

Application for Listed Building Consent
Restoration of Ceiling to Council Chamber (Retrospective)
TOWN HALL MANCHESTER ROAD BURNLEY

Applicant: Burnley Borough Council
Agent: Property Services (Liberata UK Ltd)

Application Property and Summary of Heritage Significance:

This application relates to Burnley Town Hall, a heritage asset of high significance reflected in its Grade II Listing. The significance of the building is found to lie chiefly in its architectural and historic interest. It holds high significance as a notable example of Victorian municipal architecture in the Renaissance Revival style, which retains much original detail both externally and internally. The building possesses a high level of architectural interest for its external qualities including its embellishment and degree of intactness. Internally, the building has retained a significant amount of its original plan form, internal fabric, fixtures and features. The effect of these elements are particularly legible in the public areas including the principal entrance, hall and staircase; and the civic suite including the Council Chamber, Reception Room and Mayors Parlour and as such are of high significance. Surviving original finishes and fittings to the office accommodation are of moderate significance, though later 20th century fixtures and finishings throughout the building and insensitive service installations have a negative impact in places. The building also holds value at a local level in representing the political history and growth of Burnley; and in terms of its contribution to the architectural quality and character to the townscape.

This application specifically relates to the Council Chamber. The most notable feature being the finely decorated coved (barrelled) and coffered ceiling comprising 14 polychromed plaster panels painted with the Lancashire Boroughs coats-of-arms and separated by rib mouldings. The upmost (flat) part of the ceiling is framed by square panels decorated with stucco flowers and has a central ceiling rose with laurel leaf detail. The ceiling is positioned above an ornate plaster cornice beneath which is a lettered frieze recording the principal dates of Burnley's civic history.



The Victorian wall panelling and furnishings were sold in 1973. It is thought that the ceiling and lettered frieze were redecorated at this time, using a contemporary colour palette of modern dark brown, orange, turquoise blue, dark green, sage green, mint green, mustard, cream and gold mica paints. Having suffered from damp, the polychromed plaster panels were restored in 1987-8 including crack filling, extensive retouching and varnishing.

Background:

Following the initial inspection of a suspected dry rot fruiting body located in the cornice to the south-east (Manchester Road elevation), expert investigation and condition surveys have identified the following defects to high level areas within the Council Chamber:

- Damage and decay to the structural timbers of the cornice to the south-east (Manchester Rd) and south-west (Riverside) elevations and supporting timbers above the cornice and within the barrelled ceiling as a result of past water ingress and dry rot fungal infestation.
- Damage to the plaster and decoaration of the upper wall, cornice and barrel ceiling panels to the south-east (Manchester Rd) and south-west (Riverside) elevations caused by past water ingress including de-bonded and friable paint (cracked, blistering, flaking and powdering); damage to the varnish layer (abraded and discoloured); and softened and blistered wall-plaster.
- Significant cracking and displacement in the cornice, barrel ceiling and ceiling plaster have also been identified as a likely result of movement and structural defects within the roof void above the ceiling.

It is to be noted that the moisture readings reveal the ceiling plaster to be dry which indicate that the extensive repairs to the external envelope of the building have eliminated the water ingress issues and enhanced the weathertightness of the building.

The investigatory surveys included specialist analysis of the historic plaster and paint finishes to develop a clear conservation strategy and specification. The investigation identified, amongst other details, the finish types and colours of the original scheme of decoration. The ceiling is found to have originally been finished in olive green, straw and cream lead oil paints with a rich lustre finish. Preliminary trials have also been undertaken to determine the most effective cleaning method.

