

Agenda Item	6.5
Report No	PLN/048/24

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee

Date: 4 June 2024

Report Title: 24/00364/FUL: Highland Council
Avonlea, West Banks Avenue, Wick

Report By: Area Planning Manager - North

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Internal and External Alterations to change the building from a Children's Unit to an Educational Facility (Appendix to Wick High School)

Ward: 03 - Wick And East Caithness

Development category: Local development

Reason referred to Committee: Objection comments received from more than five individual households

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to agree the recommendation to **GRANT** the application as set out in section 11 of the report

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 Alterations to an existing building are proposed to facilitate a change of use from a former residential children's care home to an educational annexe for the nearby Wick High School.

Internal alterations would comprise:

- Removal of store and former manager's ensuite ablutions to create a larger store/utility area;
- Kitchen/dining area reconfigured to create an open-plan life skills / dining area;
- Ensuite bedrooms and shared bathrooms to make way for two changing places areas, two classrooms, a store and a multi-sensory room.

External alterations would be minimal, basically consisting of the enlargement of two windows to accommodate doorways.

- 1.2 Pre Application Consultation: none.

- 1.3 Supporting Information: Supporting Statement received from application Agent, 22.05.2024: context for application outlined, noting that Wick High School's current Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision is insufficient and therefore breaches relevant legislation. Previous steps to enhance provision have proven unfruitful, so it is now proposed to repurpose the vacant 'Avonlea' building to provide generous ASN facilities, also making cost savings by reusing an existing modern building.

- 1.4 Variations: none.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site contains a former residential care unit, which opened in 2014 and subsequently closed in 2022. Ample paved parking/turning space is available within the application site. The site's frontage with the public road (namely West Banks Avenue, along the site's northern side) is bound by an attractive low stone wall and young screen trees. The building itself is set back considerably from the public road. The site is set within the built-up extent of Wick. It is tightly abutted by residential properties on three sides, with allotment gardens to its south.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 04.02.2023 12/04211/FUL | Erection of single storey 5 bedroom Children's unit/home & Bio mass boiler house on part of the allotment grounds adjacent to Rhind House, upgrading of car parking area with separate access and creation of a further separate access for the sole use of the allotments APPLICATION PERMITTED

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised: John O’Groat Journal, ‘Unknown Neighbour’

Date Advertised: 16.02.2024

Representation deadline: 02.03.2024

Timeous representations: 15 representations from 14 households, plus one
Community Council representation

Late representations: None

4.2 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

- Lack of community engagement or consultation regarding the proposed development – the proposed development is therefore premature;
- The proposed annexe should be located closer to Wick High School, rather than on separate premises.
- Would prefer to see it used for other uses

4.3 All letters of representation are available for inspection via the Council’s eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet www.wam.highland.gov.uk/wam.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Scottish Water: no response received.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

The following policies are relevant to the assessment of the application:

6.1 **National Planning Framework 4 (2023)**

Policy 1 - Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises

Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

Policy 3 - Biodiversity

Policy 5 - Soils

Policy 9 - Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings

Policy 12 - Zero Waste

Policy 13 - Sustainable Transport

Policy 14 - Design Quality and Place

Policy 18 - Infrastructure First

Policy 22 - Flood Risk and Water Management

Policy 23 - Health and Safety

Policy 25 - Community Wealth Building

6.2 **Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012**

28 - Sustainable Design

29 - Design Quality & Place-making

- 31 - Developer Contributions
- 34 - Settlement Development Areas
- 42 - Previously Used Land
- 56 - Travel
- 64 - Flood Risk
- 65 - Waste Water Treatment
- 66 - Surface Water Drainage

6.3 Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CasPlan) (2018)

Site is within Wick's Settlement Development Area.

6.4 Highland Council Supplementary Planning Policy Guidance

- Developer Contributions (March 2018)
- Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
- Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)

7. PLANNING APPRAISAL

7.1 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Determining Issues

7.2 This means that the application requires to be assessed against all policies of the Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

Planning Considerations

7.3 The key considerations in this case are:

- a) compliance with the development plan and other planning policy
- b) Siting and Design
- c) Privacy and Amenity
- d) Flood Risk and Drainage
- e) Parking and Access
- f) Biodiversity

Development plan/other planning policy

7.4 NPF4 Policy 9 supports development proposals that will result in the sustainable reuse of vacant buildings, whether permanent or temporary. It goes on to state that "development proposals for the reuse of existing buildings will be supported, taking into account their suitability for conversion to other uses. Given the need to conserve embodied energy, demolition will be regarded as the least preferred option".

- 7.5 NPF4 Policy 12 supports proposals which reuse existing buildings.
- 7.6 NPF4 Policy 18, 'Infrastructure First' supports development proposals which provide necessary infrastructure [NPF4's Glossary defines 'infrastructure first' to include early years, primary, secondary, further and higher education services].
- 7.7 HwLDP Policy 34 supports policy-compliant proposals within Settlement Development Areas. Such proposals should be judged in terms of how compatible they are with the existing pattern of development and landscape character, how they conform with existing and approved adjacent land uses, and the effect on any natural, built and cultural heritage feature.
- 7.8 A change of use is proposed, from a residential care home (Class 8, 'Residential Institutions) to an educational annexe (Class 10, Non-Residential Institutions). No Permitted Development rights are associated with the proposed change, therefore Planning permission is required. No amenity concerns are identified, as explained further below; the proposed change of use would take place within a Settlement Development Area, to where development is directed in the first instance. The proposed change of use is therefore not considered to be problematic in land use planning terms and is supported.

Siting and Design

- 7.9 The proposed alternations to an existing building would be minimal and sympathetic and so are accepted.
- 7.10 The proposed siting, reusing an existing vacant building in an otherwise good state of repair, is considered to be acceptable.
- 7.11 The proposed annexe to Wick High School would be located approximately nine minutes' walking distance from the main entrance of Wick High School. This is considered to be an appropriate distance which would comply with NPF4 Policy 15 ('Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods') which requires proposals to contribute to 20 minute neighbourhoods, taking into consideration the existing settlement pattern and local access to schools.

Privacy and Amenity

- 7.12 It is noted that the existing building has operated on a residential basis for a period of approximately ten years. The proposed development's occupation would likely be limited to daylight hours for schooling purposes, thereby exerting a lesser impact than that previously experienced by neighbours – the existing properties to be most affected are likely to be those adjacent to its northern and eastern sides, approximately 15 metres' distance from the existing building. Some minor amenity disruption is nevertheless considered to be acceptable on balance, given the application site's location within a Settlement Development Area which attract greater population densities.

