



Kirklees Council
George Hotel

Heritage Impact
Assessment

Revision P1

1.0 Introduction

The initial proposals for the redevelopment of the Grade II* listed George Hotel in Huddersfield gained planning permission and listed building consent in September 2023. Since that time AHR Building Consultancy have been appointed by Kirklees Council to work with Queensbury Properties in order to further develop the proposals for the hotel. These have been revised to take into account additional building surveys, changing economic factors and other constraints.

As part of the initial application, a Heritage Statement has been prepared by Bowman Riley to meet the requirements set out in para. 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and inform the client, their agents and the planning authority of the historical significance of the Grade II* listed George Hotel. Sections 1 to 6 of the Heritage Statement describe the historic context of the George Hotel, its heritage value and significance. Later parts of the report considering Heritage Impact have been superseded due to the redesign of the proposals.

This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by Richard Storah of AHR Building Consultancy to meet the requirements set out in para 215 of the NPPF. This Heritage Impact Assessment will consider the impact of the revised proposals on the historic building and its context within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area.

The report will consider any 'harm' created by the proposals and consider these in relation to the benefits of the project. This will allow the LPA to make a judgement in respect of this as required by the conservation policies in Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy LP35 of the Kirklees Local Plan.

1.1 Context of the project

The project is for the redevelopment of the George Hotel, a grade II* listed hotel building in the centre of Huddersfield. The property has been vacant since 2010.

2.0 History & Significance

The history and significance are described in detail in the Bowman Riley report of 2022.

2.1 Historic Background

The George Hotel (referred to in the report as Block A) was constructed on the site of the former George Inn, founded in 1726. The current building was built in 1851. It was quickly extended, with the east wing (Block C) being added in 1853. The west wing (Block B) followed later around 1874. The hotel then subject to a series of incremental changes. The bay window east of block A was added around 1886, whilst bedroom wings were added to and adapted in the 1930's and 1960's. The courtyard was infilled with a ballroom prior to 1936.

On 29th August 1895, the Rugby Football League was founded in the hotel, likely due to room size the agreements may have been signed in the first floor Commercial Room. This split from the Rugby Football Union occurred as players in working-class teams needed compensation for work lost when playing games, known as broken time payment, whilst the Union forbade these payments.

The hotel is in Italianate style, built in local stone, reportedly surplus from the building of the adjoining railway station. It is listed grade II* and within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area.

2.2 Significance

The Bowman Riley report notes that there were three main elements for understanding the building undertaken: Historic building assessment; Archival material including historic building plans; and Site visits and inspections. The report was then subject to public consultation and comment.

2.2.1 Summary of Significance

The George Hotel has High Significance due to:

- Appearance and Townscape value.
- Associative value as a mid-C19 railway hotel, developed with and alongside the grade I listed Huddersfield Railway Station.
- Associative value with other buildings as part of the Ramsden Estate's redevelopment of the area in the mid-late C19.
- Associative value as the birthplace of Rugby League.
- Communal value as a venue in the collective memory of the town.

These values relate to the physical appearance of the building and its position in the context of the town.

2.2.2 Significance of the building within the townscape

The original 1851 hotel building (Block A) is considered of high significance.

The wing facing the railway station car park (Block B) is also considered of neutral significance, through the rhythm of fenestration reflects the hotel use, associated with the railway.

The wing facing John William Street (Block C) is considered of neutral significance, though the elevation to John William St has townscape value and moderate significance, within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area and associated with the Ramsden Estate.

2.2.3 Significance of the building internally

Block A has High Significance relating to the physical appearance of the principal rooms, plan forms, volume of spaces and appearance. There is evidential value in structure, volume, plan form, circulation and surviving original details. Many finishes have been renewed and have low or no evidential value.

The Commercial or 'Signing' Room has exceptional significance as the likely birthplace of Rugby League, this includes evidential value of the interior and associative value in the progression through the building and the hierarchy of spaces on its approach (entry, reception, stair, corridor, Commercial Room).

Interiors of ground floor public rooms have significance in their plan form, volumes, and circulation evidenced in ceiling downstands even when spaces have been opened up. The evidential value of spaced has been diminished by loss of original finishes.

Block B is much altered and considered of neutral or no significance. The ballroom has low significance due to its associative and communal value within the town, this principally relates to its appearance and volume as many features are much altered and modern.

Block C is much altered and considered of neutral or no significance. The ballroom has low significance due to its associative and communal value within the town, this

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principally relates to its appearance and volume as many features are much altered and modern.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 The Need for the Works

The George Hotel has been empty since 2010, numerous attempts to re-develop having been unsuccessful as can be seen from the various planning applications lodged.