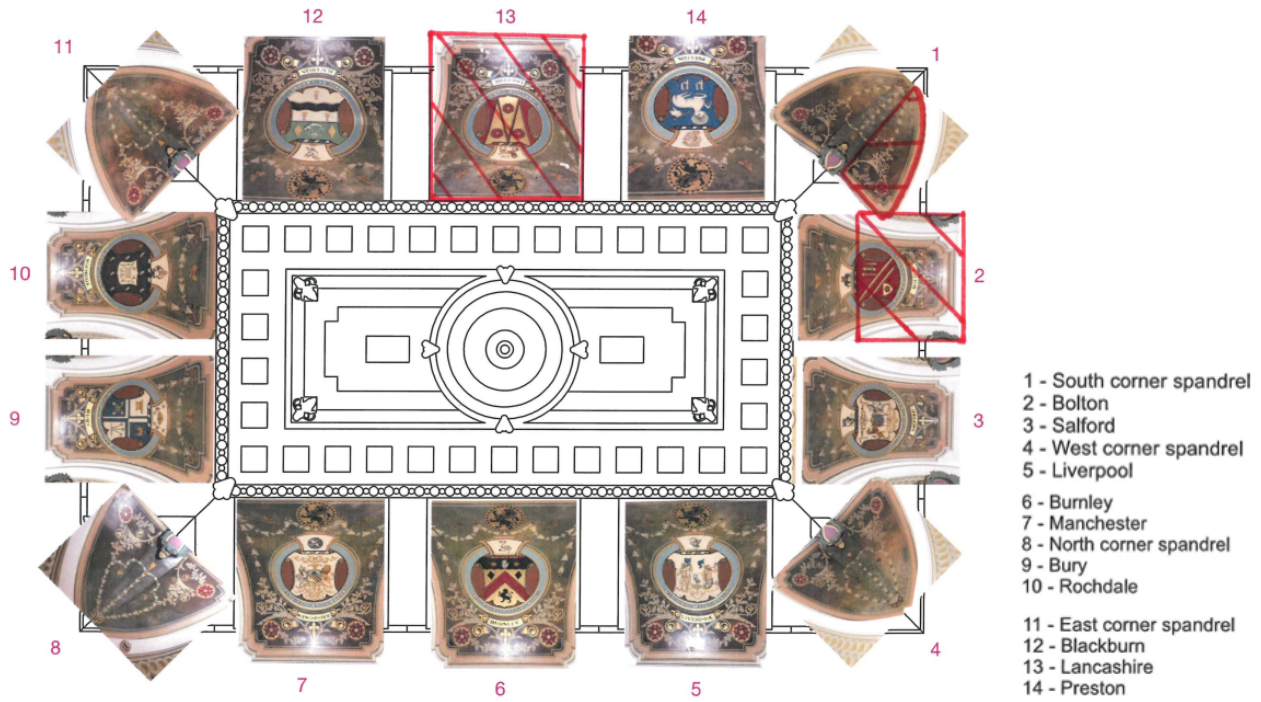
The Proposal:

This application seeks retrospective listed building consent for the restoration (structural, fabric and cosmetic repairs) of the Council Chamber ceiling and decorative finishes identified through detailed survey and expert investigation as described in the submitted drawings and schedules of work, specialist condition surveys, investigations and reports.

The works that have been undertaken are summarised as follows:

- Removal of all fabric affected with fungal growth and/or decay and water damage including sections of timbers; areas of perished plaster (to three walls); cornice and rib moulding. Panel 13 (Lancashire) has been removed in its entirety, and Panels 1 (corner spandrel) and 2 (Bolton) have been partially removed in addition to approximately 7.0m length of cornice to Manchester Road elevation and approximately 4.0m of cornice to the riverside elevation below the affected panels.
- Treatment of the masonry with a water based fungicide fluid and treatment of any localised sound timbers with preservatives.
- Replacement of all decayed sections of timber with like for like sections using pre-treated timber.
- Structural reinforcement works and repairs to the roof void, walls and ceiling as specified by the conservation engineer.
- Reinstatement of all the decorative plaster work to match the existing/original detail including mouldings and cornices etc.
- Replaster over exposed masonry with a lime-rich plaster.
- In-filling and in-painting of the coat of arms plaster panels.

Traditional repair techniques have been employed but also the use of modern techniques of re-engineering including pinning, ties, reinforcement bars and plates where necessary and unavoidable.



Extent of loss of polychromed plaster panels (highlighted in red)



Initial Dry Rot Outbreak Below the Lancashire Panel



Reconstruction of the Lancashire Panel



Partial Removal of Panels 1 and 2



Removal of Cornice, Support Timbers and Wall Plaster

The historic decorative scheme, including colours and finishes, has been established through investigative works undertaken by specialist conservators and is proposed to be reinstated following the repairs.

The works have been informed by the findings and recommendations of expert heritage advisors, following detailed survey and research, and has been developed following extensive engagement with the Council's heritage planner who remains actively involved in the project.

