undertaken on Monday 14 April 2025.

1.4.2 Sources

A full list of sources is included in [Section 5.0 on page 26](#)

1.4.3 Historic Environment Record

The Somerset Historic Environment Record has been consulted via the public website *Know Your Place*. The search map and relevant results are reproduced in [Section 5.2 on page 26](#).

1.4.4 Limitations

It is the nature of existing buildings that details of their construction and development may be hidden or may not be apparent from a visual inspection. The conclusions and any advice contained in our reports — particularly relating to the dating and nature of the fabric — are based on our research, and on observations and interpretations of what was visible at the time of our site visits. Further research, investigations or opening up works may reveal new information which may require such conclusions and advice to be revised.

1.5 Acknowledgements

This report has been produced in collaboration with the historian Dr Alistair Fair, who undertook research, interviewed Terry Hopegood and wrote sections 2.2.4 to 2.2.6. The report has been informed by further research and analysis by Ian Chalk from ICA and Martin Berkeley from *Let's Buy the Amulet*.

1.6 Designations

The Amulet theatre and 3-4 Market Place are not currently listed or included on the Somerset local list. The Amulet is however on the Theatres at Risk Register held by the Theatres Trust, and the campaign to restore the theatre is supported by the Twentieth Century Society. The buildings lie within the Shepton Mallet Conservation Area, which includes most of the historic centre of the town.

There are many designated heritage assets in the immediate vicinity of the Amulet. Of most note are the market cross to the west, which is Grade II* listed and a scheduled monument; the Grade I church of St Peter and St Paul to the east; and Merchant House, a Grade II* listed seventeenth-century house to the south east.

In the centre of Market Place stands a fifteenth century Shambles market stall, which was reconstructed and restored as part of the 1970s redevelopment of the Centre. This is Grade II listed.

On the south side of Market Place, Nos. 9-11 Market Place are all listed Grade II. Nos. 10 and 11 date to approximately 1600, with No. 9 approximately 1800.

Many of the other buildings around the churchyard, the High Street and the west side of Town Street are also listed at Grade II.

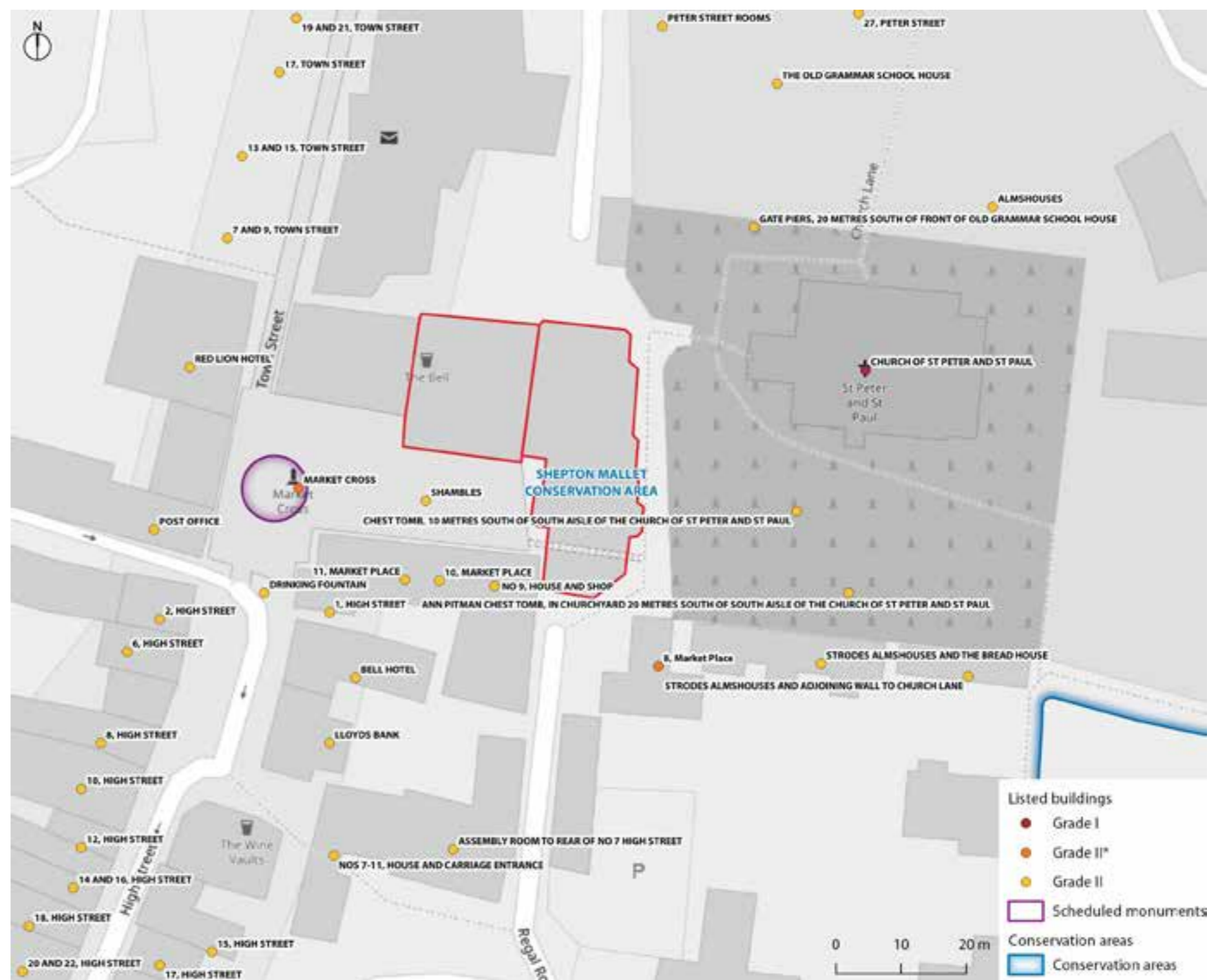


Figure 2: Heritage designations [© Historic England 2025. This data was obtained on 29 April 2025. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2025. Base imagery Openstreetmap 2025]

2.0 Understanding the Amulet

2.1 Summary

The Amulet lies within the centre of Shepton Mallet in Somerset, an historic woolmaking town with a large number of well-preserved seventeenth and eighteenth century buildings, and some significant nineteenth century factories and viaducts from a Victorian revival. The town centre was redeveloped in the 1970s after a long and controversial period of planning blight, with a comprehensive scheme which included the demolition of many historic buildings and the construction of new residential retirement apartments, shops, a supermarket, community space and a new state-of-the-art theatre. The theatre, now called the Amulet, was designed in a brutalist style, but with an eye to the character and materials of the context. Since approximately 2005 the Amulet has suffered a series of interventions that have negatively affected its fabric and its appearance in the conservation area, including insensitive and inappropriate cladding materials, new windows, and the loss of most of the interior finishes particularly at ground floor level.

2.2 History

2.2.1 Geology and topography

Shepton Mallet lies at the northern extent of a shallow sloping shelf of fertile land, which ends in the steep sides of the river Sheppey which runs approximately east-west. Shepton lies on a bed of Blue Lias. To the east of the town in the higher ground lies a significant layer of inferior oolite from which Doultling Limestone is quarried.

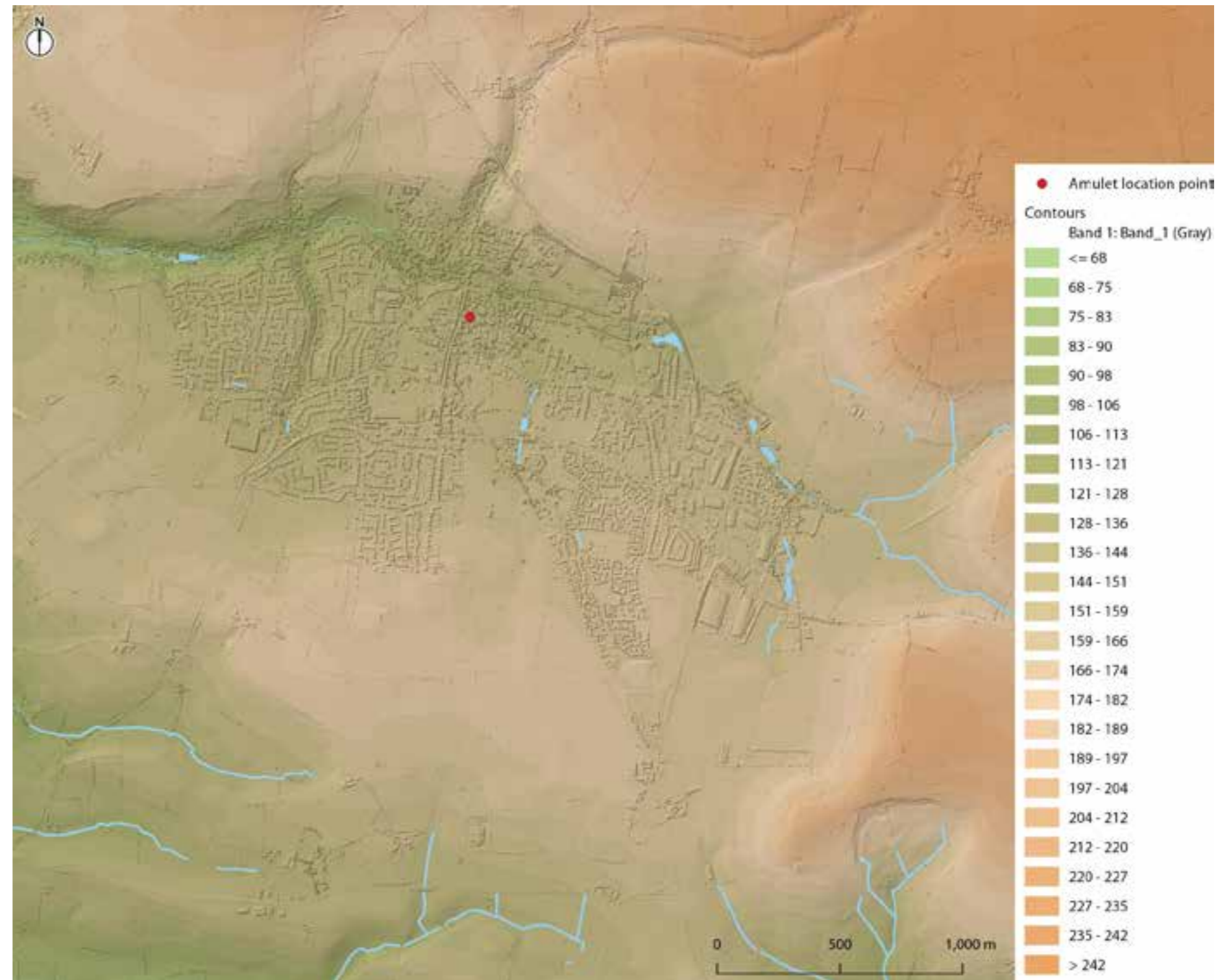


Figure 3: Shepton Mallet and the surrounding terrain [Source: Environment Agency Lidar downloaded May 2025]

2.2.2 Summary history of Shepton Mallet

This fertile area of Somerset has evidence of ancient human occupation. Neolithic fragments have been uncovered from areas south of the town and there is evidence of prehistoric burials in the Sheppey Valley. Iron age pottery fragments have been uncovered in various locations in and around the town, including close to the Amulet building in the Market Place in 1951. The Roman Fosse Way, which linked Lincoln and Exeter via Bath, lies to the east of the town and a linear Romano-British settlement along the line of the Fosse way south-east of the town was discovered in 1990. The settlement included stone and timber buildings and cemeteries, and is now a scheduled monument.

