

James Argles

From: Planning Support
Subject: FW: Conservation Comments HGY/2023/1043 & HGY/2023/1044_Civic Centre, High Road, Wood Green

Sent: 31 August 2023 15:25

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Dear Sam,

applications HGY/2023/1043 and HGY/2023/1044 propose the full external and internal refurbishment of the grade II listed Wood Green Civic Centre as well as the erection of a new three storey office building in place of the existing car park located to the immediate north of the Civic Centre.

The proposal will include the creation of built links between the listed Civic Centre and the new office building, creation of a central courtyard, landscaping, and parking.

Site

The Civic Centre is an elongated, four storey grade II listed, nationally important building of historic and architectural special interest.

The southern wing of the building, hosting the public uses, has a concrete frame with plate glass curtain walling, whilst the north wing offices areas are characterised by large, regular windows with stock brick infill.

The building was designed by architects practice Sir John Brown, A E Henson and Partners who also designed other civic centres between the late 1930's and 1960's. It was inaugurated in 1958 and was the first civic centre of its size to be built after the Second World War while providing a source of inspiration for a new generation of civic centre schemes elsewhere in the country. The project was influenced by the design of Danish city halls of the late 1930's and was exemplary of an understated, informal, and transparent form of modernist architecture characterised by modern frame construction, use of reinforced concrete, largely glazed facades, steel, natural finishes, and attention to detail whose subtle qualities aimed to showcase the freedom of expression and values of a modern local democracy.

Its special character and features of interest are comprehensively articulated in the exceptionally detailed listing description published in the National Heritage List for England that reflects the special features of interest and heritage value of this public building.

Its architectural interest is summarized in the national listing as follows:

- * for its clear Scandinavian influence, the subtle qualities of which express architecturally the values of informality, transparency, and modernity, defining aspirations of the post war civic centre as a type.
- * for its generous planning and creative use of space.
- * for its elegant and consistent application of high-quality materials and detailing in the principal internal spaces.
- * for the level of survival of key aspects of the building's character and physical fabric.

The listing summary proves that well-preserved design attributes of the civic building such as its siting, plan form, internal and external spatial configuration, architectural language and composition, materiality and detailing concur altogether, without exclusions, to its uniqueness and special interest .

The original design for the wider site included an auditorium and a small hall to be positioned along the western boundary of the site, running at the back of the council offices, and connected to these by means of an extension of the colonnaded walkway. The scheme also included a public library to be built at the north of the site, along Trinity Road, thus concluding a group of public buildings revolving around a central square with a pool and terraces.

Only the town hall and council offices were built, and while the full extent of the original design intent was never realised, the design quality and character of the then innovative early post-war civic centre have since characterised the site and contributed to the architectural and townscape quality of its area, although with varying public appreciation, as shown in historic pictures of the then recently completed Civic Centre in views along the High Road and from Crescent Gardens.

Nowadays the listed Civic Centre sits as one of the finest examples of public buildings of the 1950's and as an architectural landmark at the heart of the Trinity Gardens Conservation Area which encompasses three principal

public open spaces, each of townscape and historic interest, which together provide the setting for public buildings and places of worship as well as the setting for houses dating from the early to late 19th century.

The listed Civic Centre is surrounded by several listed and locally listed assets that define the historic character of the Conservation Area; in the immediate surrounding of the development site sit grade II listed St. Michaels church located to the south of the development site along the High Road, and the grade II listed Trinity Primary school located to the west and therefore to the rear of the development site and listed Civic Centre. At the northern side of the junction of the High Road with Trinity Road, the former Fishmongers' Arms is a striking corner public house in the Italianate style, built in brown stock brick and stucco, with pedimented first-floor windows and a balustraded parapet. North - south views across the conservation area along its High Road, as well as east-west views along White Hart lane, Bounds Green and Trinity road are important part of the experience of the listed Civic Centre and of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its defining institutional buildings.

Comments

The proposed retention of the civic use of the listed building, its refurbishment and extension, the opportunity to optimise and improve the uses, urban and landscape quality of the wider site which sits in the setting of other listed buildings, all have been carefully considered, tested, and designed by a multidisciplinary team of experienced professionals based on thorough understanding of the original design intent for the site, as well as on the basis of the conditions and heritage significance of the listed building and its heritage setting.