Flood Risk and Drainage

- 7.13 SEPA's Flood Risk Management Map does not identify the application site to be at any risk of flooding. In any event, removal of a residential element of the application

building's use is considered to reduce its vulnerability during any future flood event.

- 7.14 Drainage arrangements would remain as existing - this is acceptable. There is a slight visibility shortfall from the existing access point, with around 70 metres westward and 80 metres eastward demonstrated. This is accepted on balance as the proposed educational use would be less intensive than its former residential purpose.

Parking and Access

- 7.15 There is ample parking and turning provision within the application site.

Biodiversity

- 7.16 NPF4 Policy 3 requires all development to accommodate biodiversity enhancement measures. The application site already possesses some appropriate habitat, with the existing building having taken biodiversity enhancement into account from its original construction. Currently, five screen trees are located by the public roadside, with a further soft planting area located adjacent to the building itself. A condition is however attached to enrich this provision further, e.g. through the attachment of bird/bat boxes to the application site's buildings.

Non-material considerations

- 7.17 Circumstances surrounding Avonlea's closure in 2022 are not a material Planning consideration.
- 7.18 The current quality and quantity of children's care service provision in the Caithness area is not a material Planning consideration.

Matters to be secured by Section 75 Agreement

- 7.19 None

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is acknowledged that the proposal has been the subject of a wider debate in relation to the future use of the building, however this is not relevant to the consideration of this planning application. The proposal requires to be determined solely on its own planning merits in the context of relevant national and local policies. The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in Planning terms, comprising the reuse of vacant building within a Settlement Development Area. Support for this application is therefore recommended. The majority of the concerns raised relate to non planning matters and are not relevant to the consideration of the assessment of this proposal.
- 8.2 All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Resource: Not applicable
- 9.2 Legal: Not applicable
- 9.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable
- 9.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: Not applicable
- 9.5 Risk: Not applicable
- 9.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

10. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before decision issued

Notification to Scottish Ministers No

Conclusion of Section 75 No
Obligation

Revocation of previous permission No

Subject to the above actions, it is recommended to

GRANT the application subject to the following conditions and reasons:

- 1 The development to which this planning permission relates must commence within THREE YEARS of the date of this decision notice. If development has not commenced within this period, then this planning permission shall lapse.

Reason: In accordance with Section 58 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

- 2 No development shall commence until full details of biodiversity enhancement measures have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

Biodiversity enhancement measures may include, but are not limited to, installation of bird/bat boxes or inclusion of soft planting.

All planting, seeding or turfing as may be comprised in the approved details shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the commencement of development, unless otherwise stated in the approved scheme.

Any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, for whatever reason are removed or damaged shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of the

same size and species.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity net gain.

Signature: Dafydd Jones

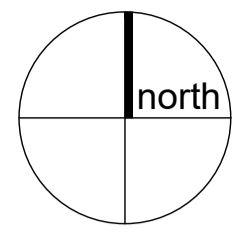
Designation: Area Planning Manager - North

Author: Craig Simms

Background Papers: Documents referred to in report and in case file.

Relevant Plans:

Document Type	Document No.	Version No.	Date Received
Site Layout Plan - Downtakings	CAL22017-THC-ZZ-GF- DR-A-000-0012	REV A	06/02/2024
Proposed Floor Plan	CAL22017-THC-ZZ-GF- DR-A-000-0013	REV A	06/02/2024
Proposed Elevations	CAL22017-THC-ZZ-GF- DR-A-000-00014		06/02/2024
Proposed Sections	CAL22017-THC-ZZ-GF- DR-A-000-00015		06/02/2024
Location / Site Layout Plan	THC-ZZ-GF-DR-A-000- 00009		06/02/2024