The current town probably began as a small Saxon or early medieval settlement centred on what is now the Market Place area, evidenced by Saxon fabric in St Peter and St Paul's Church. It is likely that the narrow, fast-flowing river powered mills in the area from a very early date, and a mill is recorded in the Domesday Book when the settlement is first named as *Sceaptun*, 'the sheep farm'. According to Clare Gathercole in *An Archaeological Assessment of Shepton Mallet*, the town then 'appears to have been deliberately developed as a commercial enterprise, either by Glastonbury Abbey or by the Mallet family' throughout the thirteenth and

fourteenth century. On the profits of this industry Shepton grew into a prosperous woolmaking town, granted charters to hold fairs and markets in its own right.

By the early seventeenth century Shepton Mallet was thriving and wealthy, as evidenced by many high-quality buildings surviving from that era. Its importance led it to be chosen as the location for the county jail, one of Britain's first purpose-built prisons, which was in use by 1625. The town's wealth was still focussed on woolmaking, but Shepton's factories began to diversify into silk and crepe making during the eighteenth century. The town expanded to the east as clothmaking mills grew up along the Sheppey River.

The woolmaking trade saw a decline towards the end of the eighteenth century, which was a particular blow to Shepton Mallet. Large Victorian-era factories and the new connectivity of the railway improved the damaged fortunes of the town. Other industries such as the cheesemaking and brewing industries developed, and the town still produced fine fabrics like silk and crepe. Despite this Shepton Mallet did not recover its position of primacy.

Shepton Mallet suffered a second decline in the twentieth century following the first world war. Despite the national success of the town's Babycham perry from the 1940s onwards, the town did not substantially revive. By the mid twentieth century the narrow streets of Shepton were clogged with motor traffic, often reaching a complete standstill. Redevelopment and road widening was seen as a potential solution to the town's traffic problems and its languishing economy. The decision was tabled in 1958 to implement a road widening scheme on Town Street, and over the following years property on the east side of Town Street north of Market Place was purchased for demolition. The subsequent long story of rejected proposals and planning blight which ultimately led to construction of the Amulet and its associated buildings is set out by Alistair Fair in the summary below.



Figure 4: First edition Ordnance Survey map of 1888 (surveyed in 1885), showing the layout of the town's Market Place [Source: National Library of Scotland]



Figure 5: 1898 view north from the High Street to Town Street. [Source: Historic England]



Figure 6: Market Place in 1968 viewed from the bottom of Town Street, with traffic struggling to navigate the narrow streets [Source: Shepton Mallet Journal October 25 1968]

2.2.3 Creation of Shepton Mallet conservation area

The creation of the Shepton Mallet Conservation Area was in many ways spurred by the creation of the town centre development which includes the Amulet. In 1968 an extensive proposal for the redevelopment of the town centre was rejected by the Secretary of State due in part to the damage it would cause to the character of the historic town, and that definition of the distinctive character formed the basis not only for the designation of the town centre as a conservation area, but also for the new, detailed brief for the town centre development site, which prompted the current, more contextual design. The Conservation Area was designated in 1973. The area's special interest is summarised as follows:

- Rural location on the southern margins of the Mendip Hills on either bank of the River Sheppey;
- Medieval town centre stands above a string of historic former industrial settlements along the river valley namely, Darshill, Bowlish, Draycott, Longbridge, Lower Lane, Garston Street, Charlton;
- The architectural and historic quality of the area's historic buildings, 189 of which are listed and many others which make a positive contribution to the area's historic character and appearance
- Variety of building types with many good examples of industrial (textiles and brewing), religious (especially non-conformist), and residential buildings;
- Prevalent use of locally quarried Forest Marble and Doulting stone and the predominance of terracotta/brown/red clay tiles – either Bridgwater pantiles or double/triple/ Roman tiles;
- Valley bottom characterised by a haphazard mix of 17th and 18th century cottages, mill owner's houses and mills built as a result of the rapid growth of the early woollen industry;
- St Peter and St Paul's Church and churchyard with a tranquil atmosphere enhanced by mature trees and areas of historic paving;
- Market Place and its historic cross, shambles and drinking fountain;
- The Anglo Brewery and HM Prison;
- 17th, 18th and 19th century artisans' houses in Garston Street, predominantly 19th century expansion along Waterloo Road and Princes Road;
- Historic shopfronts and recent 'traditional' shopfronts;
- Darshill and Bowlish which have the character and appearance of rural hamlets;
- Part of the course of former Somerset and Dorset Railway and Great Western Railway;
- Trees and tree groups within the open spaces and specimen trees in private gardens;
- Old stone walls.



Figure 7: The Grade II* listed Anglo-Bavarian Brewery



Figure 8: View of the market cross looking north from the High Street



Figure 9: View from the junction between Peter Street and The Batch, showing an array of historic buildings including the Grade II listed 27 Peter Street on the left



Figure 10: Lower Lane in the steep sided valley to the north of the town, with a Grade II listed bridge over the lane.

2.2.4 The post-war theatre boom and Shepton Mallet

Note Sections 2.2.4 - 2.2.6 are by Dr Alistair Fair

The Amulet – originally known as The Centre – was completed in 1975. It was realised amid a wider boom in theatre-building which took in the length and breadth of Britain, and which, between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, saw new theatres constructed in places from Plymouth to Inverness, Aberystwyth to Ipswich. The ‘regional’ location of these venues is significant, for although this is the period of the National Theatre in London (1976), most of the new theatres were outside the largest centres of population. Many were located in smaller towns; others were built on university campuses, including the new greenfield sites of the ‘plate-glass’ universities. This theatre-building boom was principally supported by public funds, as were, in many cases, the organisations housed in these buildings. The Arts Council of Great Britain was founded in 1945 in order to distribute public subsidies for the arts at ‘arm’s length’ from government, and during the 1950s began increasingly to consider how it might support building projects. During the 1960s, support for capital works was formalised as a dedicated ‘Housing the Arts’ scheme which offered grants, usually 20-30% of construction costs, responsively. In parallel, grant-making bodies such as the Nuffield Trust and the Gulbenkian Foundation made major grants to arts organisations, as did local authorities, whose spending on the arts was enabled by the Local Government Act of 1948.

Within this context, the Amulet is extremely significant and unusual as an entirely privately funded venue. Its construction costs were funded by Francis Showering, a prominent local industrialist, as part of a wider, privately-led scheme for the reconstruction of an important town centre site. Privately funded theatres were not unknown in this period: Glyndebourne is perhaps the best-known example. In addition, both amateur and professional venues sought to attract donations from local businesses – practice which became increasingly common during the 1970s, in response to the broader economic challenges of the period. The Arts Council recognised this development with a conference on the subject in September 1976. However, as noted, the post-war theatre-building boom was largely underwritten by public funding, combined with a range of donations from other sources, and indeed participants in the 1976 conference noted the elusive ideal of a ‘single large donation’ as well as the mixed track records of the professional fundraisers who were increasingly involved in theatre projects.

Francis Showering’s support for the project appears to have reflected a degree of frustration with the lack of progress made in the redevelopment of Shepton Mallet town centre more generally. In 1959, the local council decided to widen Town Street, and began acquiring the necessary land. It was agreed that the county would deliver the road improvements, with the Urban District Council then purchasing surplus land from the county for commercial redevelopment. The scheme increased in scope and soon

came to encompass the reconstruction of a substantial part of the town centre. Such major redevelopments were very much a feature of the 1960s, and were typically realised by private developers operating within a basic framework laid down by the local authority. As the proposals evolved, the county council now proposed to build an inner relief road via the former Rectory gardens, which negated the need for the widening of Town Street and allowed its pedestrianisation. This approach was agreed by 1967 and was submitted for approval to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

A succession of schemes submitted by developers, including shops and offices, failed to secure approval due to their scale, which was felt to be out of character. The developers refused to change their designs or to reduce their scale, arguing that the result would be financially unviable. As the negotiations rumbled on, the area proposed for reconstruction was increasingly derelict, and was subject to ‘planning blight’. A planning brief was prepared in 1969, showing the scale and type of development which was likely to secure approval. It emphasised the way in which existing historic buildings in the town used a range of materials, combining render with natural finishes.

In 1971, Francis Showering stepped in. He purchased the site and financed the development personally, spending some £1.5 million overall. His motivation, according to a 1975 article in *Building Design*, was to contribute to the future development of the town – where his family had been based for some 300 years – and to arrest the planning blight from which the centre was suffering. His home overlooked the site and he was frustrated by the lack of progress. The design work was awarded to the Wyvern Design Group, a practice with offices in south-west England.

Wyvern’s work was varied, typologically, and included housing (not least sheltered housing) plus commercial premises. The Shepton Mallet town centre development appears to be unique within their output. Their connection with Showering’s business – the producer of drinks including Babycham – had begun in the mid-1960s, when they were commissioned to construct a new building on the firm’s nearby Kilver Street production site. Still extant, this building has a rubblestone ground floor with elevations of tile and concrete above; the windows have concrete hood-moulds. Considerable attention was given to ensuring that the tiles would not detach, as was then being experienced in tiled buildings by other architects (such as the University of Warwick by YRM). A glass bridge spans the main road, connecting the two parts of Showering’s site.

Following on from this commission, Wyvern was tasked with the new town centre. As with the earlier Kilver Street job, the partner in charge was Terry Hopegood. For the town centre, the job architects were Paul White and Henry Alpass. The periodical *Forma* described the job as a ‘unique commission’ in which the aim was ‘to produce the kind of development which would be right for Shepton Mallet.’



Figure 11: The 1960s Showerings laboratory and offices on Kilver Street, designed by the Wyvern Design Group, 1968 [Source: Hopegood Archive]

2.2.5 The design

Showering was adamant that the new town centre must be alive during the day and into the evening (Building Design, December 5 1975), and so the design brief not only included shops and offices but also a community hall and housing. According to interviews with the architect Terry Hopegood, the wide range of uses was deliberately chosen to activate the site. The proposals were quickly approved by the local authority during 1972, were presented to local people, were on site in early 1973, and the complex opened in 1975. Construction was accompanied by the narrowing and pedestrianisation of Town Street, whose traffic was diverted to the new relief road. In addition, Market Place was restored to its earlier proportions through the demolition of nineteenth-century council offices, opening the square up to the churchyard. Car parking was also relocated elsewhere, allowing more of the site to be developed and creating a more deliberately built-up, urban character at an appropriate scale for the pedestrian.

The site available for development was approximately 0.3 hectares, with buildings to be kept to a height of around three storeys in order to fit in with neighbours. The realised design provided shops and a supermarket to Town Street, with twenty-six flats for elderly people above (along with a warden's flat and accommodation for visitors.) The provision of these flats reflected Wyvern's specialist expertise as well as growing interest at this time in providing forms of 'sheltered' housing for the elderly. A block facing Market Place and the churchyard housed the hall/theatre. Further buildings around the square were restored for various uses, and an open-air market was planned for Market Place itself.