Feasibility studies, comprehensive surveys and investigations have been carried out while developing the proposed scheme so to assess the build-up and defects of the listed building; its finishes, original fixtures and detailing have been benefitting from a comprehensive salvage strategy; fundamental asbestos removal, and other preliminary works have been carefully designed and expertly implemented while ensuring appropriate protection of significant fabric and features.

The retention of the original public and civic uses of the listed building and its site, the extensive refurbishment, energy efficiency upgrades and retrofitting are welcome in principle as pre-application discussion and related evidence have proven that these works are necessary to bring the listed building back into long lasting, beneficial use.

The proposed site layout, new link buildings to the new office building, the proposed landscape scheme, have been informed by the design and character of the listed Civic Centre and have been imaginatively inspired by the original intent for the wider site, while aiming for an authentic, contemporary design to complement the listed civic centre and respect its heritage setting. Proposed new development is also welcome in principle as a unique opportunity to accomplish and enhance the intrinsic architectural and urban quality of the setting of the listed Civic centre and bring its wider site back into optimal use.

Internal works

The proposed internal works are soundly justified and sensitively designed.

- The strip outs, removal of internal partitions and reconfiguration of basement level to host storage and plant equipment space is fully supported as the modest character and ancillary functions of these spaces will be retained and enhanced.
- The proposed strip outs and removal of internal partitions to the north wing's offices have been carefully considered throughout the pre-application discussions considering the necessary reconfiguration and upgrades of the original office space according to contemporary working standards. The Council needs independently functioning flexible office areas, that can flex with needs and accommodate new ways of working (NWOW) and cross departmental integration and collaboration. Within this context the upgrading and integration of the office space available within the listed building with the quality and configuration of the new office space offered by the proposed extensions is fundamental for the optimal and integrated use of the civic hub for the Administrative Office Functions of the council.

It has been acknowledged that the cellular spatial configuration of the northern office wing forms part of the original design intent and appearance of the Civic Centre, as mentioned in the listing section related to the plan form and internal spatial arrangements of the listed building. However, the office wing was altered and impoverished at various stages and has generally modest finishes, progressively towards the north end of the building: the aesthetic, historic and communal values attached to the interiors of this wing are considered medium/low as it is their contribution to the overall significance of the listed building.

It is desirable in principle to retain these components of significance as any level of harm to heritage significance is undesirable in principle.

Accordingly, the proposed retention of those most valuable, panelled offices still surviving to ground, first and second floor, coupled with an informed and sensitive reconfiguration of the axial office wing aimed at unveiling and enhancing its original design intent and related spatial and architectural qualities, is a positive design response that, depending on its details, can successfully sustain the legibility of the original design and significance of the listed building. The overall energy improvement strategy will require careful removal and reinstatement of timber panelling from suitably experienced heritage contractors, as per relevant statements supporting the application, so to achieve the desired improvements with minimal alterations to the internal spatial configuration of these representative rooms.

- Strip off and demolition works to entrance hall and south wing will sensitively reinstate to ground floor a well-connected, flowing internal configuration, and will retain finishes and decorative features of the most significant public areas by decluttering them from later partitions, storage, and doors. These works will be essential to reinstate and reinforce the original character of the public spaces of the Civic Centre and are very welcome.
- The proposed enclosure of the colonnaded walkway running at the back of the Civic centre will tie the uses, circulation, and spatiality of the Listed building together with the proposed new link building and new office building to the north of the site. The enhanced use of the colonnaded walkway, its transparency and visual connection to the proposed internal courtyard and new landscaped gardens to the south of the site are consistent with the character and design principles of the host building and appear as an elegant, flowing architectural gesture to convey the qualities of the civic centre within the new extensions.
- The proposed refurbishment of the gallery at first floor above the colonnaded walkway and including the panelled committee rooms and mayor parlour is proposed to be refurbished and allowance for localised removal of severely decayed heritage timber joinery in the Committee Rooms are supported.
- The refurbishment and services upgrade in the Council Chamber and related public gallery, where many of the key features of interest, historic fabric and character still survive and are still relatively well preserved despite the asbestos removal works, are certainly necessary to reinstate the optimal use of the civic and democratic functions of the building and are welcome.
- The extensive strip off, demolitions and sympathetic rebuilding of the top floor of the Civic Centre including the roof plant rooms are robustly justified by the severe state of decay and asbestos presence on this ancillary floor that hosted the staff canteen.

