

Proposals
For The former
House of Fraser
in Chichester, West Sussex
by Caleb O'Connell

Introduction

FIND A PROPERTY MARKET YOUR PROPERTY FIND A SERVICE WHY SAVILLS

GALLERY MAP STREET VIEW

Former House Of Fraser
12-18 West Street, 51-55 Tower Street, Chichester,
PO19 1QF

70,000 sq ft
(6,503.21 sq m)

Price on application

FREEHOLD

Some notes to accompany the plans to the right:

The area shown in red is the site currently for sale; although No. 11 was part of the House of Fraser it was sold separately and is already under development. The Former Central Post Office is vacant and no plan has been worked out for its future use. The Vesta Apartments are a newbuild set of flats adjoining the modern Novium Museum which houses parts of Roman Chichester.

Introduction to these proposals

I was born and raised in West Sussex, living for the first part of my life in Midhurst, some twelve miles away, until we had to move for my father's work. Chichester was our County Town and the only city; it was there that we visited to go shopping or visit the theatre when we could afford it. In those days Chichester was a wonderful place to be, with shops at every turn and a general buzz of happiness. It still is, but the dreadful encroachment of the modern age has taken its toll on Chichester too. There's a fair few empty shops now, and it doesn't have the same optimistic feeling anymore.

At the centre of the city is the cathedral, a beautiful gothic building that has been there for around 900 years—it sits in a haven of lovely old buildings which are a joy to be around. Opposite the cathedral has, for the past hundred-or-so years, been a department store, most recently House of Fraser. It is a massive building, in the beating heart of the city. I have great memories of shopping there with my parents when I was very small; it is devastating for it to have closed. Nothing is more representative of the decline the city has felt than the loss of the House of Fraser site.

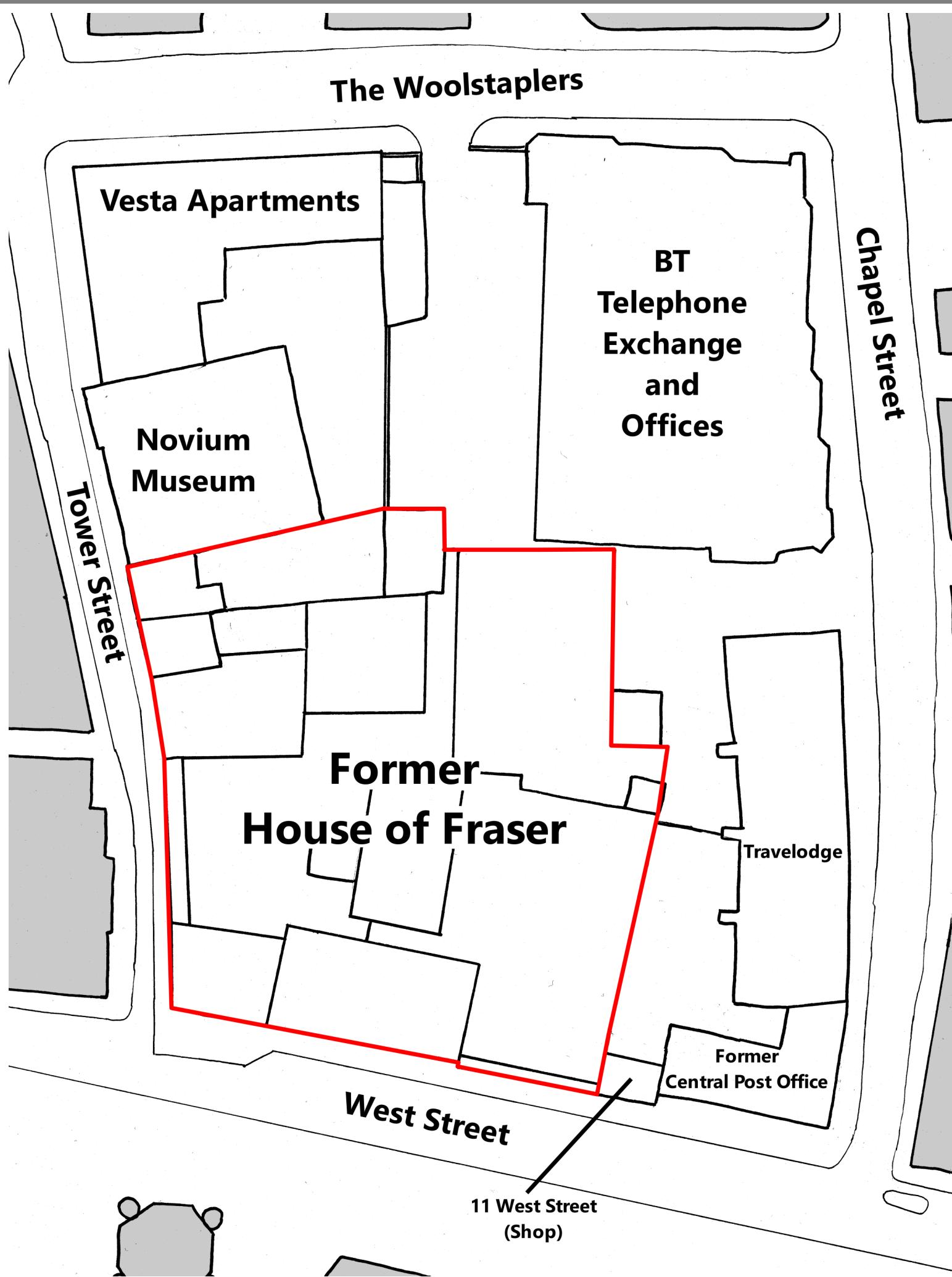
It has been closed for a few years now, and is decaying. It is a lovely old building, and I am very sad to see it in such a state. It is clear that it will never re-open as a department store; re-development is necessary. The estate agents have proposed some designs, but they are truly hideous and massively detract from the ancient core of the city it sits in. Their plans (see below; image from Savills) look like a heap of shoeboxes, and would involve the destruction of perfectly viable old buildings. We are supposed to be being environmentally aware these days, but nothing is

