



The Royal Bell, Bromley

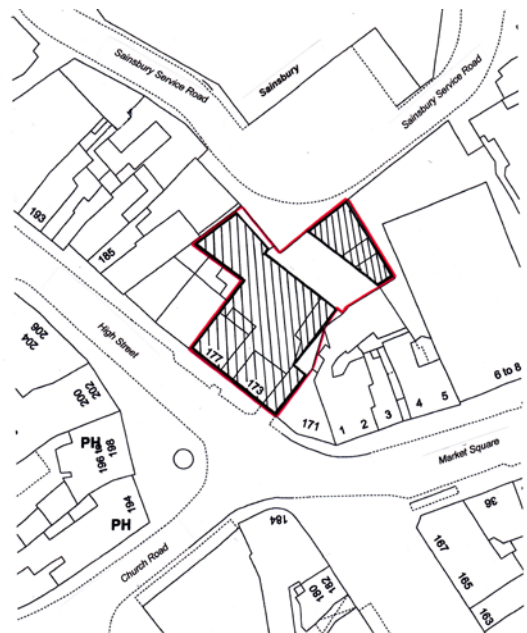
Prepared by the Bromley Arts and Community Initiative
May 2013

The former Royal Bell Hotel, High Street Bromley is a Grade II listed building that has lain empty for more than three years. Designed by Ernest Newton in 1898, it is the centrepiece of the Bromley Town Centre conservation area and a well loved feature of local heritage.

In its current state, however, boarded up and semi derelict, it has a negative impact on the local environment and is blocking the economic regeneration of the northern part of the town. Uncertainties over its future and its condition has led to it being included on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register.

The problem

There is little prospect of the building being re-occupied in the foreseeable future. The cost of repairs, estimated to be over £2million, is a deterrent to potential occupiers; it has also proved difficult to find conventional pub or restaurant operators that can make effective viable use of all parts of this large rambling building with a separate stables building to the rear.



The building has an unrealistically high valuation placed on it due to the current lease being paid by The Spirit Group. As a listed building it is exempt from the business rate normally payable on vacant buildings – thus in its current state it makes no contribution to the local economy.

The solution

With a more imaginative approach taken to the activities and uses within the building the Royal Bell could, by taking advantage of its prominent central location and quirky internal layout, become a commercially viable visitor attraction.

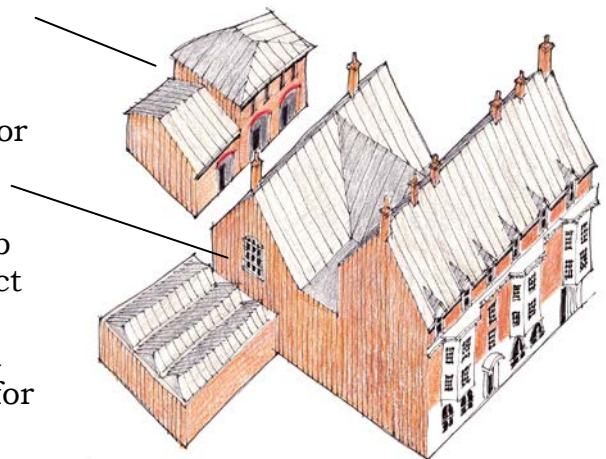
The Bromley Arts and Community Initiative (BACI) is a recently formed not-for-profit group with over 200 supporters including Councillors, MPs, local firms and professionals with a wide range of skills and knowledge in the fields of property, planning, heritage and the arts. Its aims are to widen the range of cultural activity in Bromley Town Centre by establishing an arts venue within the Royal Bell for theatre, music, comedy; also art display and workshops – together with a commercially run café and pub use on the extensive ground floor.

To achieve this aim BACI would form a partnership with the owners of the building to enable an application to be made for up to £5 million from the 'Heritage Enterprise' programme recently launched by the Heritage Lottery Fund (see link below). Heritage Enterprise is designed to bridge the funding gap that prevents a historic asset in need of repair from being returned to a beneficial and commercial use. HLF hope to encourage private sector involvement working in partnership with community organisations to deliver commercially viable projects. Such a partnership could achieve the restoration of the Royal Bell and enable it to achieve its full economic potential. The introduction of new arts and cultural activity in the town centre would also be a widely recognised benefit.

