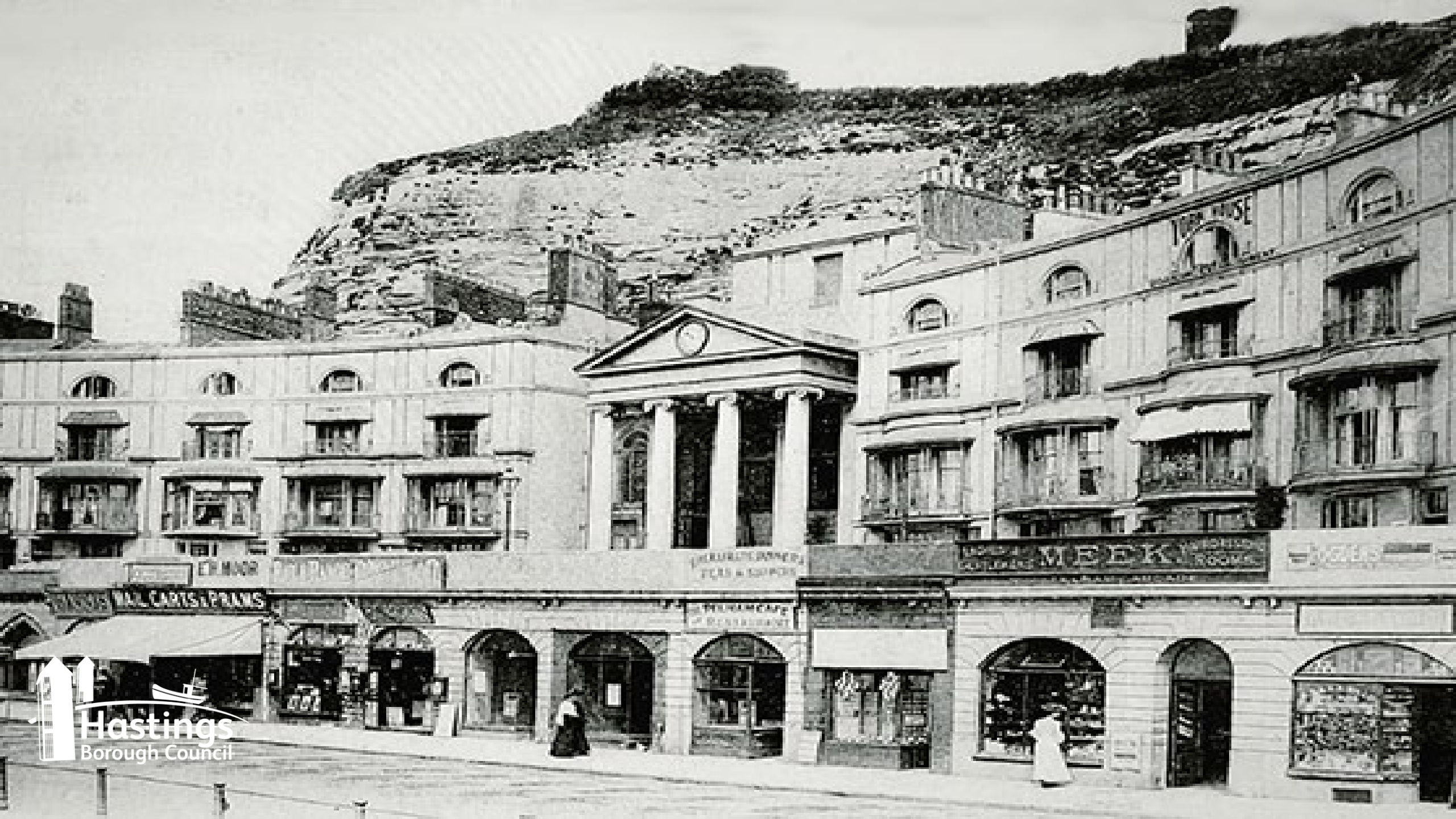




blue
horizon

St Mary in the Castle
Expressions of Interest
October 2025





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- Investment in Hastings
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Background and Context



Background and Context

- Hastings Borough Council wishes to appoint an experienced partner within the Cultural Assets sector, to lease, operate, and maintain St Mary in the Castle.
- Hastings Borough Council (the council) is the current freeholder of this unique Grade II* Listed Building located in a prominent position on the Hastings seafront.
- The gross internal area of the building extends to approximately 16,500 ft² (1533 m²). The property is arranged over 3 principal floors in the main building with the entrance located at 6-8 Pelham Arcade, there are a further 5 floors at 7 Pelham Crescent.
- The property is situated at the centre of Pelham Crescent extending under the raised pavement to Pelham Arcade.
- Originally built in 1828 as a church, the property has had a variety of uses over the years. It is currently closed but most recently was used as a performing arts centre with some gallery space for visual arts and a café. Pelham Arcade is on the national Heritage at Risk Register.

Background and Context

- Hastings was awarded funding through the Government's Towns Fund to kickstart the regeneration of the town in 2021. Hastings' wider regeneration programme, supported by major investment through the Town Deal, Levelling Up Partnership, and the Government's Pride in Place initiative.
- Together, these programmes are delivering landmark projects such as the £3 million transformation of Hastings Castle and the new West Hill Café & Interpretation Centre, the Town Living housing scheme, and major £10 million public realm and housing investments and Pelham Crescent road repair.
- However, St Mary in the Castle is an integral part of the overall regeneration of Hastings and a huge opportunity for the right commercial partner.
- In parallel, the council intends to repair and resurface the road in Pelham Crescent, addressing the damp problem in Pelham Arcade, where the road forms the roof of the buildings, improving the public realm, and strengthening the setting for the revived venue.

Investment in Hastings – Pride in Place





Key pieces of work and investment since 2018

- Channel 4 bid
- Boosting coastal productivity
- Regeneration review
- Delivery of CHART CLLD
- Opportunity Area prospectus
- Prof Whitty visit/Reviewing Regeneration timeline
- Local Regeneration Fund (Town Deal)
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Levelling up partnership
- LTA investment in Alexandra Park tennis courts
- 4 NPOs invested in by ACE
- Priory Street Development
- Connected Futures work



TINGS
PORTUN
EA



Regeneration Funding – since 2014

- Coastal Communities Fund
- Regional Growth Fund
- East Sussex Invest
- Fisheries Local Action Group
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- ESCC/HBC
- European funding
- Arts Council
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Historic England
- Public Health
- Sport England
- Levelling up Partnership fund
- Homes England
- Opportunity Area
- Towns Fund
- UK Shared Prosperity
- Pride in Place funding



Long-Term Plan for Towns

Hastings allocated £20,000,000 over ten years

25% revenue, 75% capital with a flat funding profile

An endowment intended to become self-sustaining after the funding ends

Delivered by the Hastings Board with members drawn from the local community, business and key stakeholders including the MP, Police and Crime Commissioner and the VCSE sector

Three objectives: Thriving places; Stronger Communities; Taking back control

Eight categories: Cohesion; Education and opportunity; Health and wellbeing; Regeneration, high streets and heritage; Housing; Safer and Security; Transport; Work Productivity and skills

Plan to be developed and evolve following extensive community engagement

A 250-word vision, ten-year plan and four-year investment plan has been prepared and is ready for submission to Government, but the deadline has been postponed indefinitely with no further guidance provided

Hastings: – West Hill Café & Castle Project

A complementary project enhancing the St Mary in the Castle (SMiC) opportunity

Cultural Gateway: Connects SMiC with Hastings Castle and the Lift, creating a joined-up heritage circuit.

