

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Application Details

Heritage, Conservation & Design team officer

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Date

24 October 2025

Application reference

25/00846/LBC

Address

Rochdale Town Hall, The Esplanade, Rochdale, OL16 1AZ

Proposal

Listed building consent for installation of modern artwork hanging track system onto walls

Affected Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets

- Rochdale Town Hall (grade I)

Non-designated heritage assets

N/A

Summary

There are concerns regarding the position and impact of the hanging track system in the Zodiac Room, Entrance to the Mayor's Parlour and Corridor to the Zodiac Room. These concerns relate to the visual impact of the hanging system in high significance rooms.

Assessment

Site description and significance

Rochdale Town Hall is listed at grade I, placing it amongst the most significant historic buildings in the country. Designed by William Crossland, it is a fine example of a Victorian town hall as well as being an outstanding example of the Gothic Revival. Its original form is little altered except for the later tower, added after the original burned down. Internally original decorative schemes remain

including in the Great Hall and the Exchange. The Town Hall has recently reopened to the public after undergoing a major restoration.

Relevant legislation and planning policy

Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that *“in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority [...] shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”*.

NPPF paragraph 213 states that *“any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.”*

Paragraph 215 states that *“where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.”*

The above means that the local planning authority is required to place considerable weight (great weight in the terms of the NPPF) on the need for conservation. This means that changes to listed buildings which may result in some harm should be avoided or, if that is not possible, the impact minimised. The LPA may grant LBC for the works if the public benefit outweighs that harm.

Assessment of proposals

The proposal is for the installation of a new artwork hanging system in the various locations of the Town Hall. Each of these spaces and the potential heritage impacts are considered below:

Ground floor - Mayors Parlour

This room has previously been identified as being of high significance and provides the entrance to some of the most significant rooms within the Town Hall, including the Mayor's Parlour. The plans indicate a single track would be installed on the northeastern internal wall. This wall is unadorned by the ceiling above is vaulted. The simplicity of the decor allows for an appreciation of the ceiling.

Historic England have raised concerns with the positioning of the track in this location, and these concerns are shared. The track would run across the full length of the wall. Given the vaulted nature of the ceiling, it could not be hidden by decorative features. If artwork is accepted in this location it would need to be a reduced scheme. One option to explore may be a single fixing to the wall, as this would remove the visual impact of the track.

First floor – Zodiac Room

This room has been identified as being of high significance and is now used a bar for functions. While the walls are unadorned it has an original decorative scheme on the ceiling, and ornate timber work and decorative corbels. The proposed plans show tracks to run along two of the walls, positioned between the ceiling beams.

Historic England have raised concerns about the placement of tracks in this location. Again, these concerns are shared, and the scheme should be revised to address them. One option may be to reduce the extent of the track so that it only relates to certain portions of the room rather than the full length of two of the walls.

First floor – Corridor outside Zodiac Bar

As with the Zodiac Room, this corridor is identified as being of high significance. This corridor has a relatively simple decorative scheme, with wood panelling at lower level. There are circular protrusions on the wall. The hanging track is proposed to be positioned below these protrusions. the concern raised by HE is that this would make the tracking system more prominent than if it could have been positioned below the picture rail. Can the tracking system be split so that it sits below the picture rail, with gaps to accommodate the circular protrusions? This would help to reduce its visual appearance.

First floor – Corridor outside Magistrates Court

This corridor is also identified as being of high significance. As with the above corridor it has a relatively simple decorative scheme, with wood panelling at lower level. the proposal shows the hanging track system to be positioned below the picture rail. Subject to making good of any damage to the plasterwork and the colour matching of the track, this element would be acceptable in heritage terms.

Second floor – Activity suite and lobby

These rooms have previously been identified as being of medium significance. The rooms do not have an ornate decorative scheme and it is understood that the tracks would be able to be positioned underneath the cornice. While there would be some harm from the installation of the tracks, this could be mitigated through colour coding of the tracking and making good of the plaster and paintwork when no longer required. With these conditions and noting the reversibility of the proposals and the simple decor scheme, this location is considered acceptable in heritage terms.

Conclusions

There are concerns regarding the position and impact of the hanging track system in the Zodiac Room, Entrance to the Mayor's Parlour and Corridor to the Zodiac Room. The scheme should be revised to overcome these concerns.

Re-consultation

Yes – on submission of revised plans.