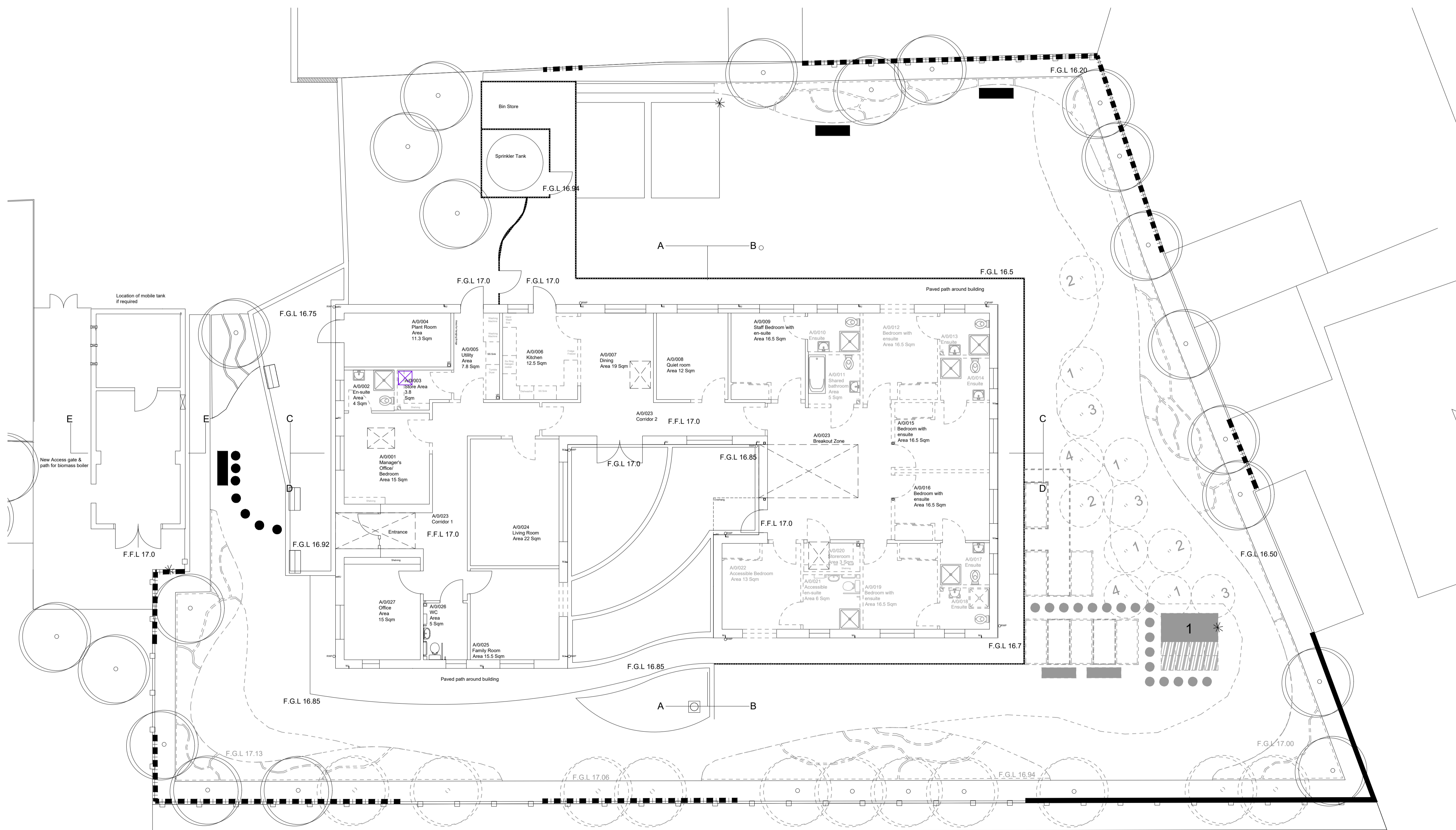


Existing building make up

- Floors: Concrete
- Walls: Timber kit with rendered blockwork
- Internal Walls: Timber frame with 2 layers plasterboard.
- Windows & Doors: Timber aluminum clad (Rational)
- Heating: Biomass Boiler with radiators
- Decoration: Painted throughout
- Flooring: Currently carpet. (new could be reused in some locations)

Key

- - - Existing to be removed



Allotment Gardens

Rev.	Description	By	Date
1	Additional external door openings	CM	11 Dec 23

THIS DRAWING IS SIGNED AS BEING
RELATIVE TO OUR TENDER OF _____ DATE

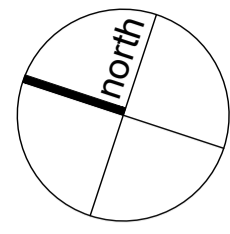
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HOUSING AND
PROPERTY SERVICE

CLIENT	Care & Learning	SCALE	1/100
PROJECT	Wick ASN unit	DATE	Feb 2024
CONTACT	Claire Mackenzie	DRAWN BY	CM
DRAWING TITLE	Existing/Downtakings	CHECKED BY	
PURPOSE OF ISSUE	Planning	PAPER SIZE	A1

PROJECT NUMBER	ORIGINATOR	VOLUME OR SYSTEM	LEVELS AND LOCATIONS	TYPE	ROLE	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	REV
CAL22017	THC	ZZ	GF	DR	A	000	0012	A



General Notes

Internal

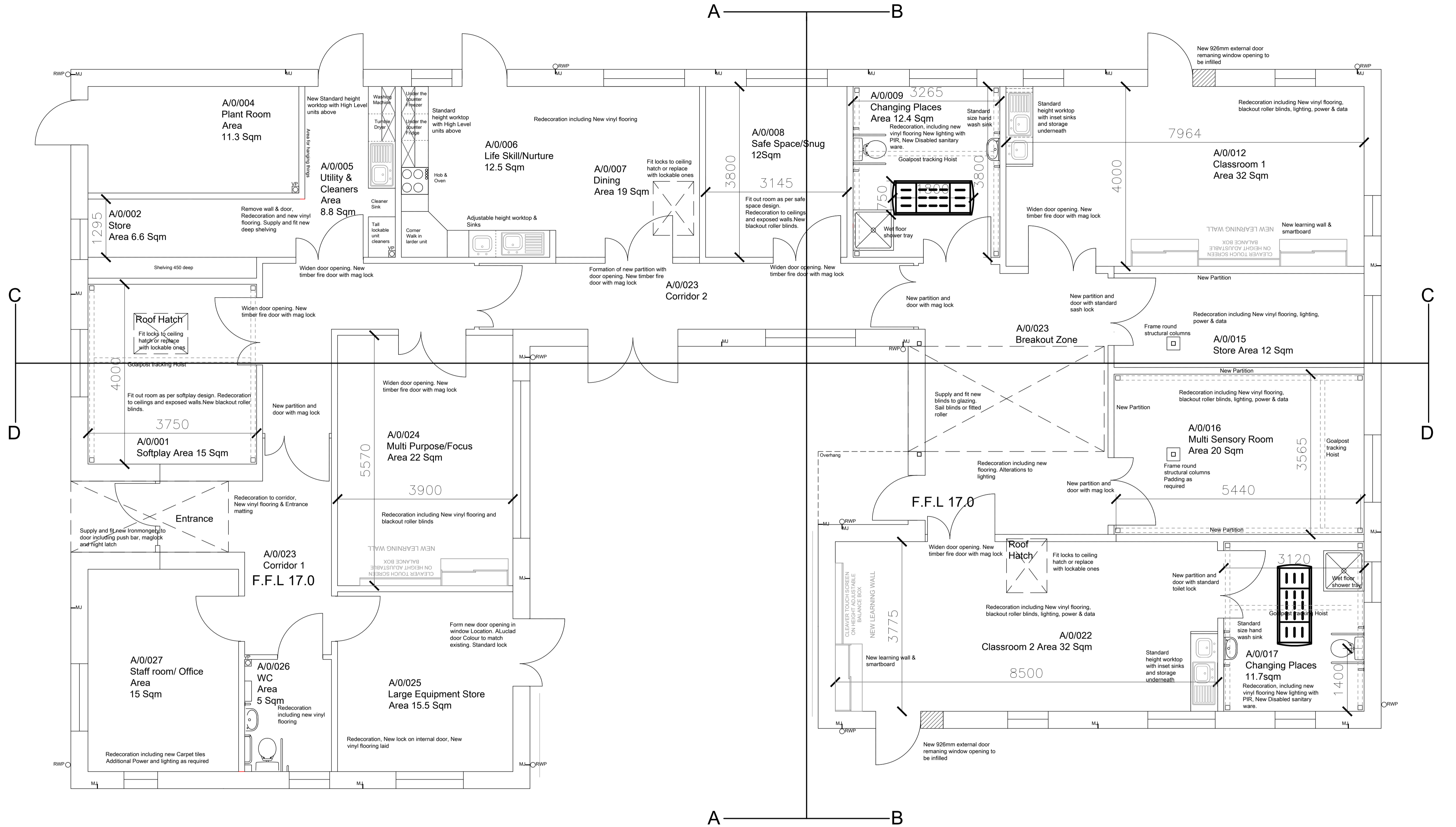
Carryout Downtakings as noted on the downtaking drawing
 Make good all floors walls and ceilings.
 Formation of new plasterboard/timber partitions to from new rooms.
 Widen door openings as noted and fit new solid core timber fire doors with vision panel.
 Redecoration of walls, ceilings & architraves (paint) throughout
 New flooring throughout. Majority Vinyl with carpet in office & multi purpose room
 New blackout roller blinds throughout including anti-ligature chain
 New lighting in classrooms
 Reconfigure and reuse of existing lighting in other rooms to suite new layout
 Reconfigure existing sprinkler system to suite new layout
 Supply and fit new power and data as required
 Supply and new learning walls and smartboards as required
 Create 3 x new external door openings in window locations. Door to be Alu-clad Grey to match existing
 Supply and fit new DDA compliant sanitaryware including 2 x changing tables and wet room shower formers in changing places
 Reconfigure heating system and relocation of existing radiators to suite new layout.
 Re fit out kitchen and utility room with new units, sinks (including cleaners sink & lockable unit) & white goods.
 Reconfigurations of drainage system to suite new layout
 Supply and fit new sinks with lockable units in classroom
 New fob and door access system to be fitted
 Reconfiguration of fire system including zones and alarms
 Carryout a boiler service
 Supply and fit goalpost track hoists in changing places, soft play & multi sensory room