Visitor Experience: Hastings Castle and West Hill Café and interpretation hub extending dwell-time, spend-per-head, and engagement with local history.

Commercial Synergy: Strengthens SMiC's business model by driving footfall, shared marketing, and cross-programming.

Community Value: Accessible, sustainable space serving residents and visitors year-round.

Strategic Fit: Demonstrates Hastings' commitment to culture-led regeneration, reinforcing the case for investment at SMiC.

Funding: Supported through £3 million Towns Fund investment, complementing the wider SMiC development.

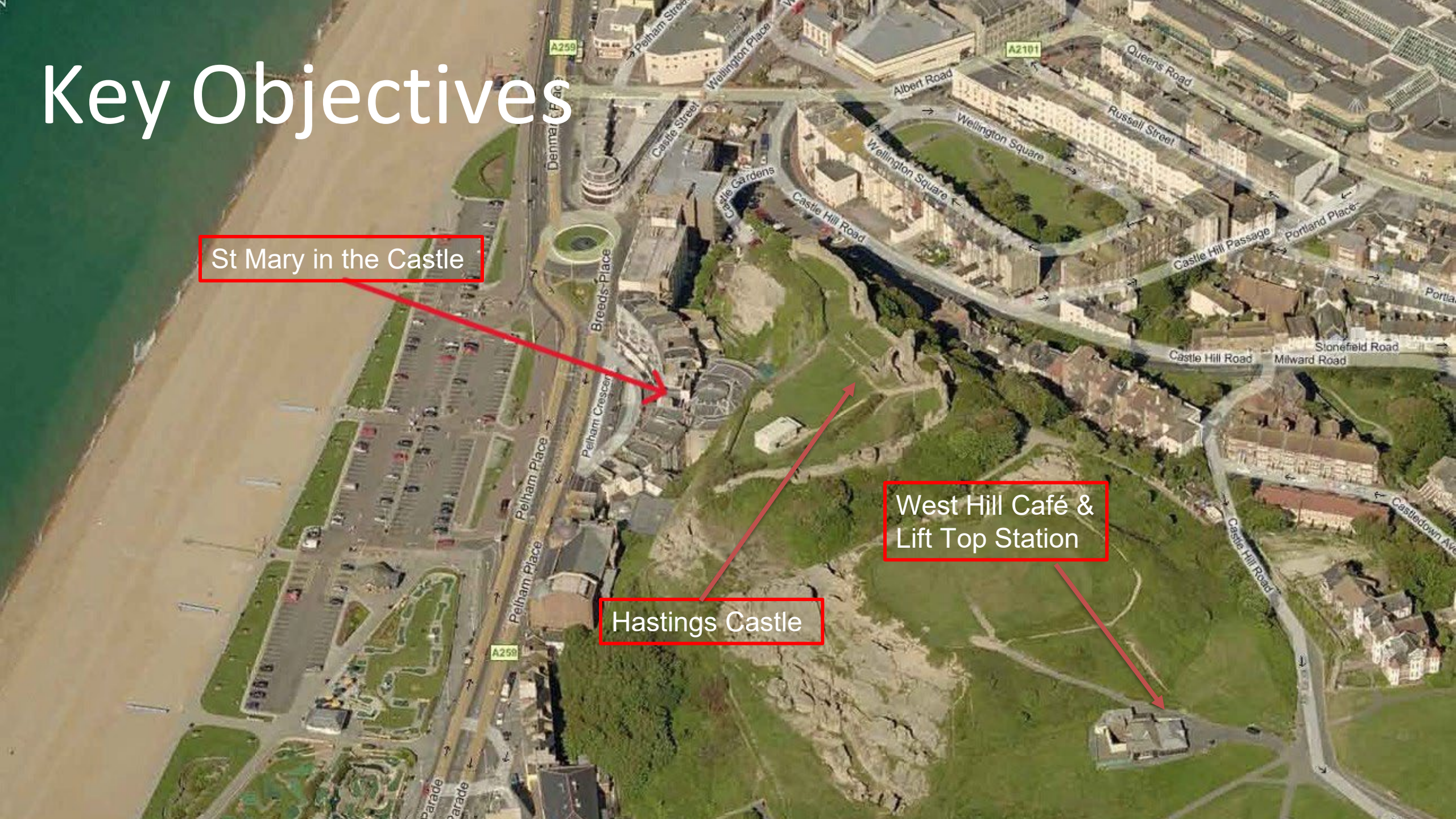


Key Objectives

St Mary in the Castle

West Hill Café & Lift Top Station

Hastings Castle



Key Objectives

The council's overall objective for this project will be achieved by enhancing the visitor experience to Hastings, with an exciting cultural and hospitality offering housed in an iconic and historic venue.

- Preserve and retain this nationally significant heritage site, ensuring its long-term sustainability.
- To provide new jobs to the region because of higher visitor activity to St Mary in the Castle and the town overall.
- To improve visitor experience, perception, and appreciation of a significant heritage asset.
- To provide a significant boost to Hasting's nighttime economy.
- Support skills, learning, and youth engagement through arts, culture, and heritage.
- To provide wider engagement opportunities for the local community to access high quality and varied arts, culture, and social experiences on their doorstep.



The Opportunity

Hastings: The Opportunity

Hastings has a population of approximately 92,500 but equally 700k+ of the adult population are within 1 hour drive time of Hastings.

Plus, as a seafront location with a good transport infrastructure this makes Hastings a popular visitor destination.

