Ms Jillian Rann
Kirklees Council Planning Department
Via email

9 July 2025

DC.admin@kirklees.gov.uk

Dear Ms Rann

RE: 2025/91148 | The George Hotel, St George's Square, Huddersfield, HD1 1JA (Grade II*, Conservation Area, *William Wallen,* 1849 with later extensions). Application for major demolition and redevelopment to create a 96+ bed hotel with restaurant, gym, bar and 3 rentable meeting spaces.
Our ref: 205955

Following our previous comments, a site visit to The George Hotel was carried out on 1 July 2025, where we met with representatives of Kirklees Council, members of AHR Architects (Tim Ordway and Matt Stephenson) and Richard Storah of Storah Architecture. The Victorian Society and its Northern Buildings Committee was represented by Alan Davies, Mark Watson and Thomas Ollivier.

We are very grateful for the opportunity to visit the site, which has provided a greater understanding of the challenges facing this building, the extent of remaining historic fabric, the structural concerns surrounding areas of the George and the nuances of its significance following C20th alterations.

We also recognise that the proposed reuse of the building is a continuation of the historic use of the George and, in principle, a fantastic opportunity for Huddersfield and the wider Kirklees area. We took this application back to our Northern Buildings Committee, and, coupled with the information and experiences gathered at the site visit, the wider Committee shared its support for the reuse of the George as a hotel and its eagerness to see a sympathetic and conservation-led approach to its preservation.

The Victorian Society
1 Priory Gardens, London W4 1TT | 020 8994 1019 | Charity No. 1081435 | Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3940996
admin@victoriansociety.org.uk | www.victoriansociety.org.uk

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We highlight that while the state of the building is challenging, and the scale substantial, it is not exactly an unusual case for the conservation of heritage buildings, and buildings in a far more urgent state of disrepair have been very successfully redeveloped with ample consideration to their significance and character. In reference to our last letter, the Committee still hold some concerns regarding the application; thus, we **maintain an objection** to part of these proposed plans. These concerns can be broken down into three categories: the impact on the conservation area; the role of conservation architects; and the role of the Conservation Management Plan.

Demolition

Following the site visit, the Society's concerns regarding the scale and nature of demolition are greatly allayed and we therefore **withdraw our objection** to the demolition of 'Block B' and 'Block C'. We are now better aware of the structural problems faced by the John William Street façade (Block C) and the nature of the C20th material in the delisted wing (Block B). We of course still advocate for a nuanced and careful approach to demolition, as any loss of historic fabric will harm the significance of the building. The level of loss needs to be very clearly understood, and this is best done with reference to a clear and detailed Conservation Management Plan in tandem with the application.

Impact on the Conservation Area

We remain concerned that the value of the building has not been adequately assessed in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), and while it is recognised by the application that the George is a Grade II*-listed building, this value is not reflected in the 'replacement' architecture. The George forms a key part of St George's Square and is a building of high national importance. Its Classical/French Empire inspired edifices are a key contributor to the Huddersfield Central Conservation Area. It shares this iconic and important setting with: the Grade I Railway Station (*James Prichett,* 1846-50); the Grade II* Britannia Buildings (*William Cocking,* c.1858); Grade II* Lion Buildings (*James Prichett,* 1853). It is clear then that St George's Square holds high architectural, historical and national interest, as well as being a source of local pride for Huddersfield and the community. While an element of this pride and importance was shared with us verbally on the site visit, the proposals would be better served if this were reflected in a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan.

Our remaining concern then, regarding this application, remains the architectural language of the proposed replacements for Blocks B and C. The Committee feel that these are rather uninspired, and neither reflect or respond to Huddersfield nor the George. The Committee remains concerned regarding the impact of the proposed additions within the current scheme on the character and appearance of the conservation area, arguing that such uninspired

architecture would fail to preserve or enhance the historic environment and conservation area (National Planning Policy Framework 2024, para. 219). The objection is maintained to the new elements as currently proposed, whilst believing – and very much urging – that further consideration of the elevational treatment and the scale of the additions and roofscape could resolve these issues.

A scheme that more sympathetically responded to the wider architecture and character of the conservation area, and the George itself, is required. While we accept the requirements of modern health and safety law, building regulations and standards of living, none of this precludes a design that is more reflective of the C19th core of Huddersfield, which for this specific area (St George's Square) is remarkably untouched.

The Role of Conservation Architects

The Committee would recommend that the restoration and redevelopment of the Grade II*-listed front of the George (Block A, 1849 by *William Wallen*) is somewhere where the Conservation Architects should take a more involved role, while still working alongside AHR. The challenges facing the George are not unusual for heritage buildings of this age and disuse: hidden problems, decay and structural defects are all part of the overall refurbishment for a building of this type. An experienced conservation architect would be able to navigate these challenges in a careful and considered way.

A conservation architect's lead in this part of the building would ensure the preservation of key features, character and significance of the building, especially if this preservation is the 'balance' to offset the loss of the rear two blocks and subsequent harm.

The Role of the Conservation Management Plan

A comprehensive and detailed Conservation Management Plan can be instrumental in understanding and mitigating harm to a heritage building, its character, setting and any remaining historic fabric. Crucially, in the case of the George, a Conservation Management Plan would be easily adapted, updated and managed in the event that new details, problems or solutions were found. We feel this is particularly pertinent as, during our site visit, many details were brought to light which would have been more easily understood as part of a Conservation Management Plan.

A Conservation Management Plan would also allow for a degree of 'variability' in the application, as it safeguards both known and unknown historic fabric from harm and would be easily referred to (by all parties) when required. Examples of works which would benefit from a

Conservation Management Plan would be the elegant main stairs, alteration of historic planform and removal of C20th material of an unknown date.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the Society still maintains an objection to part of these proposed works. The main objection is to the design and unsympathetic language of the proposed extension. This does not enter a responsive and complementary dialogue with the building and the local streetscape, and would needlessly and unjustifiably impact and harm the significance of the listed building and the character of the conservation area. Happy resolution of the scale, bulk, and elevational and roofscape treatment of the new build elements of the scheme is necessary, and should be readily achievable.

The Committee would also like to see a conservation architect take the lead over the preservation and restoration of *Wallen*'s 1849 block, since this represents what may become the only surviving historic fabric of the Grade II* building. Furthermore, a suitably comprehensive Conservation Management Plan should be produced, updated and referred to when necessary to ensure there is transparency in the works and any harm is mitigated as far as possible.

We are concerned that there is much detail which seems unresolved, such that good conservation outcomes are not assured. There is no current Conservation Management Plan. An updated, relevant agreed Conservation Management Plan along with conservation-led decision making by the project's Conservation Architect could improve the conservation outcomes, particularly for the main building. Under these circumstances, should the Planning Authority be minded to approve the proposals, the treatment of the historic interiors should be strictly conditioned to mitigate harm to the historic fabric and significance of the listed building.

As a Society, we are keenly aware of what this project represents for Huddersfield and Kirklees. Regardless of whether your Authority approves or refuses this application, we are very eager to be available for further advice and consultation if required, to guide as best we can. As noted above, we would particularly welcome the opportunity to comment on revised proposals for the treatment of the new-build elements of the scheme.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Ollivier
Northern Conservation Adviser