External

Carefully remove and relocate existing un required trees
 Remove tree bark around perimeter edge
 Remove and relocate existing planters including soil
 Remove turf from section to be resurfaced
 Supply and fit new 6ft high fencing around neighboring boundary. Timber vertical to match existing Extend down and across car park to form secure area.
 The new fence should have a large vehicular gate and smaller pedestrians gate along car park section
 Supply and fit rubberised play surface around building where grass has been removed.
 Supply and fit grates around remaining trees
 Relocation/reuse of 3 planters and stepping stones in grass area.
 Supply and fit 2 x new timber sheds on existing bases. Doors to be lockable
 Supply and fit new whirly gig
 Re line car park as required
 Supply new timber benches as required

Specialist

External play equipment to be organised by school (may need to form the pit for the trampoline as part of the works)
 Specialist room furniture Supply and fit fixed equipment & furniture (design in conjunction with specialist companies)
 Lose equipment and furniture by the school/education



A - Additional door openings & relocation of door opening. Addition of track hoists.		CM	13 Dec 23
Rev.	Description	By	Date

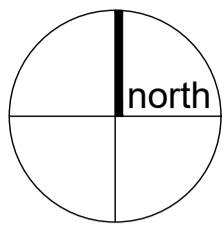
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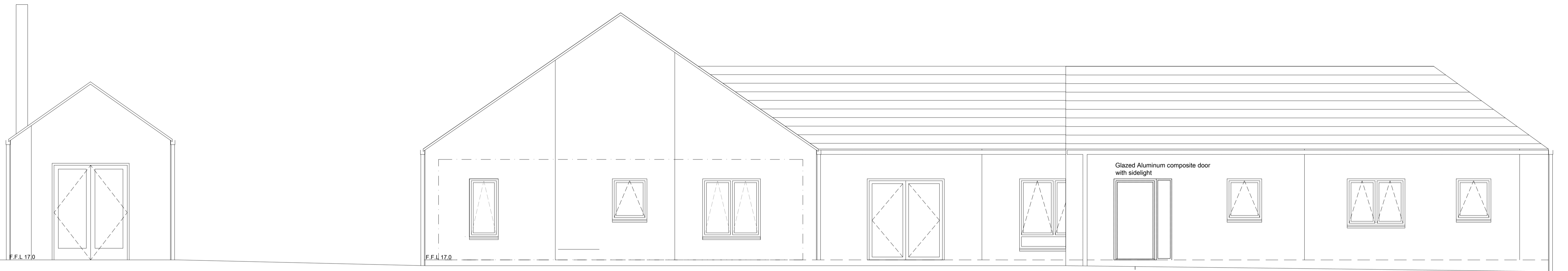
HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICE

CLIENT Care & Learning	SCALE 1/50
PROJECT Avonlea	DATE Feb 2024
CONTACT Claire Mackenzie	DRAWN BY CM
DRAWING TITLE Proposed Layout	CHECKED BY
PURPOSE OF ISSUE Planning	PAPER SIZE A1

PROJECT NUMBER	ORIGINATOR	VOLUME OR SYSTEM	LEVELS AND LOCATIONS	TYPE	ROLE	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	REV
CAL22017	THC	ZZ	GF	DR	A	000	0013	A