more environmentally destructive than the demolition of viable buildings.

I saw their plans, and was so repulsed by them, that I set out to design a better, more attractive alternative that would be good for the people of Chichester rather than lining a developer's pockets. I have also thought about some ways in which this site could help revive Chichester High Street, so that the city can return to its former glory.



A plan of the site



History of the Site

As my interests lie in the past, it is unsurprising that I believe the history of a site ought to lead its future development. It is important to understand what was there before you when designing now.

Historic composition of the House of Fraser site

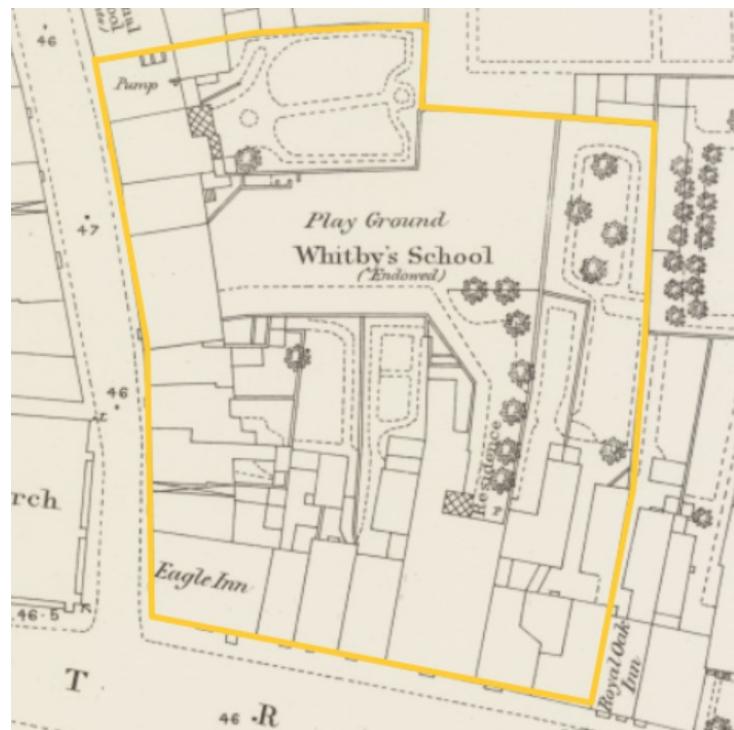
As shown in the image to the right (my lines on NLS Imagery), what is now the House of Fraser was then numerous small parts. There was **Whitby's School** and playground, the **Eagle Inn**, a number of **cottages** and two pairs of **townhouses**. There are remnants of each of these in existence today.



The first (pictured above) was the **Oliver Whitby School**. This was founded on 16th February 1702 when a lawyer, son of the archdeacon, called Oliver Whitby died without issue. He left his money for the foundation of a school for boys in Chichester, from the parishes of Chichester, Harting and West Wittering. It opened opposite the cathedral in 1712 and was known as the Bluecoat school. The old higgledy-piggledy site was rebuilt by Sir Reginald Blomfield in 1904 (above) and the school merged with Christ's Hospital in 1950 and closed. Externally the school building is excellent, with Whitby's Coat of Arms and the school motto carved above the door. It is likely gutted inside from its time as House of Fraser.



The Eagle Inn which adjoined the Whitby School was a pub probably from the 18th Century, but with changes in licensing laws closed in 1903 and was later subsumed within the department store site. It is largely externally in a good state of preservation, with the exclusion of the modern shop windows, but is probably badly preserved inside.



On the other side of the Whitby School was a **pair of townhouses**; these have been changed greatly since the above map and the site is now little more than an Edwardian façade.

Likewise, the row of 18th Century **cottages** on Tower Street were developed as part of the House of Fraser and are now just façades with modern buildings behind. These would have originally been poor workers' cottages, and as such are fairly small.