Tourism Market*:

- 4 million day trips were undertaken in 2023
- 675,000 overnight stays
- £285.3 million spent by tourists during their visit to the area
- £32 million spent on average in the local economy every month
- 21% of population employed as a result of tourism in the Hastings Borough

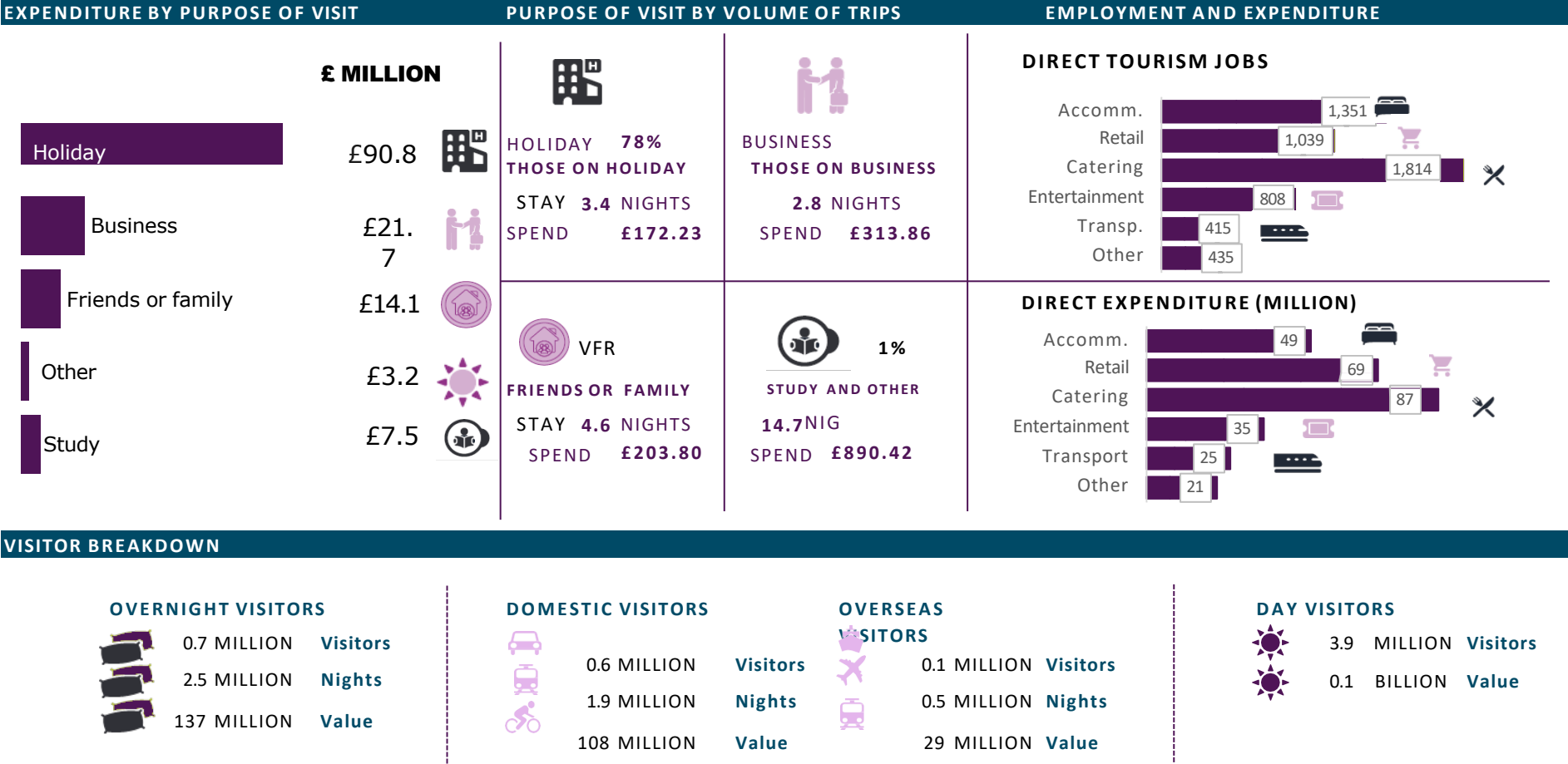
Local landmarks:

Hastings, and the surrounding region, has a wide range of landmarks and attractions that bring visitors to the locality, such as Smugglers Adventure (100k+ visitors per year) and nearby Bodiam Castle (186K+ visitors per year).

***Economic Impact Report Hastings 2023**

HASTINGS VISITOR ECONOMY 2023

This infographic summarises the volume and value of tourism and the impact of visitor expenditure on the local economy in 2023. The results are derived using the Cambridge Economic Impact Model under licence by Destination Research Ltd.



Vision and Ambition

The vision is to turn St Mary in the Castle into a must visit cultural destination, providing a desirable social space for the residents and visitors of Hastings.



Entertainment Legacy



Entertainment Legacy of St Mary in the Castle

St Mary in the Castle has a rich entertainment legacy, evolving from its origins as a landmark church in 1828 to a celebrated multi-arts venue from the 1980s onwards. For over three decades it hosted live music, theatre, comedy, dance, and visual arts, while fostering community programmes and festival partnerships.

Though closed in the 2020s it remains an iconic cultural landmark with a proven track record as a stage for local, national, and international talent — ready to be revived for a new era..

- **1828** – Opened as a landmark church at the heart of Pelham Crescent.
- **1980s–90s** – Restored and reborn as a multi-arts venue.
- **2000s** – Established reputation for live music, theatre, comedy, dance, and visual arts.
- **2010s** – Expanded role with café, community programmes, and partnerships with local festivals.
- **2020s** – Closed due to financial pressures; now identified by Historic England to go on the Heritage at Risk Register.

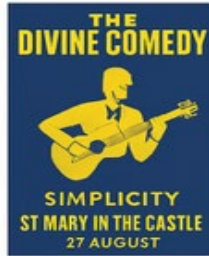
Legacy – Over 30 years as a stage for local, national, and international artists; a cultural landmark ready to be revived.

Entertainment Legacy of St Mary in the Castle

Notable Gigs / Events at St Mary in the Castle, Hastings



Eartha Kitt
one of the very first concerts
after the building reopened
as an arts centre (late 19
90s./1998)



The Divine Comedy
played St Mary in the Castle
on 27 August 1999



Fairport Convention
– headline folk-rock date
promoted for 1 May 2015

Steeleye Span
– performed at St Mary in the
Castle on its anniversary tours
(documented shows in Dec
2017 and 21 Nov 2019)



Hastings Oktoberfest
– an annual beer/music
festival that started at
St Mary in the Castle
in 2015



Rag'n'Bone Man – music video – Alone –
shot at St Mary in the Castle

<https://share.google/qKYmwZOWW1EgUDAbI>



James Taylor Quartet



Site Detail



Site Detail

The property, St Mary in the Castle, was designed by architect Joseph Kay for Thomas Pelham, Earl of Chichester, and built as a church in 1828. It is designated as Grade II* Listed in the register of historic buildings being maintained by Historic England. It is arranged over basement, ground and first floors as an auditorium.

