

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Conservation & Design Team Officer	Michael Atkinson-Smith
Date	14.04.25
Application Reference	24/01266/LBC
Address	Touchstones Arts and Heritage Centre, The Esplanade, Rochdale OL16 1AQ
Proposal	Listed Building Consent for alterations and repairs to Grade II Listed Building consisting of: Re-slating of existing roofs, upgrade of roof insulation, stone repairs, renewal of lead flashings and soakers, new lead abutment gutter, replacement of plastic hoppers and downpipes with cast iron fittings, new comprehensive lightning protection system and replacement of dormer windows.

Designated Heritage Assets Affected	Y	Application building (Touchstones), Grade II Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area (Civic Quarter Character Area) - within Statue of John Bright MP, Grade II – setting of Broadfield Park, Grade II – setting of
Non-Designated Heritage Assets Affected	N	Broadfield Hotel, Sparrow Hill, Rochdale – Grade 1 Local Interest Building – setting of Police Headquarters, The Esplanade, Rochdale – Grade 2 Local Interest Building – setting of

Assessment

The application is supported by a detailed Design, Access and Heritage Statement prepared by a suitably qualified conservation accredited architectural practice. On this basis, there is no good reason to disagree with its general findings or the suggestions contained within.

However, there are few points to note:

- The report notes that the 'new' roof covering would have a primary heritage impact but acknowledges that only 25% of the existing Westmorland green slate roof may reusable. The preferred option would be to explore fully the potential for slate from the original source to be utilised, although reported supply chain issues and project timeframes are noted. Only if it can be suitably evidenced that the use of slate material from the original source is not possible should other options be considered. A sample of any new slates sourced must be viewed on site in the context of the original before being utilised, with agreement in writing from the LPA.
- Less than substantial harm would be caused to the appearance of the building through the addition of extra lead flashings and the lifting of coping stones and balustrades to add a damp proof course, although it is accepted that there would be clear heritage benefits in respect of ensuring the longevity of the building and a reduction in future maintenance liabilities.
- The replacement of the existing dormer windows with painted hardwood appears to have been adequately justified based on the demonstrated impacts of rot and deflection from weight loading. The material, colour and works methodology should be included within the application for expedience or could be conditioned.

- No objection to the reforming of the lead work of the dormer cheeks and flashings, subject to confirmation of the lead code.
- Side by side replacement of rafter ends and steel plate repairs of purlins, where relevant, would represent a reasonable compromise to preserve historic fabric.
- It is agreed that the replacement of existing uPVC downpipes to the northern elevations and the dormers would represent an enhancement.
- No objection to the provision of the proprietary metal capped vent to the chimney, subject to appropriate colour treatment.
- No objection subject to a lightning protection system, subject to submission of full details being conditioned and plastic-coated earthing rods being suitable unexposed.

Subject to the submission of the requisite details, it is considered that any less than substantial harm to the historic building, including potential permanent total loss of some small areas of historic fabric, would be outweighed by the public benefits of ensuring the longevity and viability of a popular local cultural and visitor attraction for future generations to enjoy.

I would therefore conclude that, subject to the suggested requests for further detail in due course, the application would accord with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P2, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1, P2 & P3, saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan policy BE/17 and the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.