Nos. 51 and 52 Tower Street, the other **pair of townhouses**, also date from the 18th Century. They would originally been large houses for the wealthy middle class, with room for servants. At some point these ceased to be houses and became part of the department store. However, unlike much of the rest of the site, they are largely intact as they were only ever used as offices.

Listed Buildings and other buildings of note on the site

THE WOOLSTAPLERS

TOWER
STREET

CHAPEL
STREET

51 & 52 Tower Street
(1285096)

53 - 56 Tower Street
(1354365)

15 & 16 West Street
(1181636)

Former Central Post Office
(10 West Street)

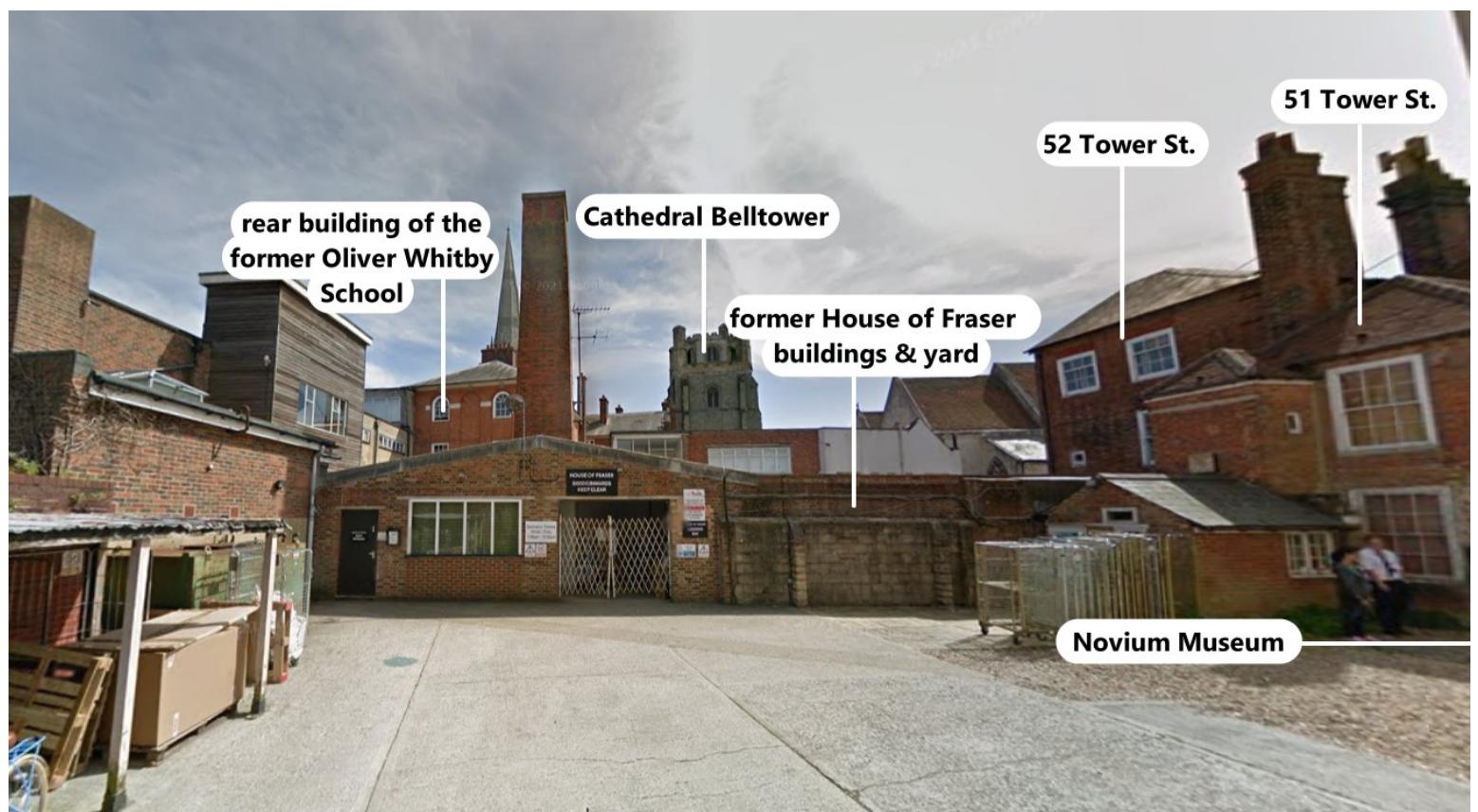
17 & 18 West Street
(1026612)

W E S T

Nos. 12 - 14 West Street

11 West Street
(1354399)

History of the Site



Listed Buildings and other buildings of note on the site

As the site is in the historic centre of Chichester, it is walked past by many every day. As such, I have included a brief study of the surrounding area to give an idea of what that is like. There are a few terribly ugly buildings nearby, but these are firmly in the minority.

View of the site from West Street

This section of West Street directly opposite the Cathedral is largely formed of the frontage of the House of Fraser site. In the image to the left (above), the former Eagle Inn, Oliver Whitby School and Nos. 12-14 can be seen, with the remainder of the buildings extending behind the façades. Along the street is the former Central Post Office and former Royal Oak Inn (No. 11). To the rear, along Chapel Street, can be seen a modern Travelodge which is not too bad for a modern building and blends in fairly well. The roofs of other historic buildings and the terribly ugly BT Building extend out towards the Woolstaplers.

