

Redevelopment to form New 70-Bed Care Home

Willian Road, Letchworth, SB6 2AB
for Caring Homes Ltd.



Contents

Guysfield Care Home
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Design and Access Statement
October 2024

1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0
Introduction	Planning History	Context	Design Development
1.1 Executive Summary 1.2 Background & Project Brief 1.3 Development Team		3.1 Wider Context 3.2 Local Context 3.3 Site Evaluation	
5.0	6.0	7.0	
Design Proposal	Consultant Reports	Conclusion	
5.1 Design Proposal 3.2 Access 3.3 Energy & Sustainability	6.1 Planning Statement 6.2 Consultancy Advice Report 6.3 Planning Need Assessment 6.4 Heritage Statement 6.5 Arboricultural Planning Report 6.6 Ecological Impact Assessment 6.7 Archaeological Desk Based Assessment 6.8 Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment 6.9 Energy Strategy Report 6.10 Acoustic Design Statement 6.11 Transport Statement 6.12 Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy		

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

1.1.1 This Design & Access Statement has been produced by Oliver + Robb Architects (ORA) on behalf of Caring Homes Group Ltd. (“The Applicant”), in support of a Planning Application to part-demolish an existing, outdated 50-Bed Care Home and construct a new 70-Bed Registered Care Home on the site of the existing Guysfield Care Home at Willian Road, Letchworth (hereafter referred to as “the site”).

1.1.2 This follows an unsuccessful Planning Application for the ‘full demolition’ and erection of a new 60 Bed Care Home submitted on 6th October 2020 (Planning Ref: 20/02219/FP). A key concern, raised by Letchworth Heritage Foundation, was the demolition of the original Guys House, constructed in 1884 as a private residence. Although not Listed, the original house is locally appreciated as a building of architectural merit.

Following 10 months of negotiation and discussion with North Hertfordshire Planning Department and Letchworth Heritage Foundation, the Planning Application was moved to Part 2 of the Planning Register on the 25th July 2022 , ensuring that the determination process would not be progressed and no formal decision would be issued.

1.1.3 The proposal for the redevelopment of Guysfield House Care Home has been developed to address the requirements of the Client Brief, the Care Quality Inspectorate Guidelines and to take cognisance of the views and observations of the Professional Consultant Team and Pre-Application Advice received from North Hertfordshire District Council Planning Department dated 28th October 2019, 1st July 2022 and subsequently 29th January 2024 (Ref: 23/02439/PRE) . The current proposal also addresses concerns raised by Letchworth Heritage Foundation through retention of the original Guys House whilst demolishing the poorly conceived 1980’s and 1990’s extensions grafted onto the east elevation of the original house. (Refer Appendix 1 - email dated 25th July 2023 in support of proposals).