The basement/vaults/crypt link to 6-8 Pelham Arcade and provide exhibition and gallery space. There are male and female WCs at this level as well as lift access to the main auditorium and balcony.

The ground floor is arranged as an auditorium, there are male and female WCs, a bar area as well as a stage.

Access to the balcony is via staircases to the east and west at the front of the building.

The location of the property and layouts are identified on the plans included in this presentation from pages 26 – 31.

Site Detail

6-8 Pelham Arcade forms the main entrance to St Mary in the Castle.

This part of the property has been previously fitted out as a café; features of note are the vaulted ceilings and the lantern light.

It forms part of a larger development that was built as the first phase of the Pelham Crescent scheme.

It is designated Grade II* Listed. Since 2011, the whole of Pelham Arcade has been placed on the national Heritage at Risk Register. Historic England & Heritage At Risk Register

There is a ramped access to the west side of the building leading up to the basement of St Mary in the Castle.

7 Pelham Crescent is a townhouse that adjoins St Mary in the Castle and is arranged over 5 storeys.

As above it is Grade II* Listed. Has been historically used for administrative offices and houses the lift providing access between the basement, ground and first floors of St Mary in the Castle.

The remaining buildings in the Arcade/Crescent are in private ownership.

Site Detail

The property is arranged over 3 principal floors in the main building, a single floor at 6-8 Pelham Arcade and a further 5 floors at 7 Pelham Crescent. The approximate gross internal areas are as follows.

St Mary in the Castle

Description	Net Internal Area ft ²	Net Internal Area m ²
Crypt/Basement	2,414	224.4
Ground Floor	5,193	482.6
First Floor	4,949	460.0
Total	12,556	1,167

6-8 Pelham Arcade

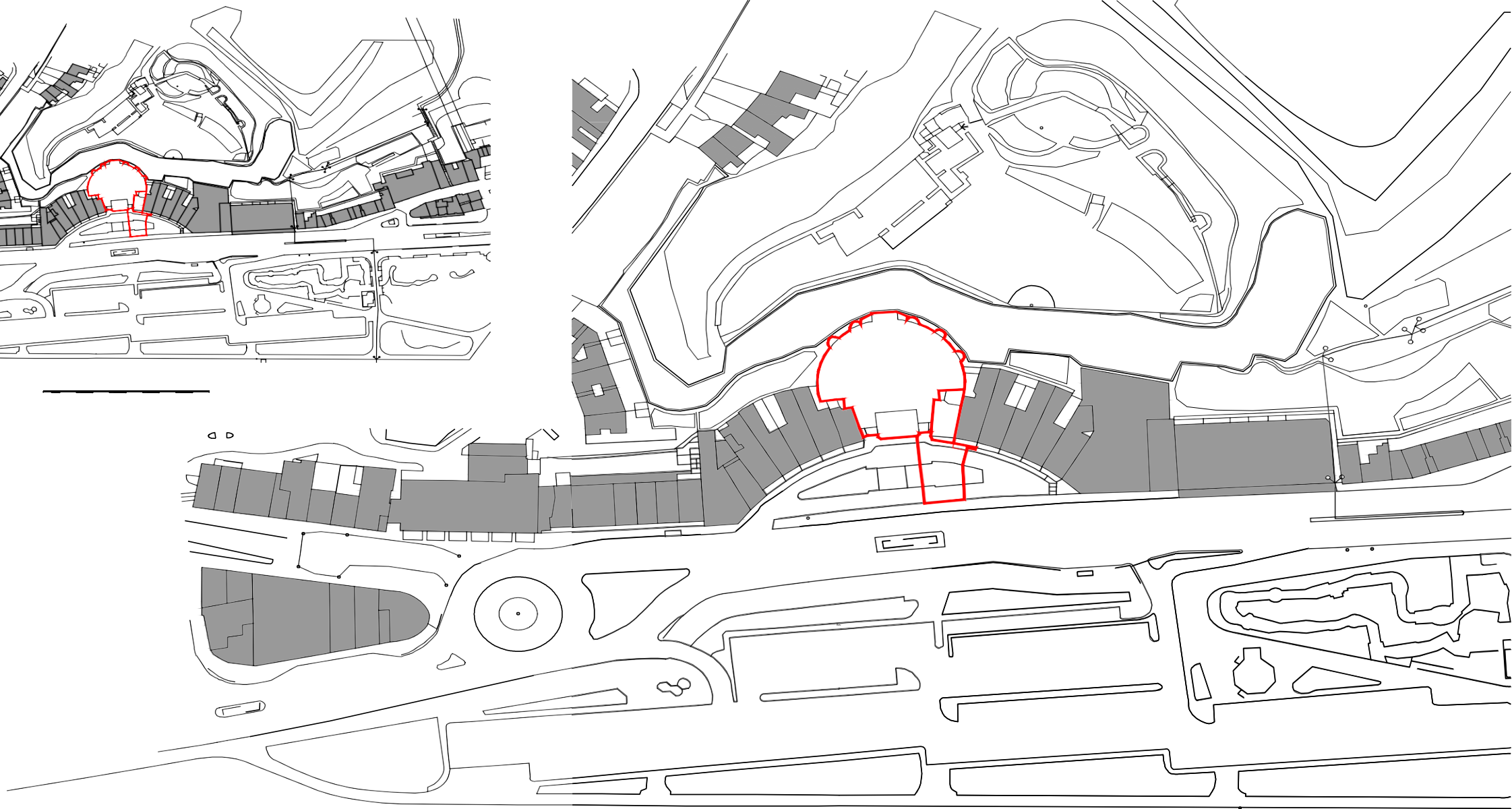
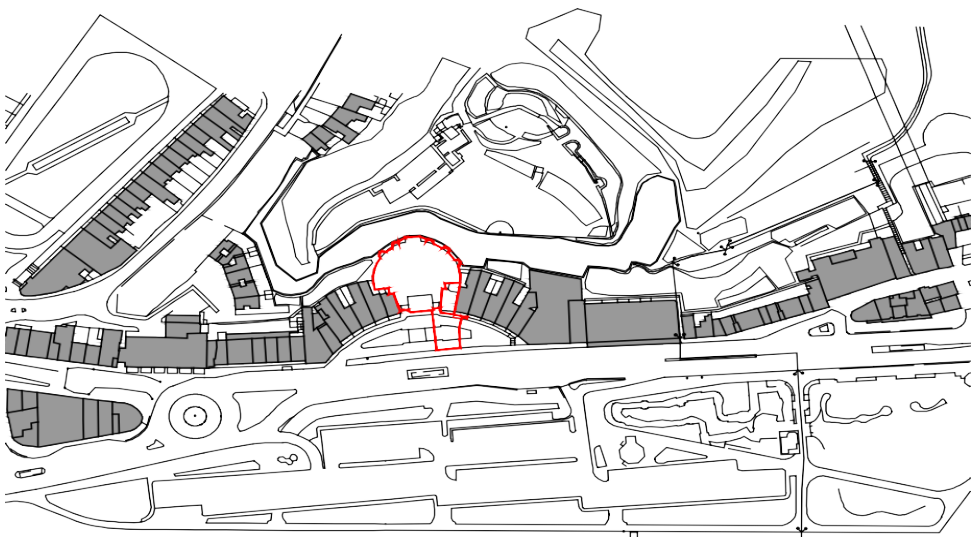
Description	Net Internal Area ft ²	Net Internal Area m ²
Café	1,736	161.3