External repairs have been carried out with Heritage Action Zone funding from Historic England, to regenerate the building, and save it from further deterioration.

Kirklees Council wishes to develop the George Hotel for use by a hotel operator, not only to save this important building, in its original and optimum viable use to preserve it and support growth of the town. Research by Queensberry Estates demonstrates that a minimum of 90 bedrooms are required for the hotel to be financially viable. In addition, there is a need for a c.100 covers banqueting suite, a c.70 covers food and beverage offer, and ancillary accommodation. As well as remodelling and adaptation, work to the hotel will also involve the repair of interior plaster and internal features.

3.2 Principles

Principles for the conservation of heritage assets are described by Historic England in Conservation Principles (2010), This notes (para 161) that *'balanced and justifiable decisions about change in the historic environment depend ... the ability to understand the impact of the proposed change on that significance'* and (para 162) *'it may be necessary to balance the public benefit of the proposed change against the harm to the place. If so, the weight given to heritage values should be proportionate to the significance of the place and the impact of the change upon it.'*

At the George, the approach taken has remained in that:

- the heritage values and significance have been assessed and reviewed through community and stakeholder consultation,
- the design aims to be sensitive to the listed status of the building and seek to enhance the significance,
- the proposals seek to retain and protect the building, in particular those elements considered of Considerable, High & Moderate significance,
- Where practicable, the opportunity is being taken to retain and enhance the significance of the building through the reversal of previous detrimental alterations,
- any new interventions are to be of high quality to reinforce the quality of the original building,
- the design must meet statutory and regulatory requirements,
- The project seeks to result in a building which is sustainable and structurally sound, and
- the optimum viable use of the building as a hotel should be retained.

3.3 Policies

3.3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF was revised in December 2024. Chapter 16 considers Conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 215 states 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'

3.3.2 The Kirklees Local Plan

The Kirklees Local Plan was adopted in 2019. Policy LP35 requires proposals to *‘retain those elements of the historic environment which contribute to the distinct identity of the Kirklees area and ensure they are appropriately conserved, to the extent warranted by their significance’* it also states that proposals should *‘secure a sustainable future for heritage assets at risk ... and institutional buildings constructed on the back of the wealth created by the textile industry as expressions of local civic pride and identity’*.

3.4 Proposals

The hotel has been vacant since 2010. It is proposed to redevelop the hotel, retaining the principal building and the east elevation of Block B to John William Street, whilst reconstructing the two later wings of hotel bedrooms to a new design within the same footprint. The initial proposals for the redevelopment of the George Hotel gained planning permission and listed building consent in September 2023. Since that time the proposals have been revised to take into account additional building surveys, changing economic factors and other constraints.

The broad proposals for the redevelopment and conservation of the hotel remain the same. It is proposed to redevelop the hotel, retaining and conserving the original hotel (Block A), whilst redeveloping within the massing and footprint of the attached wings (Blocks B and C). The elevation of block B facing John William Street is considered to be of townscape value. Owing to technical concerns this is now proposed to be dismantled and rebuilt as due to structural issues its conservation in-situ is not considered viable.

Internally, the proposal is for a high quality hotel, is furnished and decorated to an exceptional quality. This will ensure that the quality of the internal spaces will match the architectural and aesthetic value of the external elevations. Within Block A, the location of the original walls (historically removed) will be identified, circulation patterns and a hierarchy of spaces restored and historic finishes and fittings retained in areas of high significance.

4.0 Heritage Impact

Regarding the previous listed building consent, the Bowman Riley report noted that *"The conservation and repair approach has been carefully thought through to ensure that the proposals for the building maximise the retention of historic fabric and significance whilst also giving the building a viable future. Where there has been conflict in terms of the proposed use and the ability to retain existing built fabric, this has been assessed and a balanced view taken on the need to retain historic fabric but also the need to secure a future for this heritage asset."* The approach now being taken remains the same.

Block A is to be retained and conserved, the internal volumes and layout will be returned to inform of the 1851 plan form, with down stand beams to ceilings to inform of past walls and provide an understanding of the previous layout. The 20th century low quality alterations including the coffered ceiling at the base of the stair will be removed to allow better understanding of the interior spaces. Specific areas of plaster in historically significant rooms is to be retained, together with skirting boards and doors architraves etc. The building will be recorded in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation to ensure recording of any fabric being removed or at risk of loss.