Unlike many urban schemes of the 1960s, which present a somewhat monolithic appearance, Wyvern's design breaks down the elements of the project into smaller units of distinct form and character. Their scale relates closely and deliberately to the buildings on adjoining sites, while their materials and detailing (such as bay windows and mansard roofs) are further contextual moves. This kind of contextualism – in terms of planning and appearance – became increasingly common during the 1970s, in part as a critical response to the scale of the previous decade's developments as well as their perceived lack of contextual sympathy. Such thinking was underpinned by the writing of (for example) Alec Clifton-Taylor on the vernacular. Contextualism (and conservation) were also increasingly prominent topics of debate and practice. At the end of the 1960s, the Civic Amenities Act introduced the concept of the 'conservation area', while the government sponsored major reports looking at how the historic centres of Bath, Chester, Chichester and York could be conserved. Organisations such as the Civic Trust also took an increasingly vocal and active stance, and there were pioneering conservation schemes in places like Norwich. Although contextual modernism was not new – with practitioners like Tayler and Green having long adopted such an approach – it was boosted by these developments.



Figure 12: Drawings of the site plan (top left) the ground floor plan (bottom left) and the first floor plan (bottom right) of The Centre, 1975. Top right: plaque in the interior west wall for the Amulet including a small relief model for the development [Drawings source: Forma vol 4 no 4, 1975]

A contextual approach was especially desirable in Shepton Mallet, given the failure of earlier designs by others to secure planning approval, and Hopegood notes the constructive contribution of the county's conservation officer. The town centre was designated a conservation area in 1973 and although this status primarily prevented hasty demolitions, it further demonstrates the significance that was now attached to architectural history and character in the town. Terry Hopegood made an extensive photographic survey to understand the look and 'feel' of the town before beginning design work.

Whereas the shops and flats to Town Street feature modest bay windows, render, rubblestone and concrete arches, the treatment of the Amulet is bolder. It is composed as a series of masses of polygonal plan, their

chamfered corners echoing the contemporaneous work of Howell Killick Partridge and Amis (for example: the Young Vic theatre of 1970), or Renton Howard Wood (the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, 1971). The way in which essentially octagonal spaces and volumes are deployed consistently across the plan – from the stage to smaller enclosures such as the entrance lobby brings Peter Moro's work to mind (e.g. the Gulbenkian Centre, Hull, 1969). However, the design is far from derivative. Externally, and especially as viewed from the churchyard, the theatre's scale and solidity respond well to the church, while the use of stone blockwork and lead also serves as a contextual device. For *Building Design* in 1975, the result was 'a strong piece of architecture'; this elevation, and that to Market Place, were the best parts of the composition. The Town Street front, by contrast, was felt to be

weaker, less certain in materials and detailing than the theatre/hall element. In essence, the theatre shows how an essentially modernist approach could be applied very successfully in a contextual way.

The design and construction process was seen in consensual terms by Showering, who hosted monthly meetings with the design team, contractor and local authority officers in a nearby hotel.



Figure 13: 1975 view of the Theatre from Market place, showing the original exterior finishes. [Photograph by Leighton Gibbins, from Hopegood Archive]



Figure 14: 1975 view of the east elevation of the Theatre viewed from the north east. [Photograph by Leighton Gibbins, from Hopegood Archive]



Figure 15: 1975 view of the Theatre viewed from the retirement apartments to the north, showing the lead-clad committee room space on the left, and the north elevation of Nos. 3-4 Market place on the right. [Photograph by Leighton Gibbins, from Hopegood Archive]

2.2.6 The auditorium

The provision of multipurpose 'community centres' was encouraged by social and architectural reformers during the 1940s, building on earlier traditions such as the village hall. In a related move, in 1945 the Arts Council published designs for a prototype 'arts centre' intended for small towns and putting on a mixture of amateur and professional work. While community centres were increasingly constructed from the 1950s onwards, multifunctional performance venues were less common. Within the specific context of theatre design and the more general world of the arts centre, it was often believed that adaptable spaces – i.e., auditoria whose configuration could be altered to suit different types of performance – were often unsatisfactory in practice. Typically flexibility was only found in small venues or studio auditoria, and was often achieved in rather crude ways (for example, by manually moving rostra).

In this context, the adaptability of the Amulet's auditorium is notable. Forma records that it reflected an original desire to accommodate a range of functions within the centre, which Hopegood attributes to Showering. However, the site was too constrained to provide both a flat-floored sprung dancefloor and a tiered auditorium. To accommodate both within a single space, the seating rake rises and falls on screw jacks, set at the sides of the space, allowing either raked seating or flat floor use. This approach was inspired by a similar arrangement in Barclays Bank's London headquarters. Terry Hopegood knew a senior director at Barclays who mentioned this arrangement; the architects and Showering travelled to see it. Showering was very enthusiastic; money was not an issue.

The Amulet appears to be the only example of an arts venue which took up this idea. Peter Moro's later Plymouth Theatre Royal (1982) uses screwjacks to lower the auditorium ceiling in order to screen off the upper balcony thus reducing the capacity for smaller shows, but by lowering the ceiling rather than raising the seating the approach at Plymouth (which is also much larger) is rather different.

In the case of the Amulet, Hopegood was keen that the auditorium should feel 'complete' in either configuration. The base of the rake (i.e., the ceiling in flat floor mode) was to be clad in aluminium, an approach he had earlier used in a bank design in Swindon. The technical aspects of the scheme were worked out in close collaboration with a leading theatre technical specialist firm, Mole Richardson, demonstrating the high specification which is evident throughout the project.



Figure 16: Image of the auditorium space in 1975. The seating is raised in this image [Still from BFI short film]

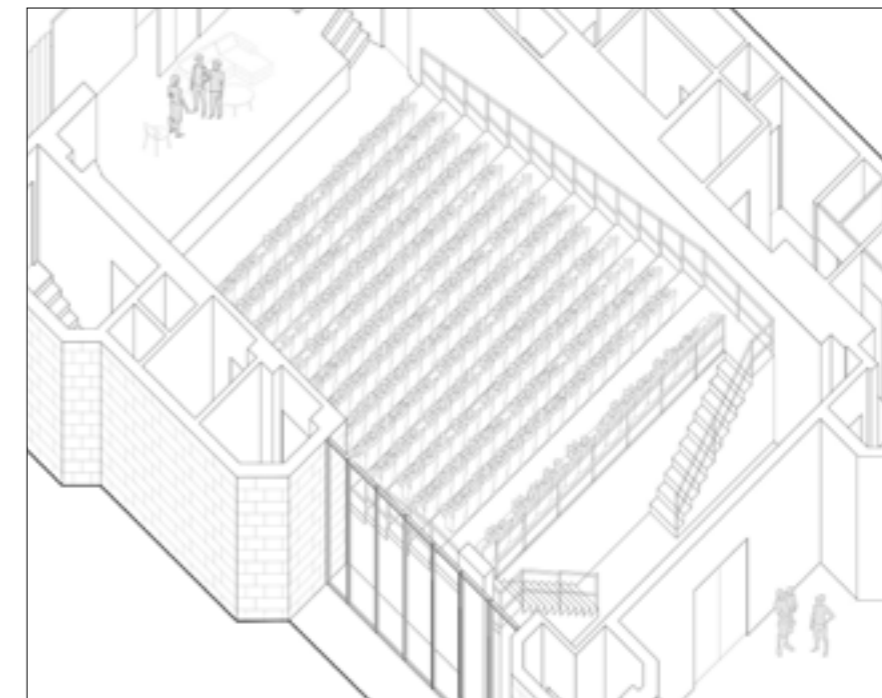


Figure 17: Axonometric drawing by ICA illustrating the auditorium seating in use, showing the folding stairs towards the rear [ICA]

6.402	Drive Mechanism	Screws are driven from 4 No. Holroyd Crofts 5 to 1 ratio vertical output worm reduction gear boxes (6 ins centres Renold No.4155306). at top of screws in Hall roofspace coupled in pairs via Hardy Spicer shafts, fitted with flexible disc type couplings and supported between bearing assemblies, to 2 No. central Holroyd Crofts 10 to 1 ratio double output right angle worm reduction gear boxes. (5 ins centres, overdriven, Renold No. 4155205). 2 No. double output gearboxes are coupled together with a Spicer Hardy shaft supported between bearings. Shaft fitted with a Dewhurst 8" diameter D.C. electromagnetic brake and a 6 ins diameter 5B Vee pulley driven by B55 belts from a 6 ins diameter 5B Vee pulley fitted on the drive shaft of a Horace Green 15 H.P., 960 R.P.M. "Trislot" motor. Motor complete with reversing duty contactor for direct on line, raise and lower limit switches, overtravel limits operating direct to a master contactor in the 3 phase line before the reversing contactors.
6.403	Bearing Pads	44 No. pads to distribute weight of lowered raisable floor onto auditorium floor, each consisting of 38mm beech pad bonded to 19mm Metalastic rubber-asbestos resilient pad bonded to 6mm m.s. bearing plate. Bearing plate bolted with adjustable screws to 9mm m.s. plate welded to framework of floor. Beech supplied to Mole-Richardson by Chivers. Access to adjustable screws for levelling or removal of pads obtained by lifting out louvre ceiling panels. Some of the shallow Angl-cel panels cannot be lifted out.

Figure 18: Extract from the specification for the raisable floor, by Mole-Richardson



Figure 19: The Auditorium near completion in 1975, showing the lowered raked seating (Source: Leighton Gibbons, 1975)



Figure 20: The Stage and flytower nearing completion in 1975 (Source: Leighton Gibbons, 1975)

2.2.7 Changes since 1975

Since construction in 1975, the development has been through many changes, and changes of name. Called The Centre when it was originally opened, the theatre was renamed The Amulet following the 1990 discovery of a Chi-Rho amulet in a Roman burial during the excavation of the Romano-British town east of Shepton (see topic box). The Bristol Academy of Performing Arts bought the building in the mid-2000s and renamed it The Academy. Its name has now been returned to The Amulet.

The first major changes to the building's fabric began in approximately 2007, when the Bristol Academy of Performing Arts (BAPA) received permission to substantially remodel the theatre and 3-4 Market Place. 3-4 Market Place was entirely redesigned as an accommodation block for students. The concrete shopfronts were broadly retained as built but at first and second floor the original brutalist façade of projecting bays was replaced with one flat plane on the line of the front of the bays. This was then rendered and fitted with sliding sash windows in imitation of a Georgian facade. To the rear, the lead-clad and windowless first floor elevation to Church Lane was also completely remodelled. Windows were pierced through and the second storey (which had been shallower, stepped back from Church Lane) was extended northwards to align with the first storey. This new elevation was itself then rendered and fitted with sliding sash windows in a mock-Georgian style.

Internally, all of the original spaces of 3-4 Market Place were removed and replaced with accommodation and bathrooms. At the southern end of the theatre building, the west facade of the first-floor dressing rooms (with public passageway below them) were also remodelled in a mock-Georgian style with a sash window inserted into the west wall, the stone cladding removed and replaced with render, and the western face of the standing seam lead roof replaced with slates. Photographs from October 2010 show most of the rebuilding work was complete by this date, and from details of these photos it seems likely that much of the standing-seam lead cladding on the exterior of the building was removed at the same time as these works, though it is not specified in the planning drawings. This includes the lead cladding of the second-floor committee room exterior walls and roof, the lead roof of the dressing rooms, and the lead details on the rear (west) elevation facing the church. Much of the lead was replaced by render, though in some areas no new surface was reinstated, and they remain strips of bare adhesive.