View of the site from the former House of Fraser Goods Yard

Viewed from the old Goods Yard, the importance of the cathedral is obvious; it dominated this area of West Street. The historic Nos. 51 and 52 Tower Street can be seen in the foreground, indicative of much of the surroundings. Some low quality brick-built buildings associated with the House of Fraser fill the foreground.



Character of the surrounding streets

Most of the streets surrounding the site were built in the 18th Century, often incorporating older buildings; the street patterns are ancient, dating back to Roman times. Below can be seen an example of the 18th-and-19th Century vernacular cottages that make up most of the surroundings. A dominant building opposite the former Eagle Inn on Tower Street is the former Mediæval church of St. Peter-the-Great, now a bar.



A large number of Mediæval buildings survive in the surrounding area, including the Cathedral (below left) and the Market Cross (below right) - it is these which give Chichester such wonderful character.

Just across Chapel Street from the former Central Post Office, close to the House of Fraser site, is a former Victorian Hotel (below middle), now a Wetherspoon's pub.

This important historic environment is the main reason why the proposed development in the sales listing is so inappropriate for the setting.



An overview of my proposals

Whitby Square Gardens

The Square would be named after Oliver Whitby, and have a statue of him at the centre. The gardens would be lawns with intersecting paths and a fruit tree in each quarter. The aim of this is to provide a communal garden in the style of a Georgian London Square.

Nos. 51 and 52 Tower Street

These old townhouses would be repaired and converted from offices to residential. This would be the first stage, as it could bring in an income much quicker than the rest of this site, which would help pay for other works.

New walled gardens would be created out of the concrete loading bay, with small brick-built sheds at the bottoms. Each of these walled gardens would be given gates through to either Whitby Yard (car parking) or the small yard adjoining the Novium museum. These walls would be constructed from the bricks of the goods yard buildings, which would be carefully dismantled for this use. This saves on cost, and is environmentally friendly.

The Eagle Inn

The building would be returned to being a pub, with a new terrace constructed to the rear and steps (and a ramp) down to the communal gardens. This terrace would be a late stage as the rest has to be done first to clear the space.

Cottages along Tower Street

These cottage façades would be retained and the building behind carefully dismantled. The bricks salvaged from the dismantled buildings would be used to rebuilt the old cottages. Each would have a small garden with a brick wall and access to the communal gardens. The cottage adjoining the Eagle would not have a garden but rather right of way across the Eagle Terrace.

The former Loading Yard

The yard would be given a walled edge with gates through to the communal garden. A new building would be constructed in the gap to complete the terrace, with flats above and some covered parking below.

The former Oliver Whitby School and adjoining building

These grand buildings on West Street would be given new shopfronts (two larger and four small units), above which would be large apartments, and above that shopkeepers' flats. In the case of the building to the right of the former school, this would involve the construction of a half-storey above the existing building, if structurally possible. The grand arch on the Oliver Whitby School would become a small alley, giving access from West Street to the gardens.

The Historic building, formerly part of the school, to the rear of Oliver Whitby School

This old building would be carefully dismantled and moved to the rear of the gardens, where it would become three terraced houses. A new building would be constructed to complete that side of the square, with an arch underneath to the Vesta Apartments access road.

