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London Borough of Camden
Development Management Team
5 Pancras Square
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21 July 2020

Dear Colette,

Camden Town Hall | Application for Listed Building Consent for the Replacement of the Glass Diffuser Panes in the Council Chamber

Introduction

Enclosed is an application for listed building consent, made on behalf of Lendlease, acting as Project Managers on behalf of the London Borough of Camden (LBC), for the replacement of the existing glass diffuser panes in the Council Chamber at the Grade II listed Town Hall, Judd Street, London, WC1H 9JE.

Application content

This application for listed building consent has been submitted via the Planning Portal (ref: PP-08874922). The following make up the application and supporting documents:

- Application form
- Location Plan at scale 1:1250
- Existing Site Plan at scale 1:200
- Existing and proposed floorplan of the council chamber
- Existing and proposed refected ceiling plans of the council chamber
- Design statement by Purcell

We would be grateful if the contents of this letter could also be taken into consideration. Applications for listed building consent are exempt from application fees.

Site

Camden Town Hall (CTH), formerly St Pancras Town Hall, was built between 1934-37 to designs by A.J. Thomas. It is a Grade II listed building, bounded by Judd Street, Euston Road, Tonbridge Walk and Bidborough Street. It is located within the King's Cross Conservation Area, and on the boundary of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. It has been the primary public building and focus of the civic and democratic functions of the London Borough of Camden. The former Assembly Room, previously known as the Camden Centre, lies at the east end of the building with its foyer currently accessed from Bidborough Street.

The site is bounded to the north by Euston Road, a major road with fast flowing traffic, bus and cycle routes. Directly to the north of the site is St Pancras Station and Chambers and the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel. Adjacent to this, on either side, are the Grade I listed British Library and King's Cross Station.

To the west of the site, on Judd Street, are office buildings and student accommodation. The offices of the Royal National Institute for the Blind are located to the south west of the site. Directly south of the site, the character is more residential with the Queen Alexandra Manson Block, a 5-7 storey residential block, located behind the town hall. The streets beyond are formed of terraced houses and mansion blocks and form the northern fringes of Bloomsbury. At the end of Bidborough Street is the Argyle Primary School. At the corner of Bidborough Street and Tonbridge Street, at the south east corner of the site, is the Victorian-era Dolphin Pub.

On the western side of Judd Street, opposite the site is another Victorian pub, the Euston Road Tavern. Directly to the east of the site, on Tonbridge Walk, is the former Town Hall Annex; this was sold by the Council and has been converted into a hotel by a private developer.

There was until recently a bridge linking the Annex to the Town Hall at second floor level. This was removed as part of the Annex conversion and the developer is responsible for making good the exposed Town Hall elevation.

Background

Applications for full planning and listed building consent application (ref: 2019/2238/P and 2019/2257/L) for refurbishment of the Town Hall were submitted in April 2019 and approved at Committee in August 2019, subject to the Section 106 agreement. The proposals will deliver essential building work to upgrade the whole building including the Council Chamber, whilst protecting its historic significance and civic function. The project will create a partnership with new commercial organisations, which will enhance the local economy and provide employment opportunities, while generating a long-term income stream to support the initial investment made by LBC.

The proposals retain the key public functions within the historic CTH at ground and first floor. This includes democratic services, which will operate out of the original Council Chamber and Committee Rooms and the Registry Services which will operate out of the remodelled ground floor of CTH. This will not only ensure that part of the historic use is retained in the building but that CTH will remain open to the public to visit as necessary and enjoy the building.

The Council Chamber ceiling is made up of three banks - a central vaulted section flanked by two flat ceilings with glazed diffusers providing soft light from external lanterns over the ceiling void above. The diffusers are arranged in a long central set of 6x6 panels and two smaller sets of 6x4 panels. The glass panes are fitted into metal frames surrounded by decorative corning and timber partitioning.

In association with the forthcoming works to the Town Hall and in particular the Council Chamber, it is proposed to replace the glass diffuser panes within the tripartite panelled ceiling vault. The existing 6mm glass panes are thought to date from the 1980s, therefore are not original fabric, and are considered unsafe for use in ceilings nowadays. They are generally in poor condition and if they were to break, they would fall in dangerous shards. As a result, their replacement is required. The existing metal frames and decorative surrounds would remain in situ.