4.1 Impact on the Townscape and Setting

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The proposals seek to retain the significant elements of the George Hotel, the original hotel block and the elevation to John William Street (which is to be disassembled and rebuilt). The proposals aim to create a gateway building which enhances the approach to the town centre and conservation area and to remain legible as a hotel from the railway. The proposals allow a return of the building to use and improved public access to the building.

Since the previous application, the designs have been reviewed and elevation treatment and massing reconsidered. Rooftop plant has been reduced in scale and visual impact, whilst the elevations of rebuilt elements to the railway and John William Street have been rationalised to reflect the rhythm and form of the original hotel building and add to its understanding and its legibility.

4.2 Interior of Block A

The proposals for the most significant section of the building include the retention of the front of house areas to the main entrance and first floor, with bedrooms above and servicing in the basement. This is broadly in line within the original design intent and retains the building legible and in its original, and optimum viable use.

Significant features including finishes, volumes and circulation will be retained and where possible exposed, repaired or reinstated to allow further understanding of the heritage asset. Historic plasterwork, joinery and the circulation stair will be repaired and retained within context as significant spaces are brought back into use.

The proposals allow retention of floors, volumes, circulation routes and the more significant elements of the interior. The intention is to ensure the least harm occurs, retaining fabric and understanding whilst also ensuring the building complies with statutory regulations relating to access and fire safety.

Some damaged historic ceilings, notably the ground floor and part of the first floor former dining room will be encapsulated where the fire strategy requires compartmentation. The intention is to leave these elements in situ as a built record. This may allow for their reinstatement should further change occur. Where elements cannot be retained they will be fully recorded.

Full assessment of all internal doors has been undertaken with new doors within historic openings designed to replicate the original design of doors in these locations. All doors will be either upgraded or designed to meet current fire regulations.

A summary of the significance of each room is contained within the room data sheets.

4.2.1 Internal floors, stairs and ceilings.

Proposals have been revised to allow the retention of internal floors, the main circulation stair, together with historic ceilings to the signing room and part of the former first floor dining room. The dining room ceiling had been previously covered up when the room was subdivided as a bedroom in the 1930's alterations. It will be restored in one bedroom as part of the works.

4.2.2 Circulation pattern

The layout of the original corridors is to be reinstated enhancing the understanding of the layout and hierarchy of spaces of the original hotel. Historic features, including the arched openings will be retained and back of house areas returned to their former use as ancillary space.

4.2.3 Ground Floor

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Initially from construction and as reflected in the 1889 plans, the ground floor formed the main reception desk and waiting lounge with access onwards to the lobby to the smoking room and dining hall. Under the 1930s adaptations the flanking main wall was replaced by a single column and the signing in desk removed to form the entrance to the new dining and ball room areas. The fireplace and a 1930s display cabinet form the only remaining elements of evidential value communicating the former use as a lounge. Very little else of the original or 1930's interiors remains, principally due to refurbishment and fire compliance works in the 1970's, however the ceiling downstand beams remain as evidential value of to original plan form.

The ground floor layout is being revised, stripping back modern interventions and finishes and to regain the sense of arrival, circulation and layout of the original hotel and the 1930's remodelling. This will improve understanding of the original layout and building form. Where opening up is taking place, down stand beams will inform of original volumes. This area has been extensively remodelled in the 1980's and few original finishes survive. Modern plaster and finishes will be renewed to achieve fire separation.

4.2.4 Stair

The stair is a key element of the building, well detailed and of high quality and status, being the principal circulation route for guests between the entrance and the dining and commercial rooms forming a 'piano-nobile' of high status public rooms on the first floor in addition to the hotel's bedroom accommodation.

The area to the base of the stairs was formed under the 1889 plans to increase the width of the stairs. Subsequent opening up works in the 1930s altered the area further and included the curved display cabinet to the side of the staircase. At some time undetermined between 1930s and 1970s, a secondary overlaid stair has been added to regrade the lower flight and create a deeper and more sweeping route via the stair to the upper floors.

The main staircase is formed from cantilevered stone steps from basement to second floor and timber to upper floors. Whilst the handrail and cast iron balusters appear to be part of the 1886 refurbishment, although significant adaptations appear to have occurred in the 1930s or later including overlaying a timber stair to the stone sections from ground to first floor, layout alterations including the curved display cabinet and other alterations.

The original entrance off the 2nd floor half landing for the staff stair remains in an altered state. The main arched window has received adaptations, with a Critall metal frame, likely dating to the early C20. Other than the the 1970s corridor fire compartment works, the joinery and plasterwork are high status and worthy of retention, although particularly at upper levels they have been extensively affected by damage due to water ingress.

