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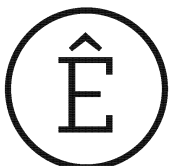
Statement

DATE: 12.04.24
REF: 547.400.004
JOB: 547 Touchstones

Re: Application to Amend First Floor Lobby Design to Gallery 1

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1.0 Introduction and Purpose of Document

- 1.1 This Design, Access and Heritage Statement is submitted by Architectural Emporium Ltd to support the application to amend the proposed entrance lobby design to Gallery 2 within the First Floor of Touchstones arts centre.
- 1.2 The previous design for the lobby has already been covered covered by the consented scheme as follows: Planning Permission Ref 23/00623/FUL and Listed Building Consent Ref 23/00624/LBC. However, the amended design from the original application is vital in the ability to create a nationally significant Art Gallery and ultimately enhance the visitor experience. The lobby itself is designed to ensure it does not read as part of the original fabric and will be read as a wholly contemporary intervention.
- 1.3 Touchstones is the Borough's main arts and heritage venue within the Grade II listed former public library. It is also located within the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area and in proximity to other designated and non-designated heritage assets. As such this Heritage Statement has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). As required by the NPPF, this statement considers the characteristics of the site and the adjacent heritage assets in sufficient detail to understand the potential impact of the proposals on their significance.
- 1.4 For consistency, this statement has been written in the same style as the statement prepared by BB Heritage which forms part of the approved scheme. BB Heritage should be credited for the content of that report and as such some of the information outlined here.

2.0 Development of the Site and Heritage Context

- 2.1 Please refer to section 2.0 of the Heritage Statement submitted with the previous approved application. Ref 23/00623/FUL and Listed Building Consent Ref 23/00624/LBC.
- 2.2 Please also refer to the historic photographs and description as submitted in the drawing pack attached to this application.
- 2.3 The lobby to Gallery 2 is non-original and was installed at some point following the 1977 building refurbishment when the lift was installed.
- 2.4 The lobby appears to have been upgraded in 1997 during works to the building to comply with fire escape and has then remained unchanged since. Another glazed lobby was also added in Gallery 1 at a similar time, this has now been removed as part of the other permitted scheme mentioned in section 1.2.
- 2.5 The lobby is clearly distinguished from the rest of the Gallery as a modern intervention through its design, materiality and height, as it steps higher than the existing exhibition boards. The lobby is also currently very obtrusive within the space, with its significant glazing both limiting wall space
- 2.6 The visitor experience of the gallery space was fundamentally altered following the lobbies construction. Instead of arriving into the space in line with the exhibition boards to either side. The lobby has resulted in any visitor's arrival being in the centre of the room, and therefore the middle of the exhibition. Making navigation of the space difficult without clear a 'start' point.



3.0 Assessment of Significance

3.1 An assessment of significance is a requirement for any planning application that affects a heritage asset. This section of the report provides an assessment of the heritage merit of the application site based on desk-based research and site visits. The assessment has been carried out with reference to the heritage values as defined in the English Heritage document Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidelines which can be summarised as follows;

- Evidential value – the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity (i.e. archaeological interest)
- Historical value – the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life are connected through a place.
- Aesthetic value – the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place (i.e. architectural and artistic interest)
- Communal value – the meanings of a place for the people that relate to it.

3.2 A statement of significance uses the following ‘grades’ of significance:

- Exceptional – the elements of the heritage asset which are of exceptional value (equivalent to Grade I)
- High – the elements of the heritage asset which are of high value (equivalent to Grade II*)
- Considerable – the elements of the heritage asset which are of moderate value (equivalent to Grade II)
- Some – the elements of the heritage asset which are of some value (equivalent to local listing status)
- Neutral – the elements of the heritage asset which have neutral value
- Negative – the elements of the heritage asset which have a negative impact or are visually intrusive
- Undefined – any elements which could be of heritage value but have yet to be determined due to lack of available information

3.3 Evidential Value

As noted above, evidential values are those that derive from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity (Conservation Principles para.35). These values will usually comprise physical remains inherited from the past and tend to be primarily archaeological in form. Consequently, the ability to understand and interpret the evidence is diminished in proportion to the extent of its removal or replacement (Conservation Principles para.36). The building itself has potential to yield evidential value relating to the 19th and early 20th century phases of construction, this has been diminished slightly by later alterations and the evidential value is considered to be limited to revealing construction materials, methods and past finishes for example. The ‘opening up works’ already complete within the first-floor galleries has revealed some of the original fabric including the tongue and groove gallery walls and some of the original ventilation system.

