

Reuse of the Derby Assembly Rooms as a Combined Civic and Community Asset

Practical Position Note

The **Derby Assembly Rooms** represents a substantial publicly owned asset in a prime city-centre location. The building is structurally robust, centrally located, and already configured around large-volume civic space. The practical question is not whether to replace it, but how best to reuse it to deliver long-term value for money while meeting current civic, cultural and community needs.

This note sets out the case for its reuse as a combined civic and community hub incorporating:

- Future **South Derbyshire Authority Headquarters**
- A new Children's Library
- Ground-floor café and small retail units
- A large adaptable performance space
- Community learning and meeting facilities
- Youth media and digital labs
- Social enterprise and SME workspace

See proposed A4 sketch plans for the Ground Floor, Mezzanine Floor, First Floor and Balcony Floor, Appendix 1.

1. Strategic Rationale: Reuse Over Demolition

Demolition and rebuild would incur:

- Significant capital expenditure (new-build civic buildings now typically exceed £3,500–£4,000 per m² all-in)
- Embodied carbon loss from demolition of a substantial reinforced concrete frame
- Extended programme delay (planning, demolition, rebuild)
- City-centre disruption and risk escalation

By contrast, reuse:

- Retains the primary structure, which represents a major proportion of embodied value
- Avoids demolition and abnormal foundation costs
- Shortens programme risk
- Preserves an established civic landmark
- Aligns with public-sector sustainability commitments

The Assembly Rooms already contains the structural scale required for civic, cultural and administrative uses. Repurposing it is a financially and environmentally responsible course of action.

2. Suitability for South Derbyshire Authority Headquarters

The building's Darwin Suite lends itself well to conversion:-

- The small hall will convert to a new Council Chamber large enough for 82 no. Councillors for the new Authority plus public seating.
- Committee rooms and public meeting spaces
- Secure reception areas.
- Secure Car parking for Councillors.

Locating a South Derbyshire Authority headquarters within the building would:

- Provide a stable anchor tenancy
- Support city-centre footfall
- Rationalise estate holdings
- Create shared-service efficiencies (security, reception, building management)

Upper floors are particularly suitable for administrative functions, with secure access and separation from public cultural uses.

3. Ground Floor Activation: Library, Café and Retail

The ground floor should prioritise public-facing uses:

- A new Children's Library, designed as an accessible family learning environment
- A café to support daytime use and evening events
- Small retail units prioritising local independents and social enterprises

This combination ensures daily footfall and supports both civic and commercial viability. It also ensures that the building remains open and welcoming rather than becoming a single-use office complex.

4. Retention of a Large Performance Space

The existing auditorium volume is a strategic asset. Converting it to a flat-floor adaptable hall would enable:

- Concert performances by **Sinfonia Viva**
- The annual pantomime
- University graduation ceremonies
- Conferences and civic gatherings
- Community and school performances

Retaining a large performance space avoids the cost and land take of building a new venue elsewhere. The structural height and span already exist; adaptation is more cost-effective than replacement.

5. Community and Enterprise Functions

Dedicated space within the building can accommodate:

- Adult and community learning rooms
- A youth media and digital lab
- Social enterprise incubator space
- Small offices for SMEs, charities and creative businesses

Co-location supports cross-sector collaboration and strengthens the city-centre economy. Importantly, rental income from SMEs and partner organisations contributes to long-term operational sustainability.

6. Financial Logic and Value for Money

The reuse model distributes cost across multiple revenue-supporting functions:

- Civic headquarters (public-sector occupation)
- Lettable office space
- Café and retail leases
- Event hire income
- Meeting room bookings
- Car Park income

This mixed model improves resilience compared to a single-purpose cultural venue.

Crucially:

- Retention of the structural frame significantly reduces capital cost relative to demolition and rebuild.
- Shared building systems (heating, security, reception, maintenance) reduce operational duplication.
- Phased refurbishment is possible, spreading capital outlay over time.

This approach represents prudent stewardship of a publicly owned asset rather than speculative redevelopment.

7. Conclusion

The Derby Assembly Rooms is not a redundant liability; it is an underused strategic asset.

Its scale, structure and location make it well suited to:

- Civic administration
- Cultural performance
- Community learning
- Enterprise support
- Family-focused public services

Reusing the building avoids unnecessary demolition costs, reduces embodied carbon loss, and delivers a combined civic and community headquarters that is financially rational and operationally sustainable.