Site Detail

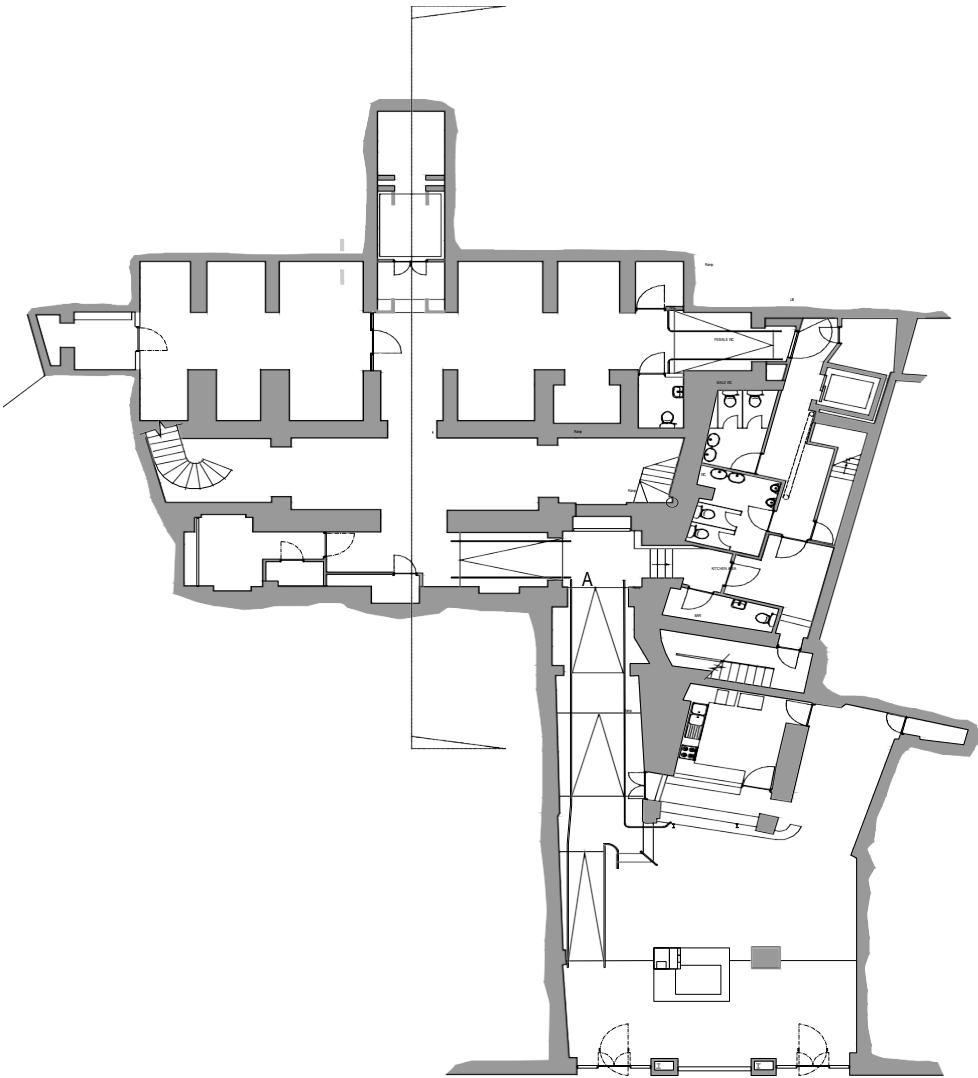
7 Pelham Crescent

Description	Net Internal Area ft ²	Net Internal Area m ²
Basement	660	61.4
Ground Floor	761	70.7
First Floor	787	73.2
Second Floor	-	-
Total	2,208	205.3

