

PROPOSED INTERNAL ALTERATIONS AT WILTON HOUSE, WILTON, WILTSHIRE

Design & Access & Heritage Statement



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Statement**

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PROPOSED INTERNAL ALTERATIONS AT WILTON HOUSE, WILTON, WILTSHIRE

Design & Access & Heritage Statement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wilton House is an exceptional, Grade I listed mansion located in Wilton, Wiltshire. It is proposed to make some minor alterations to the house at basement level.

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to make an assessment of the heritage significance of the house, specifically focusing on the fabric that may be impacted by the proposed works, and the potential impact of the proposals upon that significance and to prepare a Heritage Statement in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip. IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services, visited the property in November 2025 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 This report will present:

- Policy and guidance background
- A brief background history to the house
- A description of the rooms where the alterations are proposed.
- An assessment of the significance of the areas of proposed alterations in the context of the significance of the house overall
- A description of the proposed works and an assessment of the potential impact of the works upon the significance of the listed building
- Design and Access Statement
- Conclusions

2.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight.
- 2.2 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment which has ‘weight’ following submission to the Secretary of State in late October 2024.
- 2.3 Paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) states that:
- In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.*
- 2.4 Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation whilst para. 208 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.
- 2.5 Historic England’s *Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2* (March 2015) states that understanding the nature of significance is important for understanding the need for and best means of conservation. Understanding the extent of that significance leads to a better

understanding of how adaptable a heritage asset may be and provides the essential guide as to how policies should be applied.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The origins of Wilton House lie in the dissolution of Wilton Abbey in 1539, when the estate was granted by Henry VIII to Sir William Herbert, later the 1st Earl of Pembroke. Herbert built the first major house on the site in the mid-16th century, incorporating elements of the former monastic buildings. This initial structure established Wilton as the principal seat of the Herbert family, subsequently earls of Pembroke, a status it has retained to the present day.
- 3.2 The south wing was remodelled in the early 17th century by Isaac de Caux under the supervision of Inigo Jones to provide a series of state apartments for King Charles I who was a regular visitor to Wilton. Substantial transformation occurred in the mid-17th century following a catastrophic fire that destroyed much of the wing. The rebuilding, undertaken around 1647–1650, was undertaken by John Webb, again being supervised by Jones. Their work produced the celebrated Palladian south and east fronts, which are considered among the earliest and most influential examples of Palladianism in England which, together with the Double Cube Room and Single Cube Room interiors, mark Wilton House as a pioneering work in the development of English architectural classicism.
- 3.3 Further alterations in the 18th century responded to changing tastes and functional needs. Landscape designer Capability Brown was engaged to remodel the grounds in the 1760s, introducing sweeping lawns, tree clumps, and a naturalistic approach that replaced earlier formal gardens designed by de Caux. Within the house, successive Earls of Pembroke commissioned internal modifications, including the introduction of new service ranges and the reconfiguration of circulation routes to suit contemporary standards of comfort and domestic organisation.
- 3.4 The 19th century saw additional remodelling under architect James Wyatt who introduced Gothic Revival elements and updated various interiors. While some of Wyatt's interventions have since been reversed or softened reflecting the Victorian desire to modernise and reinterpret historic country houses. Surviving elements of Wyatt's changes to Wilton House include the two-tier cloisters within the central courtyard to allow independent access to rooms rather than needing to pass from one room to the next, the upper level also serving as a gallery for the 8th Earl's sculpture collection, and the Gothic Stairs.

3.5 During the 20th century, Wilton House experienced periods of conservation, repair, and adaptation, notably after military occupation during the Second World War. Restoration works focused on safeguarding the architectural integrity of the Jones and Webb designs and preserving the historically important interiors.

3.6 Wilton House was added to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade I in 1951. The building is described in the *List* as:

