

Officer Report

Case Reference: PL/2025/1256
Location: 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 & groove and other over-boarding to gallery walls.
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions
Officer: Rosalind Gralton

SITE

The site relates to Touchstones, a Grade II listed building in Rochdale Town Centre located at the western end of 'The Esplanade'. It is located approximately 120m distance from the Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall. The site is bound by St Mary's Gate and the Esplanade to the south and west respectively and by the River Roch to the north.

The site is located within the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area, on the edge of the Rochdale Heritage Action Zone.

The site is located in the Defined Urban Area (G/D/1). The site is located in Rochdale Town Centre (G/S/1 & S/5).

The formal listing of the property is under 'Rochdale Central Library, Museum and Art Gallery, The Esplanade', first listed in 1985. The listing details is provided below.

SD 81 SE ROCHDALE THE ESPLANADE (north-west side) 6/55 Rochdale Central Library, Museum and Art Gallery

G.V. II

Library, museum and art gallery, now library. Library 1883, museum and art gallery 1903 and 1913. Jesse Horsfall. Yorkshire stone with slate roof. The 1883 library consists of a central porch and entrance hall flanked on either side by parallel reading rooms. The 1903 extension added a linking passage, porch, hall and stairway to the left of the original building and a two-storey range with art gallery on the upper floor. The 1913 extension involved further rooms to the west and a diagonal wing, all on two storeys. The original library has 3 gables and is symmetrical about the smaller central one; it is all of one storey and has a low central porch with arcaded parapet, elliptical headed door opening with enriched spandrels, overlight enriched advanced gablet with ball finial and 3-light mullion and transom windows to either side with ovolo-moulding. The large gables to either side have 5-light ovolo-moulded mullion and transom windows with segmental heads and dripmoulds, heraldic and inscribed panels above, and ball

finials. The linking passage is detailed similarly but has elliptical headed 3 and 4-light mullioned windows with Art Nouveau stained glass. The museum and art gallery has a 4-bay central section with a 3-bay gable to the right and diagonally-set gable to the left. Detailing is again similar but each gable includes 3 panels of carved figures, one representing science art and literature designed by C.J. Allan and carved by J.J. Millson. The museum was requisitioned in the war and has since been used as part of the library.

Listing NGR: SD8936813188

PROPOSAL

Listed Building Consent is sought for internal works to the upstairs first floor galleries to amend the proposed entrance lobby design to Gallery 2 and install glazed doors between Gallery 3 and 4. The proposal will also remove tongue & groove and other over-boarding to gallery walls.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 (as amended)

Section 66 of the above Act states that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority, or as the case may be, the Secretary of State 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.

Section 72 of the above Act states that in the exercise of planning functions with respect to any buildings or other land in a Conservation Area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Places for Everyone (PfE)

Places for Everyone is a joint development plan for 9 boroughs within Greater Manchester over the period up to 2039, and follows the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF), which was dropped following the decision of Stockport Council to drop out of GMSF in December 2020.

The plan was adopted on 21 March 2024. The relevant policies within PfE are:

JP-P1 – Sustainable Places

JP-J2 – Heritage

JP-P3 – Cultural Facilities

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO3 Improving design, image and quality of place

P2 Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

P3 Improving design of new development

CONSULTATION

Conservation And Design

No objection subject to conditions.

REPRESENTATIONS

The application was publicised by way of neighbour notification, site notice and press notice. No responses were received.

ANALYSIS

Alterations to Gallery 2 Entrance Lobby

The proposed entrance lobby door would have its entrance doors 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 to the building. Subject to conditions, details of the new door and materials should be sought by condition.

New Glazed Door between Gallery 3 and 4

A glazed entrance door is proposed between Gallery 3 and 4. The agent has submitted a door survey which shows evidence of previous door fixings to the frames historic fabric. These proposed fixings are to be reused; and as such, it is considered the installation of the door would not result in an unacceptable interference with the historic fabric. The design of the doors are considered acceptable, with details of materials secured via condition.

Removal of tongue and groove boarding to galleries

The proposals seek to remove some areas of tongue and groove boarding to gallery wall. The removal of this results in some harm to the buildings significance due to loss of historic fabric. However, it is considered that the panelling to be removed is in poor condition, with visible damage. The removal of this is justified by the need to provide a new metal frame for the modern exhibition boards within the gallery.

Balancing Exercise and conclusion

The NPPF requires, where less than substantial harm to a heritage asset is identified, that a balancing exercise is undertaken with respect to the public benefits of a scheme.

The development proposals would result largely in neutral harm to the significance of the building, which is included in the national list at Grade II, however the works of removal of tongue and groove panelling would result in less than substantial harm.

The proposed works which involve removal and need to provide a new metal frame for the modern exhibition boards within the gallery help secure the heritage asset's optimum viable use, securing a viable long-term use for the building and ensuring the longevity of the building and a reduction in future maintenance liabilities. The public benefits of the proposed works will aid bringing the Listed Building back into viable use, with interventions which are ultimately justified and the harm minimised through condition, would clearly outweigh the less than substantial harm that arises.

Therefore, having regard to Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, policy JP-P2 of the adopted Places for Everyone, policies P2, P3 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and Chapter 16 of the NPPF, the application is recommended for approval.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Condition(s) (3)

- 1 The works must be begun not later than three years beginning with the date of this consent.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of section 18 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 The works hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans and documents:

- Location Plan
- Design, Access and Heritage Statement prepared by Architectural Emporium
- Application form
- Drawing No FF-1.002- Existing Block Plan
- Galleries 02-04_Modern Photographs FF-0.010
- Gallery 02-04_Existing T&G Condition FF-0.011
- Existing Internal Elevations_Gallery 02 - FF.1.312
- Existing Internal Elevations_Gallery 03 - FF.1.313
- Existing Internal Elevations_Gallery 04 - FF.314
- External Elevations - FF-1.400
- Proposed First Floor Plan FF-3.101

- Proposed Internal Elevations_Gallery 02 - FF-3.312
- Proposed Internal Elevations_Gallery 03 - FF-3.313
- Proposed Internal Elevations_Gallery 04 - FF-3.314
- Proposed Doorway Options - FF-SK01 | REV * issued 17.03.26 - G3/G4 Test Options
- Proposed Doorway Survey - FF-SK02 | REV * issued 17.03.26 - G3/G4 Doorway Survey Images

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory standard of works in accordance with the policies contained within the Core Strategy, the Unitary Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 Notwithstanding any details on the approved plans, works to the new proposed doors shall not commence until full details of materials to be used on the proposed doors between Gallery 2, Gallery 3 and 4, including product specifications, fixtures and fittings, cross-section and elevation details, glazing, and signage, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall then be carried out in accordance with the approved method statement and details and they shall be retained as approved thereafter.

Reason: In order to ensure use of an appropriate design and materials which are sympathetic to the character of the building and the surrounding area in the interests of visual amenity and heritage. These are in accordance with the requirements of Core Strategy Policies P1, P2 and P3 and the National Planning Policy Framework.