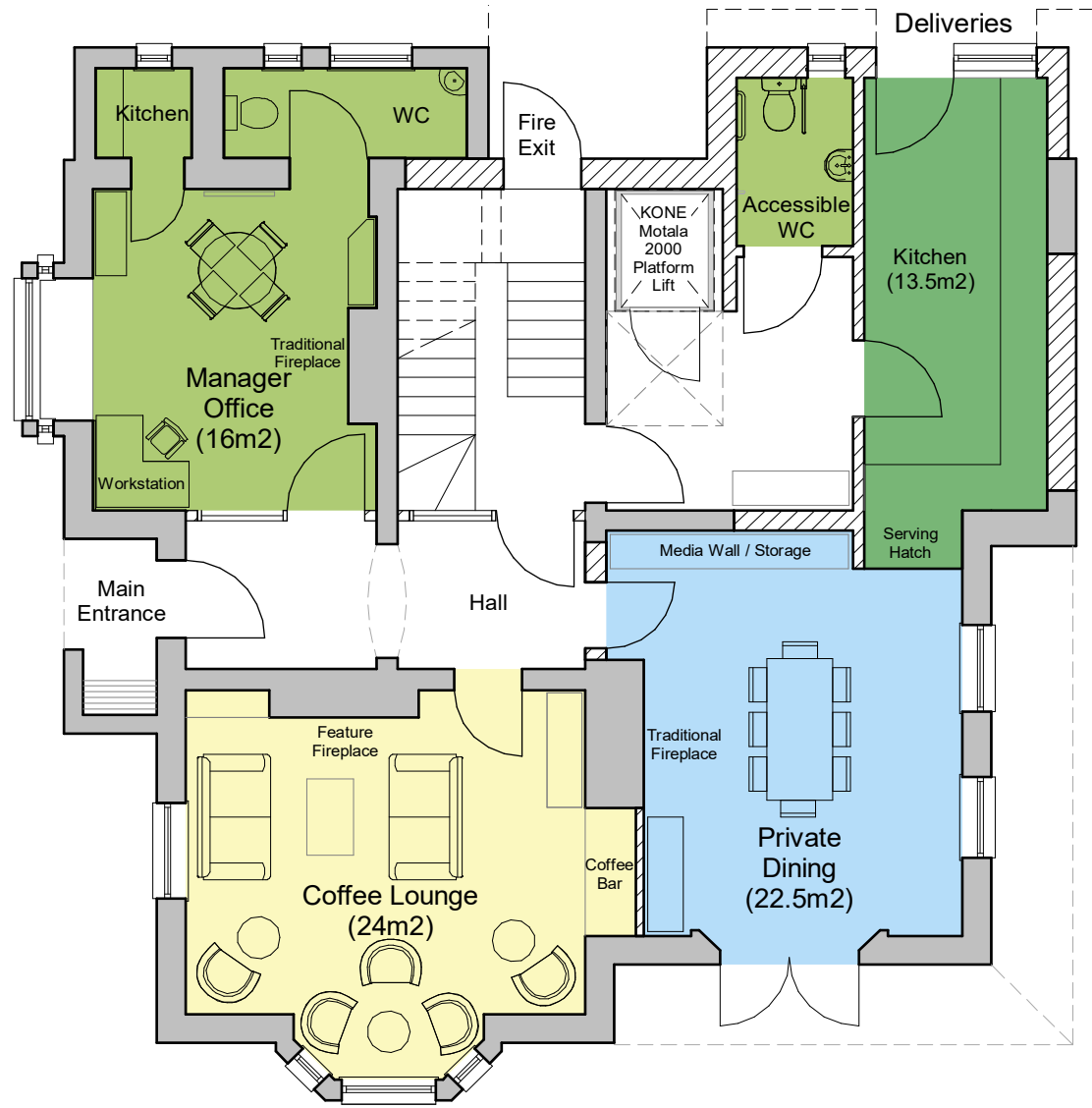


External Perspective facing North-East toward ‘Guys House’

The Covid-19 Pandemic has influenced the design and layout of the new facility to take account of functional, operational and ergonomic design parameters to ensure the effective delivery of care, should similar events occur in the future.

1.1.4 Importantly, following extensive negotiation, Letchworth Heritage Foundation now support the principle of the revised scheme and in particular the retention of the original house and the contemporary approach to the new build element. They have requested to remain informed throughout the Planning process and may comment further upon receipt of the detailed Planning proposals.

1.1.5 Caring Homes Group Ltd. will operate the Care Home and are committed to being responsible neighbours, paying due respect to surrounding properties and building to a high quality and appropriate scale within the context of the location, the Willian Conservation Area and the Metropolitan Green Belt.