In approximately 2010 a bad water leak destroyed much of the ground floor ceilings. The seats of the auditorium were also badly damaged and subsequently disposed of (though the adjustable floor and lifting mechanism remains). The surface of the auditorium dance floor was also badly damaged.



Figure 21: View of the Amulet from Market Place in 2025 showing the c. 2007 mock-Georgian facade of Nos. 3-4 Market Place on the left and the dressing rooms on the right (compare with [Figure 13](#)).



Figure 22: View of the Amulet from the north from Market Place in 2024 showing the c. 2007 mock-Georgian rear facade of Nos. 3-4 Market Place on the right and the north elevation of the Amulet on the left. The jettied committee room on the left has lost its standing seam lead cladding, and the windows were added following planning permission to convert the space into a flat in 2015 (compare with [Figure 15](#)).



Figure 23: View of the Amulet from the north in 2025, showing the rendered panels where standing seam lead cladding has been removed (compare with [Figure 14](#)).

The BAPA continued to run the theatre as a public venue while using it as a training venue and accommodation for students. The organisation went into administration in 2011 and the building was vacated. It has not been a performance venue since.

Following the planning permission of 2011 and 2012 to divide the building into a theatre at first floor and a public house at ground floor, the connection between the two floors was essentially severed. The principal stair in the north of the theatre building was removed, and the opening filled with beam and block concrete. A secondary fire stair to the north of the entrance doors remains partially in place but the upper part of the last flight was broken away and the opening filled with beam and block. The ground floor level, which originally stepped down by the front theatre door and then up again into the principal atrium, has been replaced with a level floor throughout. An extra pair of glazed double doors with glazing bars were added outside the original glass double entrance doors, and the solid panel doors of the first floor balcony were replaced by glazed doors with glazing bars. Most of the internal partition walls at ground floor were also probably removed at this time. It may have been at this time that the stone wall above the theatre entrance was clad with timber, perhaps for signage purposes.

Following permission to convert the former second floor committee rooms into an apartment in 2015, windows were added to the north and east walls of that space. A bird net was also added over the balcony at approximately this time.



Figure 25: View of the interior of the Amulet looking north, in 1975 (top) and 2025 (bottom), showing the lost principal stair. [1975 image by Leighton Gibbins, Hopgood Archive]

The Shepton Mallet Chi-Rho amulet

When the Chi-Rho amulet was discovered in Shepton Mallet in 1990 it caused great excitement. The ancient Christian symbol of the Chi-Rho, and the fact that the graves of this cemetery were aligned east-west, was taken as strong evidence of the presence of Christianity in Somerset at a far earlier date than previously estimated. The artefact was a cause of great pride for the town, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells George Carey (who later became Archbishop of Canterbury) wore an enlarged copy of it.

Doubts were raised about the amulet's authenticity in the 1990s but they could not be proven until 2008, when sophisticated metal analysis techniques showed that the silver of the amulet had been refined in the nineteenth century or later. The amulet was a fake (albeit a very sophisticated one) and was possibly planted in an attempt to prevent the construction of a controversial warehouse building near Fosse Lane.

Supporters of the Amulet Theatre now embrace the full story of the discredited artefact which gave the building its name with a level of affectionate irony. The theatre is, after all, the genuine article.



Figure 24: The 'real' amulet [BBC]

3.0 Assessment of Heritage significance

3.1 Introduction to assessing heritage significance

3.1.1 Purpose

Significance is ‘the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest’ (NPPF Glossary). Such interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic and it may derive, in addition to an asset’s physical presence, also from its setting.

The purpose of assessing significance is not merely academic, it is essential to effective conservation and management because the identification of elements of higher and lower significance, based on a thorough understanding of a site, enables owners and designers to develop proposals that safeguard, respect and where possible enhance the character and cultural values of the site.

Significance is what conservation sustains, and where appropriate enhances, in managing change to heritage assets. This assessment identifies areas where no change, or only minimal changes should be considered, as well as those where more intrusive changes might be acceptable and could enrich understanding and appreciation of significance.

3.1.2 Definitions

Statutory designation is the legal mechanism by which significant historic places are identified in order to protect them. The designations applying to The Amulet and its immediate vicinity are listed in [Section 1.6 on page 3](#). *The National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF, 2025) places the concept of significance at the heart of the planning process. Annex 2 of the NPPF defines Significance (for heritage policy) as:

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

The types of heritage interest that make up significance are set out in the Government’s Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and are as follows:

Archaeological interest: As defined in the Glossary to the NPPF, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

Architectural and Artistic Interest: As defined in the Planning Practice Guide, these are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.

Historic Interest: As defined in the Planning Practice Guide, this is an interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation’s history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity [sometimes called ‘communal value’].

Historic England has helpfully sought to clarify the distinction between archaeological interest and historic interest that the NPPF intends. Para 13 of the organisation’s *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-taking in the Historic Environment* (July 2015) begins:

Archaeological interest, as defined in the NPPF, differs from historic interest, because it is the prospects for a future expert archaeological investigation to reveal more about our past that need protecting.

Any assessment of significance is usually an amalgam of these different interests, and the balance between them will vary from one case to the next. What is important is to demonstrate that all these interests have been considered. This is achieved by assessing the significance of the whole site relative to comparable places, and the relative significance of its component parts.

3.1.3 Methodology for assessing the character and appearance of conservation area

Unlike other forms of designated heritage asset, the special architectural and historic interest of conservation areas is commonly expressed in terms of character and appearance. This is based on Section 72[1] of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which states that when local authorities exercise their planning functions in the context of conservation areas, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. Much like setting, defining the extent and nature of a conservation area’s character

and appearance can be challenging, and is often based on a combination of tangible and intangible factors.

Historic England’s *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management: Historic England Advice Note 1* (Second Edition, February 2019) offers guidance on how character and appearance can be defined, suggesting the types of special architectural and historic interest which are reasons for designation of conservation areas:

- Areas with a high number of nationally or locally designated heritage assets and a variety of architectural styles and historic associations.
- Those linked to a particular individual, industry, custom or pastime with a particular local interest.
- Where an earlier, historically significant, layout is visible in the modern street pattern.
- Where a particular style of architecture or traditional building materials predominate
- Areas designated because of the quality of the public realm or a spatial element, such as a design form or settlement pattern, green spaces which are an essential component of the wider historic area, and historic parks and gardens and other designed landscapes.

3.1.4 Structure of the assessment in this chapter

The assessment begins below with a Summary Statement of Significance, followed by a description of significance by area. In this assessment, the following levels of significance are used:

Highest	primary phase that makes the highest contribution to the significance of the building
Medium	features of less historical and architectural interest which make a medium contribution to significance
Neutral	features which make little or no contribution to significance
Detracts	features which detract from significance

3.2 Summary statement of significance

Though the Amulet theatre is not formally designated as a heritage asset, either at local or national level, it has been recognised by the Theatres Trust and the Twentieth Century Society as a building of value. The building contributes to the character of the conservation area both through its community use but also through its contextual design and materials, and its unique auditorium seating mechanism and unusual high quality design may even place it on a national as well as a local level of importance. The heritage interest can be summarised as follows:

- **Historic interest:** representing the distinctive and generous philanthropy of Francis Showering, and of the wider boom in building for the arts which occurred across Britain in the 1970s (in which as a privately funded example, it occupies a distinctive place). Communal value as the building which for many years presented performances for and by the local community.
- **Architectural interest:** as a well-designed, well-resolved solution to the challenge of accommodating a range of uses on a compact site within a historic setting. It demonstrates very successfully the ways in which modernism could be contextual, with a contemporary review singling out the hall/theatre block for its strong contribution to the townscape. The means of achieving auditorium flexibility is not only highly distinctive but very well specified and also unusually successful, countering the frequently aired view that flexibility was hard to achieve.

3.3 Significance by area

3.3.1 Exterior

The Amulet is an unapologetically modern building but was designed very much with the historic context in mind, and has a deliberate designed relationship both with the church to the east and the Market Cross to the west. The chamfered corners and stepped planes of the Amulet echo the octagonal plan form of the Cross and of the church tower, as well as the layered texture of Shepton Mallet town itself, where bridges and narrow stone passageways are a feature of the streets, particularly in the steep slopes of the valley bottom. The volume of the flytower mimics the volume and form of the church tower, albeit in a brutalist rather than gothic language. The articulation of the planes of the building break up the volume of the structure into a sculptural form, reducing the impression of scale while maintaining a commanding presence on the Market Place.

The sculptural forms of the exterior are unusual in their scale and context and well considered in a palette of complementary materials including Douling stone cladding, and bronze window and door frames.

Overall, the surviving original exterior forms and finishes express the building's **architectural interest** as a piece of well-designed 1970s

architecture, executed to a very high level of quality. The building also has **historic interest** as the centrepiece of the 1970s remodelling of the town centre, built in the context of a national boom in arts buildings. The distinctive exterior also has strong **communal value** for those who enjoyed the use of the buildings, either for work or for entertainment, during the building's long use as a community venue. Because of these, the surviving exterior forms and finishes **make a high contribution to significance**.

Later accretions which obscure the original sculptural forms **detract from significance**, as follows:

- The lost standing seam lead cladding and its replacement with render and slate
- The windows added to the dressing rooms and former committee room spaces
- The timber cladding above the principal entrance
- The render to the west face of the dressing rooms which replaced stone cladding

3.3.2 Interior:

The surviving unique auditorium mechanism and adjustable floor has strong **architectural interest** as an ingenious solution to a constrained site, executed to a high quality. Its design and individuality make a **high contribution to significance**.

The disconnect between the ground and first floor caused by the removal of the principal stair and the fire stair north of the entrance damages the functionality and readability of the building, and **detracts from its significance**.

Surviving internal details such as surviving 1970s fire doors and stairs make a **medium contribution to significance**

3.3.3 Communal value

The Amulet has strong communal value. The building was designed to be flexible enough for a variety of community uses, while at the same time delivering a well-equipped performance venue. It was more than a theatre, and was used for parties, events, and meetings by the community as well as pantomimes and other performances. *Let's Buy the Amulet* has created a website for the memories of the local community, which can be viewed on their website. Some extracts are included below:

We held our wedding reception in the black swan in 1980 when my mum was bar manageress and Francis showering provided the official toast on every table.
Mike

We held an annual tree frog party in the 80s, attended strode college discos and also there was a night club on a Friday which was always busy. We went to

local gigs, pantomime, cinema, held lots of parties one of the last being our 40th birthday celebrations in 2004. Would use the black swan suite and the main hall. It made for a great place
Janine

Loved the Pantomimes also used to go in on a Friday morning with friends for a cup of tea after school run.
Margaret

3.4 Significance drawings

The drawings on the following pages have been drawn by Ian Chalk Architects and annotated by Alan Baxter to illustrate the elements which detract from the significance of The Amulet. Hatching is used to indicate that the surface finish detracts but the form does not.

