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# THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

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Your reference: 2023/65/90112/E  
& 2023/62/90024/W

Our reference: n/a

21<sup>st</sup> February 2023

Dear Richard Riggs,

**RE: Listed Building Consent for partial demolition of Listed Building to facilitate refurbishment and extension of the George Hotel to form 90+ room C1 hotel with associated ancillary uses (including bar, restaurant, gym, conference room) (within a Conservation Area)**

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society about this application. We **object** to the proposed demolition of the North West wing, partial demolition of the East wing and additional 3 storey extension.

## Significance and harm

The George Hotel in Huddersfield is a Grade II\* listed railway hotel designed by William Wallen in 1849-1850 with extensions in 1850 and 1938. It is notable for its grand Italianate style, early plan form, and historic role as the site of the founding of Rugby League in 1895. The hotel exemplifies a railway hotel of the "heroic" era of railway expansion between 1841-1850, and serves as a prime example of purpose-built commercial premises from the mid-19th century. Its architectural layout highlights the shift from coaching inns to commercial hotels. The hotel also has strong group value with other listed buildings in St. George's Square.

Our principal concerns are the lack of a convincing justification for the demolition and the proposed extension's inappropriate design for a very prominent, and historically significant, location beside the Grade I Listed Huddersfield station.

The North West wing constructed in 1874 as a service range, containing a kitchen and laundry with further staff accommodation added in 1963. The wing is adorned with a handsomely proportioned chimney and numerous square framed windows.

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Although the interiors and exteriors have been altered, such a far-reaching scheme, as is proposed, is not justified. The NW wing demonstrates the evolution and growth of The George hotel; increased staffing and back of house facilities. Moreover, the chimney and exterior walls positively add to the almost exclusively 19<sup>th</sup> century-built environment, in particular the setting of the grade I listed station building.

The justification for the full demolition of this wing is primarily based on the client's minimum requirements for bedrooms, 90+. Option appraisals clearly demonstrate that up to 79-85 rooms could be achieved without the large scale of proposed demolition. Falling short by 5 bedrooms across the site would not make the hotel financially unviable, but the large scale of demolition would cause less than substantial harm to The Huddersfield conservation area and substantial harm to the historic and architectural significance of The George Hotel.

Many service ranges within historic buildings were lost throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they were seen to be of little value or interest to the main structures. The survival of this wing is therefore worthy of note, providing readable evidence of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial success of The George Hotel and Huddersfield's working-class history. Its loss would deprive residents and visitors of this physical evidence and the multiple layers of The George Hotel's 19<sup>th</sup> century history. The 1874 aspects of this wing should be retained and incorporated into a new scheme.

The East wing, facing onto John Williams Street, was also constructed in 1874 and contained a large dining room, billiards room and bedrooms above. The exterior seamlessly extends the Italianate classical design of the main building. The interior, although altered, contains features such as cornicing and skirting and a coherent 19<sup>th</sup> century hotel plan form, in particular the dining room. The proposal entails the almost complete demolition of this wing with only the John Williams Street façade retained.

The loss of the interiors would cause substantial harm to the significance of this heritage asset. The coherent hotel plan form, as noted in the listing description, would be fragmented and C19 decorative joinery lost. This wing was retained in Historic England's 2022 update of the listing and is therefore considered to be of special architectural and historic interest. Again, the 1874 aspects of this wing could easily be retained and incorporated into a new scheme.

The George Hotel is positioned within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area. This is characterised by large, three -storey commercial and civic buildings, dating to the Victorian period, and constructed of stone, and includes a high number of listed buildings, at Grades I, II\* and II.

The proposed massing of the extension which would replace the NW wing and most of the E wing is too large. It would overwhelm the careful classical proportions of the principal block and the surviving façade on John Williams Street. The immediate conservation area is characterised by classically proportioned buildings, a hallmark of classical architecture, with the exception of pediments or domes, is a flat roof. Buildings from this period in the design are often built with discrete mansard dormers that disappear or are non-intrusive at street level.

The massing of the proposal would be visually jarring and greatly distract from the carefully executed classical design of the hotel and neighbouring heritage assets. Furthermore, given the grade II\* status of this building and the group value of this area, it is surprising that the design of this extension is so poor and low quality. The massing and design of the proposed extension would cause substantial harm to this heritage asset and less than substantial harm to the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation area.

The George Hotel sits within the Historic England Huddersfield High Street HAZ - there has been a huge amount of local authority and HE funds spent on conservation works to this building. It seems bizarre that this scheme seeks to demolish and façade large parts of a heritage asset both Historic England and the local authority have spent money on to conserve.

The application justification for the current proposal is based primarily on the need to create 30+ bedrooms to meet current market demands. A modest in keeping extension, use of spaces such as the currently vacant kitchens and the sensitive division of some of the current larger bedrooms in the NW and E wings the 30+ rooms could be achieved. Additionally, the basement floor in the E wing could also be lowered to provide additional height in the basement for service areas, a gymnasium or even bedrooms.

## **Policy**

The Kirkless Local Plan Policy LP35 states: 'Development proposals affecting a designated heritage asset (or an archaeological site of national importance) should preserve or enhance the significance of the asset. In cases likely to result in substantial harm or loss, development will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposals would bring substantial public benefits that clearly outweigh the harm'

Paragraph NPPF 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."

The application fails to preserve or enhance the heritage asset, provide substantial public benefits, or offer a convincing or adequate justification for the scheme and the resulting harm to the designated heritage asset, as required by both Kirkless Local Plan Policy and NPPF.

The public benefits are marginal and could be achieved by a much less harmful scheme. Option appraisals clearly demonstrate that up to 79-85 rooms could be achieved without the large scale of proposed demolition and subsequent harm. Falling short of the 90 bedroom minimum by 5 should not be justification for the part loss of a designated heritage asset and the less than substantial harm to the Huddersfield Town Centre conservation area.

Emphasis needs to be put on the importance of reusing and recycling buildings such as this as per Historic England guidance <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/recycle-buildings-tackleclimate-change/>. The demolition and replacement

of the North West and East wing would be wasteful and generate significantly more carbon emissions compared to its adaptation and reuse.

I would be grateful if you could inform the Victorian Society of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Newton

**Conservation Adviser**