The works will repair and restore the stairs as the principal means of circulation within the hotel. Missing and damaged elements will be repaired or replaced. This will enhance understanding. Interventions are required to repair and augment the structure of the stair and landings, A glazed internal balustrade is also required to improve safety and reduce the risk of falling.

4.2.5 First Floor

Significant internal spaces, including the stair, circulation, signing room and the bay windowed bedroom (see 4.2.5.2) are to be retained with plasterwork and joinery retained or repaired. Fire separation of rooms considered of high significance with historic plaster ceilings is to be achieved by insertion of additional fire insulation within the pugging layer within the floors to achieve adequate fire resistance whilst maintaining historic fabric.

The removal of modern partitions and insertion of new lightweight stud partitions to create bedrooms, en-suites and fire separation does not remove historic fabric and is therefore reversible in the future.

In other spaces ceiling heights, floor structures where practicable, and internal volumes are to be retained. Ceiling finishes are typically renewed to meet fire separation and acoustic requirements. In some areas ceiling height will be reduced to allow for discrete servicing requirements.

4.2.5.1 The Commercial Room

The room has considerable associative interest for its likely role as the site of the meeting of the northern clubs for the foundation of the sport of Rugby League in 1895. The room has had little alteration and is considered of significant historical and communal value. The plan form is unchanged, whilst the space retains highly decorative plaster and joinery work, including: plaster ceiling roses, timber skirtings, architraves highly pedimented door architraves and cloaking, timber windows, and reveal panelling. The proposals have been developed to conserve the room, generally understood to be the "birthplace" of Rugby League (Northern Rugby Football Union).

4.2.5.2 Dining Room

The dining room at first floor level would likely have provided a rest stop for travellers in the age before on train restaurant car dining. The room was extended with a bay window in the 1880's alterations, but sub-divided to form bedrooms in the 1930's. During investigation works, the 1880's ceilings have been revealed intact in the bay and fair in the bedroom behind. The proposals have been revised to reveal and restore the ceilings in this bedroom with the bay, enhancing and informing of the significance of the space and the railway link. Other areas of former dining room ceilings can be retained encapsulated above new ceilings to provide a reversible solution if the space is restored as one in the future.

4.2.6 Upper Floors

The historic bedroom spaces on floors 2 to 4 will be retained, including circulation routes and bedrooms. Alterations will be made to provide en-suites and to reconfigure rooms. The new walls have been designed to read as modern insertions, retaining legibility and understanding of the original buildings plan and layout. To the upper floor bedrooms below the mansard roof the walls will be lined to improve their thermal performance both for comfort and improve environmental sustainability.

4.3 Blocks B and C

In the previously approved scheme, the design ethos stated *'the redesign of the rear wings of the hotel is to provide high-quality contemporary additions that are clearly an addition but are a contextual response in terms of scale and materiality.'* Block B was identified as having *'high capacity for change due to the complete re-build of the structure in the early 20th century, and substantial alterations in the 1960's. It was decided that the most efficient, and least harmful way forward for the building as a whole was to demolish Block B and rebuild.'* Block C was considered as having *'Moderate capacity for change due to the extent of alterations that had been undertaken both internally and externally and the resulting structural condition.'*

The previously approved scheme shows the renewal of Block B and the substantial redevelopment of Block C, essentially redevelopment in the footprint with facade retention to the John William Street elevation.

The current proposal is to redevelop on the site off Blocks B and C to retain a similar building footprint with the three distinct blocks expressed externally. Due to structural concerns regarding the facade retention to Block C, it is proposed that the elevation to John William Street will be recorded with each stone identified. The wall will then be dismantled and rebuilt as existing. Due to structural concerns it is proposed that the central courtyard will be infilled.

4.3.1 Block B

As noted above, Block B was identified as having high capacity for change due to the complete re-build of the structure in the 20th century. Rebuilding allows for circulation patterns from Block A to be retained, and revision to the elevation to the railway car park to be remodelled to greater express the hotel use.

4.3.2 Block C

Since the preparation of the earlier proposals for the hotel, further studies and investigations have been carried out revealing problems affecting the structure and land around Block C. In order to address these issues it is proposed that the basement to Blocks B and C is infilled and that the John William Street elevation of Block C is rebuilt as the bearing capacity of the adjacent road will not allow for facade retention.