Guys House - Proposed Ground Floor Plan



External Perspective facing North from Landscaped Gardens

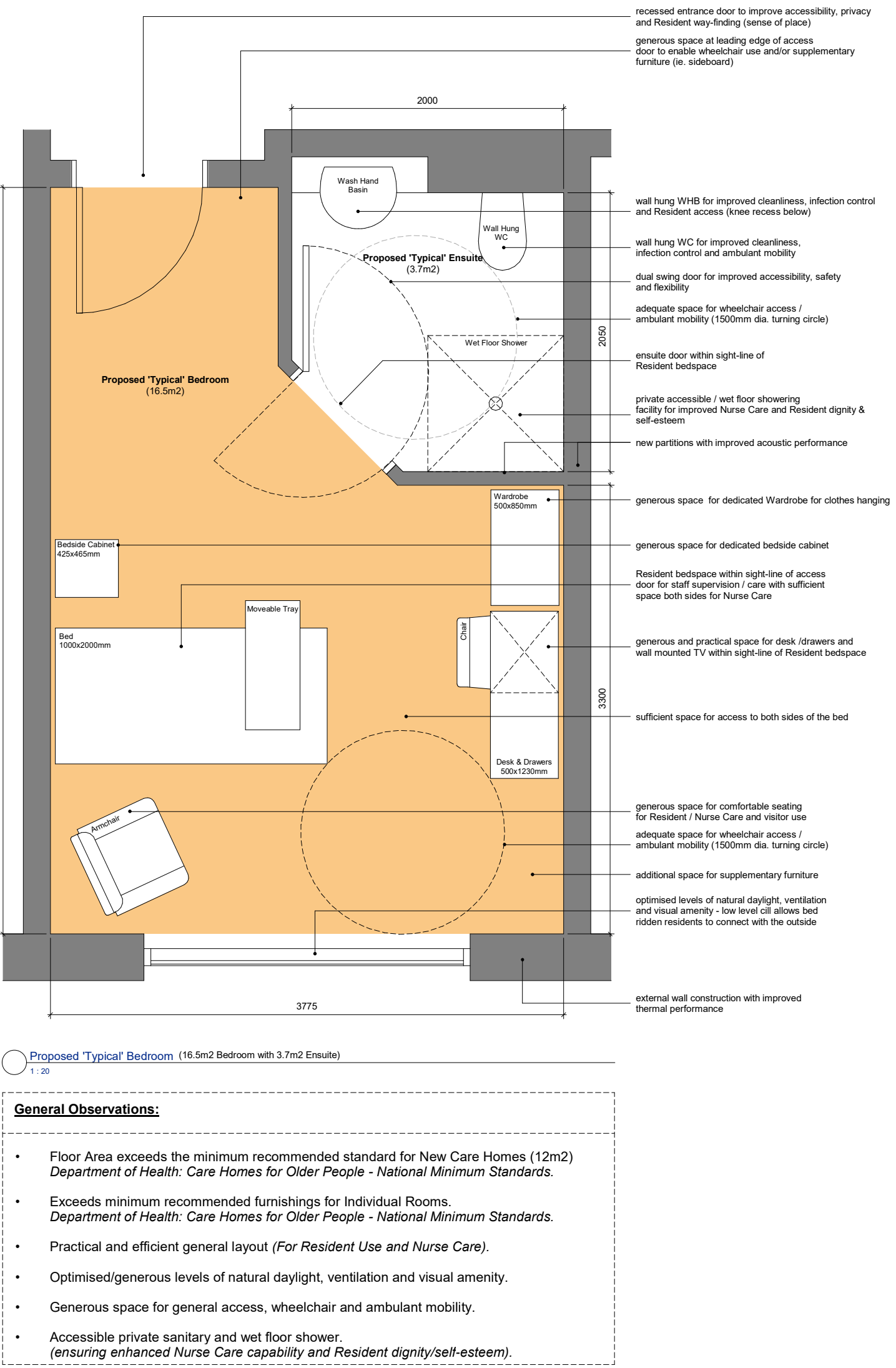
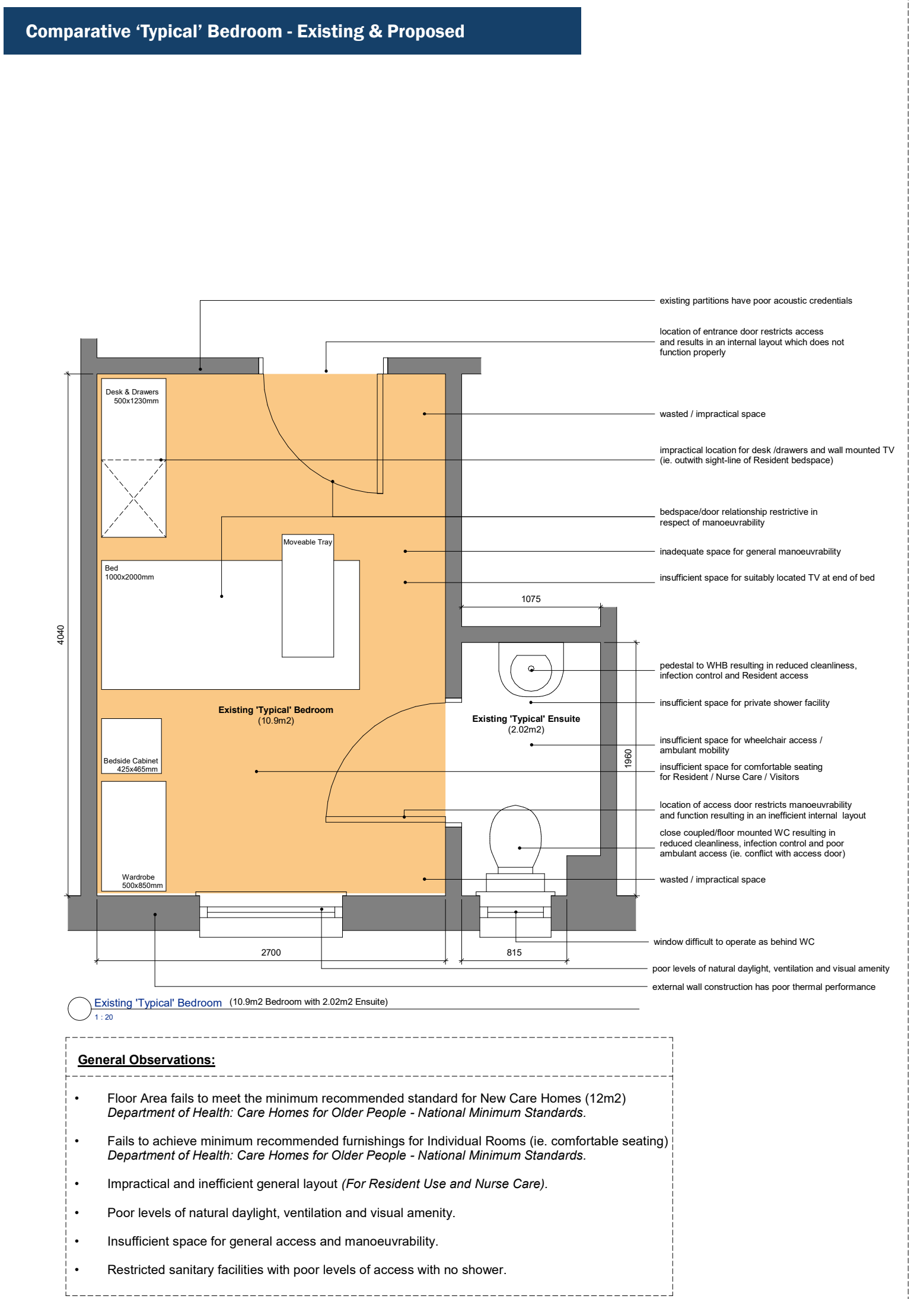
1.2 Background & Project Brief

1.2.1 Caring Homes have been providing specialist care to the frail and elderly for over 25 years and are one of the leading care providers in the UK, with over 90 Care Homes, 3,820 residents and in excess of 5,500 staff. They are also recognised for their expertise in providing specialist Learning Disability Services within a high quality, modern care environment which underpins the self esteem, self respect and dignity of the residents.

1.2.2 Caring Homes consider that the retention of Guys House offers a bespoke opportunity to create a standalone facility for resident and staff use in a contrasting traditional setting to the contemporary Care Home. The plans for the house include a Reception Room and Private Dining for dual use of residents and staff and offices, Training Rooms, and Male and Female changing for staff only. In addition, 2 sleepover rooms are included for staff and next of kin when required.

1.2.3 In respect of the new Care Home the following factors were a pre-requisite for any design proposals:

- A sustainable building incorporating renewable energy technologies and utilising thermal modelling to create a low energy building for the new build element.
- A contemporary approach to the aesthetic, utilising quality and durable materials to achieve a low maintenance building.
- A minimum of 70 bedrooms (all with dedicated En-suites) to assist with the cross funding for the retention and refurbishment of Guys House.
- Retention and re-use of the existing Site Access.
- Optimum levels of natural daylight and sunlight throughout internal spaces.
- Improved space standards for Resident Bedrooms, Public and Staff Accommodation beyond C.Q.C standards.
- A building, which integrates with its context and setting, sitting within a natural green environment accessible to residents, staff and visitors alike.
- A building which takes advantage of its Southerly aspect.
- Internal space planning which promotes and assists with the delivery of high quality care and dignity and self esteem of residents.



