

WEST AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Application Number: 17/03039/LBC

Decision Due by: 19th January 2018

Extension of Time: 24th January 2018

Proposal: Internal and external alterations to ground floor and basement in association with the redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford, including the installation of 2 platform lifts, opening-up of a blind arcade, installation of raised platform and steps, removal of wall sections and partitions, new partitions, new openings, damp-proofing works to basement, and other internal alterations; re-glazing of external pavement lights, and alterations to south west external entrance door.

Site Address: Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford, Oxfordshire

Ward: Holywell Ward

Case Officer: Amy Ridding

Agent: Miss Suzanna Crabtree **Applicant:** Ms Vanessa Lea

Reason at Committee: Oxford City Council are the applicant

1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1. West Area Planning Committee is recommended to:

(a) Approve the application for the reasons given in the report and subject to the required planning conditions set out in section 12 of this report and grant listed building consent subject to:

1. Historic England raising no objection to the application.

(b) Agree to delegate authority to the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services to:

1. Finalise the recommended conditions as set out in this report including such refinements, amendments, additions and/or deletions as the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services considers reasonably necessary;

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1. This report considers proposed works to the grade II* listed Town Hall in

association with the Heritage Lottery Funding bid for the redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford. The works include the rationalisation of the museum entrances, improved visitor access and the removal and improvement of existing unsympathetic modern interventions. Overall the proposed scheme would bring substantial public benefits to the city and result in much needed improvements to the museum, including some which would better reveal the significance of the listed building. It is considered that the design of the intervention into the blind arch needs resolving in order to ensure that the less-than-substantial harm caused has been appropriately mitigated.

2.2. The key matters for assessment set out in this report include the following:

- Impact on the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II* listed building.

3. LEGAL AGREEMENT

3.1. This application is not subject to a legal agreement.

4. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

4.1. The proposal is not liable for CIL.

5. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

5.1. The Museum of Oxford occupies the south western corner of the Town Hall, which is sited at the northern end of St Aldates on the corner of Blue Boar Street, in a prominent central location. The Town Hall is a grade II* listed building located within the Central Conservation Area.

5.2. Site location plan:

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Ordnance Survey 100019348

6. PROPOSAL

6.1. The application proposes internal and external alterations to the areas of the ground floor and basement of the Town Hall in association with the redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford. The internal alterations include the installation of two platform lifts, opening-up of a blind arcade, installation of a raised platform and steps, removal of wall sections and partitions, new partitions, new openings, and damp-proofing works to the basement. Externally, the alterations include the re-glazing of basement windows and changes to south west external entrance door. Following Officer's and Historic England's assessment of the application, amended plans have been requested to improve the quality of design of the proposed glazing and doorway in the new arched opening to ensure the harm caused to the understanding of the buildings layout is appropriately mitigated and does not detract from the exceptional architectural quality of the existing building.

7. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

7.1. The table below sets out the relevant planning history for the application site:

55/04910/A_H - Alterations to form office. PER 8th November 1955.

55/04911/A_H - Additional two storeys over lavatory. PER 8th November 1955.

65/16290/A_H - Alterations to form additional ladies lavatory accommodation. PER 21st May 1965.

71/25030/A_H - Internal alterations and formation of new window. PER 14th December 1971.

75/00979/LH_H - Erection of high level sign and notice board for Museum of Oxford Town Hall. PER 3rd December 1975.

77/01094/P_H - Banner to be displayed across frontage of Town Hall. REF 4th January 1978.

89/00256/L - Consent to alter the Assembly Room and the Former Reference Library. PER 14th February 1981.

90/00783/L - Listed Building consent for internal canopy at main entrance to house warm-air curtain. PER 28th March 1991.

90/01051/L - Listed Building consent for formation of opening, at ground level, between Town Hall and Carfax. PER 4th July 1991.

93/00460/L - Listed Building Consent to construct lift enclosure, shaft and roof light adjoining Council Chamber. PER 8th October 1993.

95/01788/L - Listed Building consent for alterations to existing counter. Provision of dividing partition to create new cloakroom area. PER 20th March 1996.