The vision

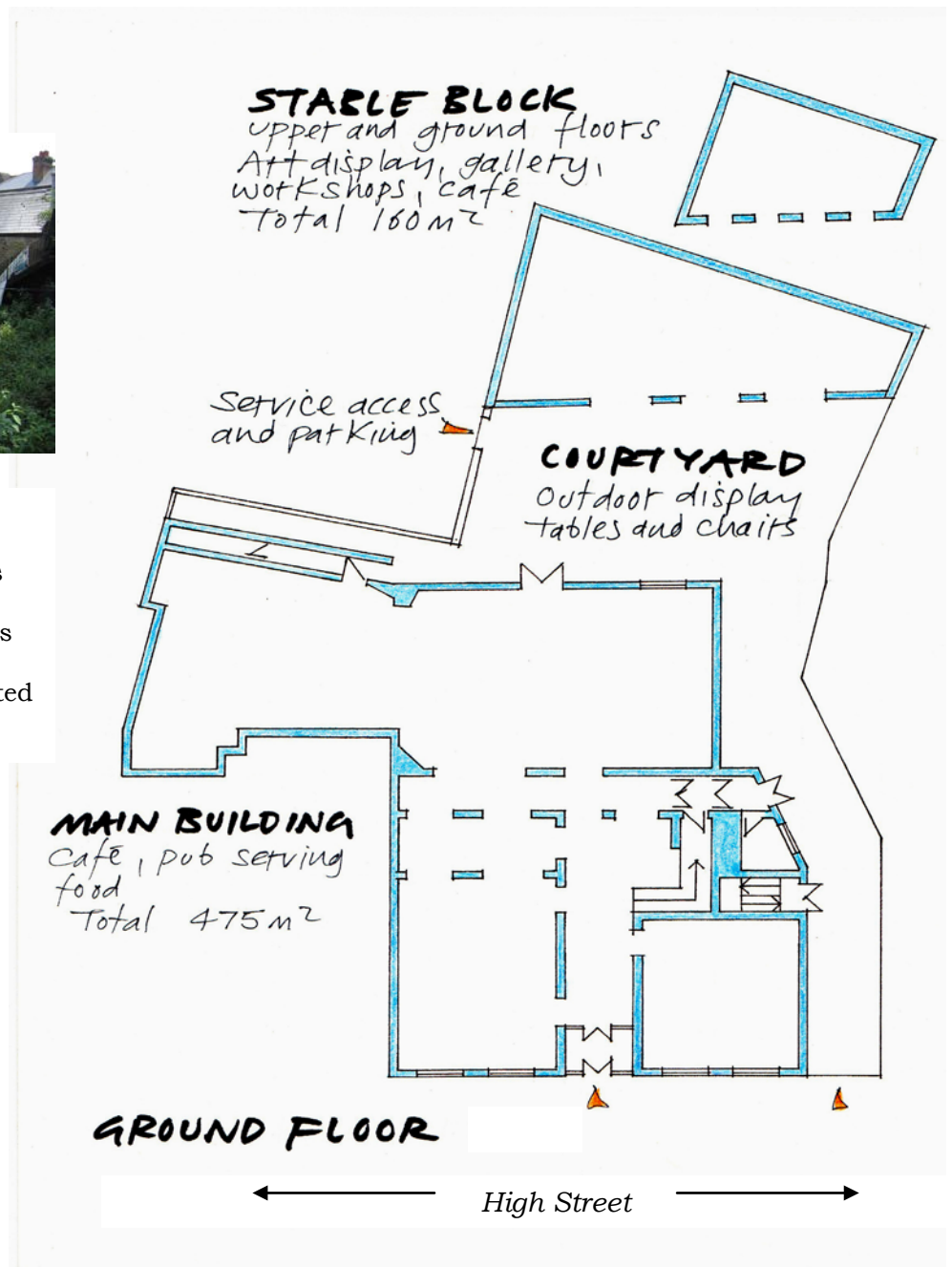
An art gallery and workshop space can be established in the 2 storey stables to the rear (this can be accessed separately through the arch from the High Street); A space for performing arts on the first floor would be capable of hosting a seated audience of up to 150.

These activities, combined with a café/pub offering food on the ground floor with direct High Street access, would ensure many visitors of all ages throughout the day and into the evening, thus improving viability for the building as a whole – synergy and connection between the activities is vital.





