

Consultation Response from KC, Conservation and Design		
2019/92983 Ramsden House, Ramsden Street, Huddersfield, HD1 2TW		
Change of use and alterations to offices (class B1) to form 45 studio apartments for students (class C3) and change of use of ground and first floor units to gym (class D2), flexible A1/A3/A5 use and ancillary student facilities along with associated external alterations and installation of roof top plant		
Date Responded: 19/12/19	Responding Officer: Craig McHugh	Responding Ref: Huddersfield

Summary

Ramsden House forms a key part of the redevelopment of Huddersfield Town Centre in the 1960s and 1970s. Its design probably derives from that of Lever House in New York, although it as a rather average example of its type. Alterations to the shopfronts have diluted its architectural quality and the building detracts from the setting of the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area and the Town Hall. There is no objection in principle to the change of use, however Conservation and Design have concerns about the proposed development on heritage and design grounds, particularly with regards to Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act and Local Plan Policies LP24 and LP25. It would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the Town Hall and the Town Centre Conservation Area. The proposed new interventions are not innovative, respectful of the original design of the building or the surrounding townscape.

Significance of the heritage assets affected and design of the existing building

In 1959 Huddersfield Corporation sought the comprehensive redevelopment of the town's centre. Murrayfield Real Estate was the selected developer for much of the area. Murrayfield's architect for the four phases of 1966-1975 was the J Seymour Harris Partnership. Ramsden House was the first phase of the development. Its slab and podium form and some of its detailing and materials appears to have been based upon that of Lever House, New York by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and completed in 1952. Ramsden House's office block slab is however rather dumpy in comparison to the original. Pevsner's architectural guide notes that it "could stand for many others as the routine image of the replanned urban scene in England during the twenty years up to 1975." The building features a Harold Blackburn mosaic frieze on the Ramsden Street elevation illustrating the development of the woollen industry from domestic production to the industrial revolution. The Princess Street elevation frieze shows local vernacular buildings by Mural Consultants.

Ramsden House's design shares some of the detailing and materiality of Lever House including its glazing arranged in coloured and clear bands and the use of stainless steel. Elements of original stainless steel shopfronts can be seen on several retail units at Ramsden House, including narrow vertical fins separating each unit, a detail that is repeated in the first floor windows around the building and the narrow windows in the New Street and Corporation Street elevations of the office slab. There are two complete original shopfronts on the Corporation Street elevation.

Ramsden House is located in the immediate setting of the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area and numerous listed buildings, most notably the Town Hall, which is listed grade II. Ramsden House detracts from their setting, being of a substantially different scale, style and materials to the buildings that predominate in the town centre. It is however of some historic interest as part of the redevelopment of the town centre in the 1960s and 1970s.

Impact of the proposals on significance and the design of the existing building

The proposed new window treatment to the office slab would run counter to the original design intent of the glazing pattern by introducing vertical stripes in grey colours. This would create an excessively 'busy' pattern that would detract from the setting of the conservation area and the Town Hall.

The proposed new shopfronts would introduce some greater uniformity to part of the ground floor, but result in the loss of the only remaining complete original shopfronts. The proposed shopfronts would be in dark grey frames. Such a colour treatment is rather ubiquitous and neither responds to the original design of Ramsden House or the character of the conservation area. The appearance of the existing building has been greatly undermined by ad hoc alterations to the shopfronts. The opportunity

exists as part of significant refurbishment project to greatly enhance their appearance by reintroducing standard designs, preferably drawing on that of the original shopfronts utilising stainless steel.

Relevant Policies/Guidance

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act requires that 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. Policy LP24 of the Local Plan requires that the form, scale, layout and details of all development respects and enhances the character of the townscape, heritage assets and landscape.

The proposed development, particularly the glazing pattern to the office slab would harm the setting of the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of the Town Hall.

Furthermore Policy LP24 requires, high levels of sustainability, to a degree proportionate to the proposal, through the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings, where practicable and encouraging the incorporation of vegetation and tree planting to assist heating and cooling.

Whilst replacement of the existing building may result in an enhancement to the setting of the heritage assets the re-use of the existing building would have environmental advantages. If the building is to be retained we should encourage higher levels of sustainability. A defining feature of the original Lever House design was a rooftop garden on top of the podium. The introduction of a similar feature at Ramsden House would help contribute to the greening of the town centre in accordance with the Local Authority's Huddersfield Blueprint, which includes further planting along New Street and a Town Park between Queensgate and the library building.

Policy LP25 requires that the design of shop fronts is consistent with the character of the existing building in terms of scale, quality and use of materials. Neither the recent replacement shopfronts nor those proposed as part of the change of use scheme are in keeping with the aesthetic of the original design, which employed stainless steel to create a consciously modern design.

Conclusion

There is no objection in principle to the change of use, however Conservation and Design have concerns about the proposed development on heritage and design grounds, particularly with regards to Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act and Local Plan Policies LP24 and LP25. It would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the Town Hall and the Town Centre Conservation Area. The proposed new interventions are neither innovative nor respectful of the original design of the building or the surrounding townscape.

Recommendations

A more subtle glazing treatment to the office slab should be required, based on a pattern of horizontal banding, with less contrast than the existing. A bronze colour was approved for the nearby former Co-op building (ref: 2017/93886) to respond to the tones of local stone.

Stainless steel curtain walling was used at Lever House, it would be worth investigating if a similar scheme was used at Ramsden House and remains beneath existing paint. This could tie the design of the whole building together.

A more ambitious scheme of shopfront replacement should be encouraged, preferably modelled on surviving original stainless steel shopfronts. This would give the building a distinct character of its own.

Rooftop planting to the podium should be encouraged along with higher levels of sustainability.

Craig McHugh, IHBC
Senior Conservation and Design Officer