97/00082/P - Between the Town Hall and Macmillan House St Aldates - Excavate duct trench and 7 No drawpits between Town Hall and Macmillan House, St. Aldate's. PRQ 13th February 1997.

97/00338/GFH - Between the Town Hall and Macmillan House St Aldates - Excavation (600mm deep) and installation of cable ducts, back filling and reinstatement of highway to provide telecommunication link between council offices. PER 21st April 1997.

97/01610/GFH - Rear of Town Hall and Municipal Buildings Kemp Hall Passage St Aldates - Security fence and gate. PER 19th November 1997.

05/02296/LBC - Listed Building Consent for internal alterations to provide a platform lift within an existing store with a new opening into the Drill Hall Corridor, to overcome the difference in floor levels. Ground floor adjacent to cloakrooms (works under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995). RNGSPR 13th January 2006.

07/00857/CT3 - Listed Building consent for conversion of redundant print unit area to provide new gallery and cafe with alterations and insertion of fire doors in corridor adjacent (Retrospective). Creation of, and alterations to form, new secondary means of escape via the "White Stair", to serve the gallery, cafe and Long Room. RNO 1st August 2007.

11/01152/CT3 - Installation of external fire escape. RNGWPR 7th July 2011.

11/01153/CT3 - Listed Building Consent for external alterations involving installation of external fire escape on rear elevation, internally block modern opening on 1st floor. RNGWPR 15th June 2011.

11/01299/CT3 - Listed Building Consent for internal alterations to convert cloakroom into museum retail area and information point, involving new security screen, new counters and changes to suspended ceiling. RNGWPR 22nd July 2011.

13/02687/CT3 - Listed Building Consent for internal alterations to upgrade and refurbish existing toilets involving removal of walls and partitions and formation of lobby and doorways. (Amended Plans). PDE.

8. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

8.1. The following policies are relevant to the application:

Topic	National Planning	Local Plan	Core Strategy	Sites and Housing Plan	Other Planning Documents
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	Policy Framework (NPPF)				
Design	Section 7 Paragraph 57				
Conservation/ Heritage	Section 12 Paragraphs 129, 131, 132, 134	HE2, HE3, HE4, HE5	CS18		

9. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

- 9.1. Site notices were displayed around the application site on 29th November 2017 and an advertisement was published in The Oxford Times newspaper on 30th November 2017.

Statutory and Non-Statutory Consultees

Historic England

- 9.2. Historic England very much supports the principal of using this part of the building as a museum and in general the proposals have been carefully designed to achieve sensitive introductions whilst successfully accommodating the new use with minimal intervention into historic fabric.
- 9.3. No objections are raised regarding the insertion of the proposed stair and platform lift, and the new lift within the former stair cupboard.
- 9.4. Where the historical layout of the building is proposed to be altered, to create a new reception and access to ground floor exhibition space, limited harm would be caused to our understanding of the building's historic layout. However, this is justified by the need to rationalise the museum's entrance and visitor access.
- 9.5. The glazing and doorway in the arched opening requires further refinement. At present this looks rather utilitarian, with a very simple and rather chunky frame. This contrasts poorly with Hare's windows, doors and screens which are of exceedingly high quality and therefore in its current form, this aspect of the proposals would cause harm to the special interest of the Town Hall.
- 9.6. In their current form the proposal would entail a degree of harm to the significance of this listed building and paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires harm to have clear and convincing justification. In this case we do not consider the harm justified as the adverse impact on the architectural qualities of the museum rooms could be avoided if the design of the proposals was improved. Therefore, we recommend that the proposals are revised and we would welcome the opportunity to provide further advice on these.

- 9.7. It is important that the detailing of the new work is completed to a high standard to ensure the proposal robustly achieves the aims of enhancing the listed building. As such, it is recommended conditions be applied to explore the detailing of several elements further, including the installation of the new glazing into the existing blind arch, the reinstatement of cornices to the blind arch, proposed new services, and alterations to doors.

Public representations

- 9.8. The Oxford Preservation Trust commented in support of this application, stating they are pleased to see the proposed improvements to the Museum to make it a more accessible space for all and tidy up the entrance from Blue Boar Street.