Area adjoining the Travelodge Carpark

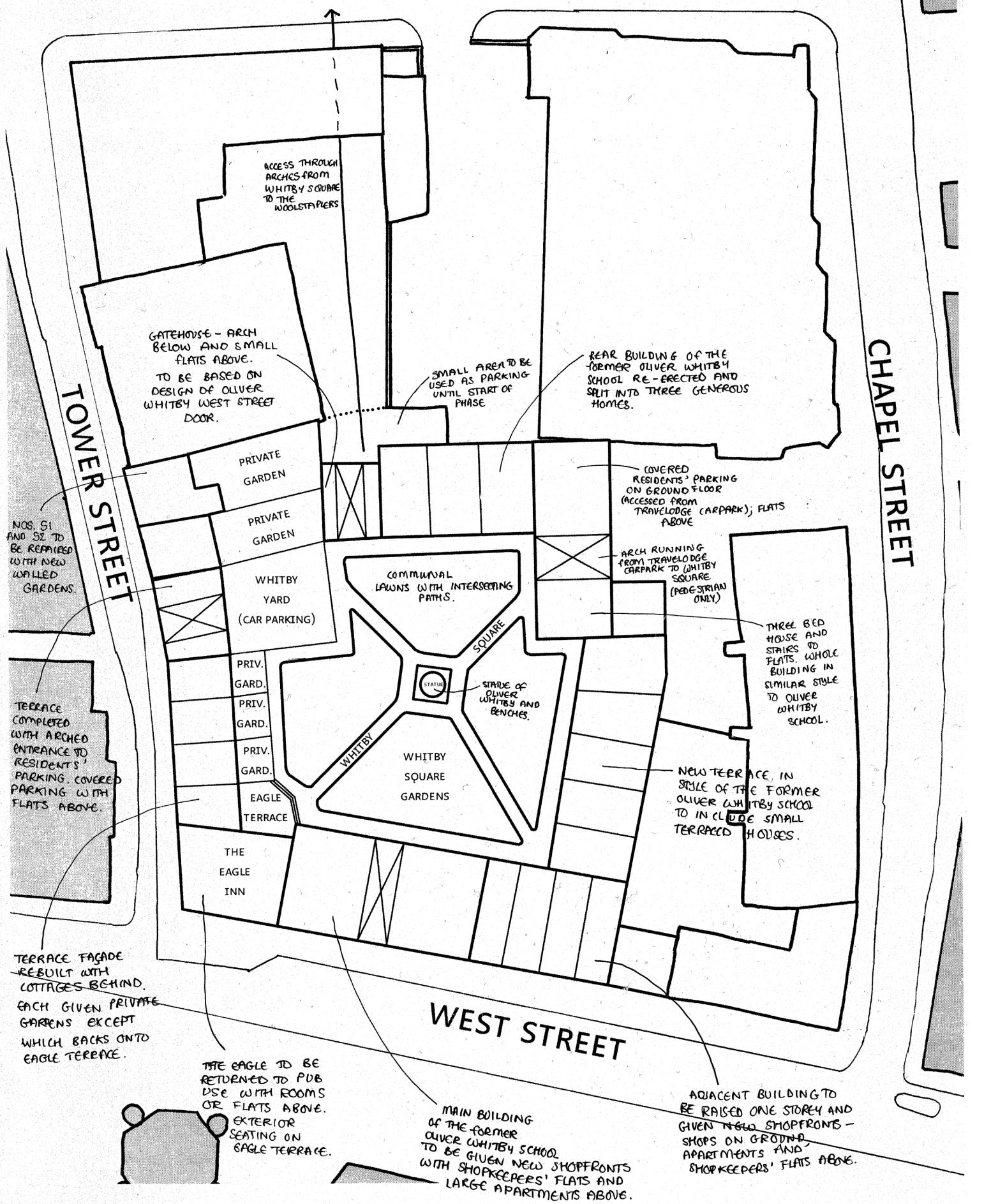
The new building constructed here would have covered parking underneath, with an arch through to the gardens and accessed from the Travelodge carpark. Above would be small flats.

Righthand side of the Square

The final side of the Square would have a new building in the style of the West Street elevation, containing a number of terraced houses.