Outstanding for both historical and architectural reasons. A courtyard house in landscaped grounds, probably on site of the medieval nunnery. Rebuilt by 1st Earl of Pembroke after 1544 and largely finished by 1563. The Holbein porch (qv) and the centrepiece of the east front survive from this period. South wing remodelled by Solomon de Caux in early C17 and rebuilt after 1647 fire by John Webb with Inigo Jones supervising the internal arrangements. Gothicised by Wyatt circa 1801 who built the cloister in the courtyard and remodelled the north and west fronts. The exterior Gothick features mostly removed in early C20 and replaced by classical. Built of ashlar. 2 and 3 storeys with corner and gatetowers one storey higher. Modillion cornice and balustraded parapets. East front: former entrance front. Central gatetower circa 1550: 4 storeys, 3 bays with mullion and transom windows (long on 1st floor) and central 3 storey oriel over Tudor archway. Gothick parapet (by Wyatt circa 1801) and cupola (modern restoration). Entrance flanked by Doric aedicules surmounted by achievement of arms. C16 arms over central 1st floor window. Flanking 2 bay wings link with corner towers (of 2 bays also), glazing bar windows with architraves, cornices on 1st floor, sashes on ground and 1st floors, casements above. South front: 9 wide bays, end towers of 1 bay with pedimented gables and quoins. Towers have segmental pediments to 3rd floor windows (glazing bar casements). All windows have architraves, with cornices 1st floor (piano nobile), segmental headed with heavy voussoired keystones on ground (semi-basement) floor. 2nd floor windows casements, rest glazing bar sashes. Central 1st floor window Venetian, with blank sides, surmounted by an achievement of arms flanked by carved figures. End 1st floor windows have pediments. These and centre window have projecting square baluster balconies on porches. West front: 1, 2 and 3 storey infill between corner towers. Crenellated parapets. Central canted bay window with wide stairs leading to Italian garden. North front: 2 + 3 + central entrance + 3 + 2 bays, remodelled with mullioned windows. Internal courtyard has 2 storey crenellated cloisters by Wyatt, 1st floor windows with wide Tudor perpendicular 4-light windows. Wilton House is one of England's principal

country houses. The Herbert family (Earls of Pembroke) have been great patrons of the arts and builders. The south range of Wilton is of seminal importance to the development of Palladianism, almost a century later. The suite of state rooms on the piano nobile by Inigo Jones are by far the best surviving C17 rooms in England. Fully described in Pevsner, *Guidebook*, *Country Life* May 1904, Jan 1944 and especially May, July and August 1963.

- 3.7 A basement plan dated 1966 shows that the present kitchen in the west range was in use as a kitchen at date, although due to the lack of a fireplace, it is clear that this was not the historic kitchen (Figure 1). The room to the west, now the private family kitchen, was the staff sitting room with the butler's pantry to the south. These two rooms have now been combined into one space. The plan also shows the 'softener room' on the west side of the Long Passage which runs from the north-west corner of the main block of the house, as a single space that has subsequently been sub-divided (Figure 2).

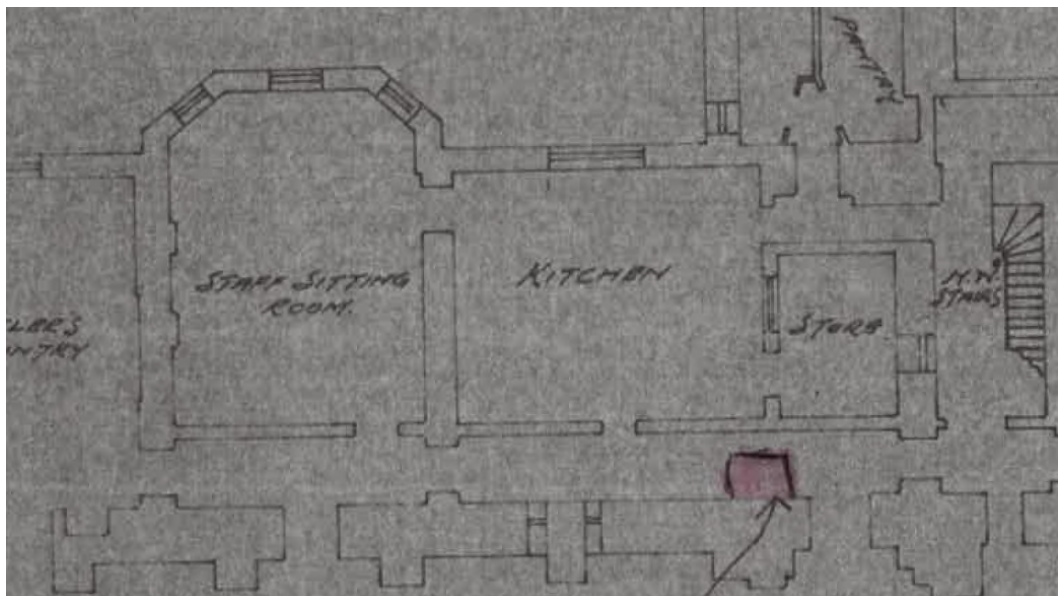


Figure 1 Part of a basement plan, 1966, showing the area of the present service kitchen which then had a doorway linking to a staff sitting room which is now the private kitchen.

