
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

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Your reference: 2023/62/90024/W

Our reference: 183506

1st June 2023

Dear Richard Riggs,

RE: 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 on this proposal. I write now to convey our continued **objection** to the partial demolition of the East wing and additional 3 storey extension.

Our previous objection dated 21st February 2023 still stands. Following a site visit and amendments to the application we have some additional comments.

Firstly, we want to emphasise our support for the building's ongoing use as a hotel. However, it is crucial to get the details right to ensure harm to a designated heritage asset is mitigated. The Council should not feel time pressured into making a decision that will have a long lasting and wide-ranging impact on future planning applications and the built heritage of Huddersfield. If contrary to our advice permission is granted, the design and materiality of the facades should be agreed under a planning condition.

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

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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.

However, 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, originally constructed in 1874 as a service range containing a kitchen and laundry, underwent significant alterations in the 1930s with the addition of a ballroom. Further staff accommodation was added in 1963. Although heavily altered in the 20th-century, it showcases the evolution and growth of The George Hotel, reflecting the increased need for leisure, staffing, and back-of-house facilities.

Furthermore, the chimney and exterior walls contribute positively to the 19th-century built environment surrounding St. George's Square, particularly complementing the setting of the Grade I listed station building. The extent of these alterations presents a unique opportunity to respond with a high-quality intervention that satisfies the minimum room requirements while simultaneously enhancing the conservation area and the listed hotel. However, the revised scheme fails to achieve these goals due to its overwhelming scale and low-quality architectural design.

The East wing, facing onto John Williams Street, was 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 19th 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 be retained and incorporated into a new scheme.

The principal block, facing onto St. George's Square, was constructed in 1851 and contains many key historic spaces, including various function rooms and reception areas. A particularly significant aspect of the George Hotel's history is the foundation of the Rugby League, which took place in a meeting held in 1895 in the Commercial Room. The listing description notes that the room is 'very little-altered' and features several decorative elements, such as a geometric plaster ceiling.

The proposal intends to remove the decorative plaster ceiling and replace it with a replica. The reason provided is to accommodate soundproofing and fireproofing within the ceiling. However, such action would undermine the integrity and historical significance of the Commercial Room. It is surprising that a solution cannot be found to retain this ceiling, given that many listed buildings with modern uses still have preserved historic plaster ceilings. A minor compromise to the plans would allow for the retention of this valuable ceiling.

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 still too large. Despite amendments the extension 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 amended 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 the group value of this area and further consultation, 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 and the sensitive division of some of the current larger bedrooms in the 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 East wing would be wasteful and generate significantly more carbon emissions compared to its adaptation and reuse.

However, if the scheme is approved against our advice, we strongly recommend that the design or the materiality of the new sections of the façade should be determined by conditions. This will allow further time to develop the proposals for the facade to better reflect the significance of this listed building and enhance the conservation area. The harm would be minimised for example if the facades were all in stone.

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

Yours sincerely,

Guy Newton

Conservation Adviser