Officer Response

- 9.9. Officers share the same concerns as Historic England regarding the design of the proposed glazing and doorway in the arched opening and as such have worked collaboratively with the agent to achieve a more suitable design and thus appropriately mitigate the harm caused.

10. PLANNING MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1. Officers consider the determining issues to be:

- i. The impact on the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II* listed building.

i. **Impact on the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II* listed building.**

- 10.2. Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states 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. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states 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, including securing its optimum viable use.

- 10.3. Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy states that development proposals should respect and draw inspiration from Oxford's unique historic environment, should not result in loss or damage to important historic features, particularly those of national importance, and where possible should include proposals for enhancement of the historic environment. Saved policy HE3 of the Oxford Local Plan states that permission will only be granted for works involving an alteration or extension to a listed building that is sympathetic to and respects its history, character and setting. Saved policy HE4 of the Oxford Local Plan requires the applicant to agree a programme of investigation, recording and publication of the results where the structure of a listed building is considered to conceal important archaeological evidence or remains. Saved policy HE5 of the Oxford Local Plan states that permission will only be granted for proposals affecting a listed building

which involve fire precautions if the council is satisfied that both design and fire safety requirements can be met without harm to the special interest of the building.

- 10.4. Oxford's Town Hall constructed in 1893-97, was designed by Henry Hare in the Elizabethan-Jacobean style. The building exhibits elaborative decoration of exceptionally high quality Victorian craftsmanship. The building is three-storeys with basement, constructed from ashlar and rubble stone under a Cumbrian slate roof. A substantial amount of its original fabric, features, decoration and floorplan survive and for these reasons it is listed as grade II*. The areas of the Town Hall which are the subject of this application comprise the ground floor and basement areas in the south western corner of the building. The ground floor areas originally housed the public library including Newspaper Room, Ladies Room, Reading Room, with the basement floor originally housing a repairing room, W.Cs and store rooms. In 1894 a spiral iron staircase with wooden block treads was installed providing access between the Lending Department on the ground floor and book store in the basement. This staircase was replaced in the late 20th century with a straight flight, and moved to another location within the museum and displayed as an exhibit.
- 10.5. The proposed redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford is part of a Heritage Lottery Funding bid for a wider project called Oxford's Hidden Histories, which aims to uncover, open up and communicate the heritage of the city's communities to the public. It is proposed to create new gallery spaces with flexible displays, learning spaces, a 'Museum Makers' area for researchers to work, a new shop, reception and entrance area. The current museum arrangement dates to the late 20th century (post 1973) and features a number of partitions, additions and interventions, many of which are unsympathetic and detract from the original architectural character of the spaces and confuse the original floor layout of the building. The museum is currently only partially open to the public. Despite the late 20th century interventions, a substantial amount of the original floorplan, historic fabric and decorative features remain within the spaces.
- 10.6. Officers are fully supportive of the aims and objectives of the proposed redevelopment and recognise the public benefits that realising the project would bring to the city. The scheme would result in a number of improvements to the building, including restoring and repairing the Blue Boar Street entrance, improving the impact of and removing a large amount of the harmful 20th century additions to better reveal the significance of the building, rationalising and improving the accessibility and entrances into the spaces to create a better functioning museum facility. These improvements would constitute public benefits in accordance with the NPPF.
- 10.7. In order to improve the current entrance arrangements into the museum and achieve suitable accessibility in compliance with DDA requirements it is proposed to make several interventions into the fabric of the building. The proposal to create an opening between the two reception rooms which are accessed off of the main entrance of the Town Hall would cause some limited harm to the historic floorplan, however, this is considered justified by the need to rationalise the entrance and improve visitor access into the museum. A downstand, the existing

cornicing and side nibs would be retained ensuring the former layout can still be understood, as such the harm caused is considered to be limited.