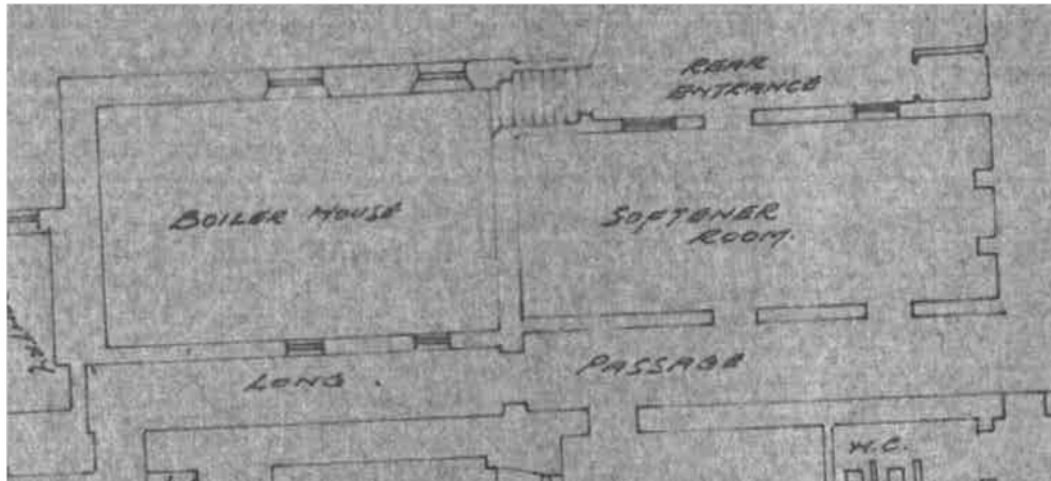


Figure 2 Part of a basement plan, 1966, showing service rooms along the Long Passage in the range extending off the north-west corner of the main block of the house.

4.0 DESCRIPTION

4.1 This description focuses on the areas of the proposed alterations only.

Kitchen

4.2 The service kitchen has been in use as a kitchen since the mid-20th century at least, but it contains no features of historic interest relating to a kitchen use (Figure 3). The main features of interest are the doors to the service corridors to the east and north. A doorway in the south wall which led to the staff sitting room in 1966 has been blocked. The small store to the north, shown as a separate room in 1966, has been combined with kitchen (Figure 4). The floor is of linoleum tiles. Along the south wall is the cook line with a modern copper extractor hood over. All kitchen cabinets are modern.



Figure 3 The service kitchen facing south.



Figure 4 The service kitchen, facing north.

Service corridor and dumb waiter

- 4.3 Running between the former service rooms of the west range and the Lower West Cloister is a service corridor into which a dumb waiter has been inserted, leaving only a narrow gap to pass the dumb waiter (Figures 5 and 6). The dumb waiter, which was inserted after 1966, is constructed in concrete blockwork (Figure 7).



Figure 5
The dumb waiter in the
service corridor facing
north.



Figure 6
The dumb waiter in the
service corridor facing
south.



Figure 7
The interior of the shaft
of the dumb waiter
showing the blockwork
of the structure.

Back entrance hall and office

- 4.4 The back entrance hall and office to the north were a single space in 1966 that has been subdivided with a stud partition wall (Figures 8 and 9). The southern part of the back entrance hall has a moulded plaster cornice, but this stops at a cross beam set just south of the opposing doors in the northern part of the room (Figure 10). There is no cornice to the walls where the partition wall has been inserted. The cornice is damaged where it meets the beam suggesting that there has been an alteration to this space resulting in the loss of the cornice.



Figure 8 The back entrance hall, looking north.



Figure 9 The office to the north of the back entrance hall, south wall.



Figure 10 The east wall of the back entrance hall showing the cornice to the southern part of the room which does not continue north of the cross beam to the ceiling.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designations

- 5.1 Wilton House is a building of exceptional significance reflected in its Grade I listed status.

Assessment of Significance

- 5.2 This assessment of significance, whilst recognising the very high levels of significance of the house overall, and the fact that the service elements of a country house contribute to the overall heritage values of the house, particularly the illustrative historic interest, will focus on the significance of the areas of the proposed alterations, referring to the wider significance where necessary.

Kitchen

- 5.3 The present service kitchen was not the historic kitchen of the house, and it has no historic features, fixtures or fittings that indicate its original or historic use. It evidently formed part of the service area being accessed off the service corridor that ran inside of the Lower West Cloister. The room has been altered with the removal of the wall between this space and the former store to the north. The significance of this room is limited to it forming part of the service range, although as a suite of service spaces there has been change to original character with the two rooms to the south combined to form the private kitchen and the room at the south-west corner the Chinese Dining Room, adjacent to the male servants' rooms in the south range, now a formal dining room.

Dumb waiter

- 5.4 The dumb waiter is a late 20th century insertion (post-dating 1966) and is a feature that has no heritage significance. The enclosure for the dumb waiter partly blocks the service passage, creating a narrow gap to pass and blocking the sightline along the corridor. It is considered that this feature is a negative element within the service area and does not contribute to the special interest of the listed building.