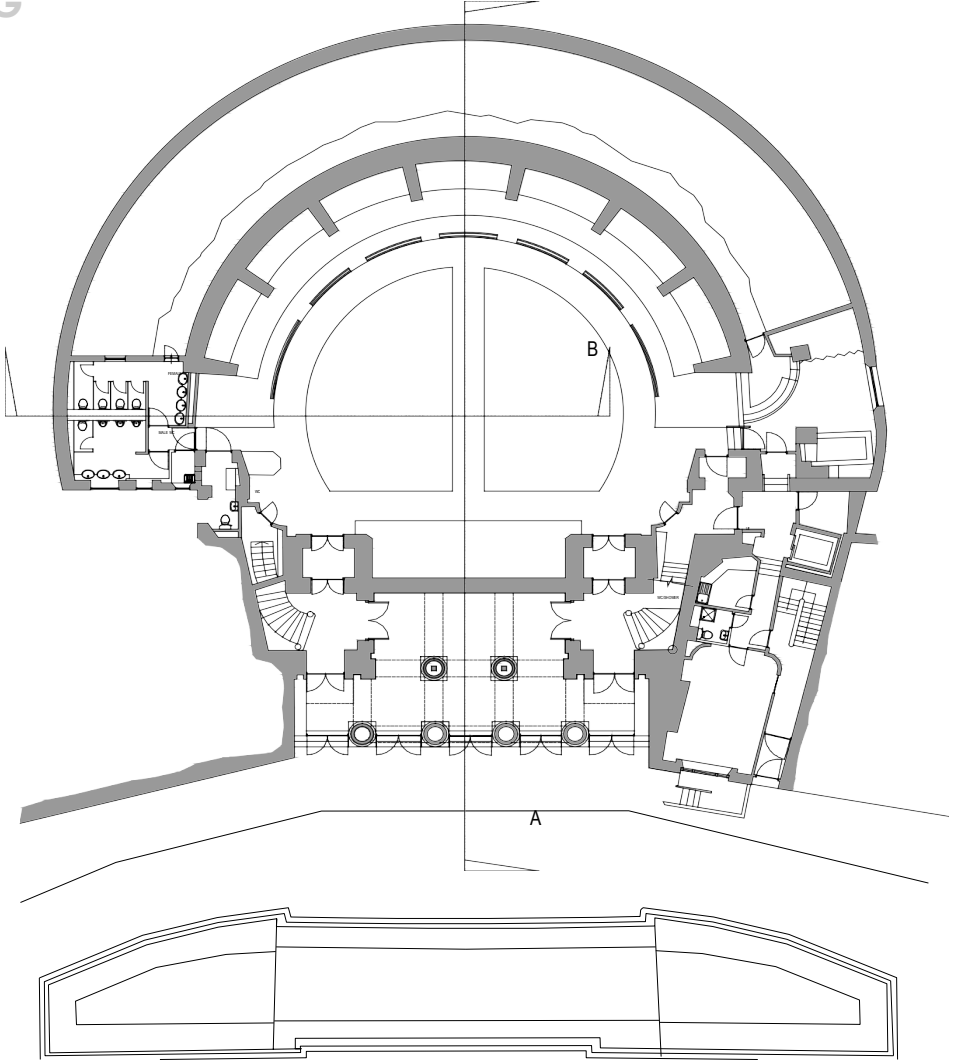
Site Location



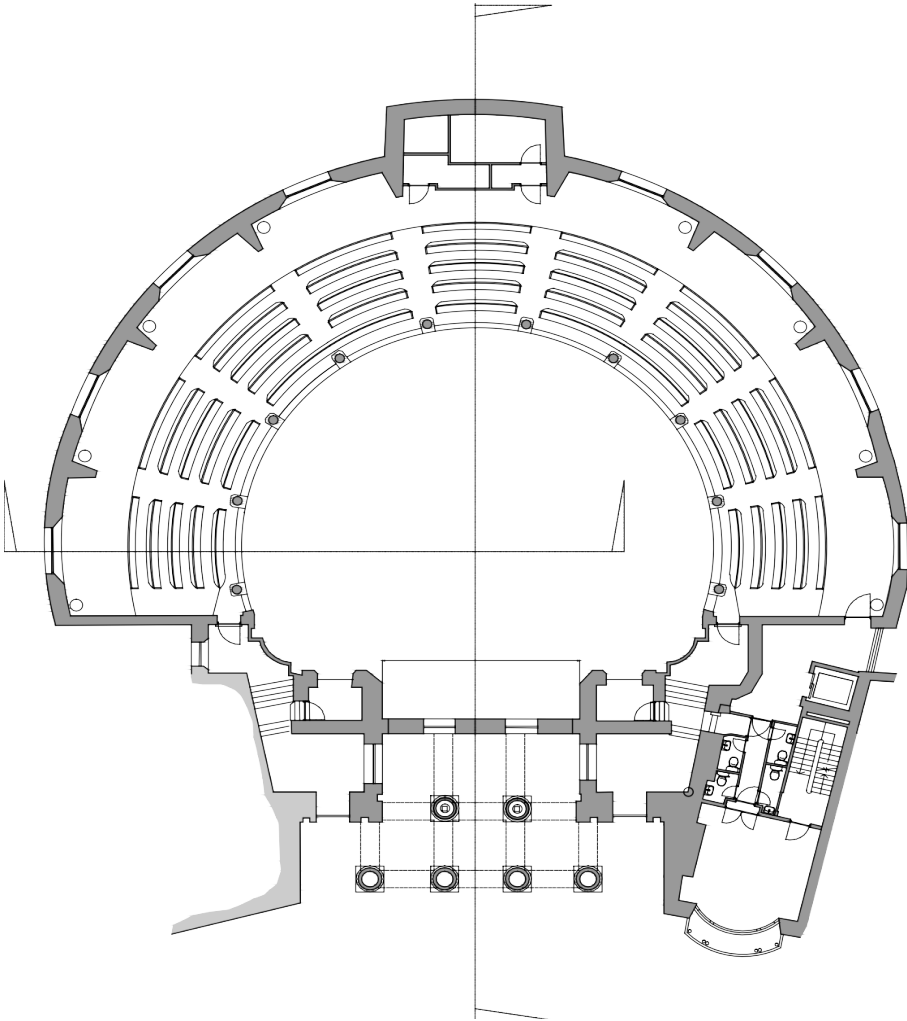
LOWER GROUND FLOOR PLAN AS EXISTING



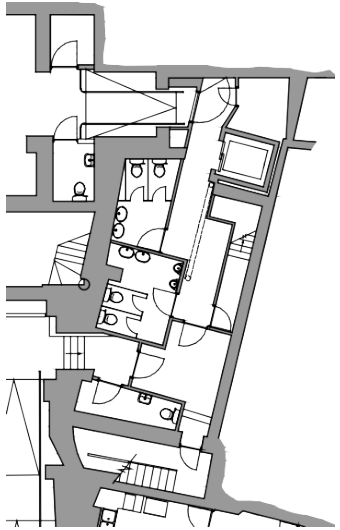
GROUND FLOOR PLAN AS EXISTING



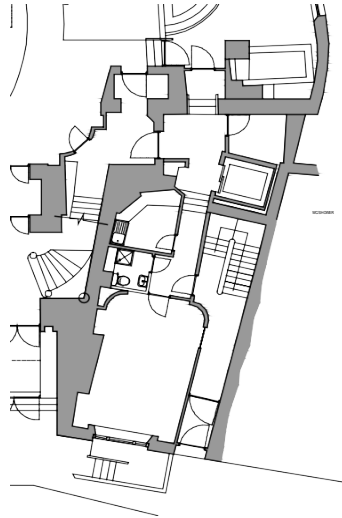
GALLERY PLAN AS EXISTING