- 10.8. Similarly, the principle of forming an opening through the blind arch from the reception room into gallery 1 would cause some harm to the original layout and ventilation ducts and is considered justified by the need to improve access into the museum. It is considered that the less-than-substantial harm caused would be adequately mitigated by the retention of the surrounding arch and cornice detailing, the reinstatement of previously lost decoration, and the appropriate elegant design of the proposed glazed infill screen and doorway. Concerns have been expressed by both officers and Historic England that the initial design of the screen and doors with a relatively chunky and crudely detailed frame would appear utilitarian and detract from the architectural character and detailing of the spaces. As such, amended plans have been requested seeking a more refined, elegantly designed screen.
- 10.9. The proposed introduction of a set of stairs and platform lift in gallery 1 and a lift within the stair cupboard at ground floor and basement levels would cause limited harm to the significance of the listed building, which would be justified by the ability to provide better and level access to the museum areas and the appropriate design of the interventions.
- 10.10. A substantial amount of original doors remain in situ within the museum spaces and make an important contribute to the architectural character and appearance of the building. A number of changes have been initially proposed to the existing doors, including their upgrading and replacement, where considered necessary to comply with fire safety requirements. It is considered that as many of the existing original doors as possible should be retained and upgraded as necessary. It is acknowledged that the exact proposals and detailing of the scheme has not been finalised, and as such is considered necessary and appropriate to agree the final door proposals via condition.
- 10.11. The proposal to introduce new floor surfaces in the form of wooden herringbone floors, where existing original surfaces do not remain, including into gallery 1, is considered to be improvement and appropriate to the character of the building. However, further investigation works are required to the existing floor structures to establish the types of surfaces and the most appropriate and least intrusive means of installing new surfaces without damage to existing original architectural features. It is considered necessary and appropriate to agree this detail by condition.
- 10.12. The site is of archaeological interest because it is located within the heart of the Late Saxon and medieval town, in the vicinity of historic plots associated with the medieval Blue Boar Inn and Carry's Inn and at a depth below the Grade II* Town Hall where cut archaeological features may survive. As the proposed scheme would involve the installation of a damp proofing system to the internal faces of the south and western external basement walls involving excavation works to install sump pumps, in accordance with policy HE4, it is considered necessary to apply a condition requiring the undertaking of a programme of archaeological work. The proposed damp proofing system, a cavity membrane system, is

considered to be a relatively sympathetic intervention and appropriate means to deal with the damp ingress in these areas and as such, no objection is raised.

- 10.13. Given that the scheme is still in the design development phase, is it considered reasonable and necessary to approve by condition the detailed design and finished appearance of a number of the proposed interventions and additions, such as the new steps and platform lift in gallery 1, new mechanical and electric services and new floor, wall and ceiling treatments to ensure they are of an appropriate high design quality and do not detract from the special architectural and historic interest of the grade II* listed building. It is also considered necessary and reasonable to condition details of the re-location of the iron staircase to be agreed, to ensure this important original architectural feature is retained within the building.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1. Overall the proposed scheme would result in much needed improvements to the museum, including some which would better reveal the significance of the listed building. It is considered that the principle of the altering the original floorplan of the building is justified by the public benefits which would arise; namely the creation of a functional entrance and improved visitor access to the museum. Subject to an appropriate amended design of the glazed infill screen and doorway, the resulting harm that would be caused to the buildings original historic floorplan would be adequately mitigated by the appropriate high quality design of the new intervention and the application would comply with section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, paragraphs 131, 132 and 134 of the NPPF, policies CP1, HE3, HE4 and HE5 of the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy.
- 11.2. It is recommended that the Committee resolve to grant listed building consent for the development proposed subject to the agreement of Officers and Historic England being reached regarding the amended design of the glazed infill screen and doorway, and subject to the following conditions. Officers will provide an update at the committee meeting to confirm whether this element of the proposal has been resolved.

12. CONDITIONS

- 1 The works permitted shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years from the date of this consent.

Reason: In accordance with Section 18(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 2 Unless specifically excluded by subsequent conditions the works permitted shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the terms of, and subject to, the conditions attached to this consent and in compliance with the details specified in the application and the submitted/amended plans listed in this decision notice.

