

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Application Details

Heritage, Conservation & Design team officer

Catherine Fenghour

Date

9 February 2026

Application reference

PL/2025/1191

Address

Touchstones Arts and Heritage Centre, The Esplanade, Rochdale, OL16 1AQ

Proposal

Interior works to the first-floor galleries to amend the proposed entrance lobby design to gallery 2, install glazed doors between gallery 3 and 4 and to remove tongue and groove and other overboarding to gallery walls

Affected Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets

- Touchstone Arts and Heritage Centre (grade II)
- Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area

Non-designated heritage assets

-

Summary

Revisions are required to the proposals for the new doors between galleries 3 and 4. The other elements of the proposal are acceptable in heritage terms

Assessment

Site description and significance

The application site is Touchstone Museum; a grade II listed building located on the Esplanade within the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area. Built in 1884 as a public library and museum, its architectural style denotes its intended civic function, with ornate stonework, arched windows and symbolic carvings.

The building is currently closed for the refurbishment works but continues to be used as an art gallery and museum space and makes an important contribution to this part of the Conservation Area, clustered with a number of other civic buildings, including the grade I listed Town Hall. The building is listed at grade II for its special architectural and historic interest. This interest derives in part from its age, architectural features, civic and community role in the town.

Relevant legislation and planning policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 66(2) - 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.

Assessment of proposals

This application follows on from other listed building consents, covering the internal and external refurbishment works. The works proposed as part of this application include:

- Alteration to the internal entrance lobby to Gallery 2
- New glazed doors between Gallery 3 and 4
- Removal of tongue and groove boarding to gallery walls

Alterations to Gallery 2 entrance lobby

The existing entrance lobby is a later addition, likely installed in the late 20th century to meet fire safety regulations. Proposals have previously been put forwards to amend this lobby. This most recent amendment would have its entrance door aligned with the doors into the gallery, reducing the total amount of glazing. The reduction in glazing would reduce the sense of openness but would also enable a greater area of exhibition space. The revised location of the entrance door (from the previously approved scheme) would also allow a greater appreciation of the original layout and entrance. On balance it is considered that this element would not result in any greater harm than the previously approved scheme. Details of the new door and materials should be sought by condition.

New glazed door between Gallery 3 and 4

There is currently no door between galleries 3 and 4 enabling the free passage of visitors. Historically, there was an ornate timber door surround. This has been lost but the original timber panelling in the door frame appears to have survived. A new door is proposed to be installed in this location, to allow for the climate to be controlled within gallery 4. This will allow for high value art loans and exhibitions to be displayed, which was not previously possible.

There are some concerns about the proposed door in its current location, as it would appear to be sited within the door frame. It is not clear how the new door would interact with the historic panelling. However, it is imagined that there would need to be some fixings and this would result in interference with the historic fabric. Less intrusive means of installing a door should be considered.

When we met on site, we discussed setting the new doors off the panelled frame. Can this option be looked at. I would be happy to discuss further.

Removal of tongue and groove boarding to galleries

Historic images show the galleries had tongue and groove panelling although it is not known whether it is original. The proposals seek to remove this panelling. There would be some harm to the building's significance from the loss of historic fabric. However, it is known that this panelling is in poor condition, has been damaged by previous refurbishments and is likely to be lost or further damaged, when removing later coverings, as has been the case to date. Its removal has also been justified by the need to provide a new metal frame for the modern exhibition boards within the gallery.

It is considered that the harm resulting from the loss of the tongue and groove panelling has been clearly justified and would be outweighed by public benefits.

Conclusions

Revisions are required to the proposals for the new doors between galleries 3 and 4. The other elements of the proposal are acceptable in heritage terms

Re-consultation

Yes