A plan showing my proposals

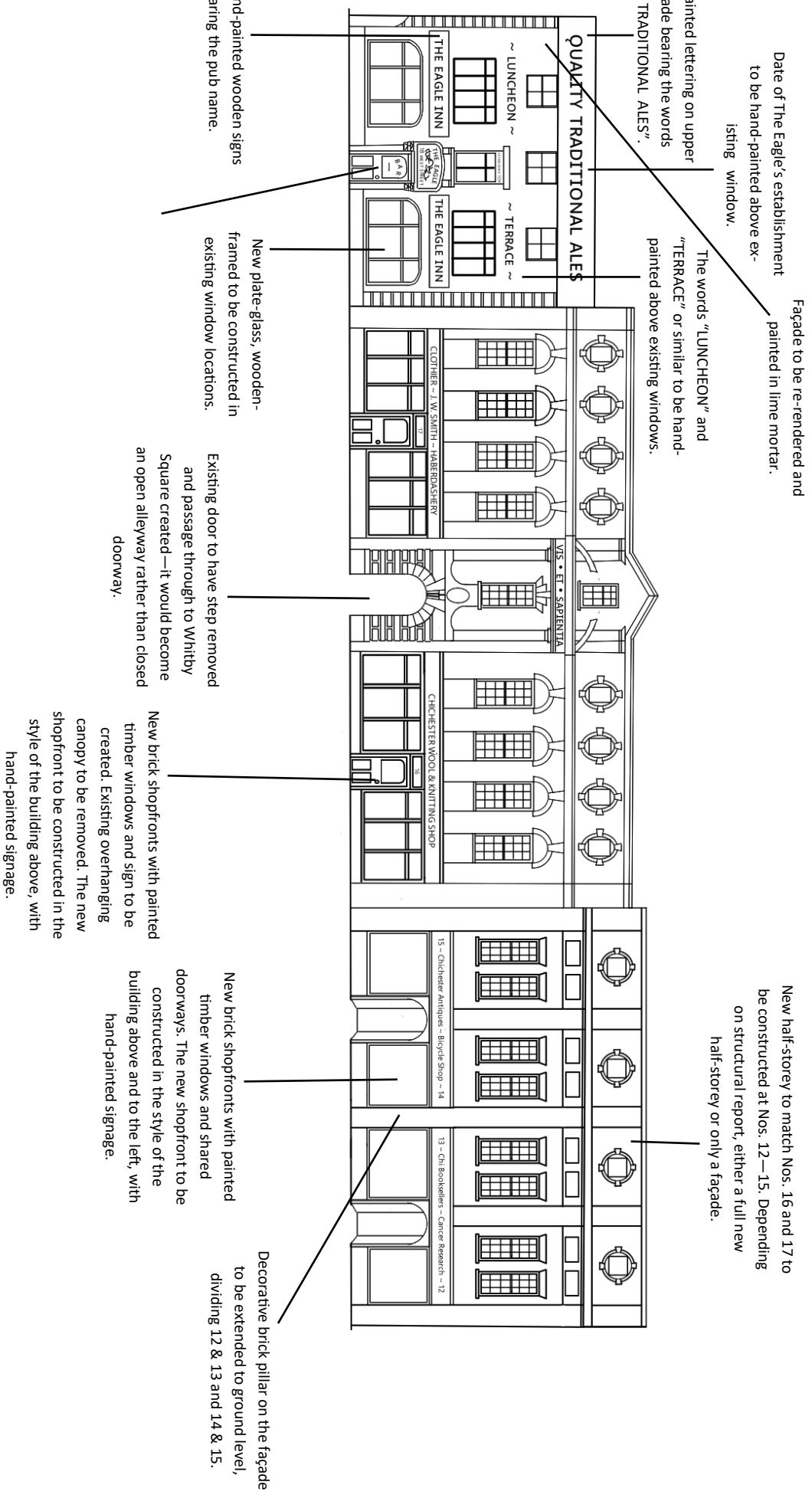
THE WOOLSTAPLERS



Proposed West Street Elevation for the former House of Fraser site

Drawing by me (C. M. O'Connell) based on plans submitted to Chichester District Council in 2016 (Ref: 16/02887/LBC). Any slight errors are from the original (fairly poor) drawings, unless it is in my changes.

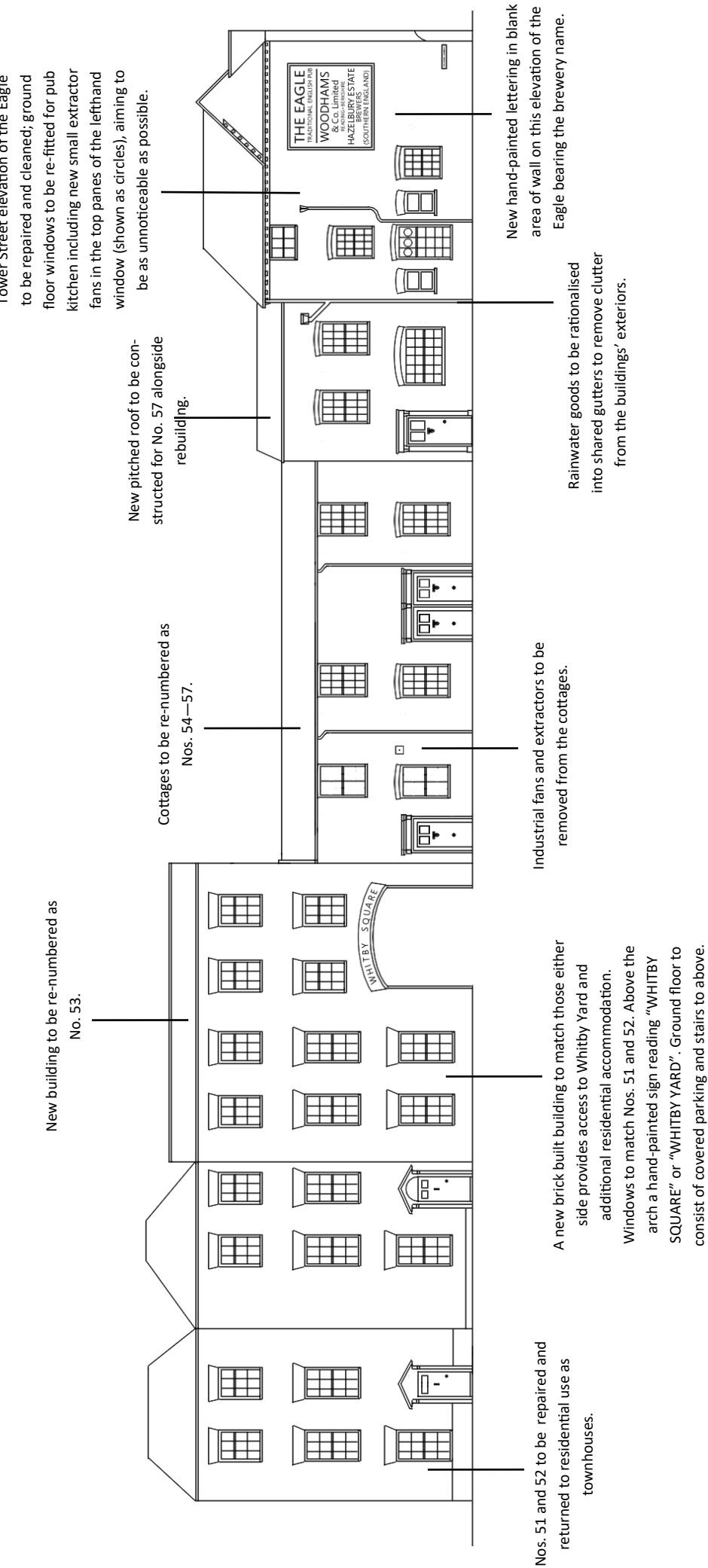
The West Street frontage would become six new Victorian-style shopfronts (two large and four small). I believe in the importance of hand-painting, so each shop sign would be and painted, with a grant to fund this from the Estate which retains ownership of the entire site. The shop names shown in my plan are only examples, and some certainly would never be opened these days (Haberdashery for example). Above the shops on the grand first floor would be large flats (what some may call Apartments), and above that shopkeepers' flats on the second floor (if the second floor were only a façade this would not happen in Nos. 12–15). The former Eagle Inn would return to being a pub, with the alterations relating to this change of use.