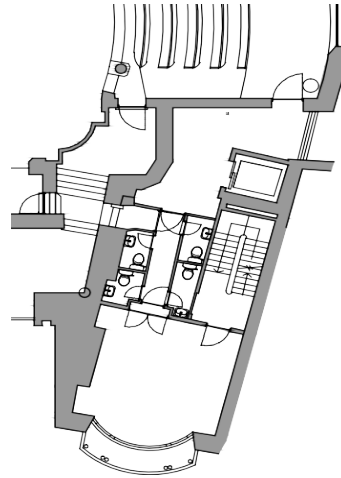
PELHAM CRESCENT FLOOR PLANS AS EXISTING



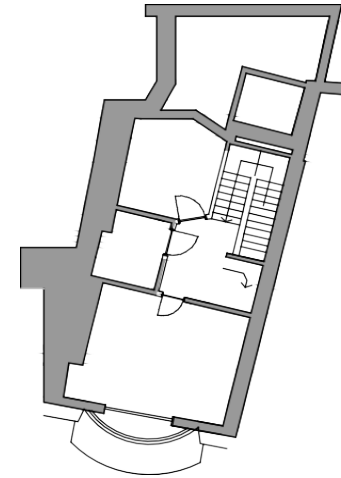
Lower Ground Floor



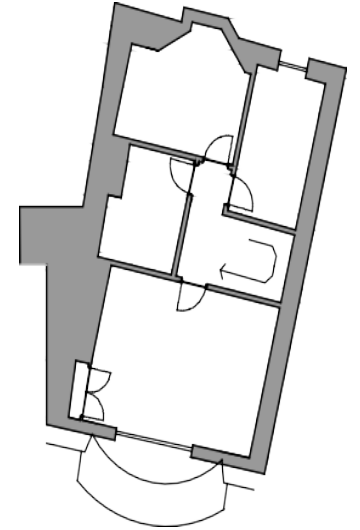
Ground Floor



First Floor

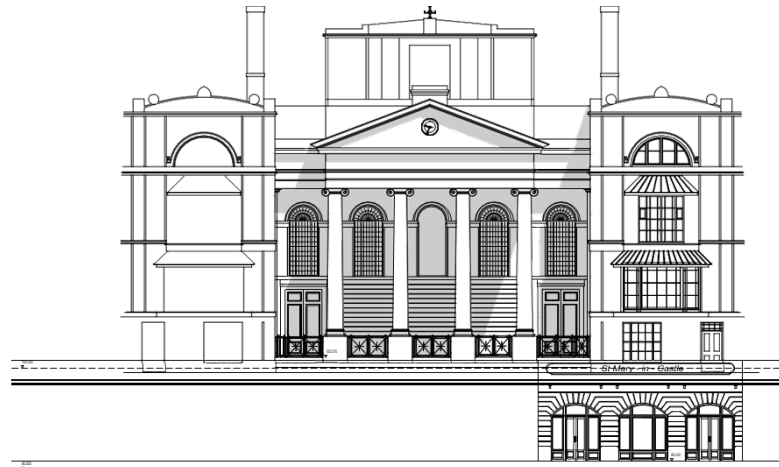
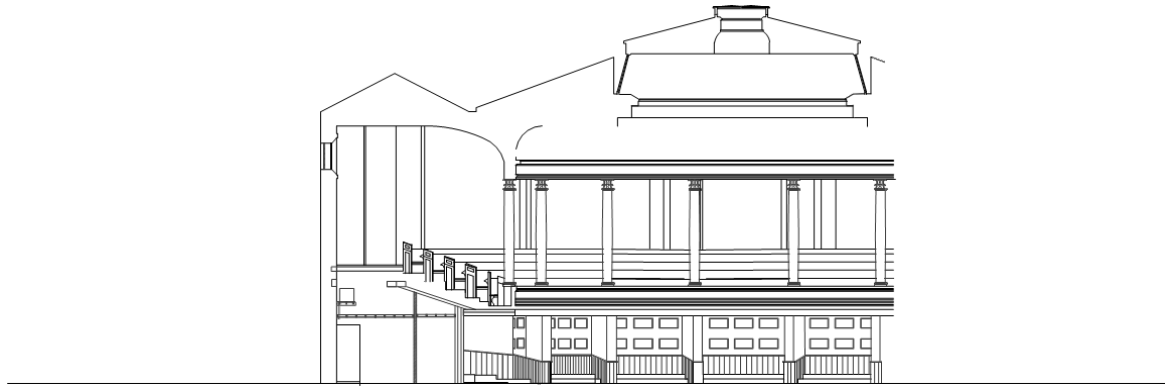


