Historic England

Mr Richard Riggs

Kirklees Council

Planning, Investment, Regeneration Service

Civic Centre 3

Huddersfield

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Direct Dial: 01904 601982

Our ref: L01555367

9 May 2023

Dear Mr Riggs

Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2021
& T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990

GEORGE HOTEL, ST GEORGE'S SQUARE, HUDDERSFIELD, WEST YORKSHIRE HD1 1JA
Application Nos 2023/90112 & 2023/90024

Thank you for your letters of 25 April 2023 regarding further information on the above applications for listed building consent and planning permission. On the basis of this information, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the applications.

Summary

The George Hotel is one of the foremost commercial buildings in Huddersfield town centre, not only for its impressive architecture but also for its communal value resulting from the pivotal part it has played in the story of the town over the last 150 years. The fact that it has remained in its original use throughout all the changes that have occurred around it is a key part of its significance and identity.

Historic England is supportive of the proposal to secure a viable hotel use for The

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George following a period of vacancy and deterioration. The current project provides an opportunity to capitalise on the investment made by Kirklees Council and Historic England into the repair and enhancement of the exterior of the building as part of the Huddersfield High Street Heritage Action Zone.

Subject to the resolution of some concerns regarding the floor structures in Block A and an independent assessment of the viability justification, we are content for the application to be determined by your authority in line with the relevant local and national planning policy and statute.

Historic England Advice

The George Hotel is an extremely important building in the story of Huddersfield and has played a central role in the civic and social life of the town for over 150 years. It is also known internationally as the birthplace of Rugby League and previously housed a Rugby League museum in the basement.

Historic England supports the initiative to secure a viable hotel use for the George following a period of vacancy and deterioration. The project provides an opportunity to capitalise on the investment made by Kirklees Council and Historic England into the repair and enhancement of the exterior of the building as part of the Huddersfield High Street Heritage Action Zone.

Significance of the George Hotel

The applicants have undertaken an impressive assessment of documentary sources and physical evidence from the building. The intrusive surveys necessary to inform the conservation and repair of the building have provided an excellent opportunity to archaeologically investigate the structure and understand its evolution. This has been captured in the heritage statement and the amendment to the listing in 2022.

The evidential value of the building is the opportunity it provides for the fabric to tell us things we do not already know about the building. In this instance, we consider the majority of the evidential value of the George has been captured and converted into historic value in the form of the various reports produced as part of this project.

The significance of the George Hotel therefore lies primarily in its historic, architectural and communal value. As one of the earliest buildings in the Ramsden Estate's "new town" development around the railway station, the George represents the ambition of the estate in the mid nineteenth-century and the huge investment it initiated to make the town centre that we see today. The high architectural quality of the building complements the impressive railway station (Grade I listed) and indicates the wealth of the industrial town at that time. The building's long-standing use as a hotel and function rooms means it will feature in the collective memory of the people of Huddersfield as the location of celebrations and events over the years.

The high significance of the building is reflected in its listing at Grade II*, placing it within the top 8% of listed buildings in England.

Impact of the proposals on this significance

Works to Block A.

The majority of the proposed works to Block A would be highly beneficial as they consist of repair or rectification of previous inappropriate works. Where alterations are proposed they consider the relative significance of the historic features and layout.

We do have concerns, however, about the proposals to remove the majority of the existing floor structures to facilitate the installation of acoustic and fire separation. Cumulatively this would be a considerable loss of historic fabric and decorative elements, particularly in the first-floor conference room which has a decorative plaster ceiling.

Following advice from our Structural Engineer we consider further focussed testing could reduce the impact on the existing floor structures. We would wish to see the ground floor structure and the second-floor structure above the first-floor conference room retained and recommend a design solution is explored for these areas.

Works to Blocks B and C.

The western rear range (Block B) and central ballroom of the George were excluded from the listed status of the building following a review in December 2022. The proposed demolition of these elements would have a minimal impact on the significance of the listed building and the character of the conservation area.

It is also proposed to undertake what amounts to a façade retention scheme of the eastern rear range (Block C). The reasons behind the proposed demolition works are complex and interrelated as set out in the Structural Report (*Ramboll* December 2022, page 20) and Design and Access Statement addendum (*Bowman Riley* March 2023, page 18). Following careful consideration and advice from our own Structural Engineers, we are satisfied that there would be a requirement for significant structural intervention into Block C even if it was retained and refurbished. The extent of demolition proposed would result in a loss of some historic fabric, but the overall harm to the significance of the listed building through the loss of this fabric would be less than substantial.