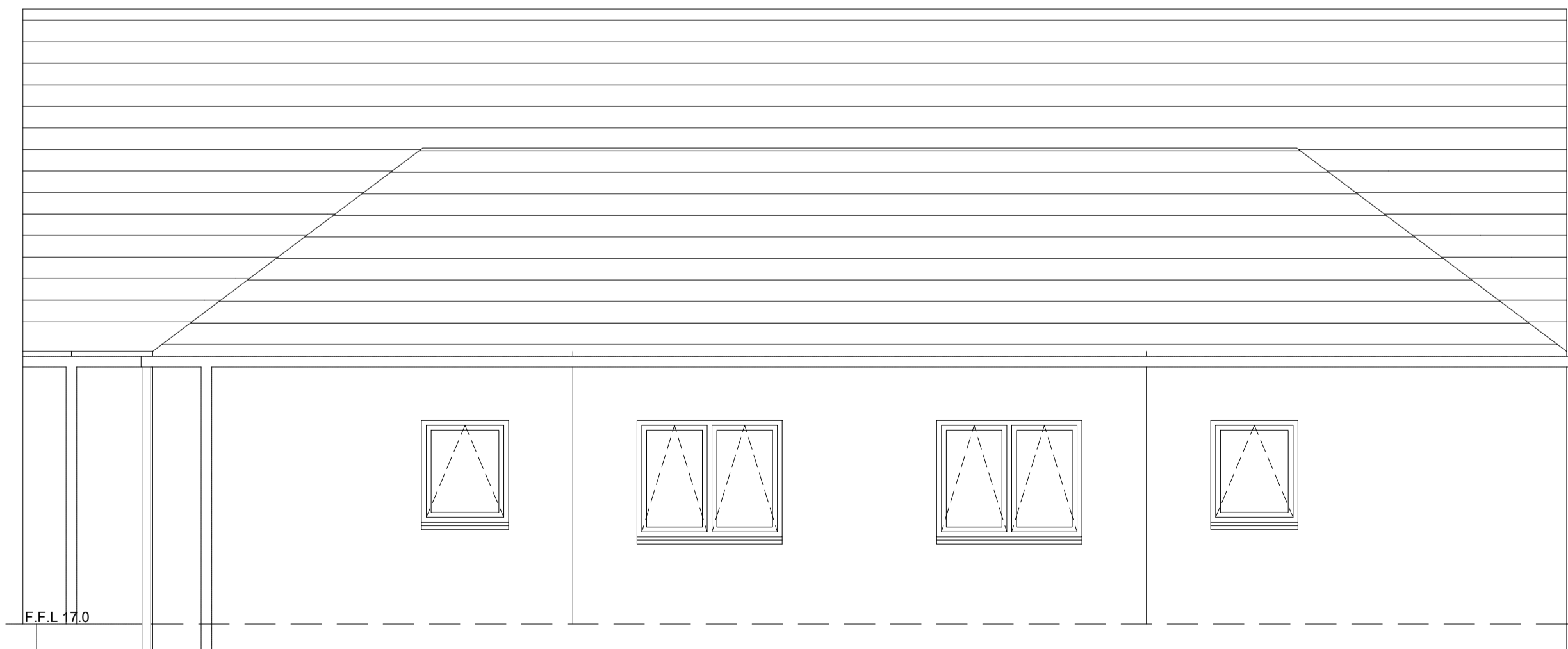
North Elevation



South Elevation



West Elevation



East Elevation

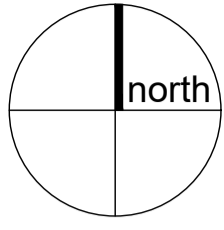
Rev.	Description	By	Date

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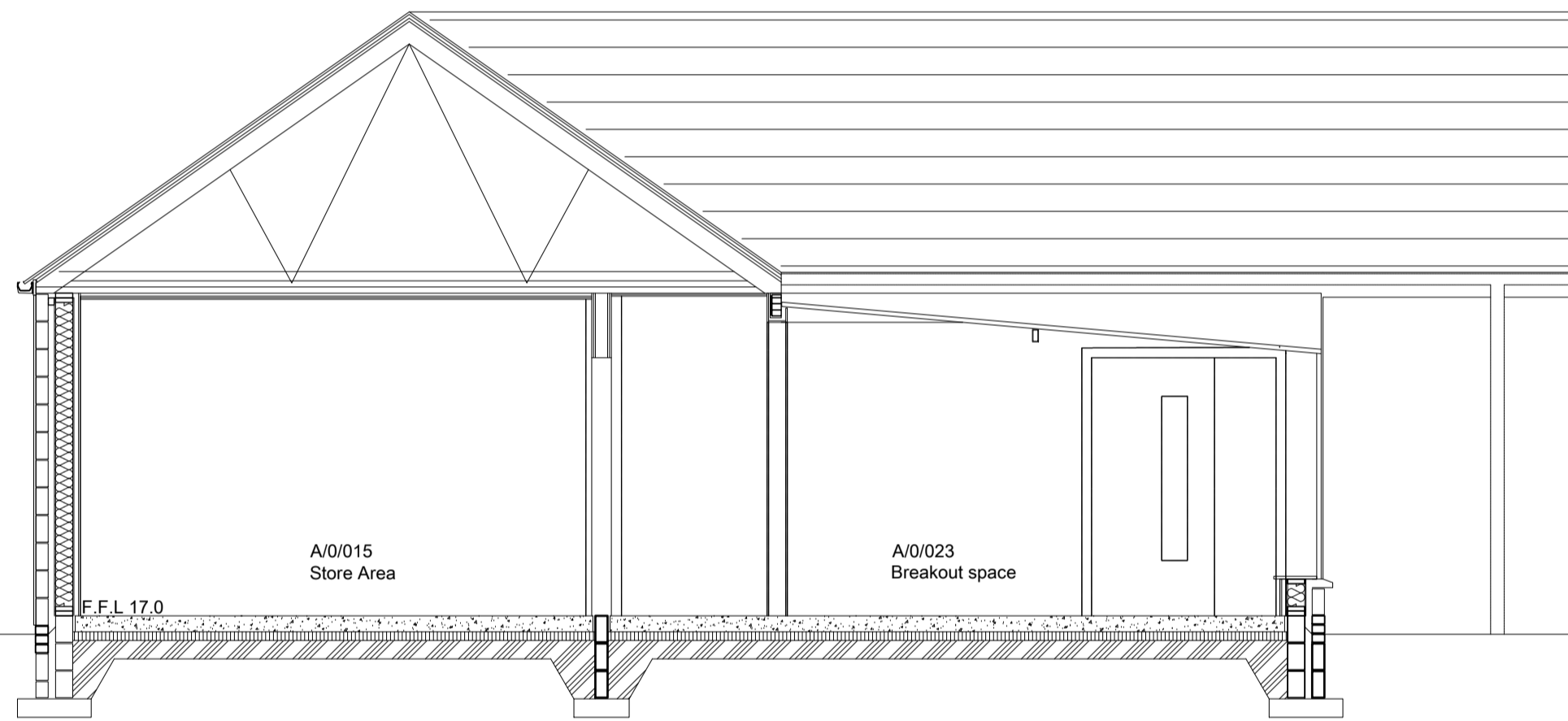


CLIENT	Care & Learning	SCALE	1/50
PROJECT	Avonlea	DATE	Feb 2024
CONTRACT	Claire Mackenzie	DRAWN BY	CM
DRAWING TITLE	Proposed Elevations	CHECKED BY	
PURPOSE OF ISSUE	Planning	PAPER SIZE	A1