Planning Policy Context

The key primary legislation relevant to the planning process is as set out in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Listed Building Act). S.16 and s.66 of the Listed Building Act impose a statutory duty on planning authorities consider the impact of proposals upon listed buildings and their settings.

The policies within The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) including the Planning Practice Guidance 2014 (PPG); and the Development Plan form a material consideration in the determination of this application. The Development Plan is formed of GLA's London Plan 2017 (which is under review), and the Camden Local Plan comprised of: The Camden Local Plan July 2017; the Site Allocations Plan September 2013 and the policies map (updated version) January 2019.

Other relevant guidance is within LBC Kings Cross/St Pancras Conservation Area Statement (December 2003), LBC Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (April 2011). The following policies have been considered in devising this proposal: NPPF Section 12 'Well-designed Places' and new Section 16 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment'; London Plan policy 7.8 Heritage assets and archaeology, 7.9 Heritage-led regeneration; LBC strategic policy D1 Design, D2 Heritage.

Proposal and assessment of work

The primary planning policy consideration for the proposed works is the design impact of the works on heritage significance, namely the special architectural and historic character of the Grade II listed building. The key policy consideration are as follows:

- Section 16 of the NPPF sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced. It requires heritage assets to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- London Plan Policy 7.8 states that development should identify, value, conserve, restore, re-use and incorporate heritage assets, where appropriate. Development affecting heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.
- London Plan Policy 7.9 states that, wherever possible, heritage assets (including buildings at risk) should be repaired, restored and put to a suitable and viable use that is consistent with their conservation and the establishment and maintenance of sustainable communities and economic vitality.
- Policy D1 of Camden's Local Plan requires that development preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2.

- Policy D2 states that the Council will resist proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building.

The existing glass diffuser panes in the ceiling of the council chamber comprise of 6mm thick monolithic Pilkington Arctic patterned glass which is used widely in the 1980s. It is considered dangerous if the glass shatters and fall into the public. Therefore to improve the safety, it is proposed to upgrade all the existing glass diffuser panes to a 6mm Pilkington Optilam laminated glass in translucent white. This will prevent shards of glass from falling in the event that a glass pane is broken. The translucent finish will also improve the light quality and atmosphere within the council chamber. The metal frames and decorative ceilings would remain in place.

Purcell (appointed project architect and heritage advisor) has assessed the significance of the heritage asset and considers that communal value is derived from the overall use of the building as a town hall, contributing to civic presence in the borough. The formal civic functions of the building is particularly expressed in the spatial qualities and character of the Council Chamber along with the committee and members' rooms and the richness of the materiality within these spaces. It was noted in the Heritage Statement (2019), submitted as part of the planning and listed building consent (ref: 2019/2238/P and 2019/2257/L), that the glazing over the Council chamber is thought to have been replaced previously and therefore not original.

Overall, the proposals will result in sensitive improvements to the heritage asset and no harm to the heritage asset will arise, rather the proposed upgrade of the glazing will improve the safety and the overall operations of a public building. The new glazing will preserve and enhance the heritage asset into the future, in accordance with Section 16 of the NPPF. There will be no adverse impact on the special architectural and historic character of the Grade II listed building nor the surrounding Conservation Area. The works fully meet the objectives of the NPPF (section 16), London Plan policies 7.8 and 7.9, as well as Camden Local Plan policies D1 and D2.

Summary

CTH is an important building in Camden and the proposed works will ensure that appropriate repair works are undertaken to the ceiling of the council chamber to futureproof it, whilst preserving its heritage and ensuring the long-term longevity of the building.

The proposals are not considered to cause harm in accordance with NPPF terminology and are fully justified in the context of the works. They will fully respect the special architectural or historic interest of the listed building. Overall, the proposals will support the LBC's function and mission and will continue to enhance the building's important status and significance.

If you have any questions, please contact susie@theplanninglab.com or melanie@theplanninglab.com (0207 257 9363).

Yours sincerely,

Susie Taylor
The Planning Lab