1.3 Development Team

1.3.1 An experienced Development Team has been assembled to support this application and they have collectively reviewed the requirements of the project and provided expert and bespoke advice to ensure the submitted proposals are deliverable.

The following Specialist Reports have been commissioned to inform the basis of this Detailed Planning Application.

- Planning Statement.
- Consultancy Advice Report.
- Planning Need Assessment.
- Heritage Statement.
- Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment.
- Arboricultural Planning Report.
- Ecological Impact Assessment.
- Archaeological Desk Based Assessment.
- Energy Strategy Report
- Acoustic Design Statement.
- Transport Statement.
- Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy.



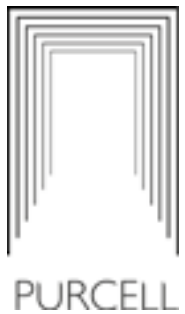
Client
Caring Homes Group Ltd.



Planning Consultant
Woolf Bond Planning



Property Advisors
Christie & Co



Heritage Consultant
Purcell



Ecology Consultant
SWECO



Energy Consultant
Harniss Consulting Ltd



Transport Consultant
Intermodel Transportation Ltd.



Architect
Oliver + Robb Architects



Social Care Property Advisors
Carterwood



Landscape Architect
Fisher Tomlin & Bowyer



Arboricultural Consultant
ARB Consultant Ltd.



Archaeology Consultant
RPS



Acoustic Consultant
Sound Solution Consultants



Civil Engineering
Canham Consulting

2.0 Planning History

2.1 For comprehensive detail regarding the Planning History please refer to the ‘Planning Statement’ prepared by Woolf Bond Planning Consultants).

A summary of the relevant planning history is noted below:

- Erection of two storey extension, together with change of use of dwelling to Elderly Persons home following demolition of existing building. Conditional permission granted on 15th September 1986 (Ref: 86/01075/1)
- Erection of front boundary walls. Conditional permission granted on 17th October 1987.
- Conversion of existing roof space into living accommodation for Elderly Persons home. Conditional permission granted on 10th November 1988.
- Erection of part two, part three storey wide extension and glazed conservatory link to existing residential home, rearrangement of existing parking area to create a total of 16 spaces and ancillary works. Conditional permission granted on 12th November 1991.
- Replacement roof to existing conservatory, part pitch/part flat with roof lantern and insertion of double doors to rear. Conditional permission granted on 28th October 2013.
- Pre-Application Advice received 20th July 2012 (70 Bed Care Home).
- Pre-Application Advice received 28th October 2019 (Ref: 19/00504/PRE).
- Pre-Application Advice received 1st July 2022 (via email).



- Planning Application moved to Part 2 of the Planning Register on the 25th July 2022 , ensuring that the determination process would not be progressed and no formal decision would be issued.
- Email from Letchworth Heritage Foundation dated 25th July 2023 in support of proposals. (Refer Appendix 1).
- Pre-Application Advice received 29th January 2024 (Ref: 23/02439/PRE).
- Online Pre-Application Meeting held with North Hertfordshire Council on 14th March 2024.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the success or otherwise of a future planning application submission for the proposed development will depend on how the supporting information and documents demonstrate that the development complies with all of the stated policies and whether 'very special circumstances' can be demonstrated which clearly outweigh any harm to the Green Belt.

On balance, is considered that very special circumstances could be demonstrated in this instance which would clearly outweigh any harm to the Green Belt.

As previously indicated, additional information/evidence is required to justify the benefits identified in Chapter 8, Section G of the Planning Statement and consideration should be given as to how 'very special circumstances' can be comprehensively demonstrated as part of the proposal. This in turn will assist in the assessment of the very special circumstances case as part of the overall Planning Balance.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Chaston

Senior Planning Officer



2.2 The benefits arising from the proposal are substantial in respect of meeting an identified housing need for elderly people, providing employment opportunities and facilitating the release of under-utilised housing all of which support any future Planning Application.

2.3 The proposed development would result in several material benefits to the local community as follows:

- The delivery of a range of new employment opportunities during both the construction and operational phases.
- The demolition and redevelopment of an existing Care Home which is no longer fit for purpose.
- New investment into Willian, Letchworth and the immediate area.
- Additional expenditure within local shops, eateries and other services.
- The provision of advanced care accommodation that shall relieve the pressure on hospital bed spaces.
- The provision of a bespoke, purpose built, registered care facility which shall release pressure on local GP services.
- The release of under-utilised family housing to the local property market through the provision of modern care accommodation providing choice in type, form and level of residential care.
- Improved health for local people through the provision of secure, comfortable accommodation and companionship within a stimulating, caring environment
- The home shall be a focal point and an integral part of Willian’s Community Facilities.