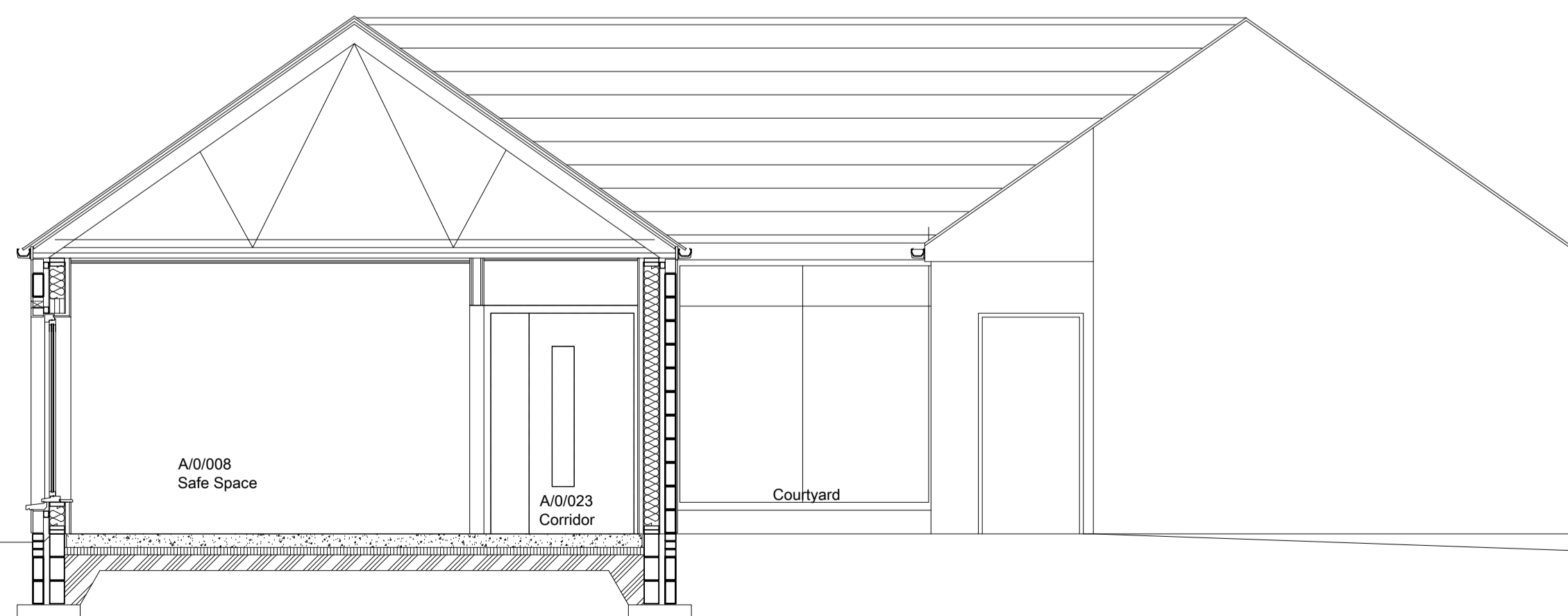
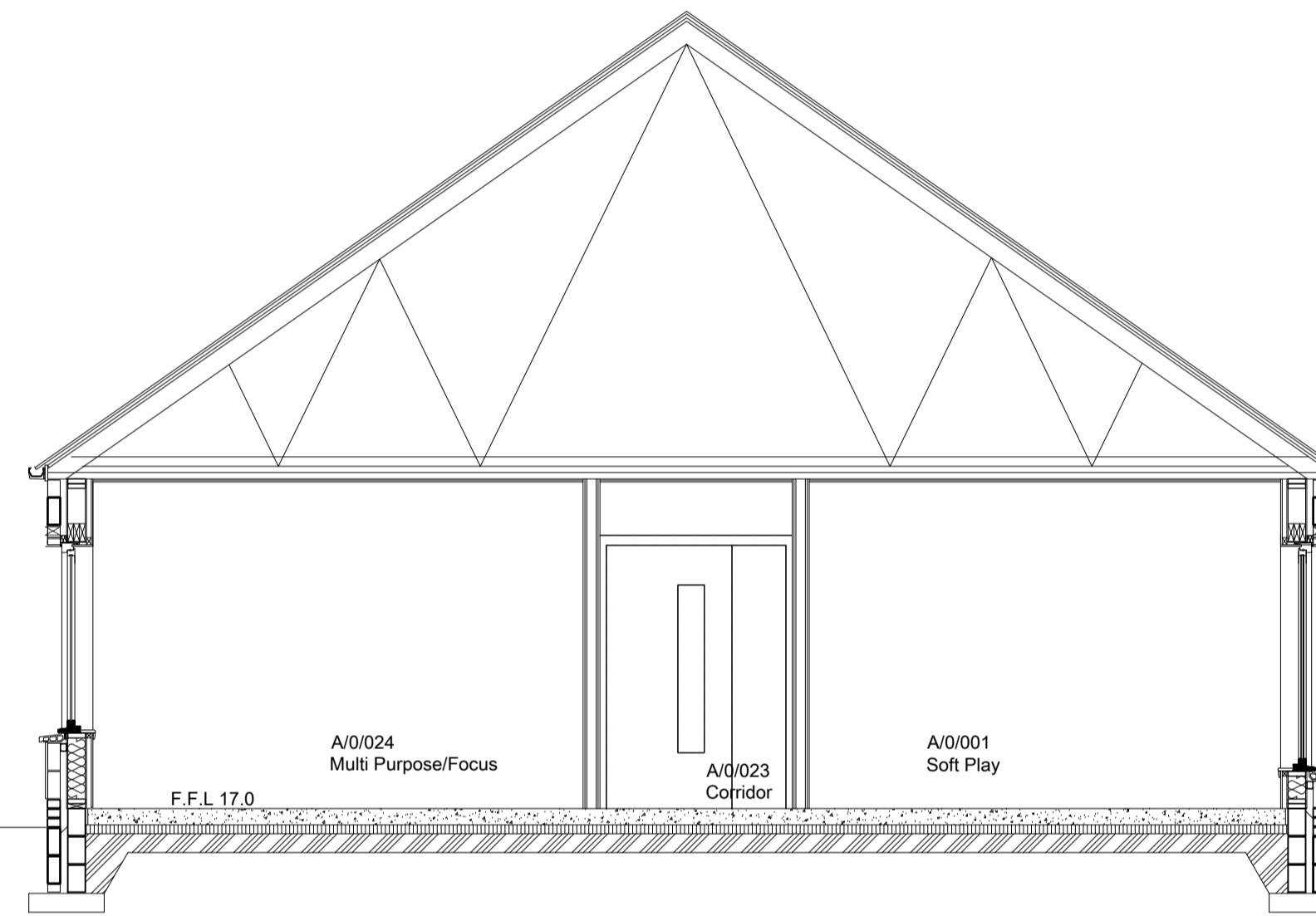