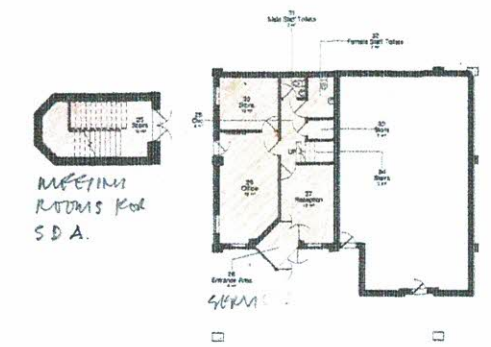
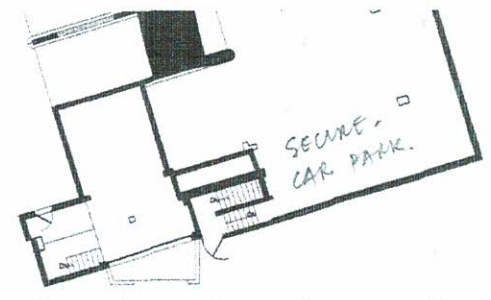
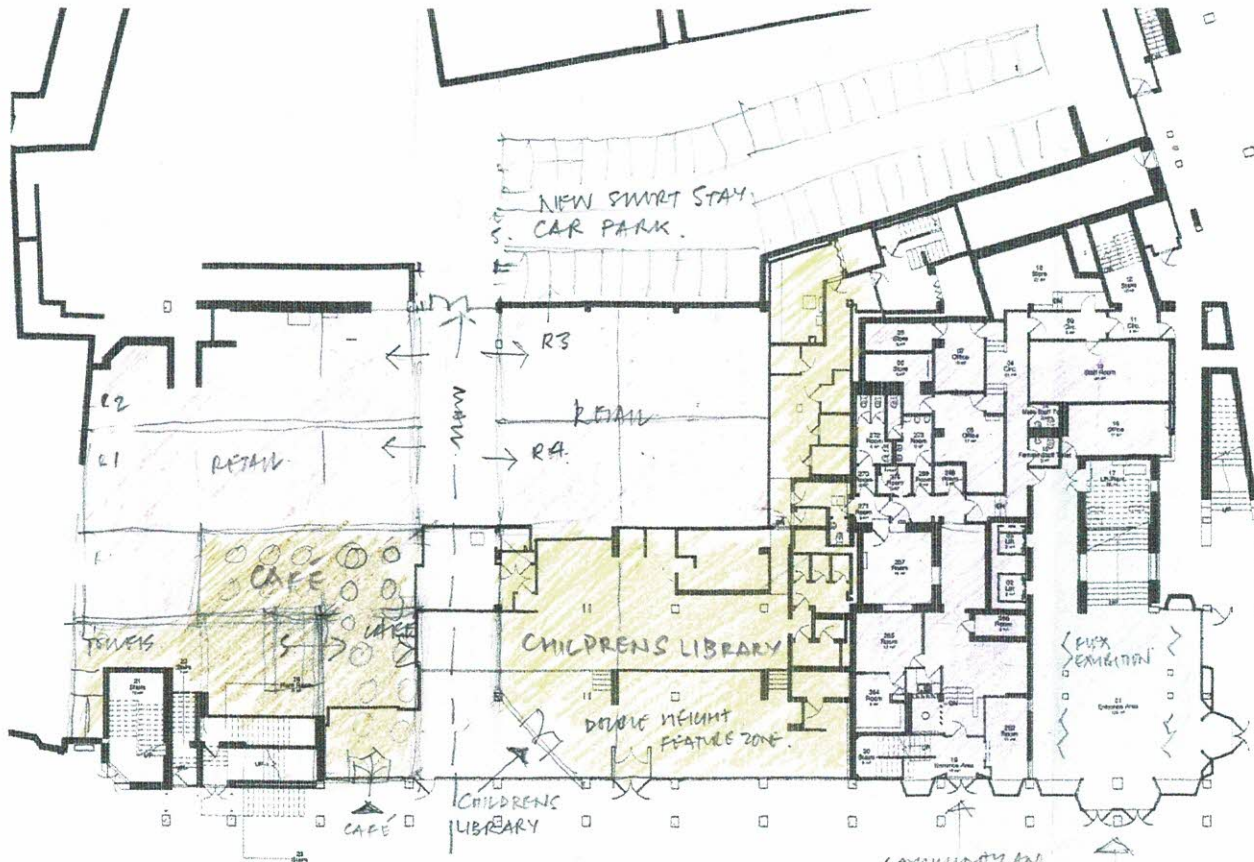
The practical case is clear: reuse offers better long-term public value than replacement.