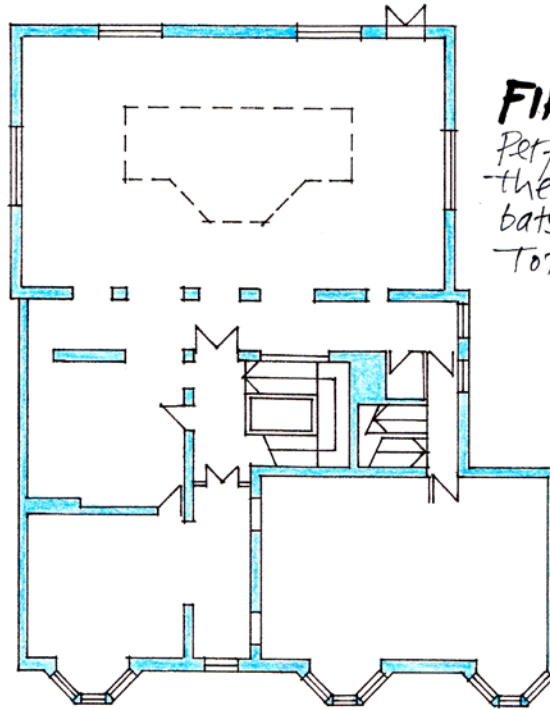
The 2 storey stables, with its overgrown courtyard, would provide space for art displays and a workshop; volunteers would help restore the stables and clear the courtyard (all within the curtilage of the listed building).



A good restoration scheme is needed to bring out the true qualities of this grand and elegant building

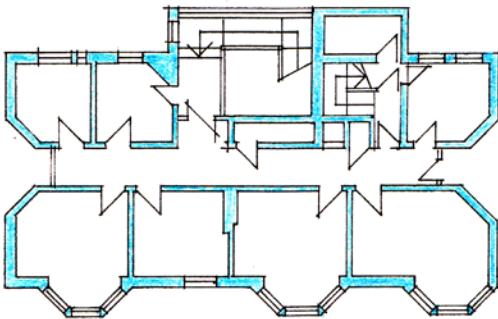


The large hall at the rear of the building on the first floor can provide a performing arts space of approx 156 m² (up to 150 seats)

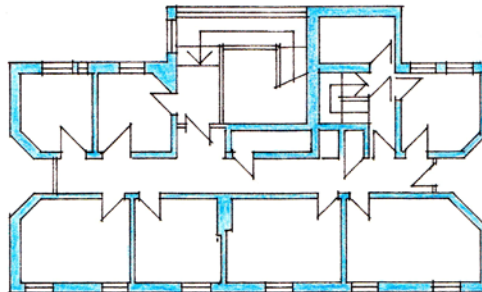


FIRST FLOOR
 Performance area,
 theatre/music/comedy
 bars and function rooms
 Total 460 m²

A variety of possible uses can be considered for the rooms on the 2nd and 3rd floors (formerly the bedrooms of the hotel).



SECOND FLOOR
 Community rooms for hire,
 residential, B+B, offices
 Total 230 m²



THIRD FLOOR
 Residential, B+B,
 offices Total 225 m²



Next steps

The first step in the process is to jointly consider with the owners the best business model and most appropriate form of partnership that achieves the vision set out above. Once an appropriate partnership has been established an approach to the HLF can be made.

Initial HLF funds can be used to undertake market research, test the viability of different options and establish costs. It will also be necessary to investigate other sources of funds and prepare a business plan.

Suitable tenants for the building, both commercial and non-commercial will need to be identified – this includes organisations that can sustainably manage the performance area and the art gallery/workshop. Some progress has been made in this area: – a popular local theatre group, the Bromley Little Theatre, has expressed an interest in managing the performance space; BACI could manage the art gallery space in the stables.

£5 million public realm improvements in the Bromley North area, funded by TfL, Bromley Council and the Mayor of London are about to start. Improvements to the footways, removal of clutter and creation of shared space – including the area directly in front of the Royal Bell – are all envisaged. Thus the proposals set out above are consistent with and indeed support all current plans and policies for the area.

The vision for the Royal Bell, if achieved, will contribute significantly to the economic regeneration of the northern part of the High Street and will stand as a lasting credit to the owners and occupiers of the renewed building.

Peter Martin
Chairman
Bromley Arts and Community Initiative
Peter.Martin1947@gmail.com
07949 713618
May 2013

For more information on the Heritage Enterprise scheme:

http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Documents/HE_Application_Guidance.pdf

For more information on BACI:

<http://bromleyartsandcommunity.blogspot.co.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/bromleyartsandcommunity>