Former Softener Room (now back entrance and office)

- 5.5 The room that was described as 'Softener Room' in 1966 has subsequently been subdivided to form a rear entrance hall and an office with the insertion of a stud partition wall. The historic use of these rooms is not evident as there are no fixtures or fittings that convey an understanding of function other than the room formed part of the ancillary/service part of the house. The presence of a plaster cornice within the southern part of the entrance hall suggests that the space had a degree of status or visibility to more than servants. The fact that the cornice stops at the beam set just south of the opposing doors might suggest that there has been previous alteration to the plan in this area.
- 5.6 The present configuration of rooms has no significance in terms of plan form or character, and the partition does not represent important historic fabric. Other than forming an element of the ancillary or service area of the house, the present rooms make a limited contribution to the overall special interest of the listed building.

6.0 PROPOSALS & ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

6.1 There are three elements to the current proposals:

- The sub-division of the service kitchen to form a utility to the private kitchen
- Removal of the dumb waiter at basement level
- Removal of the partition between the back entrance hall and the office to the north.

Kitchen

6.2 It is proposed to insert a stud partition across the southern part of the room, set away from the reveal of the window, to form a utility to the private kitchen to the south. The blocked door in the western part of the south wall will be re-opened to give access to the utility.

6.3 The service kitchen was not, historically, the kitchen of the house and it retains no features or fittings that convey an understanding of the original or historic function of the room. It evidently formed part of the service function of the house, and with the continued use of the room as the service kitchen, and its access from the service corridor, it will continue to be seen as part of the service range, so there will be no material impact on understanding or character.

6.4 The partition will, evidently, change the size of the room but it is considered that this minor change will not harm the importance of plan form in terms of the suite of service rooms on the west side of the basement level, especially given the changes that have been made within the present private kitchen, where there has been change to plan, and the Chinese Dining Room where the character has changed from a service space to a formal dining room. The partition is also a reversible alteration that could be removed in the future with no impact on historic fabric.

6.5 The unblocking of the door between the private and service kitchens will remove late 20th century infill to a historic door opening, and will not harm the special interest of the listed building.

Dumb waiter

6.6 The removal of the dumb waiter at basement level only will impact on modern concrete blockwork of the enclosure, and so will have no impact on important historic fabric.

6.7 The dumb waiter enclosure is an evident modern insertion into the service corridor running the length of the west range, and has impacted upon the character of this corridor, leaving only a narrow gap to pass. The removal of this feature will reinstate the corridor to its original form and so may be regarded as a positive change for the listed building.

Removal of partition to the back entrance hall

6.8 The partition between the back entrance hall and the office to the north is a modern insertion that post-dates 1966. As a modern stud wall, there will be no impact on important historic fabric.

6.9 The partition sub-divided a room described as the 'Softener Room' in 1966, and so its removal will reinstate the room to a historic form. The presence of the cornice to the southern part of the entrance hall suggests that the form of the room recorded in 1966 may not have been the original form of the room. The removal of the partition will not harm the plan form of the service and ancillary area of the listed building.

7.0 DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

- 7.1 The proposed partition will be a simple stud partition that will be set slightly away from the reveal of the window and door opening, and so will not impact on these features. The service kitchen is a plain, simple room with no architectural decoration, and the partition will reflect this simplicity, and so is of an appropriate design.
- 7.2 The removal of the dumb waiter will reinstate the service corridor, representing an improvement to the aesthetics of the space.
- 7.3 The proposed works will not result in any harmful changes to the ability to access the house or the rooms whilst the removal of the dumb waiter will improve the accessibility as, currently, the gap to pass the enclosure is too narrow to allow a wheelchair to pass and creates a 'pinch-point'.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 When considered as a suite of service rooms, it is evident that there has been a relatively high level of change to these spaces, and it is important to note that the present service kitchen is not where the historic kitchen of the house was located as there are no fireplaces to this space. The main aspect of significance to this area of the house is the fact that most of the rooms retain a simple, service character reflecting the general use of this part of the house.
- 8.2 The sub-division of the service kitchen to create a utility space for the private kitchen will introduce a partition wall that will represent a change to the form of the service kitchen, but which will not harm significant plan form.
- 8.3 The removal of the dumb waiter and the partition between the back entrance hall and the office to the north will only impact modern fabric that has no heritage value, and both proposals will re-instate spaces to their historic form. Both of these changes may be regarded as positive alterations to the listed building, particularly the removal of the dumb waiter from the service corridor.
- 8.4 Whilst this assessment considers that the proposal for the service kitchen does not represent harm to the special interest of the listed building, if the local authority chooses to identify harm, it will be at the very lowest end of less than substantial as it is a reversible alteration, and the impact on the form of a room that has limited significance in terms of the overall plan of the house, will be at least balanced by the public benefit achieved by the positive changes resulting from the other two elements of the proposed works.
- 8.5 Accordingly, I can find no conflict in the proposed development with the statutory duty in Section 66 of the Act, National Policy in the NPPF or Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and conclude that the application should be allowed.