Derby Civic Society

23rd February 2026

Appendix 1

Proposed Sketch Plans, Not to scale.

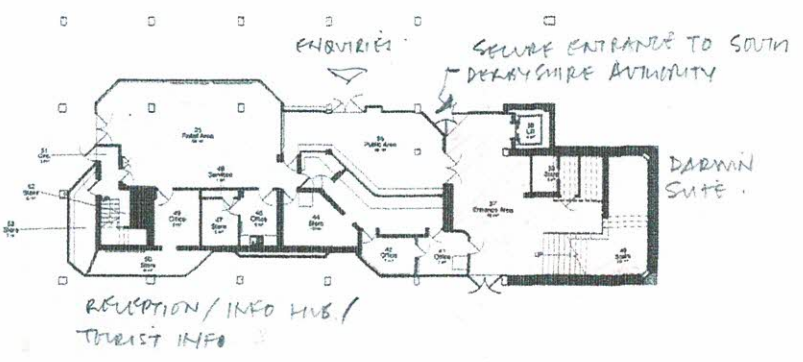


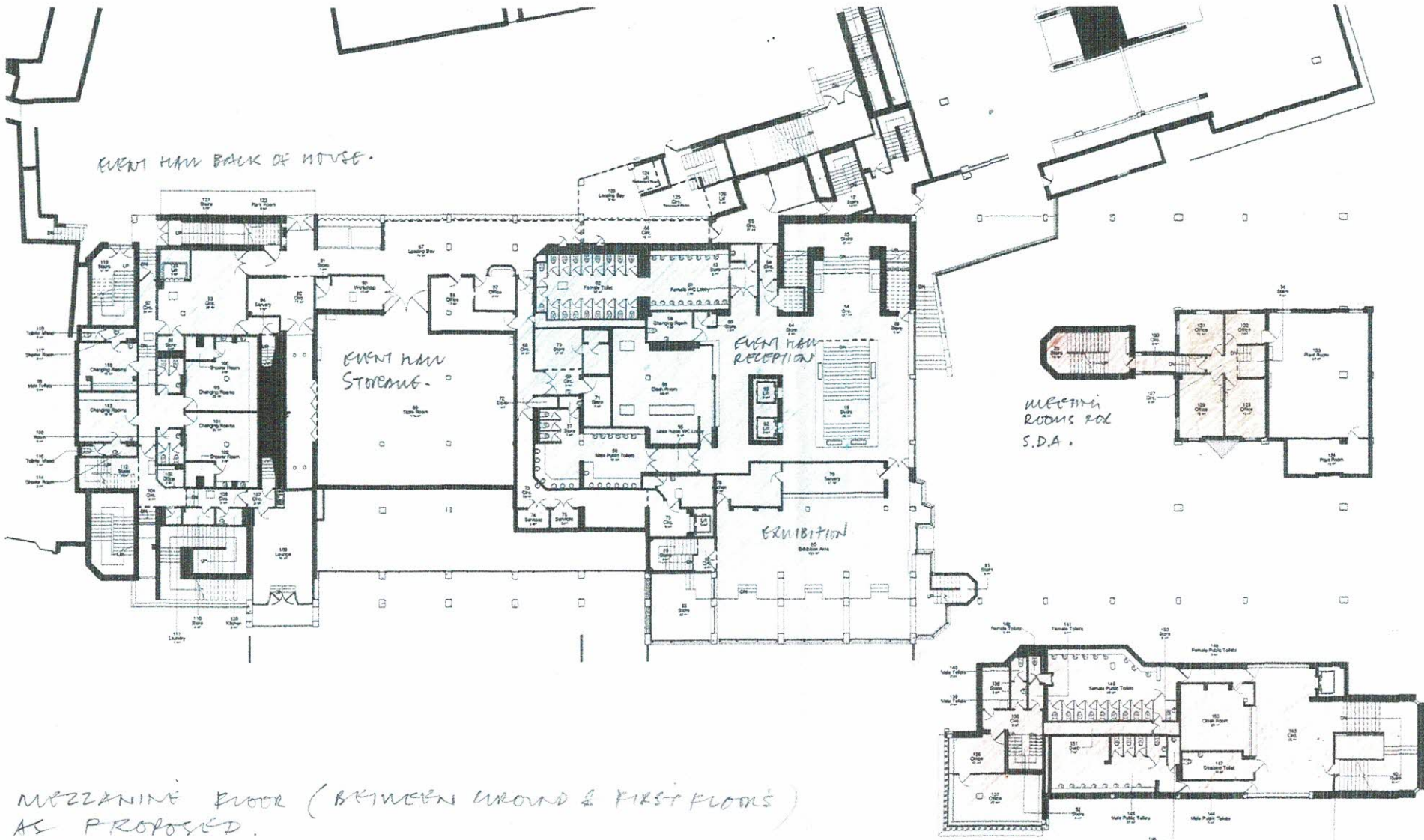
COMMUNITY AND
 LEARNING
 MEETING ROOMS
 TRAINING ROOMS
 YOUTH MEDIA LAB
 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR INCUBATOR
 SUCES, CHARITIES,
 CREATIVE BUSINESSES.
 MARKETING DECKBY.