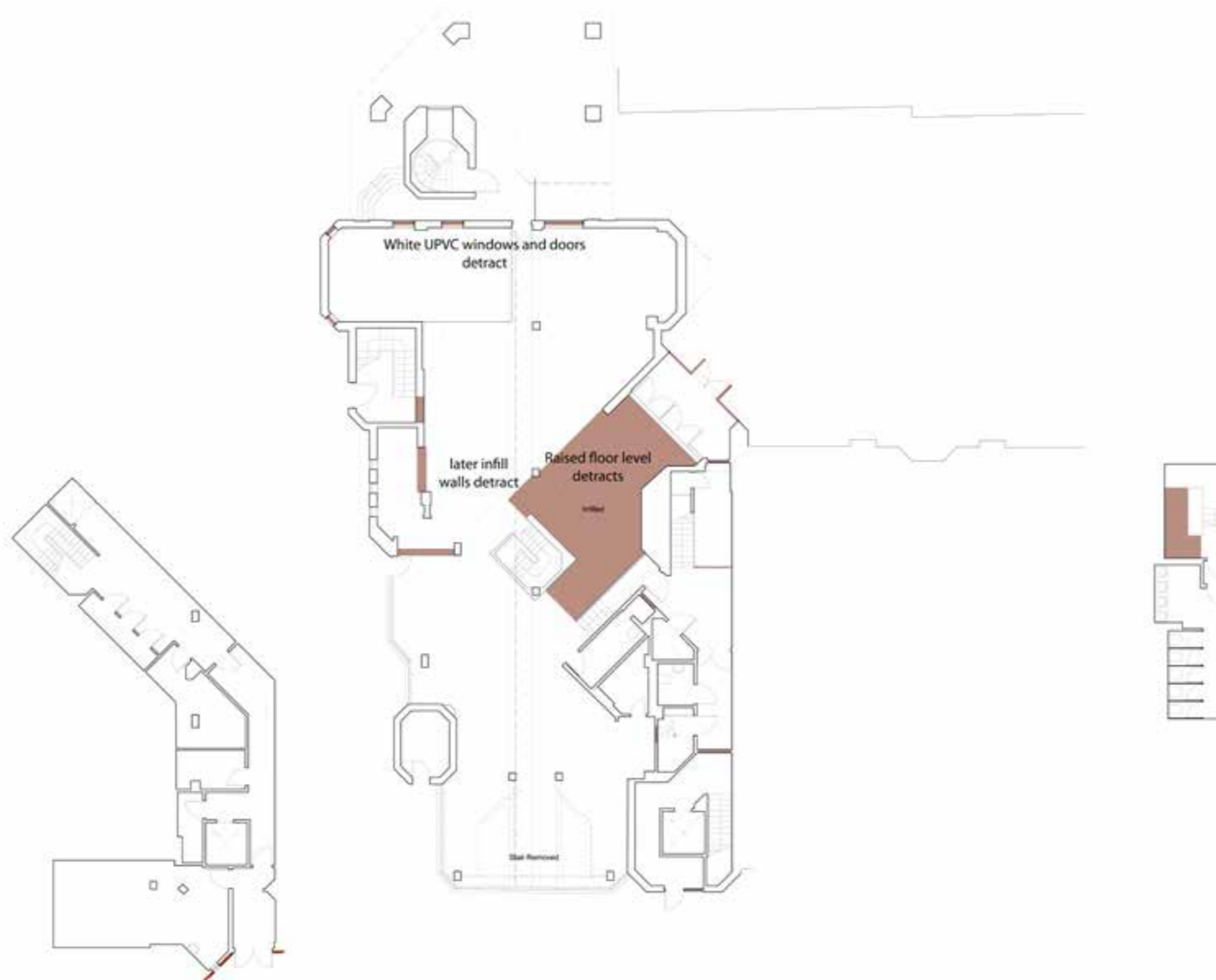


Figure 26: Ground floor detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

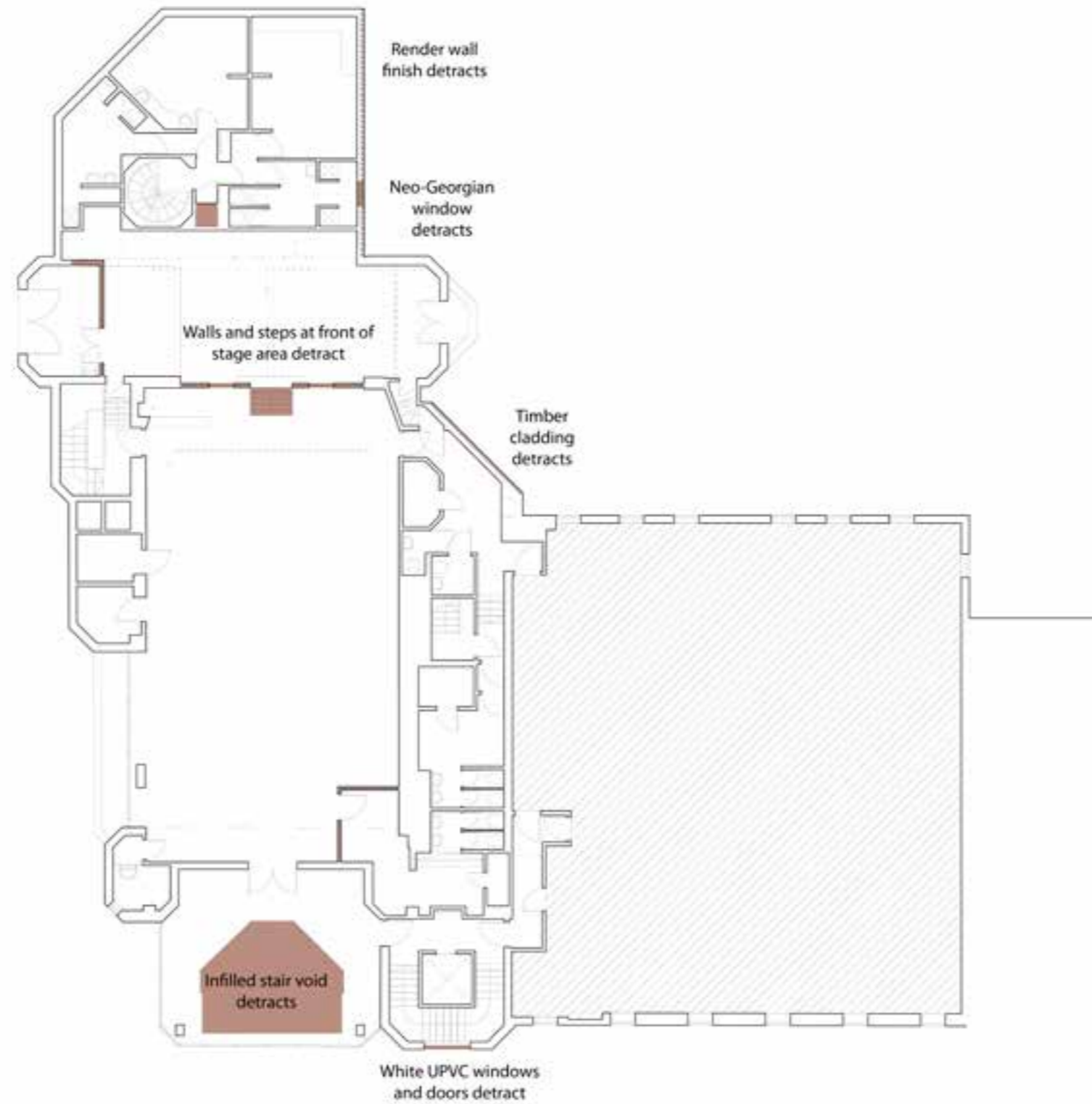


Figure 27: First floor detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

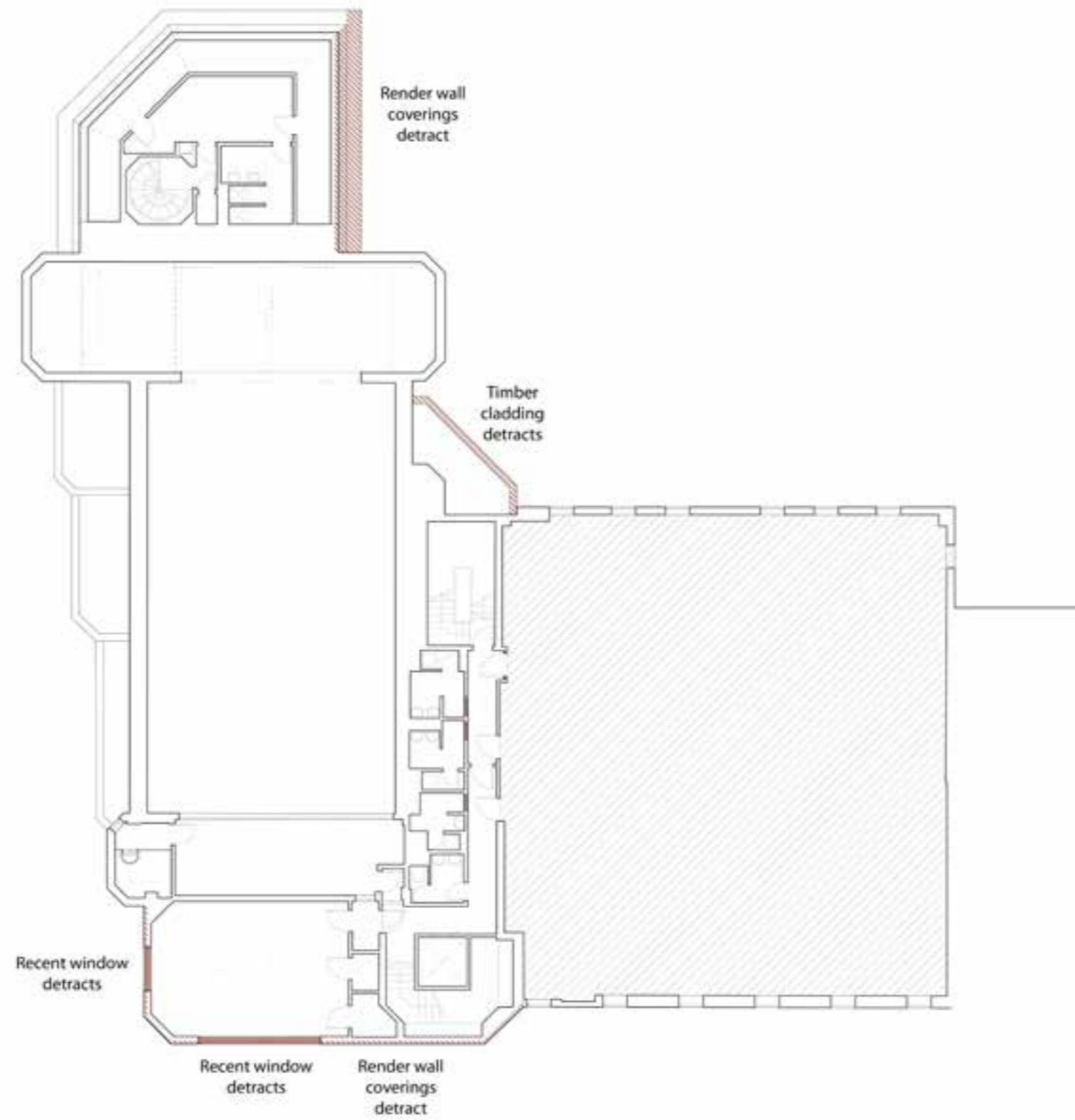


Figure 28: Second floor detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