Second Floor



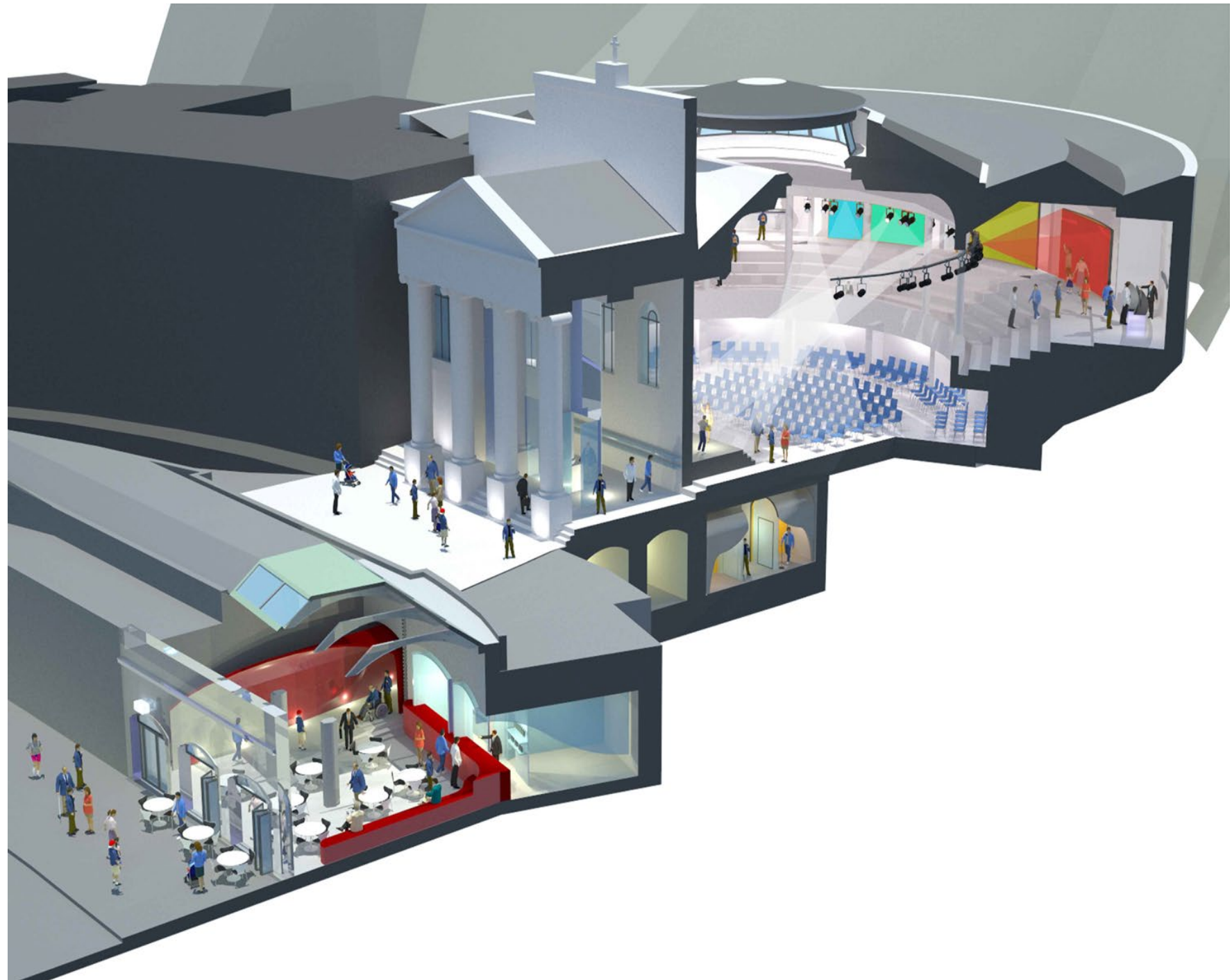
Third Floor

Elevations



Pelham Crescent Elevation scale 1:500

A Potential Vision of the Future



In Summary

- Strong vision and ambition developed for an important historical site, which will become a key part of the cultural economy.
- Clear objectives to provide an exceptional visitor experience.
- Diverse spaces with the ability to provide a commercially resilient and desirable business model.
- Strong historical significance which will stimulate both local and visitor interest.
- Significant funding and regeneration already taking place in Hastings.
- Strong transport infrastructure and visitor numbers.
- Will provide a much-needed addition to the nighttime economy.

Expressions of Interest



Expression of Interest (EOI)

Hastings Borough Council (HBC) is inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) from suitably experienced organisations and partnerships for the future operation of St Mary in the Castle.

The purpose of this EOI is to:

- Gauge the level of interest in the opportunity.
- Understand potential operating models, partnerships, and investment.
- Identify organisations with the experience and capacity to bring forward credible, sustainable proposals.
- To find a sustainable future for SMIC and to protect the venue for future generations.

The council is seeking an operator who can secure its future use, ensure financial sustainability, and deliver cultural, community, and economic benefits for the town.

At this stage, we are not requesting detailed business plans, but rather an outline of your vision, capacity, and commitment. Please provide a short response to the following six questions to help us shape the next stage of the process. All EOIs will be subject to review by HBC officers and selected external advisors. Responding to this EOI does not preclude or disadvantage any organisation in relation to future procurement processes, nor does it guarantee an invitation to tender.

Partnership Opportunity

- Long-term lease (up to 20 years) offered to provide security, encourage investment, and support sustainable operations. Preferential business rates and rent-free periods available.
- Joint investment model, with scope for capital contributions, grant leverage, and shared fundraising to maximise impact.
- Key stakeholder engagement, including Historic England, Hastings Borough Council, and cultural sector partners, to guide conservation and development.
- Integration with wider Towns Deal initiatives, including West Hill Café, Castle, and seafront improvements, ensuring joined-up regeneration.
- Marketing and promotional collaboration with the council and visitor economy partners to increase reach and visibility.
- Support for funding applications, with council backing for bids to NLHF, Arts Council, and other grant-making bodies.

EOI Information

Interested parties should respond to this EOI with a brief statement on their company background and why they are interested in this project with Hastings Borough Council.

Company background should include the following details:

- Details of your organisation size, operation, mission, relevant experience, and assets/ buildings you manage currently.
- Your experience of working with heritage and cultural assets or similar sites.
- Full details of any partners you will bring forward to work with you including architects, project management team, operators, individuals and their detailed background and experience.
- Any private or other public investments you wish to bring forward to contribute towards the project.
- Respond to the six business model questions on the next slide.

Site visit opportunity - Potential bidders will be offered the opportunity to make an accompanied site visit to view the interior and exterior of the building during the EOI bid preparation phase. The provisional date for this visit is within the **week commencing 3 November 2025**, but the actual date and time, and full details of the arrangements will be confirmed once the EOI opportunity goes live. Please get in touch to register your interest, in advance, if you would like to attend the site visit.

Business Model Questions

1. Vision & Operating Model

What is your vision for the future operation of St Mary in the Castle, and how would your proposed model deliver a sustainable, long-term use for this Grade II* heritage asset?

2. Experience & Track Record

Please outline your relevant experience of managing or operating heritage, cultural, or visitor-focused assets, including examples of comparable venues or projects.

3. Investment & Resources

What level of investment (financial or in-kind) would you be prepared to commit to support the future operation of the site, in addition to any council or external funding?

4. Partnerships & Collaboration

Would you intend to work with any partners (e.g. cultural producers, education providers, heritage specialists, commercial operators)? If so, please provide details.

5. Community, Education & Engagement

How would your proposal contribute to community access, youth engagement, skills development, and wider cultural participation in Hastings?

6. Programme & Feasibility

Given the building's current condition and the council's ambition to bring it back into active use, how realistic is your proposed programme and what key risks or challenges do you anticipate? How will you approach/fund the long-term maintenance of the building.

Evaluation

All EOIs will be subject to financial and organisational due diligence and shared with HBC lead members, internal group leaders and selected external experts for assessments.

Please note this is not a contractual bid and that the council reserves the right not to continue with any development of the site.

The council is open to suggested and imaginative forms of proposed development and operation of the site with the potential investment available and further investment that may be brought in. We are open to the suggestions that the developer, architect and the operator may be different organisations working together in partnership, but we request detailed information on each organisation.

The council may conduct interviews with selected proposers as well as request further additional information on a case-by-case basis.

The council is happy to offer all proposers a tour of the site and surrounding area as requested.

Responses to the Expressions of Interest will be shared with internal HBC officers and selected external experts for assessment.

Timetable

Publish EOI	- 15 th October 2025
Site visit - interested parties	- w/c 3 rd November 2025
EOI Submission	- 15 th December 2025
EOI Evaluation	- w/c 12 th January 2026
Feedback & Clarifications	- w/c 19 th January 2026
Next Steps Published	- w/c February 2026

Submission Instructions

Please submit your proposal including all required documentation to **Blue Horizon Ventures (BHV)** by 12 noon on the **15th December 2025**.

Please specify within your response if your proposal can be shared publicly or not.

The council is intentionally not specifying the format of the EOI to facilitate innovative and imaginative submissions.

Data Room is located [here](#).

Further Information:

If you would like to talk about this in more detail, please contact Julian at Blue Horizon Ventures on 07584 102287 or julian@bluehorizon-ventures.com.

Appendices



Appendices

1. Council information including Economic Impact of Tourism – Hastings 2023
2. Building & Asset Management Information
3. Plans and Elevations
4. Images - October 2025
5. SMiC Company Information
6. Community Group & Key Stakeholder list