External works

Proposed works to the external elevations of the Civic Centre rest on detailed surveys and specialist analysis of the pre-cast stone cladding panels, cast concrete for window heads and the 3rd floor cornice, and facing brickwork. External works are fundamental to restore the good state of repair of the building and its aesthetic qualities, but also to improve its energy performance as a basis for successful retrofitting.

- The condition survey of the façade has shown that where cast concrete is damaged it appears to have been cast using an ungraded poorly compacted backing mortar faced with a finer finishing mortar. The irregular compaction and aggregate ratio of the mixes has allowed the migration of moisture through panels leading to oxidation of the reinforcement and subsequent failure of the panels. The condition of the pre-cast panels is generally poor with signs of on-going failure due to corrosion of embedded reinforcement, erosion and break down of the facing mortar and of previous repairs. The attempted historic repairs are of low quality in a deteriorating condition or failed completely. Metal restraint fixing slots were found to be corroded and in need of replacement. Besides their intrinsic poor quality and inherent defects, the pre-cast panels are potentially at the end of their serviceable life, and the specialist survey recommends full replacement with new pre-cast panels allowing for the introduction of insulation.
- Recommendations include concrete repairs to the entire length of the 3rd floor cornice and removal of the extremely deteriorated 3rd floor cladding to be replaced with the same solution intended for the 2nd, 1st floors and at ground level.
- The condition survey also reports that Facing brickwork appears in reasonable condition with isolated fracturing on the North and East elevations where pointing appeared to be sound with minimal evidence of historic replacements. There are more significant fractures and subsidence affecting brickwork on the West elevation. Fractures and subsidence have damaged the fire escape fixings which are no longer providing restraint to the

staircase. It is recommended further investigation and structural engineer consultation is carried out to determine the cause and develop an appropriate repair strategy.

- The rendered areas of the facade to the West wing are in poor condition with cracking in areas which require further structural investigation. New render should consider any movement joints required in the façade of the West wing to minimise the risk of future cracking.
- Travertine marble cladding panels have been used to clad columns and fascia on the East elevation. There were signs of minor displacement observed to low level panels, but these appeared to be restrained. Some cracked tiles require replacement, and a general cleaning is recommended as well as possible re-fixing of the larger cladding stones at the canopy columns which appear dislodged.
- The specialist survey recommends developing a Planned Preventative Maintenance strategy including a 5-10-year cycle of surveys following completion of the masonry works to maintain the fabric and long-term integrity of external masonry and helping to reduce the frequency and cost of future possible repair.
- The proposed repair works to stone cladding, concrete elements, brick masonry and replacement of the pre-cast concrete panels are soundly justified and are necessary to protect the building from further decay, also to enhance its thermal performance and to ensure its optimal and continued use. Accordingly, these works are welcome in principle from the heritage conservation perspective although the proposed energy efficiency enhancements will lead to some degree of departure from the original design and depth of the concrete cladding. Considering the important yet subtle architectural qualities of the listed building, including its lightweight, largely glazed facade currently surrounded by a perceivably coplanar concrete cladded frame, any necessary departure from the original design and aesthetic of the concrete facades will need to be minimized and harmonized with the design and proportions of the windows and curtain wall replacements, and would be considered acceptable from the heritage conservation perspective. The need and benefits of the proposed replacement panels as part of an effective set of energy efficiency improvements forms part of the council sustainability experts' assessment. Further details of the proposed repairs, and replacement panels will be necessary at condition stage to ensure that any impact deriving from this set of works is minimized through good design and that the original aesthetics and proportions among the various components and materials of the façade are respected.
- The aluminium curtain walling and steel windows at all levels are single glazed and are in poor condition. It is therefore proposed to fully replace these elements due to their negative impact on the overall thermal performance of the building, including perceived glare discomfort and heat gain due to solar film applied to most of the existing windows. These original glazed elements are key features of the original design and character of the listed building, strongly characterise its architectural composition and the aesthetics of both facades and internal spaces and require a clear and convincing justification for their total loss and full replacement. The replacement proposal has thoroughly considered the finding of the ASWS window survey that evidenced how from the technical perspective, full refurbishment and potential enhancement of the existing steel windows is possible. The report suggests that a full replacement is also technically possible, but also stresses the issues associated with a poor energy performance and presence of asbestos. The ASWS report also evidences the decay conditions of the aluminium windows which are largely beyond repair and advises that sympathetic replacements should be pursued and is accepted from the heritage conservation stance. The enhancement of the energy performance and overall comfort of the building are important considerations and have been balanced throughout the design process with the need to preserve the building and its original features from harm. The application stresses how important is to also replace the steel windows to achieve the maximum and most consistent level of thermal efficiency improvements, and the proposed full replacement of steel and aluminium windows and curtain walling with very similar replacements that respect the overall composition and aesthetics of the host building can be acceptable if it successfully delivers energy efficiency improvements as per the council sustainability experts' opinion.
- The proposed demolition of the front entrance steps and reconfiguration of the access through a central ramp to replace the steps is based on an Accessibility Statement from Buro Happold that indicates the noncompliance of the existing 1990's access ramp with current requirements and advises on the technical feasibility to run new ramps or slopes left and/ or right away from the front doors. It is understood that a new ramp located to the right-hand side of the existing entrance will need to be long and convoluted to retain two malus trees. However, the Statement discards the ramp located to the left of the entrance, where a ramp already exists based on the impact to the frontage of the Civic Centre due to the associated lengths of walls and railings which must be provided. This justification for the harmful redesign of the existing entrance, whose relevant feature has always