Proposed Tower Street Elevation for the former House of Fraser site

Drawing by me (C. M. O'Connell). A rougher drawing than West Street, with measurements based only off what visually appears correct.

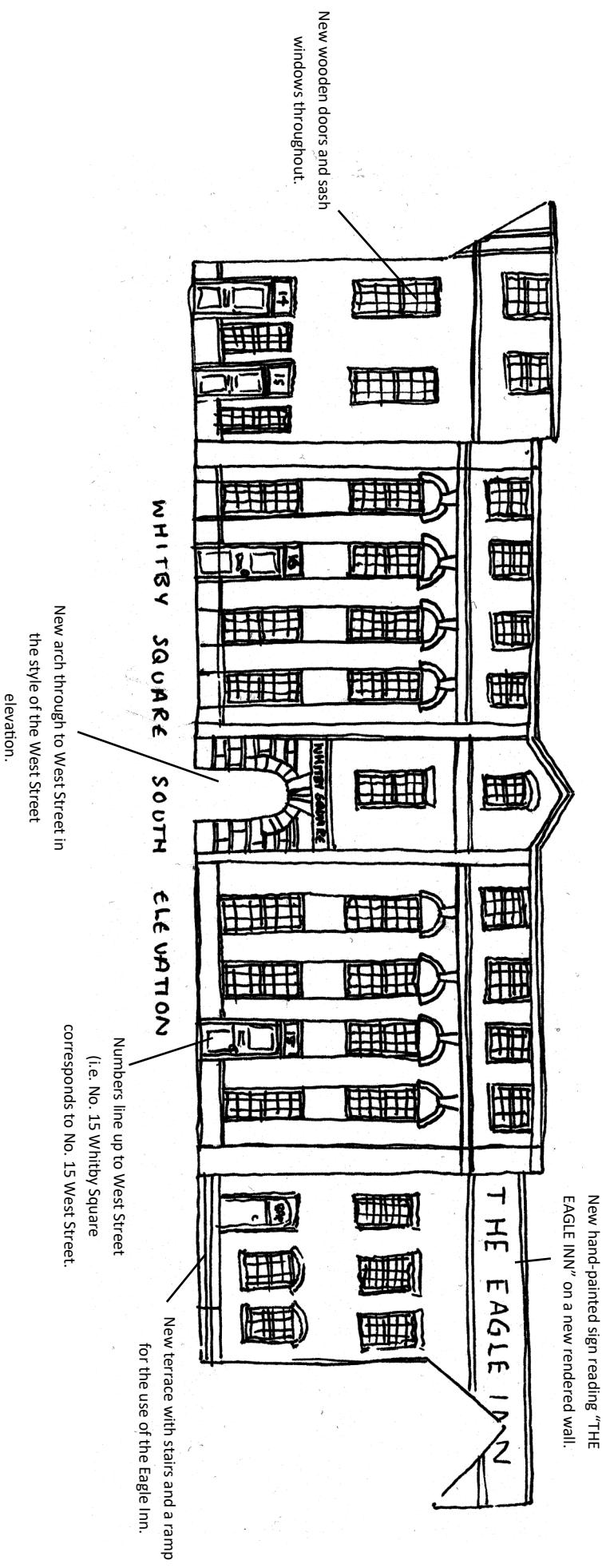
The Chapel Street frontage would mostly become houses, cottages and flats from the re-construction of the parts of the street that are currently little more than façades. The part of the Eagle Inn that faces onto Chapel Street would be cleaned up and a new sign painted onto the large area of plain brick. Moving along Chapel Street, the four old cottages would be tidied up, the industrial alterations removed and returned to being cottages once more. In the space currently filled by the House of Fraser Goods Yard a new building would be constructed to complete the row, with an arch in the style of an old coaching inn through to the Whitby Yard car parking. Above this would be two small flats. Finally, Nos. 51 and 52 would be repaired and become townhouses again.



Proposed South Elevation of Whitby Square

Sketch by me (C. M. O'Connell).