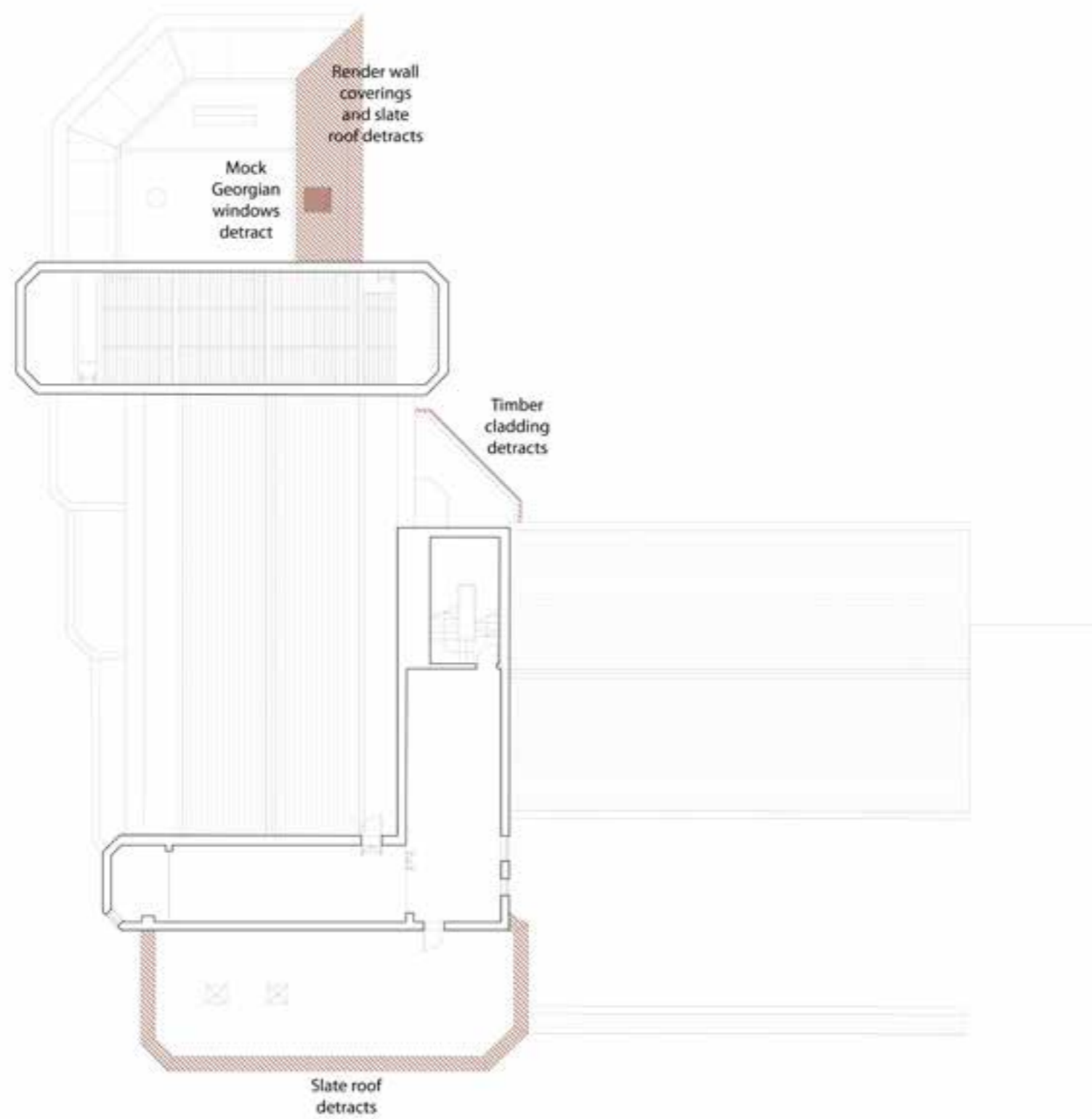


Figure 29: Third floor detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

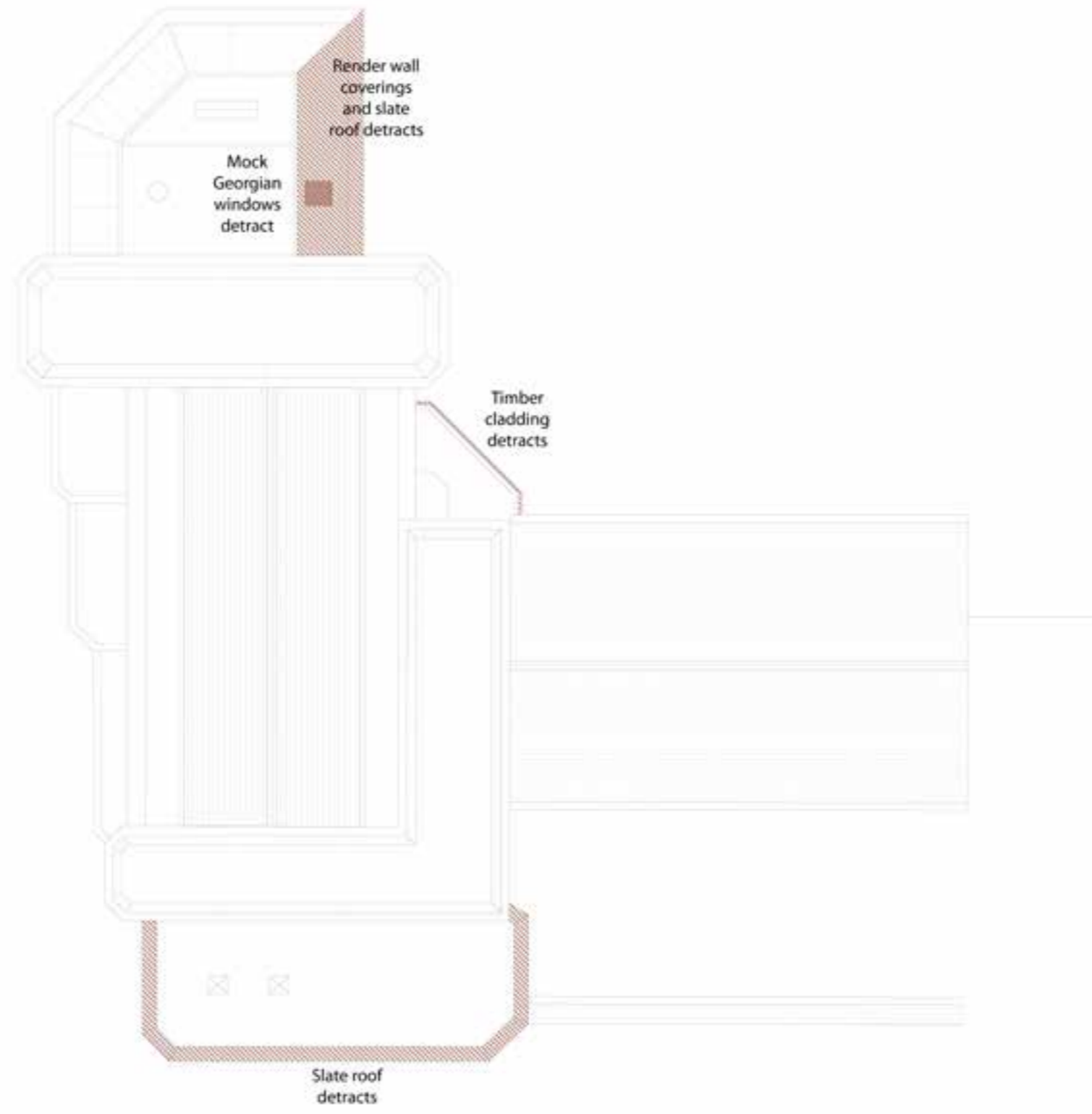


Figure 30: Roof detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

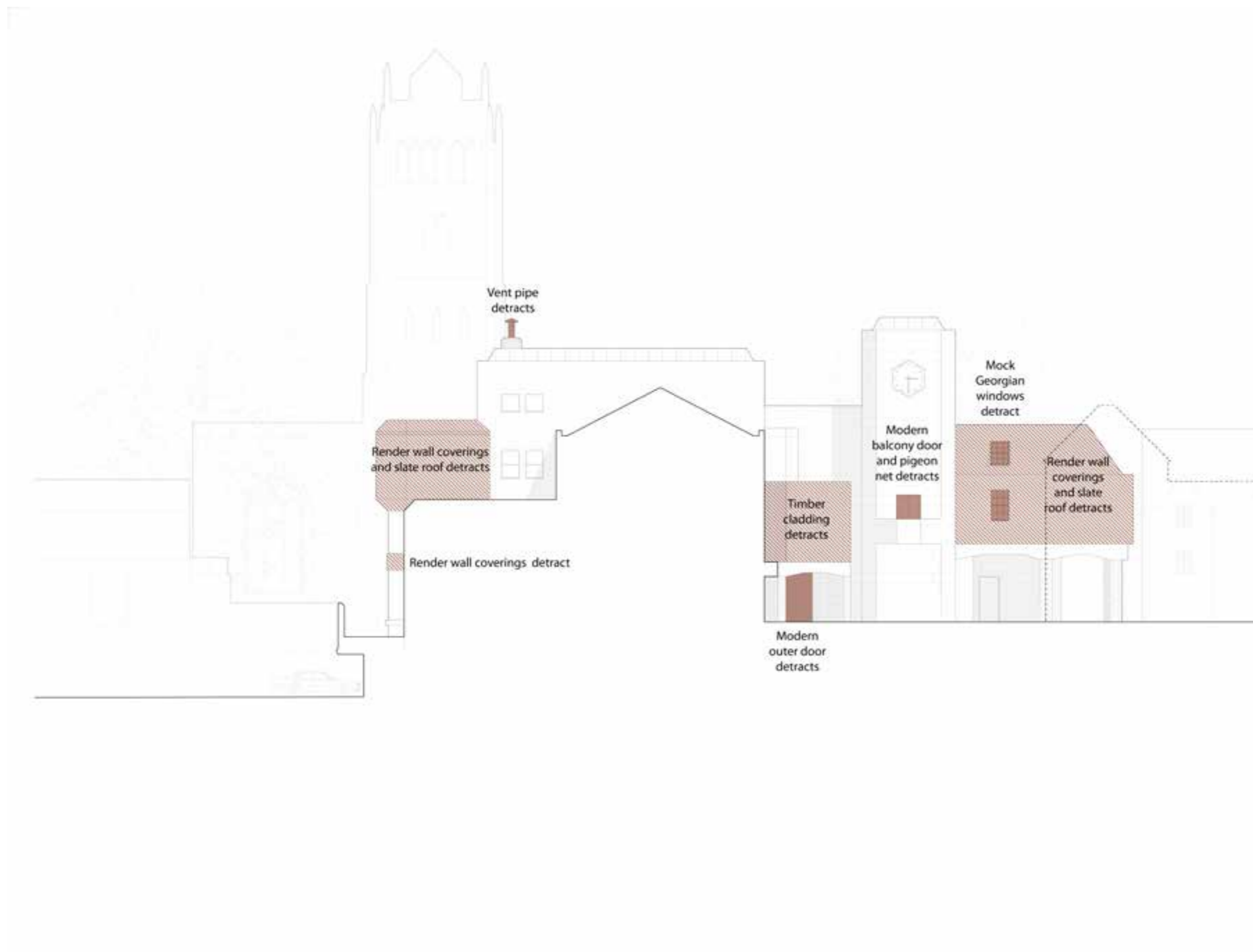


Figure 31: Front (west) elevation detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

