

Application for Listed Building Consent
Replacement of existing lath and plaster ceiling to the Jacobean stairwell
TOWNELEY HALL TOWNELEY PARK BURNLEY

The application property and summary of heritage significance:

This application relates to Towneley Hall, a heritage asset of exceptional significance which is reflected in its Grade I Listing. The Hall dates from c.1400 and has been subject to extensive phases of alteration in seventeenth to nineteenth centuries reflecting the changing architectural styles by successive generations particularly the baroque and gothic. The hall is built in large sandstone rubble brought to courses, with freestone dressings, and hipped slate roofs concealed by embattled parapets. The Hall was substantially remodelled by Jeffry Wyatt in the nineteenth century who enhanced the presence and grandeur of the building by elevating the South-East wing and adding battlements and turrets considered at the time as a display of architectural and social ostentation. The interior features equally impressive period rooms hung with original C19 paintings and is particularly noted for its fine 16th century (Jacobean) plasterwork, panelling and staircases. The Hall has been in civic use as a museum and gallery since 1903.

The significance of Towneley Hall derives from a number of factors, including the antiquity of parts of its fabric and from the architectural and visual grandeur of the building and its fine interiors. It also has important historic value, providing evidence of changing architectural forms and fashions, as well as allowing an understanding of the evolution of Burnley as a settlement.



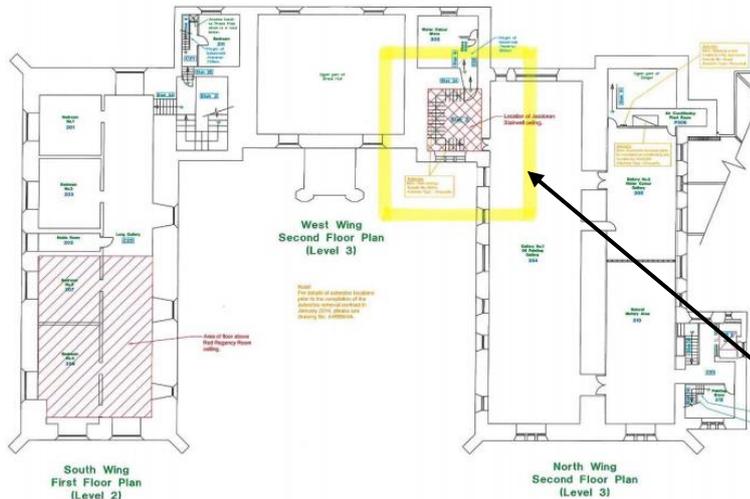
Visual grandeur of the building



Fine Jacobean interiors

Circumstances leading to this application:

This application relates to the ceiling above the Jacobean staircase located in north staircase tower constructed c1620. The ceiling over the staircase covers an area of around 23sqm and is constructed from lime plaster and laths with a decorative foliate ceiling rose in the centre and a deep cornice around the perimeter. It is understood that the ceiling is likely to date from around 1860 with repairs undertaken in the 1920s and most recently in the late 1990s following a leak in the roof space above the stairwell.

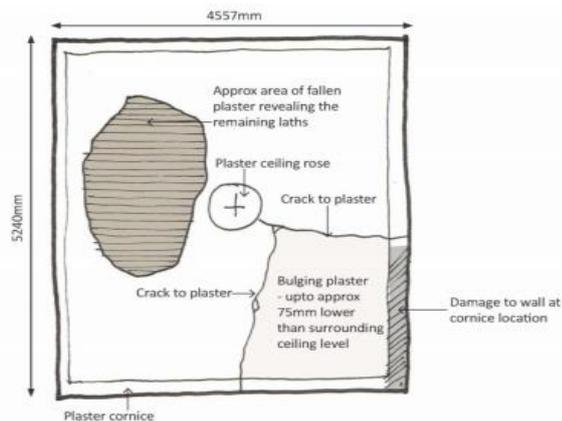


Location of Jacobean staircase

In April 2018 the section of the ceiling subject to the 1990s repair failed and collapsed and it became clear that a significant area of the remaining plaster was bowing due to detachment from the mortar holding it to the laths. In November 2019 new new cracks and areas of detachment were identified extending from the original failed area. Subsequently a scaffold crash deck was erected to safeguard the users of the stairwell and the historic fabric from falling debris in the event of a further collapse.



Area of fallen plaster



Sketch of defects (March 2020)

The submitted mortar analysis report (prepared by Mark Womersley and dated June 2020) finds defects in the plaster and its application in that it was applied excessively deep and without sufficiently sized gaps in the laths for the plaster nibs to properly key into. Accordingly the most likely explanation for the fall of the plaster is that its weight was increased by water penetrating from above, at a point where the plaster nibs in the mortar could no longer support it. It was also observed that a number of the laths were bowing, fragile and appear to have suffered some decay, most likely due to leaks from above.