3.4 Historic Value

As noted above, historical values derive from the ways in which people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present day (Conservation Principles para.39). The evidence may be either illustrative or associative. The site and building of Touchstones have considerable illustrative and associative historical value. The building is important regionally and is locally significant in representing the wealth and



ambition of the area at the time. There is particular historical value in the ambition to provide a significant public cultural building including these galleries in particular. It is also an important part of the historical fabric of the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area and a key component of the Town Hall, Square & Esplanade Character Area showing the historic development of this part of the town centre.

3.5 Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place (Conservation Principles para 46), in particular architectural and artistic interest. The site and building of Touchstones have considerable aesthetic value both externally to the building fabric and setting and also internally. Externally the aesthetic value is principally derived from the original building materials and historic detailing, key elements of the setting also contribute to the aesthetic value. Internally the principal plan form and phases of construction remain highly legible. The aesthetic value has been diminished in areas where later alterations have been made which have removed or concealed historic detailing or finishes such as on the walls of all 4 galleries. However, there are still key elements of historic value such as historic floor finishes and exposed roof structure.

3.6 Communal Value

Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory (Conservation Principles para 54). As a building which was intended for public use and has been in constant public use since its original construction in 1884, the site of Touchstones has considerable communal value. It could be argued that as a later addition the galleries themselves have slightly less significance than the original library but this is negligible.

3.7 Conclusions & Capacity for Change

The site and building of Touchstones as assessed previously (Ref 23/00623/FUL and Listed Building Consent Ref 23/00624/LBC) has some evidential value and considerable historic, aesthetic and communal value. The values are derived from its construction as an important public asset, its continual use as a public asset, the historic materials, detailing and its expression of its region and locality. The First Floor galleries are no different to this original assessment. The original lobby design and protrusion into the Gallery space has covered up some of the original historic fabric within gallery 2 and provided a different arrival point into the Gallery than was originally intended. The lobby itself is also non-original, holding no heritage significance.

Whilst we accept that the change of direction on entering the room could be to have an impact on the historic environment, we believe that the current lobby already compromises the entry experience and due to the extensive justification and public benefits as outlined in Section 6.0 of this report there is capacity for change.



4.0 Proposed Works & Heritage Impact Assessment

4.1 This application is an 'extension' to the previous approved applications Ref Planning Permission Ref 23/00623/FUL and Listed Building Consent Ref 23/00624/LBC. This application covers the amended proposed works to Gallery 2's lobby only. The proposed changes to the lobby will be completed within the main scope of works of the refurbishment.

4.2 Heritage Impact Assessment

The project requirements do involve a series of alterations / interventions to be made. The following impact assessment is structured as follows;

- assessment of changes due to physical alterations / interventions to the built fabric
- assessment of changes to the setting

4.3 Assessment of changes due to physical alterations / interventions to the built fabric

- All works covered by this application are only to the non-original internal entrance lobby to Gallery 2 and therefore have a minimal impact on any building fabric with historical or heritage significance.
- The extent of the lobby's protrusion into the Gallery space will not be altered further nor will the existing lobby's height, width or general extents.
- Additional exhibition wall space will be provided due to the reduced amount of glazing to the lobby. A fan light above the new double-glazed doors will still allow light into the lobby, whilst also providing a visual driver for any visitors entering the lobby from the stair or lift.
- The 'start' point of any future exhibitions will be dictated much more clearly and will avoid any visitor confusion. The proposed arrival point within the gallery could be argued as more authentic to the original intended gallery design, as the visitor is significantly closer to the exhibition boards (on the left-hand side upon entry).
- A screen is proposed to be included opposite the main entrance doors to Gallery 2 for visual information and digital interaction which is deemed vital to the gallery's success. This proposal means there will still be an engagement point (now screen instead of window) directly ahead of any visitors entering the lobby.

4.4 Assessment of changes to the setting

- All works as covered by this application are to the interior of the building. No changes to the external elevation are required. Therefore, the works covered in this application will have no effect on the setting of the building.



5.0 Statutory Requirements

5.1 The aim of the following statement is to demonstrate that the proposed works meet the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

5.2 PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) ACT 1990

- Section 66 of the Act requires that in considering whether to grant listed building consent special regard should be given to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and that 'considerable importance and weight' should be attached to any harm to a designated heritage asset.
- **Response:** The proposals seek to improve the functionality and visitor experience of the First Floor Galleries whilst also providing additional exhibition wall space. The intervention as described here, has only a small impact on the historic environment. All interventions are internal and therefore have no impact on the external setting of the building.