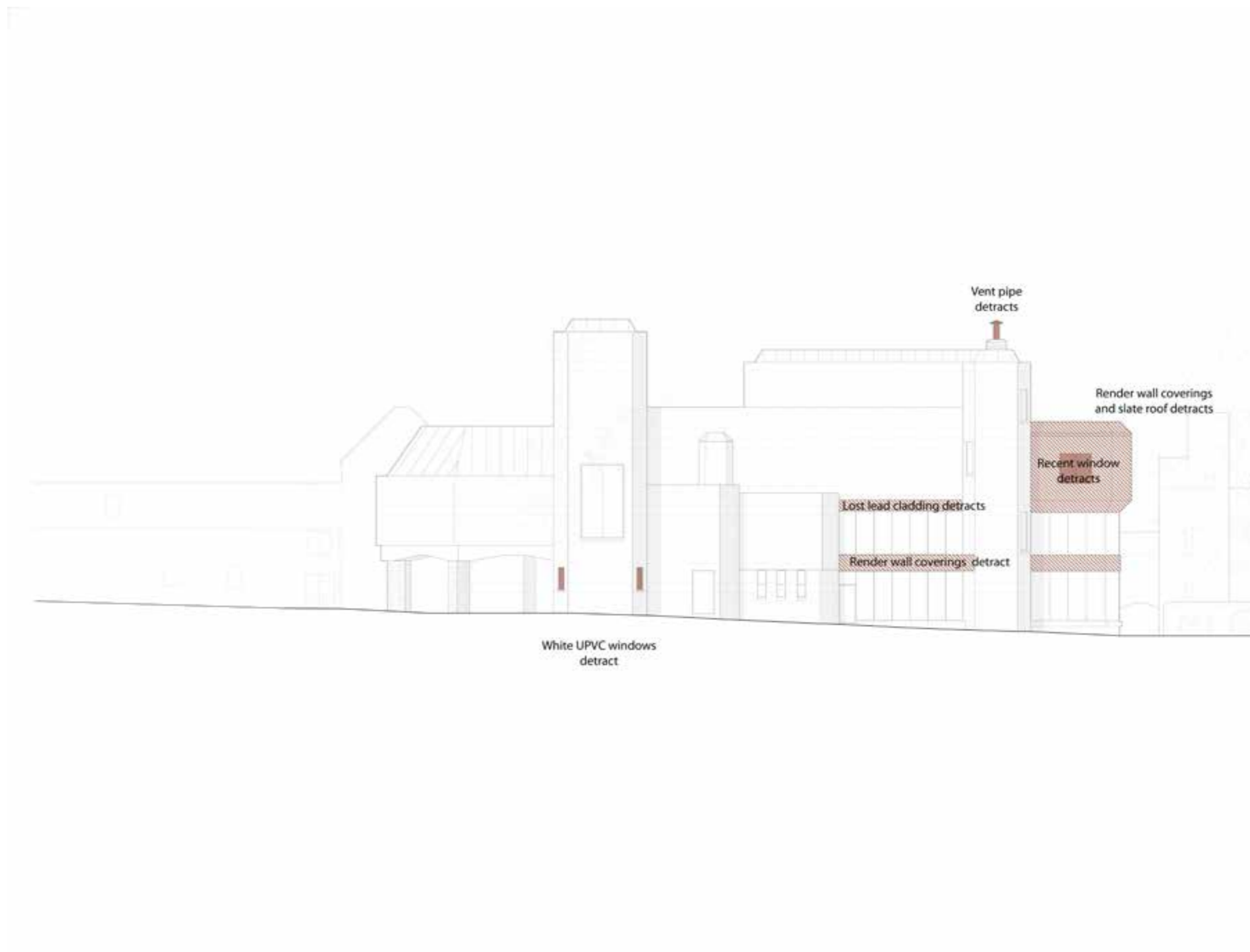


Figure 32: Rear (east) elevation detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

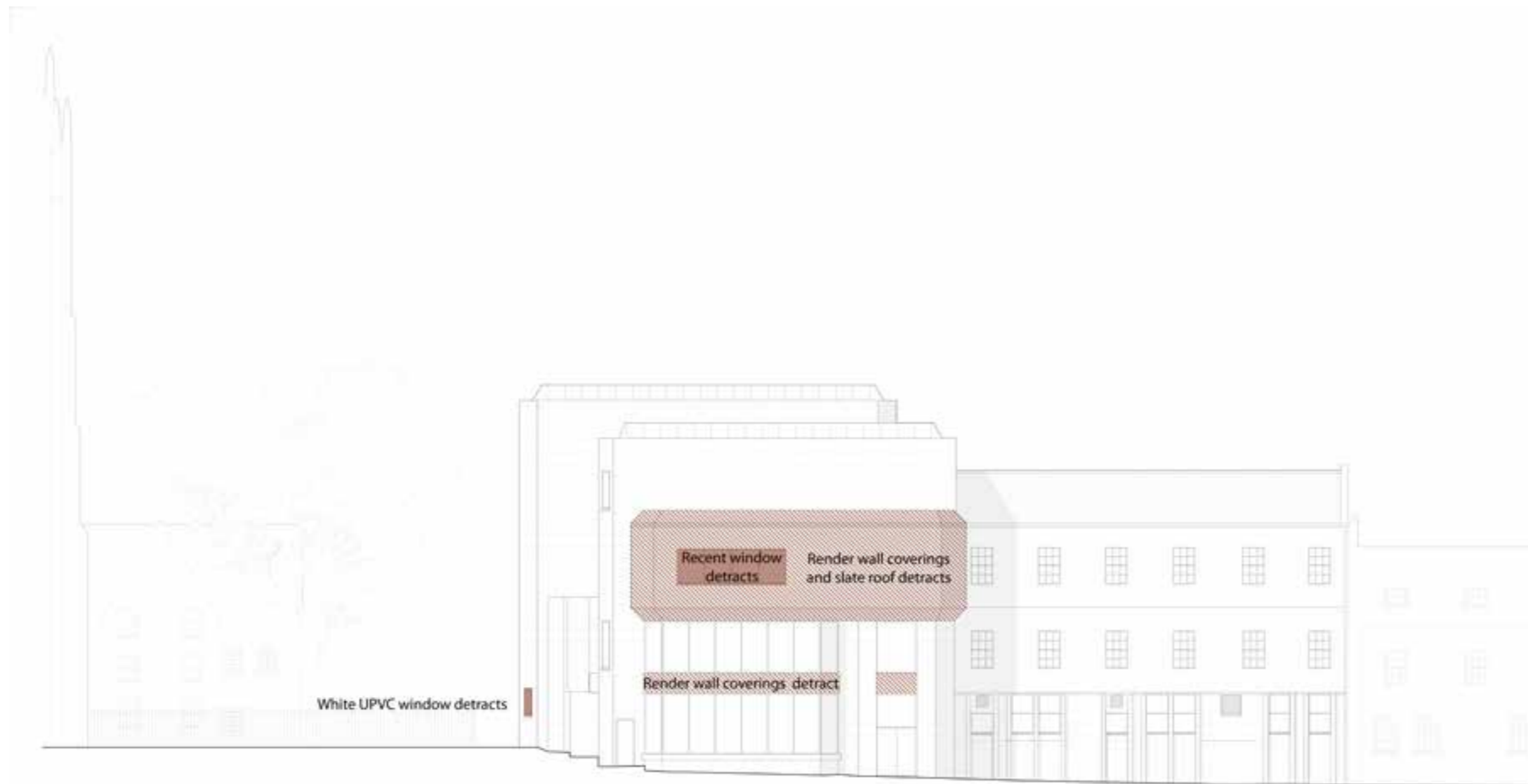


Figure 33: Flank (north) elevation detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

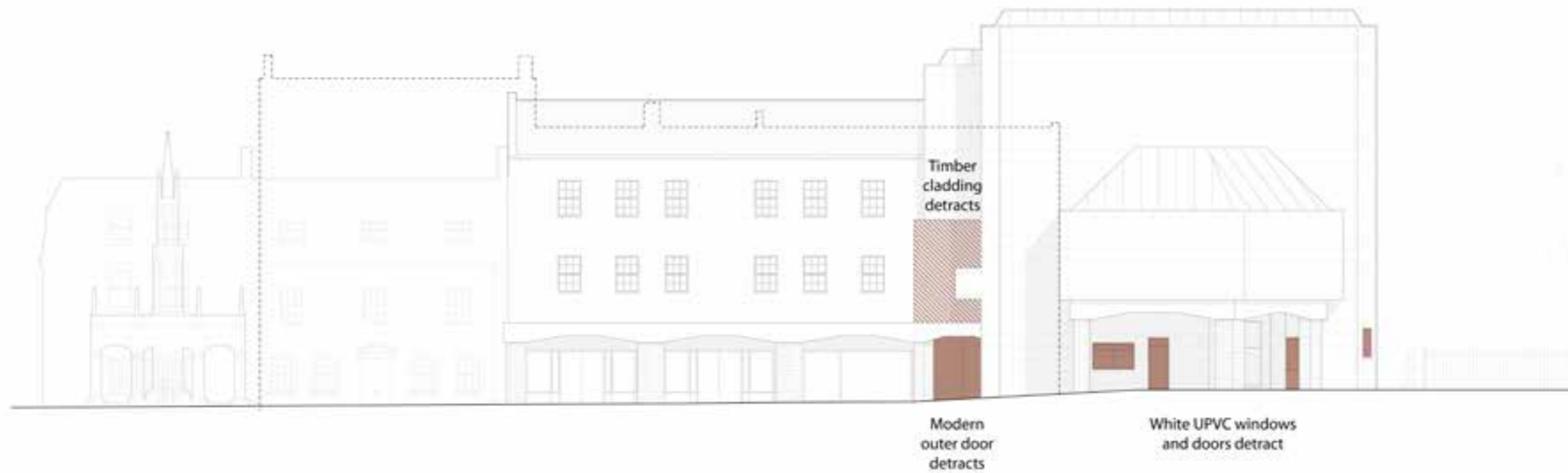


Figure 34: Ground floor detracting fabric [Ian Chalk Architects]

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Planning policy

A summary of relevant planning policy is included in [Section 5.3 on page 27](#).

4.2 The Amulet as a community heritage asset

According to the values set out in the NPPF and the guidance published by Historic England, the Amulet meets the criteria of a non-designated heritage asset, with strong architectural interest, historic interest and community value as set out in Section 3. This is further supported by the endorsement of the Twentieth Century Society and the Theatres Trust. The Amulet is therefore a community heritage asset, and Let's Buy the Amulet's proposals to save the fabric of the building and restore it to community use meeting the National Lottery Fund's criteria of 'saving heritage'.