Reason: As Listed Building Consent has been granted only in respect of the application as approved, to ensure that the development takes the form envisaged by the Local Planning Authority when determining the application in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 3 No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work (including historic building recording) in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Local Planning Authority. All works shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the approved written scheme of investigation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The archaeological historic building recording should consist of a level II building survey (Historic England, Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice, 2016) undertaken prior to the refurbishment works and an intermittent watching brief during the significant interventions into the building fabric. The recording should be undertaken by a professionally qualified archaeologist working to a brief issued by ourselves.

Reason: Because the development may have a damaging effect on known or suspected elements of the historic environment of the people of Oxford and their visitors, including Late Saxon and medieval remains, in accordance with policies HE2, HE3 and HE4 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016.

- 4 All original architectural features which are currently concealed and may be exposed during the progress of the hereby approved stripping out works shall be preserved in situ or relocated in accordance with details to be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the preservation of valuable features of historic interest which might otherwise be lost during the proposed works, in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 5 All existing historic internal features, such as plaster work, floorboards, ironwork, fireplaces, doors, windows, staircase balustrading and other woodwork, shall remain undisturbed in their existing position, and shall be fully protected during the course of works on site unless expressly specified to the contrary in the approved drawings or agreed as part of other conditions.

Reason: To ensure the retention of in-situ features of special architectural or historic interest in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 6 The existing spiral iron staircase currently sited on the ground floor shall be retained on site and either used or displayed in a new location as necessary or kept in storage in a suitable location. Details of the new location or storage location, including details of its suitability, shall be submitted to, and approved in

writing by, the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development.

- 7 Notwithstanding the approved plans, the following details regarding the hereby approved new opening within the blind arch shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority before the relevant parts are installed and the works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details only.
 - a) Method statement and schedule of works for the construction of the new opening through the blind arch and installation of the glass panels and doors,
 - b) Large scale drawn details of the glass panels and glass doors showing any elements of framing, fixings, door furniture and finished appearance,
 - c) Details of the reinstatement and repair of original historic cornices around the blind arch.

Reason: To ensure a sympathetic appearance for the new work and to conserve the special interest of the building in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 8 Notwithstanding the approved plans, details of any internal and external ventilation and extraction fixtures and equipment, including soil and vent stacks, heating and air conditioning plant, fume extraction and odour control equipment, to include details of siting, size, design and finished appearance, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority before the development commences and only the approved details shall be carried out.

Reason: To ensure a sympathetic appearance for the new work and to conserve the special interest of the building in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 9 The following details shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority before the relevant parts are installed and the works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details only.
 - a) Large scale drawn details of the new stair and platform lift within gallery 1, including finishes,
 - b) Large scale details showing the finished appearance of the new lift doors in the former stairwell.

Reason: To ensure a sympathetic appearance for the new work and to conserve the special interest of the building in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 10 Notwithstanding the approved plans, a revised door schedule shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the relevant works. The revised door schedule shall show the retention and re-use of as many historic doors as possible together with details of

the proposed method of upgrading to the existing doors to achieve the necessary fire rating and large scale drawn details of any new and replacement doors. Works shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To conserve the special interest of the building in accordance with policies CP1, HE3 and HE5 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

- 11 Notwithstanding the approved plans, following the stripping out works and further investigative works including trial holes, details of proposed new floor, wall and ceiling finishes shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority before the relevant parts are installed and the works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details only.

Reason: To ensure a sympathetic appearance for the new work and to conserve the special interest of the building in accordance with policies CP1 and HE3 of the Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and policy CS18 of the Oxford Core Strategy 2026.

13. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan

14. HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 1998

- 14.1. Officers have considered the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998 in reaching a recommendation to approve this application. They consider that the interference with the human rights of the applicant under Article 8/Article 1 of Protocol 1 is justifiable and proportionate for the protection of the rights and freedom of others or the control of his/her property in this way is in accordance with the general interest.

15. SECTION 17 OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

- 15.1. Officers have considered, with due regard, the likely effect of the proposal on the need to reduce crime and disorder as part of the determination of this application, in accordance with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In reaching a recommendation to approve listed building consent, officers consider that the proposal will not undermine crime prevention or the promotion of community.