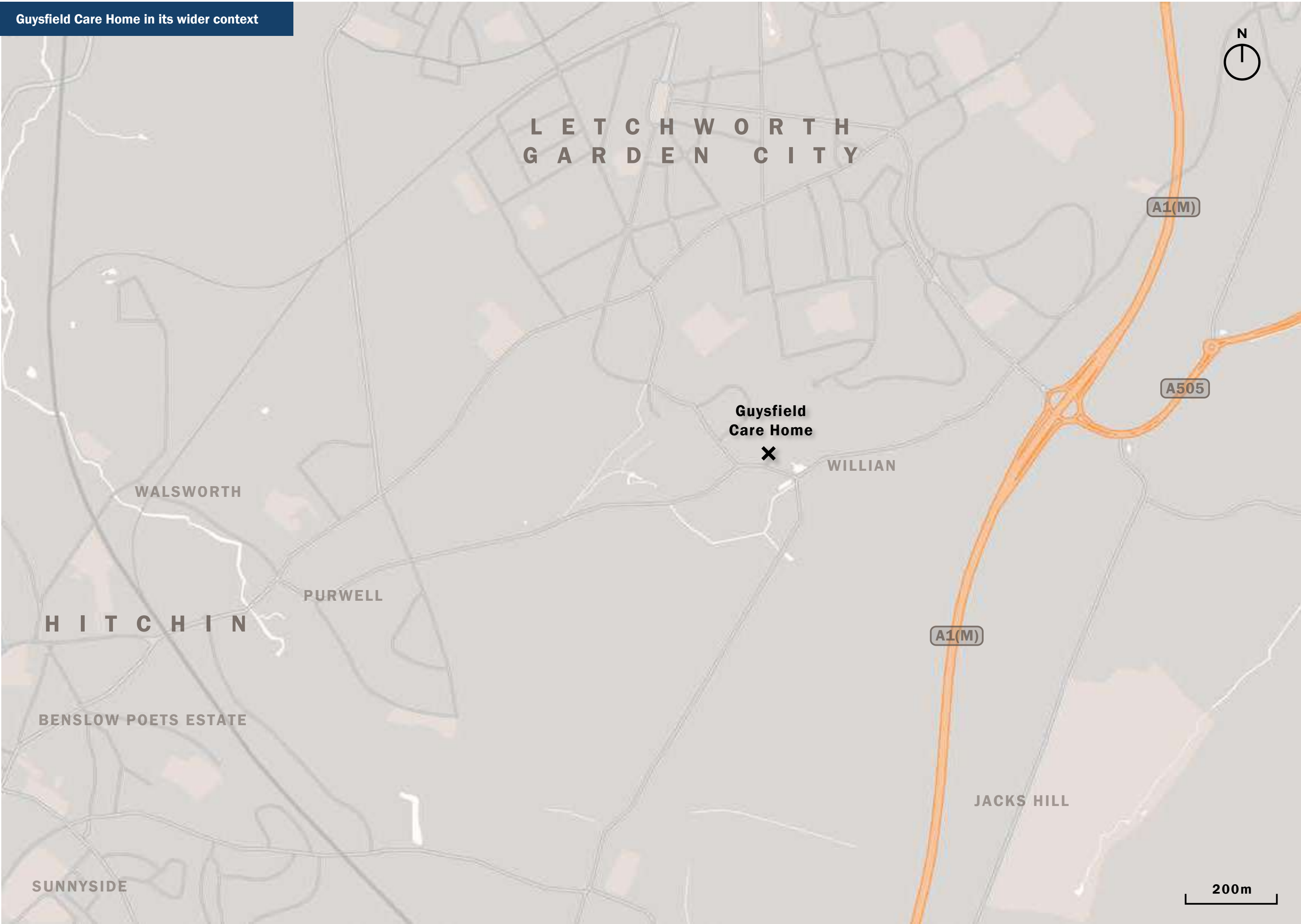
3.0 Context

3.1 Wider Context

3.1.1 The Care Home is within an accessible location on the southern edge of Letchworth, approximately 1.8km from the Town Centre. It also sits within 1km of the A1(M), a major transport route through the Midlands of England, thus making it equally accessible from further afield.



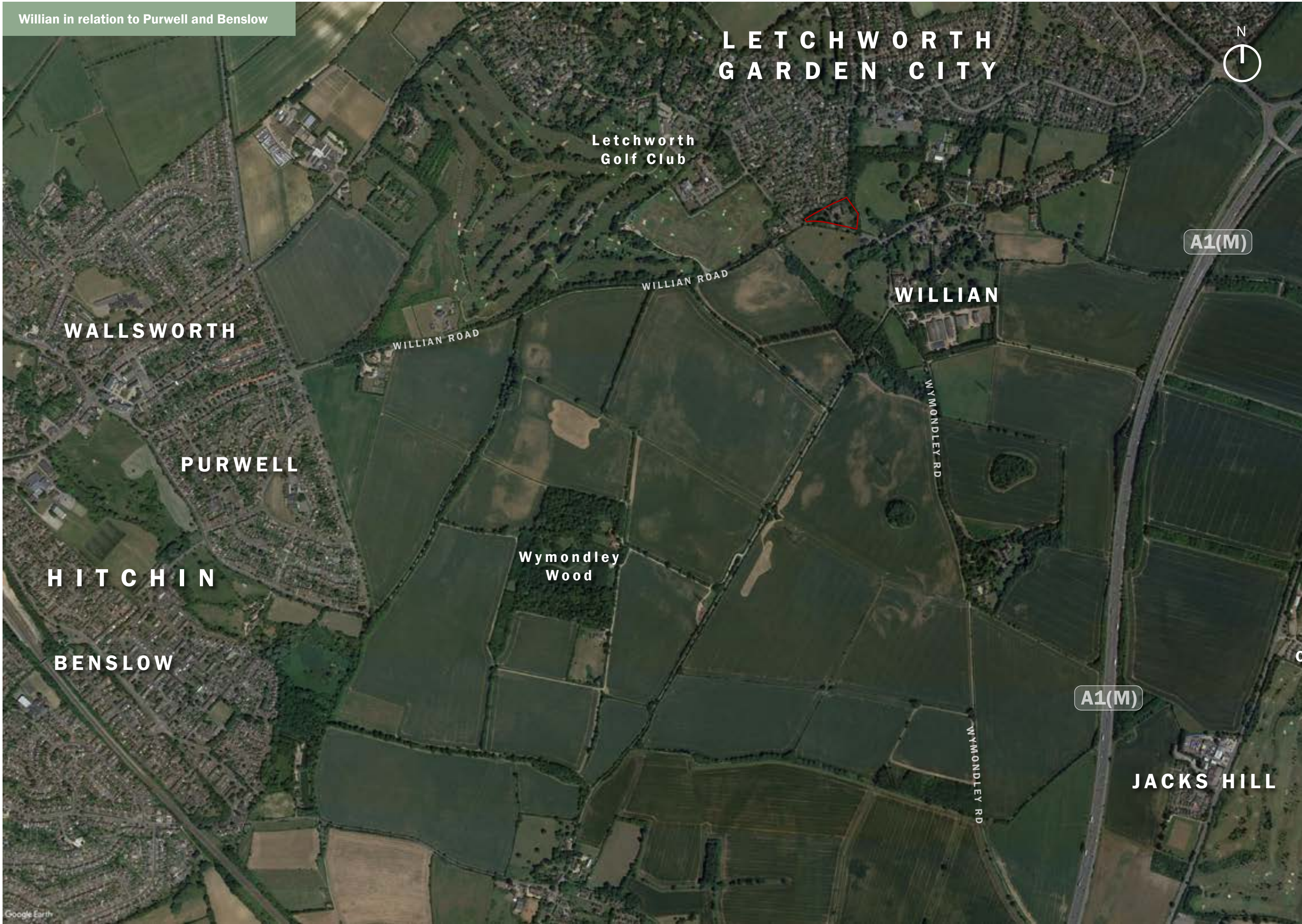
Letchworth Garden City within the county of Hertfordshire