4.3.2.1 Block C John William Street Elevation

The 2023 planning permission and listed building consent included the retention of the John William Street elevation of block C. Further structural investigations have been carried out as a part of the enabling works for the proposals. It has been determined that the retention of the elevation in-situ is not achievable in a viable manner as part of the redevelopment. Neither the adjacent street nor the services within it are capable of supporting the scaffold and counter weights required to maintain stability of the wall during construction. Instead it is proposed to record the wall, documenting all stones and windows to allow dismantling and reconstruction, maintaining its value within the townscape.

4.4 Wider Conservation Issues.

4.4.1 Impact on the Huddersfield Town Centre conservation area

The conservation area has recently been reviewed in the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan published in October 2024. This notes that the conservation area has at its core the Huddersfield Railway Station and its associated architecture and street pattern. It also notes that St. George's Square is perhaps the most significant and impressive location in the Conservation Area and the main entry point for many visitors to the town.

The George Hotel (Block A) is identified within key views of St George's Square within the conservation area appraisal, and as a key landmark within the Conservation area. It is within the station character area of the conservation area.

It is considered that the proposals which conserve the George Hotel, and the rebuilding of the John William Street elevation maintain the significance of the building with the conservation area.

There is minor harm in the loss of the remainder of Blocks B and C. This is offset by their rebuilding as a hotel within the conservation area and as a gateway building to the town centre when accessed from John William Street. There is public benefit of returning the hotel to its optimum viable use.

4.4.2 Castle Hill Setting Study

The previous proposals were considered in respect of the Castle Hill Setting Study. It was concluded that as the fact that the site is located approximately 3km away and within a built up area means it is very difficult to identify individual buildings. There is no impact on the views from nor the setting of Castle Hill.

5.0 Conclusion

The George Hotel, built in 1851, is considered of high significance and national importance, being listed at grade II*. It has associative significance with surrounding buildings of the Ramsden Estate and with the grade I listed railway station alongside. The hotel has further associative significance as the birthplace of Rugby League was founded in the hotel on 29th August 1895.

The attached wings and the ballroom infill to the courtyard are of lesser significance, being listed by attachment. The two wings have townscape value within the Huddersfield Town Centre Conservation Area.

The hotel has been vacant since 2010. It is proposed to retain the hotel, redeveloping it, in its original use, reconstructing the east elevation of Block B to John William Street and redeveloping the attached bedroom wings to a new design within the same footprint.

The proposals have been developed in a sympathetic scheme which balances the significance of the heritage asset with the need to secure a long-term, viable future for the hotel. This continues a historic pattern of development to adapt to changing needs. The remodelled hotel will be environmentally efficient, have a cohesive, identifiable presence, be structurally sound, meet the needs of less able guests and allow safe egress in the event of a fire.

Para. 215 of the NPPF states 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.' The optimum viable use for this building is as a Hotel accessible to the public which was the original intended use for the building.

Policy LP35 of the Kirklees Local Plan requires proposals to '*retain those elements of the historic environment which contribute to the distinct identity of the Kirklees*' and '*secure a sustainable future for heritage assets at risk ... and institutional buildings constructed on the back of the wealth created by the textile industry as expressions of local civic pride and identity*'.

The proposals will conserve the hotel building in its original and optimum viable use. They will retain its townscape value, interior layout, circulation patterns and significant interior features. There is further public benefit in the preservation of the setting of the building within the Conservation Area, the immediate street scene of St George's Square and the setting of the grade I listed railway station. This is a key building within Huddersfield and through its links to Rugby League.

It is considered that the minor harm through the loss of blocks B and C is outweighed by the benefits of retaining the hotel in use and improving its legibility and understanding. The proposals are considered to maintain the elements of the site considered to have High Significance and to enhance the significance of the site as a whole by restoring the massing of the building and its appearance in the streetscape.

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In mitigation of the is proposed to undertake a full photographic and measured survey of any elements to be removed to enable interpretation and understanding and to enable later reinstatement to match. These actions will allow the buildings to be understood by future generations whilst still allowing them to be used and maintained now.

The impact on the heritage asset (the listed building and curtilage) are beneficial as has been demonstrated. The works are considered not to affect the significance of the building, nor the historical evidence base. Although alterations are proposed, they are considered to result in less than substantial harm. In contrast, there are public benefits to the proposal in terms of replacing damaged fabric, improving use and circulation of the building and returning the asset to an optimum viable use. This meets the requirements in para. 215 of the NPPF.

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of the NPPF, as although significant changes are proposed, the proposal returns the building to an optimum viable use with no negative impact on the significance of the heritage assets (the listed building and conservation area).

It is considered the proposals meet the requirements of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies.

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