Accordingly, the overall condition of the ceiling has been found to be defective and the integrity of the remaining area of ceiling is therefore in doubt.

Proposal:

This application seeks consent to remove the remaining areas of ceiling plaster and defective laths to the ceiling above the Jacobean staircase and to reinstate with a chestnut lath and lime plaster ceiling using traditional materials and methods of construction as set out in the submitted Heritage Statement prepared by Knox-McConnell Architects Ltd. It is to be noted that the cornice and ceiling rose is generally sound and is proposed for retention with localised repairs as necessary.

This intervention has been informed by the findings and recommendations of expert heritage advisors, following detailed survey and research as set out above, and has been developed in consultation with the Council's heritage planner and Historic England.

The application is supported by the following documents received on the 21.08.20: Heritage Statement (including detailed method of repair) prepared by Knox-McConnell Architects Ltd; and Mortar Analysis Report prepared by Mark Womersley.

This application is presented to Committee as the applicant is Burnley Borough Council

Relevant Policies:

Burnley's Local Plan (July 2018)
HE2 – Designated Heritage Assets

The National Planning Policy Framework: Section 16 of the NPPF gives guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. In particular paragraph 192 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: Sections 16 and 66 confer upon local planning authorities a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the special interest of a listed building.

Relevant Recent Site History:

The site has an extensive planning history which mainly relates to internal and external works to maintain the upkeep and safeguard the viability of the building, the most relevant recent application being APP/2018/0044 for remedial works associated with a dry rot outbreak.

Consultation Responses:

Historic England: No outstanding concerns.

Historic England initially expressed concerns on the basis that the proposed intervention was not supported by sufficient information or justification, and was likely to be harmful to the significance of the listed building and accordingly would be contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan Policy HE2. It was advised that in order to advance the proposal, the applicant should fully assess the age and significance of the ceiling to allow an informed understanding of its significance and an approach to repair that is limited to the minimum intervention necessary.

The applicant followed the advice and engaged specialist heritage consultants, Knox-McConnell Architects Ltd, to undertake detailed survey and research and make the necessary recommendations in the form of a revised Heritage Statement.

Historic England were consulted on the revised Heritage Statement on the 11.09.20 and subsequently confirmed that it provides sufficient justification, and an acceptable proposed schedule of work therefore alleviating their previous concerns.

Publicity: No comments received

Assessment:

The main issue for consideration is the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 16(2) and 66 confer upon local planning authorities a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the special interest of a listed building. With regard to the NPPF and Local Plan Policy HE2 this can be defined as the impact of the proposal on the significance (special interest) of the Listed Building affected with 'preservation' in this context meaning doing no harm to the significance as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.

Impact on the significance of the Listed Building

The proposed intervention is informed by a sound understanding of the significance of the heritage asset, the buildings construction and the likely causes and extend of the defect. The options available have been fully considered and the proposed intervention is robustly justified and limited to the minimum loss of historic fabric. The proposed approach and methodology for undertaking the reinstatement works is considered appropriate and sympathetic to the historic fabric and significance of the building, only removing fabric where necessary and reinstating with materials and techniques that match and are appropriate to the existing. Historic England supports the proposed scheme for these reasons.

Having regard to the significance of the heritage asset it is considered the proposals are justified and proportionate and would facilitate the continued use of the building in support of its long-term conservation. Moreover, the proposed alterations will result in a relatively minor change to the appearance and fabric of the interior and when considered against the character, fabric and significance of the listed building as a whole and would not be considered to result in harm to the significance of the listed building.

The proposal would preserve the special interest of the heritage asset and therefore complies with the guidance relating to conservation of the historic environment in the NPPF (section 16) and Local Plan Policy HE2 which seeks to avoid harm to the significance (interest) of heritage assets.

Summary

In giving considerable importance and weight to the duties at Section 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, in consideration to NPPF Section 16 and Policy HE2 of Burnley's Local Plan I would recommend that listed building consent be granted subject to conditions.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Conditions

1. The development must be begun within three years of the date of this decision.

Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the detailed method of repair as set out in the approved Heritage Assessment prepared by Knox-McConnell Architects Ltd received on the 11.09.20 unless approved otherwise in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development is implemented in accordance with the approved plans and to avoid ambiguity; and to preserve the character and special interest of the building in accordance with Policy HE2 of Burnley's Local Plan (July 2018).