EVENT HALL
 ENTRY

SHOPPING
 MALL.

GROUND FLOOR AS PROPOSED.

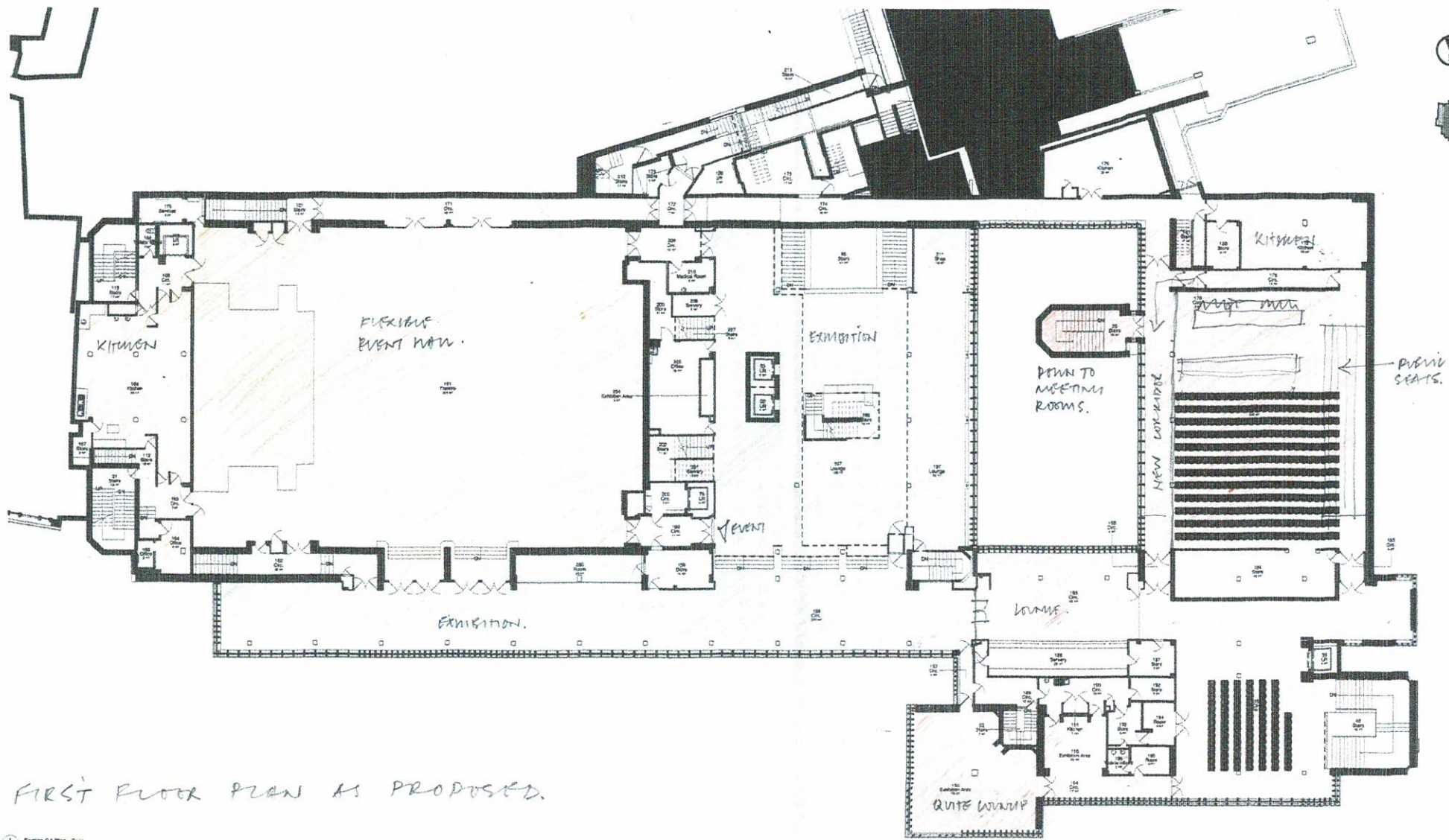




MEZZANINE FLOOR (BETWEEN GROUND & FIRST FLOORS)
AS PROPOSED.

