

## **Rochdale Town Hall Steps, Rochdale, OL16 1NJ HERITAGE ASSESSMENT**



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## Document Control Sheet

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## **SECTION A: INTRODUCTION**

### **A1: KEY DATA**

Heritage Assets: Rochdale Town Hall Steps

Location: Packer St, Rochdale, OL16 1NJ

National Grid Reference:

Designation: Conservation area

Building type/function: Historic Steps

Date: 1622 possibly 1300

Development proposal: To repair and rebuild the steps and walls leading from Packer Street behind the Town Hall up to the grounds of St Chads Church

## **A2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Possibly dating back to the 12th century, these steps have been the key route linking the town centre to the Church of St Chad for hundreds of years. Mourning relatives would climb these steps and scatter rue and rosemary in 'Gods Acre' (St Chad's Churchyard) as an offering to ease the spirits of their loved ones.

For over 4 years as part of the recent renovation of Rochdale Town Hall the steps from Packer St to St Chads has been closed off with no maintenance being carried out in the area. The result of this is the steps are overgrown with vegetation, the stone flag steps have slipped in areas and some of the stone walls are starting to collapse making the walk both up and down the steps hazardous.

A number of surveys have been carried out of the steps with the conclusion that extensive repairs are required to both the steps and side walls.

### **A3: LOCATION AND SETTING**

Located in the heart of Rochdale, linking the Town Hall (Grade I listed) and St Chads (Grade II\* listed), the Church Steps represent a crucial part of the historic and aesthetic value of the town centre.

### **A4. PROPOSAL AND RELEVANT POLICIES**

#### **A4.1 The Site(s)**

#### **A4.2 Designation Conservation Area.**

**Name:**

**List entry Number:**

**Location:** Rochdale Town Hall Steps, ROCHDALE OL16 1NJ

**Description:** Steps: take up identified stone steps, level base, provide foundation and reinstall stone flag steps. Walls: Carefully take down identified sections of collapsing walls, re-build walls with existing stone and bed on lime mortar. Handrails: remove existing handrails on either side of the path, manufacture new handrails and fit on extended brackets to bring handrails up to regulation height.

#### **Clarification**

*Section 1(5) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*

*In this Act “listed building” means a building which is for the time being included in a list compiled or approved by the Secretary of State under this section; **and** for the purposes of this Act—*

*(a) any object or structure fixed to the building;*

*(b) any object or structure within the curtilage of the building which, although not fixed to the building, forms part of the land and has done so since before 1st July 1948, shall be treated as part of the building.*

#### **A4.3 Proposals**

The proposal is to repair and refurbish the stone steps and side walls leading from Packer Street up to St Chads Church grounds, including clearing the vegetation which has grown over the last 4+ years on the cobbled area and steps.

#### **A4.4 Relevant planning policies**

As the area is part of a Grade 2 listed designated heritage assets, both national and local planning policies relating to the historic environment are relevant to the application. Nationally, these policies are contained within Section 12 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) of the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), and locally by Chapter 19 (Design and the Built Environment) of Rochdale MBC's Unitary Development Plan, 2006. These policies are examined further in Section D of this report.

#### **A4.5 Heritage Assessment/Methodology**

Paragraph 128 of the NPPF states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. Consequently, Rochdale MBC Property Services has produced this heritage assessment to evaluate the significance of the area and the impact of the proposal upon this significance.

To reach an understanding of this significance, the following approach was adopted:

1. Documentary research to place the area in its historic context, using documentary sources identified in the text.
2. Interior survey of the area to gain an understanding of the date, evolution and historic character, and identify features of importance.
3. Brief examination of the historic character of The Town Hall Steps, based principally upon the listing details.
4. Extra boundary security measures to be put in place.
5. Analysis of the impact of the proposal upon the heritage assets (Section D), with reference to the proposed works.

## **SECTION B: THE HERITAGE ASSETS**

### **B1: ELEMENTS OF THE SITE**

Stone steps, retaining walls and handrails.

## **Location Plan**

## **B2: DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING**

### **B2.1 List Description**

The list description of Rochdale Town Hall Steps reads:

Possibly dating back to the 12th century, these steps have been the key route linking the town centre to the Church of St Chad for hundreds of years. Mourning relatives would climb these steps and scatter rue and rosemary in 'Gods Acre' (St Chad's Churchyard) as an offering to ease the spirits of their loved ones.

For over 4 years as part of the recent renovation of Rochdale Town Hall the steps from Packer St to St Chads has been closed off with no maintenance being carried out in the area. The result of this is the steps are overgrown with vegetation, the stone flag steps have slipped in areas and some of the stone walls are starting to collapse making the walk both up and down the steps hazardous.

A number of surveys have been carried out of the steps with the conclusion that extensive repairs are required to both the steps and side walls.

### **B2.2 Form**

#### **b. Historic Layout.**

The steps consist of sandstone 118 steps leading from the cobbled slope at the end of Packer Street, the steps lead up to St Chads Church grounds onto a gravestone path. There are stone built retaining wall running up either side of the steps with breaks in the walls for each of the 3 landings.