3.2.4 In respect of its setting, there are short and medium range views from Willian Road to the south, and from the Public Right of Way Network adjoining the east boundary and traversing the Village Green to the south and east. Generally, visibility from out-with the site is well screened by existing trees and shrubbery on all boundaries.

3.2.5 Further afield the site has limited visibility from elevated public viewpoints along Wymondley Road and Wymondley Wood to the south, principally due to the nature of the local topography and the presence of tree and hedgerow cover.

3.2.6 It should be noted that the ‘Landscape and Visual Impact Analysis’ submitted with the original planning application shall be updated and re-submitted with any future planning application pending feedback on this Pre-Application submission.

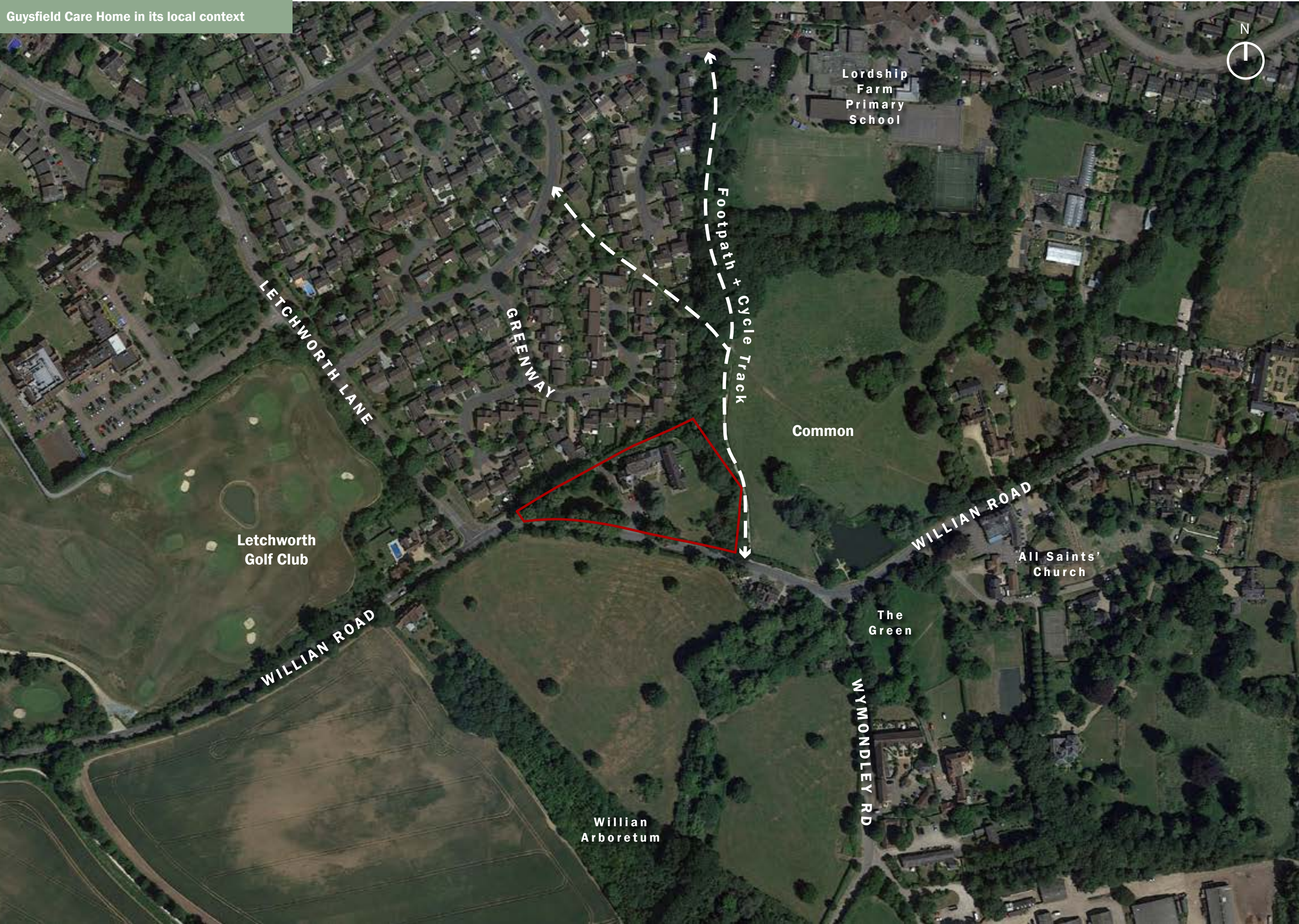
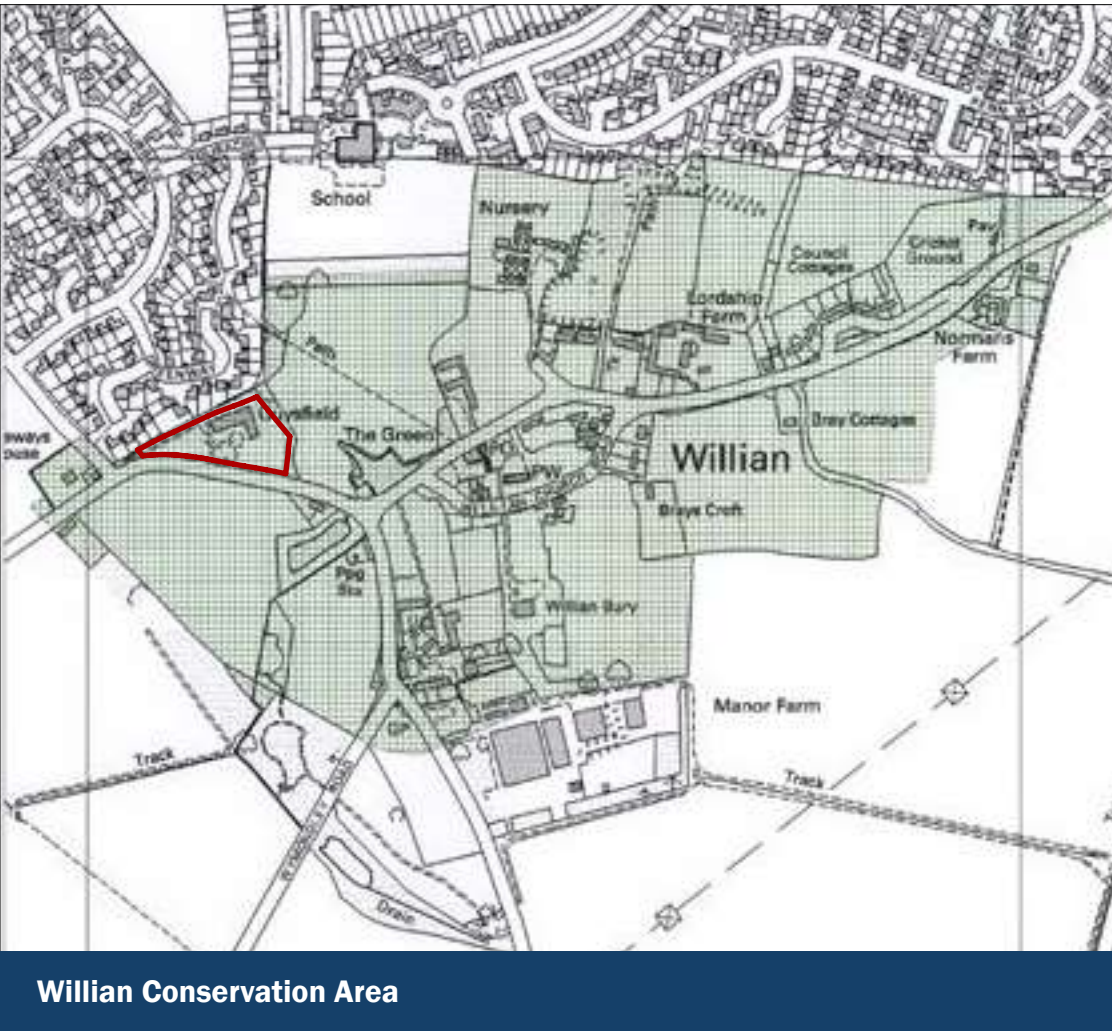


3.2 Local Context

3.2.1 The site is approximately 0.94 ha in area, occupying a triangular shaped plot on elevated land (within the Metropolitan Green Belt and Willian Conservation Area) and overlooks open countryside to the south. It is accessed from Willian Road (C19) to the south, with a former tree lined driveway forming a secondary, albeit unused, access to Willian Road to the west.

3.2.2 The site is bounded by modern residential properties on Greenway to the North, a footpath and cycle track (bounded by the Common) to the East, Letchworth Lane and Letchworth Golf Course to the West and Willian Road to the South with open countryside beyond including Willian Arboretum, a popular area for walking.

3.2.3 It sits within 200m of the Village Centre and its modest facilities, with a further foot-way and cycle track providing routes north to the Letchworth Urban Area with its wide ranging community facilities.



3.3 Site Evaluation

3.3.1 Built as a private residence in 1884, Guys House lies within established, well landscaped grounds, incorporating a number of individual mature trees, along with areas of shrub, lawn, tree belt and hedgerow interest, all of which positively contribute to the rural approach to the southern end of Letchworth and the setting and character of both the house the village of Willian.