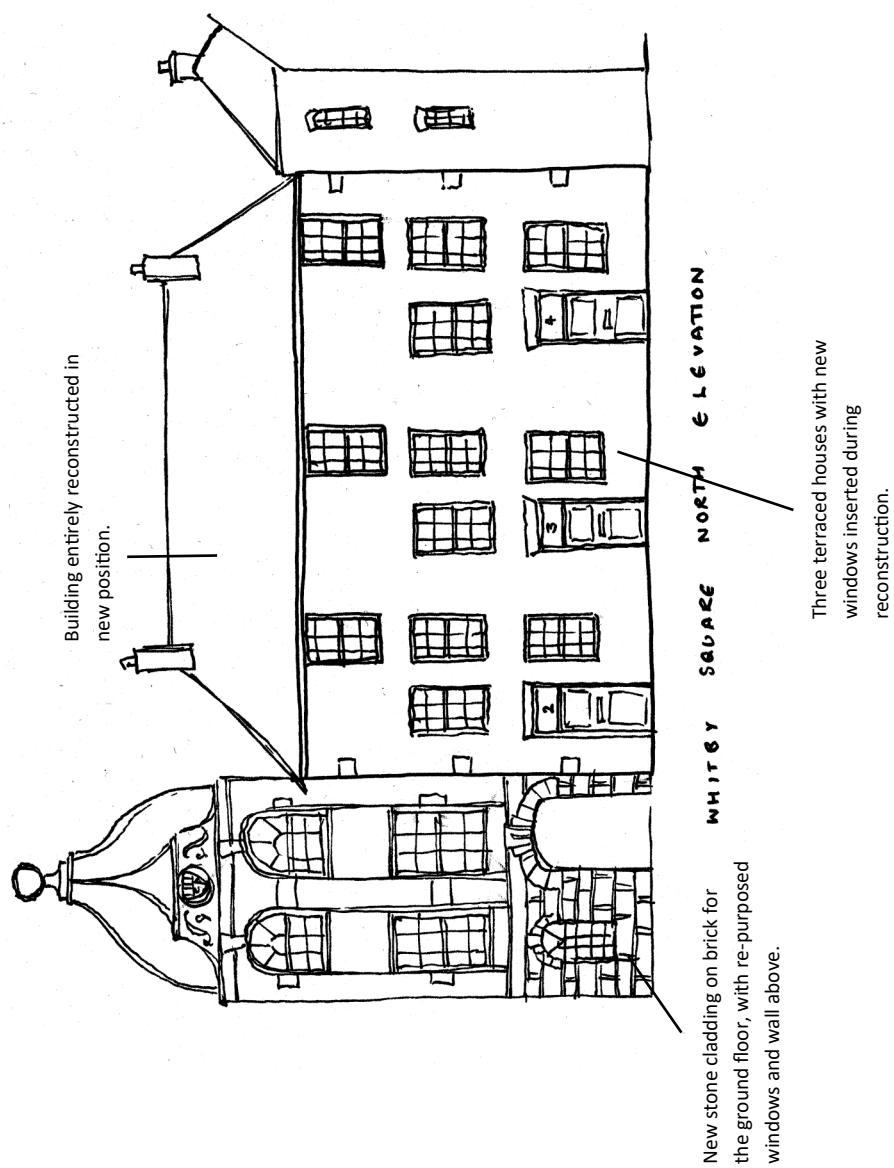
Much of the existing building would be carefully dismantled, and where possible the materials used for rebuilding. The main building (centre) would be a simpler version of the West Street frontage on the other side; the new passage through to the gardens is continued through to this side. The design of this building is based on the old photo of the school shown on a previous page. The doors lead to stairs to the upper floors as well as the rear of the shops on West Street. In a similar vein, the new building to the left contains access to the shops and flats above. To the right is the rear of the Eagle Inn and Eagle Terrace, consisting of a door through to the bar and large windows to light that space and the rooms above.



Proposed North Elevation of Whitby Square

Sketch by me (C. M. O'Connell).

This elevation is entirely new: the building in the centre is the re-assembled building that once formed part of the Oliver Whitby School. The lovely curved windows on the end, which would be covered up in its new position, would instead be replaced with brick. They would then be used on the gatehouse building to the left. This building has a lower half inspired by the Oliver Whitby building and leads through to a couple of parking spaces. Above it is two small flats. The roof is French-inspired, and it aims to be the focal point on the Northern elevation. To the right of my sketch is the end wall of the covered parking building, which is explained more fully on the East Elevation.



Proposed East Elevation of Whitby Square

Sketch by me (C. M. O'Connell).

This side of the square would be entirely new buildings, constructed from any remaining salvaged bricks. On the left is the entrance from the covered parking, with a coaching inn-style arch and iron railings across it to prevent car access to the Square. This would have flats above, with a single terraced house on the righthand end. To the right of this is a building containing five terraced houses, each with access to the shared gardens. This building would be built in a similar style to Nos. 51 and 52 Tower Street.