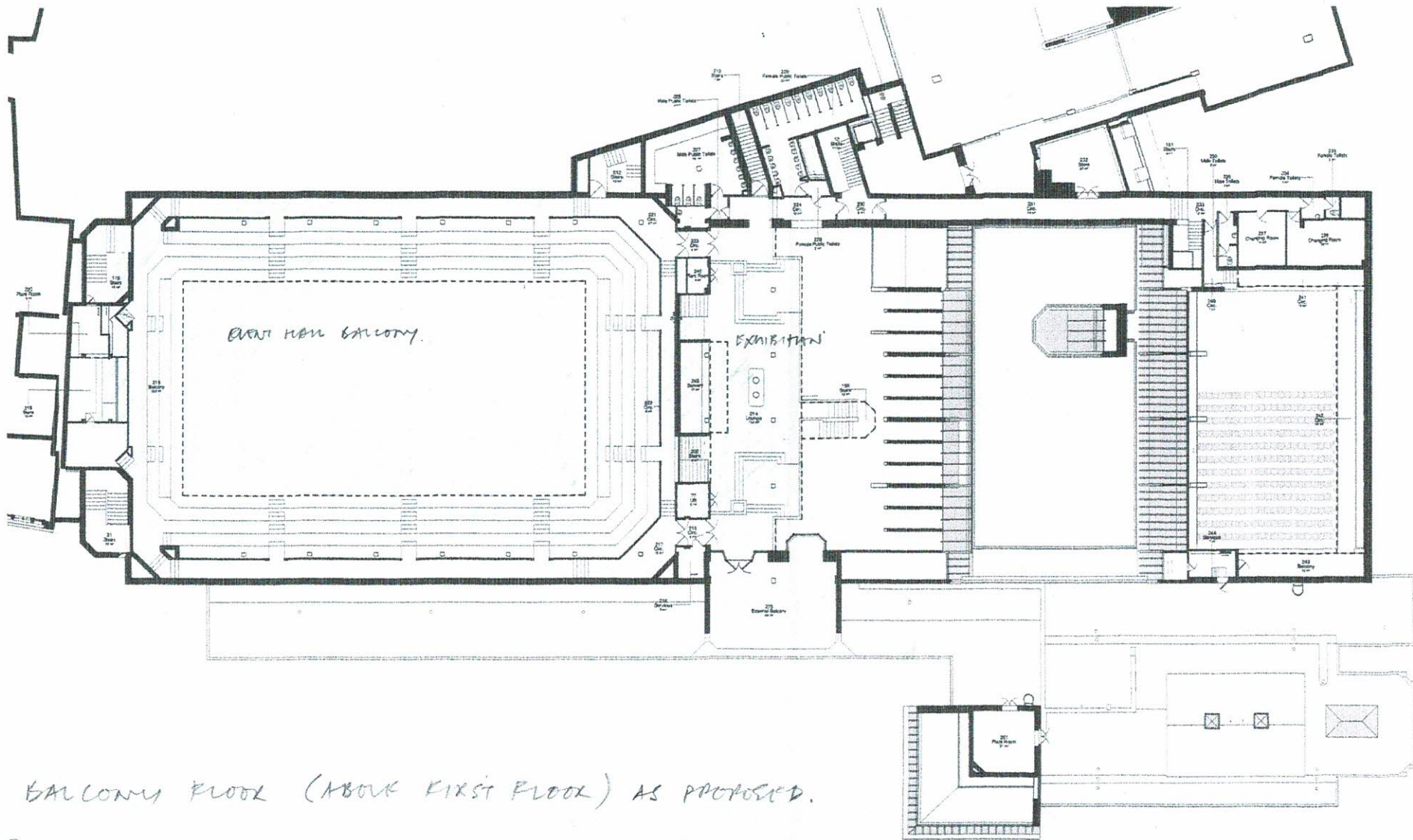
Existing SA Plan - Mezzanine

RECEPTION AREA FOR S.D.A.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN AS PROPOSED.

SOUTH DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL ASSEMBLY
PREVIOUSLY DARWIN SUITE



BALCONY FLOOR (ABOVE FIRST FLOOR) AS PROPOSED.