3.3.2 Converted to a Care Home in 1986, Guys House has since been extended in the late 1980’s and 1990’s to provide a 50-bed facility over four floors, including a basement. It incorporates areas for car parking and servicing to the front and west side of the building.

3.3.3 The existing Care Home has three distinct elements, the original building and the latter-day extensions which are complimentary “to a fashion”. However, they lack the integrity, sensitivity and impact of a carefully considered and architecturally harmonious single building, which is demonstrated through this design proposal.

3.3.4 Purcell were appointed by Caring Homes (The Applicant) to prepare a ‘Heritage Statement’ in support of the Detailed Planning Application as summarised in Section 6.4 of this report.



West Facade of 1990s Wing, Existing Guysfield Care Home



Bay Feature with Dentil Course Brickwork, Existing Guysfield Care Home



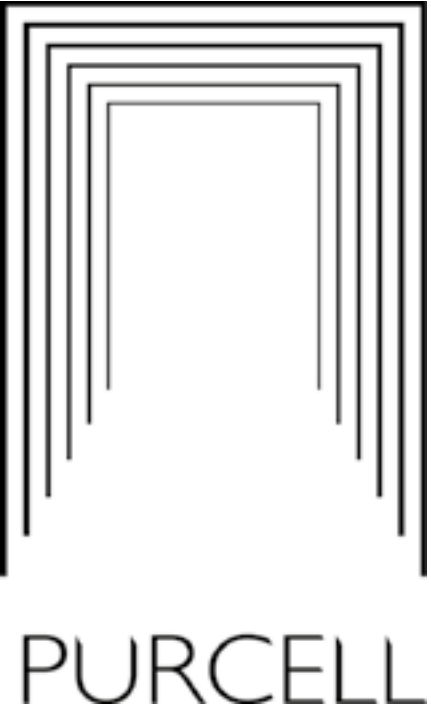
West façade of the original house



Inscribed brick to RHS of entrance porch



Inscribed brick to LHS of entrance porch



Primary South Elevation, with 1980’s extension and later conservatory and entrance to right of the original Care Home

4.0 Design Development

4.1 The existing Care Home provides Residential and Specialised Dementia Care, including Short Stay and Convalescent Care for the Elderly. However, the accommodation falls distinctly short of the standard and specification which Caring Homes aspire to in their high quality developments, and is blighted by the fact that the original Victorian Building is inappropriate in terms of its layout, the most critical issue being that it does not meet modern space standards, particularly for Residential Accommodation for the elderly and frail.

4.2 The existing building also has very poor thermal characteristics which are extremely difficult to upgrade within the envelope of the existing building, all to the detriment of elderly resident’s comfort levels. A fully glazed Entrance/Day Room with glazed pyramid roof exacerbates the problem in so far as Residents are socialising/resting within a space which overheats in the summer and is cold in the winter, proving costly to ventilate and heat in those respective seasons.

4.3 Jo Cousins of North Hertfordshire District Council acknowledged the shortcomings of the existing Care Home in her Pre-Application Advice, dated 28th October 2019, when stating:

“From my visit to the site it was very apparent that the existing older section of the building is not fit for purpose with access, heating and general layout being problematic for staff. The lack of lift access to the upper floors was particularly noticeable and this would have a limiting effect on care and safety, I would suggest”.

4.4 Feasibility proposals for a full ‘refurbishment’ of the existing building were developed by ORA for review/consideration and have been submitted as part of the Detailed Planning Application. Given the inherent restraints of the existing building this exercise demonstrated that a maximum of 29no. bedrooms could be achieved, and the proposals fell short of the required standards expected of a modern Care Home (i.e. corridor widths, bedrooms sizes and shared resident space). In addition, an indicative Cost Plan prepared by Aero Property Consultants estimated the works at circa. £3,368,285.52. Therefore, the ‘refurbishment’ proposals were deemed unviable, both economically and operationally, as acknowledged by NHDC Planning Department during the Online Pre-Application Meeting held on 14th March 2024.



4.5 The developed contemporary design integrates with the site and surrounding context, whilst reducing the perceived mass and scale of the building through the formation of a basement area and flat roof, broken by feature brick panels, to align with the ridge level of the existing house. Importantly the building steps down to Willian Road presenting an articulated gable which importantly aligns with a mature Atlantic Cedar to create a natural courtyard setting when viewed from Willian Road.

4.6 Initial concerns raised by North Hertfordshire Planning Department in their Pre-Application Advice Letter (dated 1st July 2022) regarding encroachment of the new build element into the southern portion of the site, facing Willian Road, have been duly addressed. This has been achieved by reducing the extent of the proposed building footprint by 15.5m to align with the southern edge of the existing mature Atlantic Cedar, as noted above. This creates an attractive landscaped courtyard and effectively ‘frames’ the existing Guys House creating an interesting and fascinating juxtaposition between the “old and new” buildings both of which shall be “of their time”.

In addition, a series of ‘open terraces’ have been formed to punctuate the southern most projection, a design feature duly acknowledged by NHDC Building Conservation Team:

“Other terraced areas are to be created at the southern end of the projecting wing. Here, the terrace areas are not roofed, and part of the extension’s design is a ‘cascading effect’. This will certainly assist in reducing the bulk/mass of the proposal”



Juxtaposition of ‘old & new’ and attractive Landscaped Courtyard Garden



Initial Proposal - 29th October 2021 (Note extent of southern projection)



Developed Proposal - 22nd October 2022 (Note reduced extent of southern projection)



Detailed Planning Proposal (Noted reduced southern projecting, cascading roof terraces and landscaping)



Cascading roof terraces to reduce perceived bulk/mass of souther projection