## **SECTION C: SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT**

### **C1: INTRODUCTION**

### **C1.1 Relevant policy: Section 12 of NPPF**

Paragraph 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of the heritage asset or its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

### **C1.2 Methodology**

The nature of a building's significance may be varied and complex. A means of evaluating the significance of a heritage asset is to apply the criteria used when assessing a building for listing purposes, which are:

**Age and Rarity:** Most buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most built between 1700 and 1840

**Architectural Interest:** Through architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship and also important examples of particular building types and techniques

**Historic Interest:** Encompassing buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history, or close historical association with nationally-important people or events

**Group Value:** Especially where buildings are part of an important architectural or historic group or are a fine example of planning (such as squares, terraces and model villages) Furthermore, a heritage asset derives significance from its setting, as this represents the surroundings in which it is experienced.

In the following sections, the significance of the buildings overall will be examined (Section C2) and thereafter the significance of their surviving features and details (Section C3).

## **C2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE War Memorial.**

### **C2.1 Evaluation**

Using the criteria given in C1.2, the significance of the buildings is evaluated thus:

#### **Age and Rarity:**

A "Blue Plaque" attached to one of the pillars at the start of the steps say the construction of the steps was done pre-1660 but suggest they may have been built as far back as the 12th century.

#### **Architectural Interest:**

These steps have been the key route linking the town centre to the Church of St Chad for hundreds of years. Mourning relatives would climb these steps and scatter rue and rosemary in 'Gods Acre' (St Chad's Churchyard) as an offering to ease the spirits of their loved ones.

**Historic Interest:** NA

**Group Value:**

Unknown

**Setting:**

Within the memorial gardens

## **C2.2 Summary of significance**

The Age of the steps

## **C3: RELATIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUAL FEATURES OF THE BUILDING**

### **C3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to inform the planning and design processes by identifying the original historic features of the buildings and assess their significance.

This is evaluated on a relative scale as follows:

High Significance – Features which make an important contribution to the architectural and historic interest and character of the buildings, through age, rarity, architectural merit or historical association or group value, and whose preservation and enhancement is considered essential

Medium Significance – Those making a lesser contribution, but which nevertheless are also considered worthy of preservation or enhancement

Low Significance – Those making only a limited contribution overall, although not necessarily detracting from it

No Significance – Those which make no contribution to the interest of a building, or could be considered detractive

**C3.2 Features of High Significance**

Historic stone steps.

**C3.3 Features of Medium Significance**

Not applicable

**C3.4 Features of Low Significance**

Not applicable

**C3.5 Features of No Significance**

Not applicable

**C3.6 Summary NA**

## **SECTION D: IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

### **D1: INTRODUCTION**

The planning process will judge the impact of the proposal in the context of both national and local policies governing the historic environment.

Nationally, the NPPF states (Paragraph 131) 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. It adds (paragraph 132) that 'great weight' should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset; the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; and that significance can be lost through development within its setting. Locally, guidelines for conservation of the historic environment are contained within Chapter 19 (Design and the Built Environment) of the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan, 2006. Relevant to this application is Section BE/14 (Alterations and Extensions to Listed Buildings), which states:

Development proposals affecting the character of a Listed Building must not harm the architectural value or historic interest of the host building, its curtilage and the surrounding area. In particular, applications for Listed Building Consent involving alterations and extensions (and repairs where materials and/or techniques differ from the original) will need to demonstrate, through the provision of detailed plans, that:-

- a. Account has been taken of the scale and proportions of the host building, and its relationship to other buildings and their setting;
- b. Sympathetic and high quality materials are used;
- c. Internal spaces, features and fixtures are retained;
- d. Appropriate detailing is employed throughout, particularly the arrangement and design of fenestration and appropriate roof forms. In cases where Listed Building Consent for alteration or extension is given, and where it is appropriate to record the character of the building before works commence, a condition may be attached to such consent, or a legal agreement sought with the applicant relating to a proper programme of recording.

## **D2: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL**

### **D2.1 The Scheme**

The proposal is to repair and rebuild the steps and retaining walls along the route from Packer St to St Chads Church grounds. The steps and walls are in a poor state of repair after being closed off for a number of years while the refurbishment of Rochdale Town Hall was being carried out. The area is now overgrown and many of the steps have moved and have become unsafe to walk on. Also the retaining walls on either side of the steps are falling over in areas and require rebuilding where required. With regards to the steps the proposal is to take up the steps and improve the base, put back the steps level and more secure. There is no plans to replace any of the stone steps or use new materials for the stonework and these will be bedded on lime mortar. With regards to the hand rails the proposal is to replace these with new but to match the original, the brackets are to be fitted into the original leaded holes in the pad stones, the brackets are to be higher so the handrails can be set at a more regulation height, currently the handrail are very low.

We are also looking at the lighting running up the sides of the retaining walls and looking at changing the existing modern street lights to a more traditional black cast iron street lighting.

### **D2.2 Impact upon the Building**

The proposal should have no impact on the War Memorial and will be protected during work.

### **D2.3 Summary**

The proposal is consistent with the conservation of the area, will respect the remaining historic fabric and will sustain or enhance their significance. The nature of the works means there will improve the area and make it again usable by the public. The proposal appears therefore to be in accordance with paragraphs 131 and 132 of the NPPF, and with Rochdale MBC Policy BE/14.

