

Heritage Impact Assessment



Town Head House, Yorkshire Street, Rochdale

Our Ref: 22-039

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1.0 Introduction

Storah Architecture have been commissioned by Raj Property Investments Ltd to seek planning and listed building consent for the change of use of the former Council offices at Townhead to form residential apartments.

2.0 Background to the application

In June 2015, Storah Architecture were commissioned by Hallmark Developments (NW) Ltd to prepare a heritage statement to describe the significance of the buildings at Townhead to inform proposals for the redevelopment of Town Head House, Rochdale, which is listed, grade II and within the Town Head conservation area. Subsequently, Storah Architecture prepared a heritage impact assessment to consider proposals by A J Cocker Associates to convert the building to apartments. This scheme obtained planning permission and listed building consent, but lapsed due to the non-discharge of pre-commencement planning conditions.

The property was then sold to Raj Property Investments Ltd who wish to continue with the development, but with a slightly amended layout. This heritage impact assessment considers the impacts of the revised scheme.

This statement has been prepared by Richard Storah, to address the requirements of Section 12 of the NPPF, in particular para 194, which states 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected.' The statement will consider the significance of Town Head House.

3.0 The need for change

The building is a former council office, which following disposal by the Council has since been left vacant both before and following sale. Office use is not considered viable in this location and change of use to form flats, for which there is a demand is proposed.

The NPPF (para. 197) states that "In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of... ..the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation." The accompanying Planning Practice Guidance notes that "sustaining heritage assets in the long term often requires an incentive for their active conservation. Putting heritage assets to a viable use is likely to lead to the investment in their maintenance necessary for their long-term conservation."

Though this report is not a condition survey, it is apparent that a number of unsympathetic alterations have been made in the past (possibly prior to listing), that there are some condition issues which need to be addressed and that to ensure the future maintenance and conservation of the building a viable use for the building must be found.

4.0

Methodology and basis of design approach

Town Head House was built as a single large dwelling. The layout of this earlier part of the building allows the use be reverted back to its original form as a house, though a large single dwelling is not viable in this location, the building retains a domestic scale which allows for sympathetic conversion.

The Board Office extension was purpose built as offices and so any proposed change of use would introduce new functions with no past precedent. It does however repeat the scale of the earlier house, so generally has a modest and relatively domestic scale which again allows for sympathetic conversion. The single large space within the building is the Board Room for the Poor Law Union, which has previously been sub-divided, possibly prior to listing.

The proposal is to convert the building to form 14 flats. The existing entrances to the Board Office building and the link section will be retained and common entrances, with the main door to Town Head House retained for use of Flat 7.

There are only modest alterations proposed to the exterior of the building, with a later metal fire escape stair and doorway being removed and the opening restored to its original pattern as a window. Where windows are to be replaced they will match either the existing frames or revert to the original pattern of the sash windows.

Internally flats have been designed to reflect the pattern and form of the existing rooms, with few new structural openings, though subdivision of larger rooms being inevitable to accommodate the new use.

Circulation routes within the building are altered, though the existing building does not reflect the historic pattern in any case. The original plan of Town Head House was of a large, high status dwelling planned to be serviced by staff with service rooms in the basement and to the north. Circulation patterns were altered firstly to face away from Yorkshire Street (which was its original frontage) and later in the conversion to office use. Circulation within the offices was of a centre core running though the link with a public entrance to the north and a staff entrance to the link, with an entrance for the Guardians of the Poor Law via the main door to Town Head House and an approach via a grand stair to the Board Room. The proposal cuts the central circulation core, but retains the grand stair and approach to flats on the upper level. This provides a balance between the functional needs of the building and the retention of the earlier evolved building form.

Earlier high status joinery is to be retained where practicable, including the door and casing to flat 13 which will be blocked but retained during the works.

The Board Room has been sub-divided in the past. It is a double height space with a vaulted decorated plaster ceiling. Further sub-division is proposed at low level, with a glazed half height mezzanine inserted into each of the existing spaces to provide additional accommodation, whilst leaving the ceiling visible and clear of intervention.

Heritage Statement: Town Head House, Rochdale

The majority of the former gardens and earlier landscaping have previously been given over to car parking. These are now in separate ownership and outside the curtilage of the development.

5.0 The impact of the proposed works

There are no significant alterations to the external fabric of the building including the windows. The removal of the fire escape (which is considered to have a negative value on the historic context) is considered to be beneficial. This does not affect the historic significance of the building and will improve its appearance.

The internal layout of the building has been altered through sub-division of spaces and amendments to circulation, though no major interventions are proposed. The sub-division of the Board Room reflects past alterations, but has no adverse impact on the historic fabric.

8.0 Conclusion

The proposals are for modest alterations to the internal layout of both the original Town Head House and the later Poor Law Union Offices and Board Room.

The building is considered of historic significance, hence its listing at grade II. The proposal does not impact greatly on the historic fabric, its significance nor understanding. There are no alterations to the external envelope of the building which affect its visual character or historic significance.

Internally the proposal is sensitive to the building's historic significance and retains historically significant elements, such as the window surrounds and detailed plasterwork on the ceilings. Removal and relocation of internal sub-divisions have been proposed to both improve the quality of the space and to aid the usability of the building.

The proposal does not impact on the significance nor understanding of the building. It is considered that the proposal meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular para. 197. *"In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; and the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality".*

Report prepared by

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