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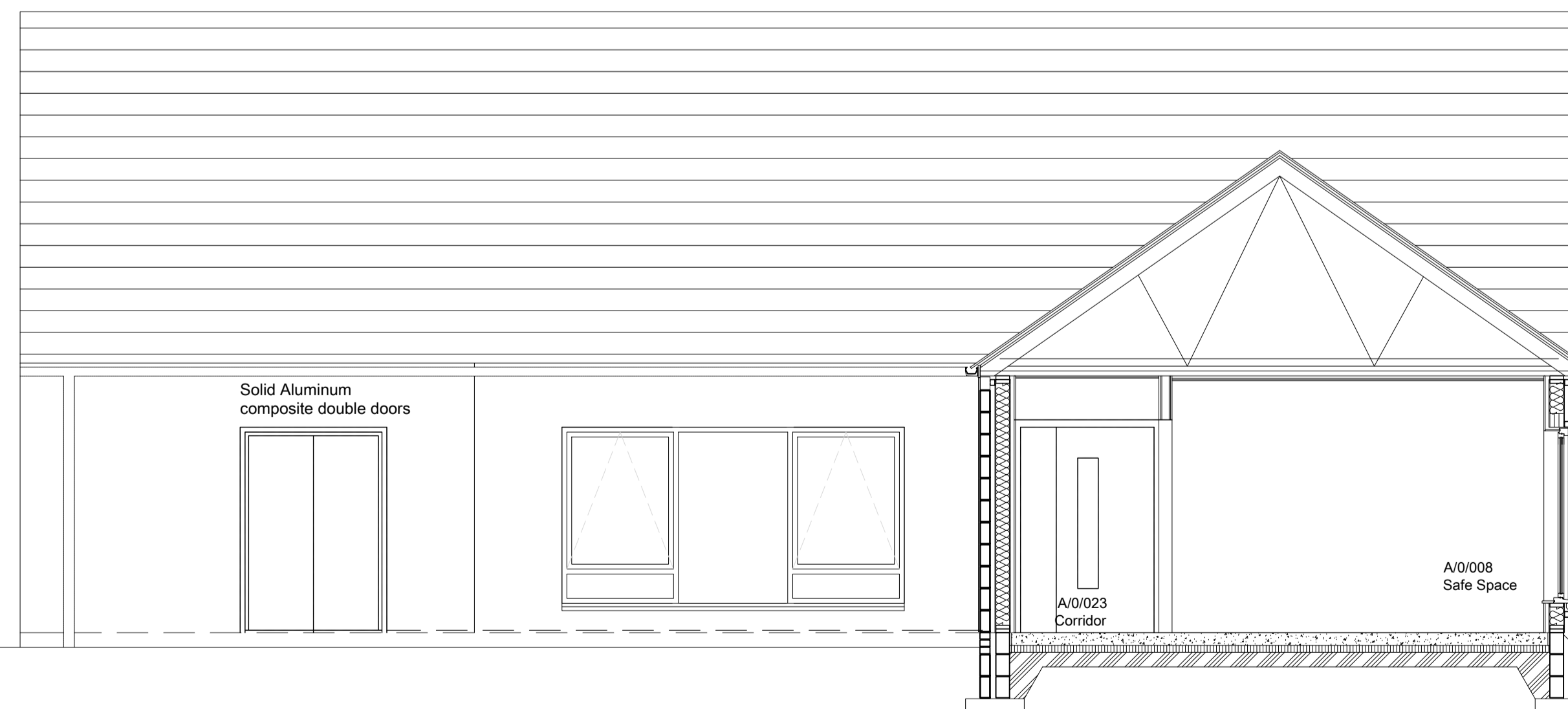
Section C-C