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

Relevant Policies:

Burnley's Local Plan (July 2018): Policy HE2 (Designated Heritage Assets) outlines the key requirement for proposals to have regard to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of listed buildings and, where appropriate, securing a viable use most consistent with their conservation. All levels of harm should be avoided. The policy adopts the NPPF's categories of 'substantial' and 'less than substantial' harm and the corresponding policy tests (as set out in NPPF 201 and 202). In summary, these tests provide an opportunity for an applicant to demonstrate that there would be public benefits arising from a proposal which may outweigh heritage harm.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021): It is the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their 'significance' which is the focus of the NPPF. Paragraph 199 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss, or less than substantial harm. Paragraph 200 sets out that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 202 explains that 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.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: Sections 16 and 66 as below.

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/2017/0561 for re-roofing works including structural repairs to defective chimney stacks, lift shaft and clock dome; and stone and leadwork conservation.

Consultation Responses: None 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, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses. 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.

Having regard to the relevant policy and legislation, as set out above, the main issue is whether the works have preserved (not cause harm to) the special interest (significance) of the Listed Building.

Impact on the significance (special interest) of the Listed Building:

The proposal involves urgent repairs to arrest the infestation of fungal dry rot and to strengthen the ceiling structure including works to conserve the surviving plasterwork. The works have been carefully

considered following conservator, structural engineer and timber decay specialist advice to ensure that the ceiling construction is understood as a whole. The application is supported by their specialist reports and surveys, these documents and their findings have been assessed by the Council's Heritage Planner who advises that they cumulatively provide a well-considered analysis of the significance of the Council Chamber Ceiling, its construction and the likely causes and extend of the defects. The supporting information explains the reasons for the works and demonstrates a good level of understanding of both the heritage significance and the construction and behaviour of traditional buildings and materials. Having regard to these documents, there is compelling evidence that the works were urgent and unavoidable and could not have been reasonably achieved by alternative less harmful means.

The approach and methodology for undertaking the 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.

Taking the above into account it has been demonstrated that without the works, the ceiling structure and its decorative plasterwork would be at risk of further decay which could further undermine its stability and integrity. However, the loss of historic fabric and introduction of modern techniques of structural reinforcement has had a minor adverse impact on significance (at the lower end of the 'less than substantial' scale of harm). Taking into account that the substantive part of the listed building would not be adversely affected by the works and would therefore not result in any real change in the ability to understand and appreciate the overall significance of the heritage asset. Moreover, stabilising and strengthening the ceiling and surviving historic fabric will facilitate the continued use of the building in support of its long-term conservation which is considered to constitute a desirable public benefit as will the reinstatement of the historic decorative scheme.

Having regard to the supporting documents and drawings, it is considered that the applicant has adequately demonstrated that the works were necessary and unavoidable in order to address the identified structural defects and arrest the dry rot fungal infestation. The works were appropriately specified so as to mitigate any harm arising and when considered against the heritage benefits resulting from the retention and good repair of historic building fabric are sufficient to outweigh the identified less than substantial harm to significance in accordance with Policy HE2, the NPPF and the duty assigned by the LBCA Act.

Conclusion:

The works were informed by a sound understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and limited to what was reasonably necessary to arrest the dry rot fungal outbreak and secure structural stability. The works are robustly justified against the considerable public benefits associated with arresting decay in the interests of preservation.

Recommendation: Approve with conditions

In giving considerable importance and weight to the duties at Section 16(2) and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, in consideration to the objective of the NPPF and Policy HE2 of Burnley's Local Plan I would recommend that listed building consent be granted subject to conditions.

Conditions and Reasons:

1. The works hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

Reason: As required by Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out other than to the specifications as indicated on the approved drawings except where modified by the conditions of this consent. The

approved drawings are: Y91/200 (Proposed Works: Council Chamber Roofspace) received 16 January 2023.

Reason: To ensure the development is implemented in accordance with the approved plans and to avoid ambiguity.

3. All materials to be used in the approved scheme shall be as stated on the application form and approved drawings and shall not be varied without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to safeguard the special architectural or historic interest and heritage significance of the building and comply with Policy HE2 of Burnley's Local Plan (July 2018).

4. Any works of making good to the retained fabric, shall be finished to match the adjacent work with regard to the methods used and to colour, material, texture, and profile, except where indicated otherwise on the drawings hereby approved

Reason: In order to safeguard the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and to comply with Policy HE2 of Burnley's Local Plan (July 2018).

EEP (Principal Planner) 18.05.23