The acceptability of the façade retention scheme is also contingent on the quality of the proposed new-build and its relationship with the retained elements.

Impact of the new build.

The George is a building of high architectural quality and historic significance, and is also within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of a number of highly graded listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Huddersfield

Train Station, one of the most highly regarded railway stations in the country. It is therefore critical that any new-build elements emulate this quality and the character of the wider conservation area.

The footprint of the proposed new-build extensions echoes the historic layout of the rear wings and the scale of the extensions does not dominate the main block of the listed building. Along John William Street, the new-build element reads as a contemporary extension continuing the historic expansion northwards from Block A, but with a distinct identity that echoes the junction between Block A and the later nineteenth-century extension. The use of natural stone for this section and the introduction of a canted corner at the northern apex of the extension make reference to the adjacent listed buildings and the character of the conservation area. A greater degree of hierarchy in the prominence of the windows on the upper floors, particularly the fourth floor, on both the east and west elevations of the new-build has also reduced the visual impact on the listed building and the conservation area.

Material choice will be critical to the successful integration of the new-build into its sensitive setting. We have seen some samples of the proposed stone and metal cladding, which appeared to be of a quality to reflect that of the original building, however we cannot see the specific details of these materials within the application documents. If these materials are to form part of the current application, rather than be agreed by condition, we recommend a detailed list of materials is agreed prior to determination. We would welcome the opportunity of commenting further on this aspect of the proposals given our investment in the repairs undertaken to the building as part of the High Street Heritage Action Zone.

Entrance canopy.
We have no objection to the principle of a canopy over the main entrance, of the scale indicated in the Design and Access Statement. Details of the method of fixing the canopy to the building should be provided prior to determination.

Finally, although the importance of the building to the Rugby League community is identified in the application, it seems like a missed opportunity that this is not followed through into some form of representation within the building. We recommend this is addressed through the scheme for the interiors of the building, for example through the naming of suites/ meeting rooms, some form of interpretation or artwork.

Policy relevant to the application.
The George Hotel is a Grade II* listed building. Originally listed in 1977, the listing was revised in December 2022 to exclude the twentieth-century west wing and the central ballroom. The proposals will have a physical impact on the listed building, as well as an impact upon its setting and the setting of the surrounding listed buildings. The proposals would also impact upon the character and appearance of the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area. In determining this application, the local planning

authority therefore has a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed buildings and their setting and to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area (sections 16, 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

The George Hotel has been vacant and closed to the public for over ten years. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advocates the benefits of conserving heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation (paragraph 197). In this way, Kirklees Council has been proactive is addressing the long-term vacancy and decline in condition of a very important historic building within the town. The project to repair the building and seek out an operator to enable the building to be reopened as a hotel, its original use, is consistent with the aims of the NPPF.

The proposals would result in a considerable amount of change to The George Hotel. Some of this change would be harmful to the significance of the listed building and some would be beneficial. Overall, we consider the level of harm would be less than substantial, but regardless of the level of harm the NPPF requires it to have a “clear and convincing justification” (paragraph 200).

The current application argues that in order for the proposed hotel use to be viable and sustainable it would require a considerable amount of change to the building, some of which is harmful. A financial viability appraisal has been submitted in support of the proposals. We defer to your authority to assess this justification and recommend that an independent review of the report is undertaken by someone with expertise in the hospitality sector in the local area.

<u>Historic England position on the application.</u>
The fact that the George Hotel remained in its original intended use for over 150 years is a key contributor to its significance. We are therefore highly supportive of the continued use of the building as a hotel. This use would allow public access to the key communal spaces and maintain the building’s identity and role within the commercial and social life of Huddersfield.

We defer to your authority to robustly assess the viability appraisal put forward as justification for the level of alteration proposed to the building. We are not satisfied that there is a convincing justification for the removal of *all* the floor structures in Block A and we recommend a solution to retain the ground floor and second floor structure above the conference room is pursued. The remaining less than substantial harm should then be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme.

Recommendation
Historic England is supportive of the proposal to secure a viable hotel use for the

George following a period of vacancy and deterioration. The current project provides an opportunity to capitalise on the investment made by Kirklees Council and Historic England into the repair and enhancement of the exterior of the building as part of the Huddersfield High Street Heritage Action Zone.

If the above issues relating to the works to the floors in Block A can be addressed through greater retention of historic fabric, and a robust assessment undertaken of the viability and justification, we are content for the application to be determined in line with local and national planning policy.

We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 199 and 200 of the NPPF.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

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Yours sincerely
Emma Sharpe

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