5.3 National Planning Policy Framework

5.3.1 Section 16 (paras 189-208) of the NPPF is specific to conserving and enhancing the historic environment

5.3.2 Para 197 states; *'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 positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- *the desirability of the new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'*

Response: The proposals as outlined in this application seek to promote the galleries as part of Touchstones to a wider audience and as such can significantly enhance the building's contribution to sustainable communities and its economic viability.

5.3.3 Para 200 states; *'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'*

Response: As described above, the proposals outlined in this application relate only to a non-original lobby with no extent, size or projection changes into the Gallery space.



5.3.4 Para 202 states; *'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 including, where appropriate securing its optimum viable use.'*

Response: Please see 'client justification statement' below which clearly outlines the substantial benefits the proposal will achieve, especially in securing its optimum viable use.

6.0 Client Justification Statement

Mark Doyle - Director of Arts, Heritage and Wellness

Sarah Hodgkinson - Senior Curator - Exhibitions & Collections

The main need for the lobby area to be changed is to allow more space to show our growing collection of historic and contemporary artworks, museum objects and related material. This is incredibly important to us as it offers audiences the opportunity to see more of what's currently and usually in storage. The people of Rochdale own the collections and a question we are always being asked is 'why we are not showing more of the collections?' so responds to this perfectly. Enabling our exhibitions within this space to be bigger, with more to see and do. The change will also allow flexibility on the reverse of the wall, in the actual lobby area. Here we can use the area for interpretation, introducing the themes and ideas within the exhibitions, show what other events and activities are happening around the building, or use to display more of the collections.

It will also aid a reveal of the exhibition in Gallery 2, at the moment you can see directly into the gallery from the stairway and landing area through the glass wall, which affects how you experience the exhibition and collections within the space. It also changes how you view and think about the art work and museum objects in the other gallery spaces.

Currently, the existing wall also significantly affects the visitor flow, with audiences finding it difficult to navigate their way around the space, wondering where to start their experience. They enter in the middle of the exhibition with collections on the left- and right-hand side of them as they enter which can be incredibly confusing. With a solid wall we could start the exhibition on the left-hand side of the space, where you enter so visitors would move around to the right, which makes much more logical sense to both our audiences and ourselves.

In summary the justification for the proposed change is as follows:

- The functionality and purpose of Gallery 2 as an exhibition space is severely compromised by the existing glass wall of the lobby.
- The position of the doors mean that visitors are already well into the space before the exhibition / experience starts.
- Countless museum studies have indicated that when entering an exhibition most people will naturally move to their left to begin their journey. This is where most curators would start an exhibition with an introduction panel, setting the scene.
- As things stand if we were to do the same, someone would have to enter and the double back on themselves which is highly unlikely.
- Instead, we have no alternative but to put an introduction either on the wall straight in front of you as you enter the space (just to the right of the doorway into Gallery 3) – not ideal for the above reasons, but also visitors have repeatedly commented they thought it was the introduction to whatever is in Gallery 3 – or on some kind of free-standing structure in the middle of the floor.



- In short, the lobby entrance/ doors make it impossible to create a natural /normal flow for an exhibition and interpretation.
- The proposed changes would resolve this.
- They would also enable us to gain more invaluable wall space – facing into the space (for exhibiting works) but also on the reverse for a variety of purposes – digital marketing, further information about the public events programme etc.
- I think it's also important to say that Gallery 2 is the main space in which we will showcase the borough's art, museum and local history collections through big thematic shows changing every 2 years. The more wall space we have (and this space functions as a normal exhibition space) the more works/heritage we can show.
- Ultimately the changes we're proposing will significantly improve the primary purpose of the Gallery as an exhibiting space.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 The NPPF requires planning applicants and local planning authorities to assess and understand the particular nature of the significance of heritage assets which will be affected by proposed development. Such assessment of heritage asset significance is necessary to understand the potential impact of proposed development.

7.2 This report considers the nature of the significance of the proposed site, adjacent heritage assets and their setting.

7.3 The proposed development requires some physical alterations, the extent of which is considered to be limited and will lead to a relatively low level of harm. This low level of harm is considered to be significantly outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme.

7.4 Therefore, the proposals are considered to meet the requirements of the NPPF.