been the uncluttered design, raised access level and soaring silhouette of the canopy, is therefore based on aesthetic impact of the new ramp on the facade of the listed building. No technical justification for discarding the replacement of the current ramp with a new and compliant ramp is provided. Which, from the heritage conservation perspective confirms that it is technically possible to provide dignified and inclusive access into the building without causing further alterations with associated loss of original design and features on the listed façade.

- The existing 1990's access ramp, as much as very utilitarian addition, has still allowed to retain so far, the original design of the entrance and hasn't introduced a totally uncharacteristic symmetric composition of the entrance as the current proposal. This element of the proposal has been discussed at pre-application stage focusing on the important to satisfy universal access needs while maximising retention of original design and minimizing alterations to well-preserved, defining architectural features of the listed building.
- The application unconvincingly proposes the total reconfiguration of the existing entrance, including an asymmetric couple of uncharacteristic side plinths to both side of the proposed central ramp and raises concerns that unnecessary harm will be caused to the main elevation of the listed building. Therefore, this element of the proposal cannot be supported.

New extensions

There is no objection in principle to the proposed new link buildings, the new office building located to the north of the site and related landscape scheme, and the conservation position concurs with the comments and consent conditions provided by the urban design officer. The submitted accurate views of the proposed development at Haringey Civic Centre as seen in relevant views of the listed site across the Conservation Area, show how the extension to the listed building will complement the scale, overall proportions and architectural language of the Civic Centre and its conservation area setting while retaining the legible primacy of the listed building along the high road and while providing much needed and state of the art office and civic spaces on a currently underutilised Site. The proposed new development is promising and will very likely have a positive impact on the setting of the Civic centre, surrounding listed buildings and its conservation area. However, detailed building and landscape design are fundamental to ensure that the new development delivers all its design potential, where the design of highly visible and prominent built elements, such as the crowning plant enclosure that will define its roofline will need to be carefully detailed to elegantly complement the roofline and silhouette of the civic centre and surrounding heritage assets.

Conclusions

The proposed refurbishment works and extensions to the Civic Centre are welcome in principle as opportunities to bring the listed building back into beneficial use and as promising enhancements to the setting of heritage assets and to currently underused site. Further details of the proposed works will be necessary to ensure that any impact is fully mitigated through the most appropriate and detailed design solutions and the proposed scheme is therefore largely supported with the exclusion of the proposed reconfiguration of the access to the main entrance.

Kind Regards,

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Please note the above opinion represents informal officer observation only, offered without prejudice to all future formal Council decisions and accompanying procedures