4.3 Summary of the proposals

Let's Buy the Amulet propose to rehabilitate and restore the spaces of the theatre in a gradual process, with the ultimate aim of fully restoring the building, but allowing the building to be occupied and used from an early stage in the restoration process.

4.3.1 Meanwhile use

- Entrance/Lobby: The reception/box office space is proposed to be reinstated to recreate the flow through the lobby area.
- Cafe/Bar: The cafe/bar area will operate during events and may host performance in the- round and community activities. It will also host Sunday market traders.
- Gallery space: This is a flexible space apart of the cafe/bar, with space for exhibitions.
- Mini auditorium: This small area of fixed theatre seats will be used for cinema and small theatre shows during the meanwhile phase.
- Meeting room: This room is proposed to host classes and community meetings.
- Workshop: A small workshop will support community art activities such as print club, and functions as an office space for volunteers in the building.

4.3.2 Long term proposals

- Serve the local population of 11k with community activities, including exercise classes, meeting spaces and popular entertainment.
- Offer opportunities for training, volunteering and employment, particularly for young people. To include engagement in performance and venue operation.
- Host performance of 'work worth travelling for', to attract footfall into our town from the 120k people who live within 12 mile radius.
- To boost economic regeneration, reduce retail vacancies and attract investment.'

Long term the proposals extend to the auditorium, stage and dressing rooms on the first floor, currently occupied by the gym. Thanks to the seating platform this space would be flexible and, as shown above, exercise classes are proposed to be hosted here in the day, with theatre performances or concerts in the evening.

4.4 Impact Assessment

At this early stage in the process an impact assessment can only be in principal, however the proposals set out by *Let's Buy the Amulet* offer the solution to the revitalisation of this important public building for its original designed purpose to support the community of Shepton Mallet. The potential of restoring and revitalising the building, particularly its damaged interior and its compromised exterior, will be a significant heritage benefit for the building, securing its optimal viable use, and will improve the character and appearance of the Shepton Mallet Conservation Area. The proposals therefore comply with the requirements set out in section 72 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 and in paragraphs 210 and 216 of the *NPPF* (2025), as well as policies DP1 and DP3 of the *Somerset Local Plan* and Policy 6 and 11 of Shepton Mallet's emerging *Neighbourhood Plan*

5.0 Supporting Information

5.1 Sources

5.1.1 Published sources

Gathercole, Clare and Webster, Chris. Revised 2003. *An archaeological assessment of Shepton Mallet* (Somerset County Council). Available at [Somerset_EUS_Shepton_Mallet.pdf](#) (Accessed 29 April 2025)

Pevsner, Nikolaus and Foyle, Andrew. 2011. *The Buildings of England: Somerset: North and Bristol* (Newhaven, London: Yale University Press)

October 25 1968 'The 'town on the move' is given a stand still order', in *Shepton Mallet Journal* p.18

'Putting sparkle into Shepton Mallet', in *Building Design*, 05 December 1975, pp. 12-13

'Shepton Mallet's new town centre', in *Forma*, vol. 4 no. 4 (1975), pp. 216-23

'Roman' amulet adopted by archbishop is a fake', in *The Guardian*, 19 September 2008 ['Roman' amulet adopted by archbishop is a fake | Archaeology | The Guardian](#) (Accessed 11 April 2025)

Amulet image from BBC/The British Museum *A History of the World: Object: Shepton Mallet Amulet* [BBC - A History of the World - Object: Shepton Mallet Amulet](#) (Accessed 01 May 2025)

5.1.2 Interviews

Alistair Fair interview with Terry Hopegood, March 2025.

5.1.3 Guidance and legislation

The National Planning Policy Framework, 2025

Historic England National Heritage List

Historic England. 2015. *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-taking in the Historic Environment*

Historic England. 2019. *Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in the Historic Environment*

Somerset (area east) planning map map search (Accessed 24 April 2025)

Somerset Council (formerly Mendip District Council) *Shepton Mallet Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals*. (Available [here](#). Accessed 01 May 2025)

Somerset Council (formerly Mendip District Council) *Mendip District Local Plan 2006-2029 Part I: Strategy and Policies*. (Available [here](#). Accessed 01 May 2025)

5.1.4 Websites

Know your place, Somerset [Know Your Place - Somerset https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=som](#) (Accessed 11 April)

5.2 Historic Environment Record search results

The Historic Environment Record has been searched via the *Know your Place* mapping platform. Key elements of relevance are as follows

24926: Iron age pottery finds, Shepton Mallet (old NRHE number 200430): Max Unwin reports that two early Iron age sherds, apparently associated with wooden piles at a depth of 9ft, were found when a cable trench was being dug in the High Street in 1951 at a point between the Midland Bank and the market cross.

25160: Roman Town, Shepton Mallet (old NRHE number 200387): Roman town lying to the south east of Shepton Mallet along the Foss Way. Discovered during development in 1990 and subsequently.

The first indication of Roman Settlement in the area was the discovery of the remains of a roman building in 1887 during the doubling of the Somerset and Dorset Railway line, near where it crosses the Roman road...

24924: Medieval town, Shepton Mallet: In 1086 Shepton was part of the estates of Glastonbury Abbey but by the early C14 it had passed to the Mallet family. An existing village probably developed into a town with the grant of a weekly market in 1235 and an annual fair in 1318, although the status of a borough was never obtained. Like Frome and Wells, it probably prospered from the cloth industry, especially in the C17 and C18. The C13 village was probably located around one church and on the hillside to the S of the River Sheppey. The absence of early finds from the 1972 excavation may indicate only that it was the former open market place, not necessarily that the earlier settlement was elsewhere. High Street and Town Street were probably the main thoroughfares of the medieval town which developed in the C13 - the regularity of these streets and of the property boundaries on either site suggest a planned origin. In the C17 the town expanded to the E along the valley of the River Sheppey with the building of weavers' cottages in Garston Street and Town Lane.

5.3 Planning policy

5.3.1 Legislation

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The overarching legislation governing the consideration of applications for planning consent that affect heritage assets is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) (the Act). Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Act require local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Act requires local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant planning permission with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

5.3.2 National policy

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2025)

The NPPF sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Its core principle is to help achieve sustainable development through the planning system. Sustainable development is commonly summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Having been first published in 2012, the Framework was most recently updated in February 2025.

Section 16, entitled Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, contains guidance on heritage assets, which include listed buildings and conservation areas. In particular: -

Paragraph 207 requires an applicant to give a summary of the significance of the building or area affected, proportionate to its importance. This Heritage Statement provides that information at an appropriate level.

Paragraph 208 advises local authorities to take account of that significance in assessing proposals to avoid or minimise conflict between the proposals and conservation of the asset.

Paragraph 210 emphasises the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of individual assets and wider, local distinctiveness, and the desirability of viable and fitting uses for a building being found or continued.

Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the conservation of the asset, and that the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. It also establishes a

scale of harm, from total loss, to substantial harm, to less than substantial harm.

Paragraph 213 establishes the principle that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 214 states: Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss.

Paragraph 215 states: Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Paragraph 216 establishes that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining [an] application.

Paragraph 219 advises that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Area and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Paragraph 220 addresses harm to the significance of conservation areas. It states: Not all elements of a Conservation Area [...] will necessarily contribute to its significance.

The NPPF also requires good design, as set out in chapter 12 and emphasised in relation to the historic environment in paragraph 131.

5.3.3 Regional policy

Mendip district Local plan

Policy DP1 sets out the importance of Mendip's local distinctiveness

DP1: Local Identity and Distinctiveness

1. All development proposals should contribute positively to the maintenance and enhancement of local identity and distinctiveness across the district.
2. Proposals should be formulated with an appreciation of the built and natural context of their locality recognising that distinctive street scenes, townscapes, views, scenery, boundary walls or hedges, trees, rights of way and other features collectively generate a distinct sense of place

and local identity. Such features may not always be designated or otherwise formally recognised.

3. Where a development proposal would adversely affect or result in the loss of features or scenes recognised as being distinctive, the Council will balance up the significance of the feature or scene to the locality, the degree of impact the proposal would have upon it, and the wider benefits which would arise from the proposal if it were approved. Any decisions will also take into account efforts made by the applicant to viably preserve the feature, avoid, minimise and/or mitigate negative

effects and the need for the proposal to take place in that location.

Policy DP3 of the Mendip District Local plan sets out Mendip's heritage policy as follows:

DP3: Heritage Conservation

Proposals and initiatives will be supported which preserve and, where appropriate, enhance the significance and setting of the district's Heritage Assets, whether statutorily or locally identified, especially those elements which contribute to the distinct identity of Mendip.

1. Proposals affecting a Heritage Asset in Mendip will be required to:
 - a) Demonstrate an understanding of the significance of the Heritage Asset and/or its setting by describing it in sufficient detail to determine its historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest to a level proportionate with its importance.
 - b) Justify any harm to a Heritage Asset and demonstrate the overriding public benefits which would outweigh the damage to that Asset or its setting. The greater the harm to the significance of the Heritage Asset, the greater justification and public benefit that will be required before the application could gain support.
2. Opportunities to mitigate or adapt to climate change and secure sustainable development through the re-use or adaptation of Heritage Assets to minimise the consumption of building materials and energy and the generation of construction waste should be identified. However, mitigation and adaptation will only be considered where there is no harm to the significance of a Heritage Asset.
3. Proposals for enabling development necessary to secure the future of a Heritage Asset which would otherwise be contrary to the policies of this plan or national policy will be carefully assessed against the policy statement produced by English Heritage – Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places.

5.3.4 Local policy

Shepton Mallet Neighbourhood Plan (emerging)

Shepton Mallet's neighbourhood plan has now passed examination and is about to go to referendum, most likely in early July 2025. It therefore already carries considerable planning weight, and if it passes referendum then local planning decisions will have to take account of its policies. The reopening of the Amulet Theatre as a Community Hub and a Music and Arts venue is central to the regeneration of the Town Centre, and is supported by both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Council's Strategy 2024-2029.

Policy 6. Reinforcing Shepton Mallet's heritage

i. Development should respect and where possible reinforce the historic character of the town, taking account of the character and setting of the Conservation Area (as detailed in the Conservation Area Appraisal) and other heritage assets.

ii. Development should:

- respond to, and where possible enhance, the setting of buildings and spaces that of historic importance to the town (both designated and non-designated heritage assets);
- consider the overall composition of the street, within and intervisible with the Conservation Area and historic buildings / features;
- where possible, retain heritage features of local interest where these are present within the site;
- where possible, include features to celebrate and raise awareness of the history and traditional industries of the area.

Policy 11 – Improvements to the Town Centre

i. To improve and maintain a strong, attractive and vibrant town centre development proposals will be supported where:

- they retain and improve tourist and arts/cultural attractions within and in close proximity to the town centre;

ii. Development within the town centre and related areas as defined in Figure 2.1 of the Shepton Mallet Masterplan should where possible contribute to the regeneration of the town centre, and not conflict with its delivery.

Alan Baxter

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Reviewed by Rob Hradsky

Draft issued May 2025

Final issued July 2025

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