Section D-D



Section B-B



Section A-A

Rev.	Description	By	Date

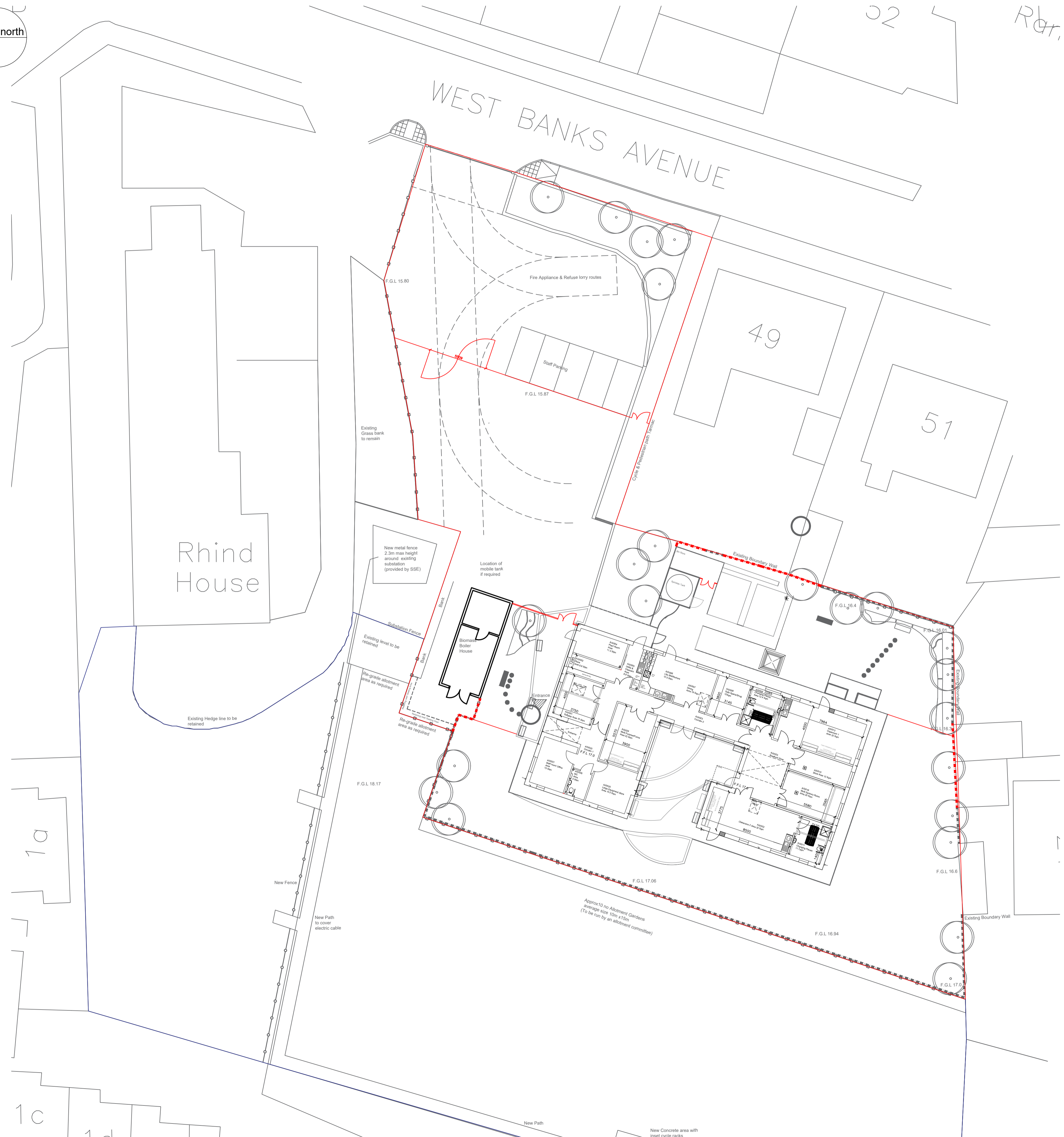
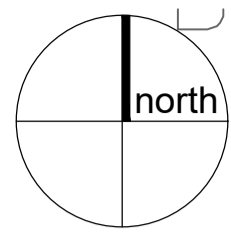
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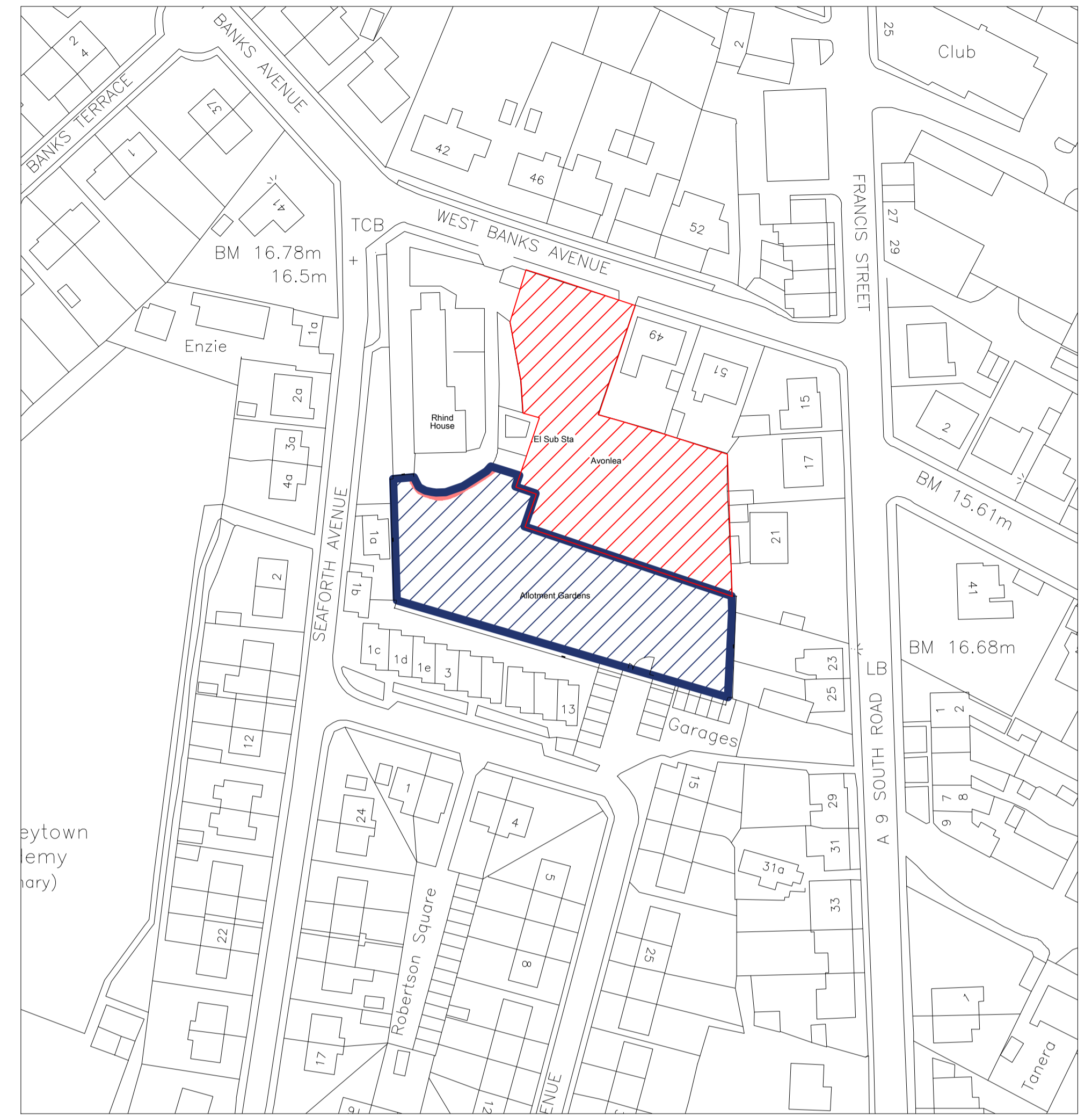
HOUSING AND
PROPERTY SERVICE

CLIENT	Care & Learning	SCALE	1/50
PROJECT	Avonlea	DATE	Feb 2024
CONTRACT	Claire Mackenzie	DRAWN BY	CM
DRAWING TITLE	Proposed Sections	CHECKED BY	
PURPOSE OF ISSUE	Planning	PAPER SIZE	A1

PROJECT NUMBER	ORIGINATOR	VOLUME OR SYSTEM	LEVELS AND LOCATIONS	TYPE	ROLE	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	REV
CAL22017	THC	ZZ	GF	DR	A	000	00015	-



Site Plan 1/200



Location Plan 1/1000

1	Updated external fence added	CM	13 Dec 23
2	Locations belows, zoning, or etc.	CM	Nov 23
Rev.	Description	By	Date

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DATE _____
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ON BEHALF OF _____



HOUSING AND
PROPERTY SERVICE

CLIENT Care & Learning	SCALE On DWG
PROJECT Avonlea	DATE Jan 2024
CONTRACT Claire Mackenzie	DRAWN BY CM
DRAWING TITLE Proposed Site/Location Plan	CHECKED BY
PURPOSE OF ISSUE Information	PAPER SIZE A1

PROJECT NUMBER	ORIGINATOR	VOLUME OR SYSTEM	LEVELS AND LOCATIONS	TYPE	ROLE	CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER	REV
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