Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)

Property: The Sessions House, Sheep Market, Spalding, PE11 1BB

Listing Status: Grade II Listed

Date: January 2026

Applicant: Andrew Blach

Proposal: Change of use of ground-floor rear cell block from residential to Cafe and Bar (Use Class E(b)).

1. Introduction and Significance of the Asset

The Sessions House is a prominent 19th-century judicial building designed in a Tudor-Gothic style, completed in 1843. It stands as a significant landmark in Spalding's Sheep Market. The specific area of this application is the ground-floor rear wing, which originally functioned as high-security holding cells and interview rooms.

The significance of the rear cell block lies in its intact Victorian "plan form"—the narrow corridors, heavy masonry walls, and small, vaulted rooms which illustrate the history of the local penal system.

2. The Proposal

The proposal seeks a change of use to allow for a commercial cafe and bar. Following a review of the building's structural integrity and heritage value, the strategy has been refined to a **non-invasive, furniture-only model** to ensure the total preservation of the 1843 fabric.

- **No Structural Alterations:** All internal 1843 masonry walls will remain fully intact. No openings, penetrations, or structural modifications are proposed.
- **Preservation of Plan Form:** The original cell layout and spine corridor rhythm will be preserved exactly as they were designed in the 19th century.
- **Flooring Strategy:** To ensure maximum preservation and zero impact on the building substrate, the existing floors will be left in their current state. No new floor coverings, adhesives, or mechanical fixings are proposed for the floor surface.
- **Service Infrastructure:** New plumbing and electrical requirements for the bar area will utilize existing infrastructure. Any necessary new wiring or pipework will be surface-mounted to avoid chasing into the historic brickwork.

3. Assessment of Impact

The impact on the historic fabric is assessed as **Nil**.

- **Physical Impact:** By retaining all internal walls and utilizing existing floor surfaces, the building's structural and historical integrity is maintained. The use of freestanding furniture

(tables, chairs, and a freestanding bar unit) ensures that the "special interest" of the listed asset is entirely unaffected.

- **Visual Impact:** The removal of modern 20th-century strip lighting and the restoration of the cells to a functional, public-facing use will enhance the aesthetic appreciation of the 1843 interior without modifying its core components.
- **Setting of the Asset:** The use of the courtyard for managed pedestrian access facilitates a better public understanding of the building's layout while maintaining the enclosed, secure character of the rear wing.

4. Heritage Benefits

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages the "optimum viable use" of heritage assets. Transitioning these underutilized rooms into a commercial cafe and bar provides the necessary revenue for the long-term maintenance and repair of the wider Grade II estate through Castle Events Limited and the CIC. By inviting the public into the cells, the proposal also provides a community educational benefit, allowing residents to experience a part of Spalding's judicial history that was previously private.

5. Conclusion

The proposed change of use is a sensitive and entirely non-invasive evolution of The Sessions House. Because it involves zero structural or surface intervention, it preserves the 1843 fabric in its entirety while securing a sustainable future for the building.

Statement of Conformity: This assessment has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Section 16 of the NPPF and the South Holland District Council Local Plan.