

**West Area Planning Committee**

12<sup>th</sup> August 2012

**Application No.** 12/01508/LBC

**Decision Due by:** 10<sup>th</sup> August 2012

**Proposal:** Replacement of existing Triton statue with new Coade stone statue. (Existing to be salvaged and displayed in alternative location)

**Site Address:** Radcliffe Observatory Quarter  
Woodstock Road  
Oxford

**Ward:** NORTH - North Ward

**Agent:** Oxford University Estates **Applicant:** University of Oxford  
Directorate

---

**Recommendation:** Grant listed building consent

### **Reasons for Approval**

- 1 The Council considers that the proposal accords with Government advice on the management of the historic environment as summarised below. It has taken into consideration all other material matters, including matters raised in response to consultation and publicity. Any harm to the heritage assets that the works would otherwise give rise to can be justified and mitigated by detailed design, which the conditions imposed would control.
- 2 The proposals have developed through informed analysis of the architectural and historic interest of the structure, examination of its condition by conservators and through pre-application discussions with officers. The impact on the significance of the heritage significance is considered acceptable and justified by the public benefits of the proposed works. Overall the benefits that will be delivered, ensuring the fountain's continued use, encouraging the public's understanding and enjoyment of the heritage assets, justify granting listed building consent.

### **Conditions.**

1. Development begun within time limit
2. Develop in accordance with approved plns
3. Sample panel on site
4. Drawings and specification showing detailed design and installation details,
5. Further details of pool lining, mechanical services for fountain,
6. External lighting
7. Details to secure appropriate relocation for existing Triton statue
8. Programme for ongoing maintenance and repair

#### Other Material Considerations:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

#### **Public Consultation**

**Oxford Civic Society** – are sad that the original fountain statue is in such a dilapidated state but welcome a replica to replace it with, and with the assurance that the original will be preserved.

**Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS)** – regret that the Triton fountain has been deemed irreparable and will not be returned to its original position. The society consider that approval should not be granted until a statement has been submitted by the conservators outlining the condition of the statue and why it cannot be reinstated, a precise drawing of the proposed replacement statue has been received and a definitive statement of where the original statue will be on display and able to be viewed by the public. They add that they are disappointed that the application was validated without these statements in place and ask that no decision is made until they have been received and the public re-consulted.

#### **Statutory Consultees:**

**Highways & Transport** – Have not objections to the development

#### **Private Individuals:-**

Main comment raised: Loss of original statue

#### **Planning History**

Planning permission and listed building consent have been granted for the alteration, extension and conversion of the hospital buildings to educational use in connection with Oxford University's proposal for the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The permitted proposals included a landscaping scheme for the front courtyard and repairs to the Triton Fountain. The consents have been implemented and it is only on close examination of the statue by conservators that the University has concluded it is beyond repair and needs replacing, hence this application.

#### **Officers Assessment:**

1. The statue is the fountain centrepiece in the front courtyard of the Radcliffe Infirmary building, installed in 1857, north of the city centre, on the west side of Woodstock Road. The courtyard is framed by the Radcliffe Infirmary (Main Block) to the west; the Outpatient's building to the south, St Luke's Chapel to the north and the boundary wall and railings onto Woodstock Road. In the centre of this courtyard is the fountain. (appendix 1)
2. The fountain statue sits in the centre of a circular stone basin. It is a six foot statue of Triton, in terracotta which has been coated with hard cementitious grey slurry. The statue sits on fibreglass coated rubble fill and puddle clay plinth. The Conservators' cleaning process has identified that the statue has been damaged by water ingress and frost action in the past which has damaged the fragile terracotta clay. This has been compounded by inappropriate repairs with cement mortars. The statue was *not* originally

intended to be used as a fountain, but was modified for this purpose following acquisition.

3. The statue is a copy of the original Fontana del Tritone fountain in Piazza Barberini, Rome, commissioned in 1642. The Artist, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, was a renowned Architect and Sculptor it is said that his work demonstrated a "unity of the visual arts". In Greek mythology Triton was a Merman, half man half dolphin, the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. He dwelt with his mother and father in a golden palace at the bottom of the sea and blew his conch like trumpet, on command of Poseidon, to calm the restless waves of the sea. It is not known why Triton was chosen as a centrepiece for the fountain, but it is likely that it was chosen to complement the space and architecture of neighbouring buildings. The Radcliffe Observatory designed by James Wyatt and completed in 1762 is based on the Tower of Winds in Athens. The Ashmolean, is another Greek revival building of mid C19th date and suggests that perhaps the choice was simply a reflection of Victorian fashion and interest in the antiquities.
4. The Radcliffe Triton was modelled by the distinguished Victorian sculptor John Bell. Recent restoration works have also discovered the castings were produced by the sculptor J.M. Bashfield in his Millwall, London workshop. The statue is seen in Bashfield's 1857 trade catalogue with a list price of £50.
5. The fountain was not part of the original scheme for the hospital. It was commissioned as part of an overall plan to improve the entrance to the Infirmary, including the removal of a section of the high wall and the erection of cast iron railings fronting Woodstock Road. Interestingly, the fountain also provided water used for flushing the drains or in case of fire. The nozzles of the fountain were silver catheters provided by one of the Infirmary surgeons. On the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1857 at a meeting of the Board of Governors it was stated  
*'permission was given to place a fountain in the centre bed of the grass plot provided none of the expense falls upon the funds of the Infirmary'*.
6. It is likely that the statue may have been a gift from a patron, possibly Thomas Briscoe, who is recorded as providing the largest contributions to the fountain scheme, with two payments of £20 each. In August of 1857, after the erection of the fountain in front of the infirmary, comments from the annual report are as follows;

*'A great improvement has been effected in the external appearance of the Infirmary by the erection of a Fountain and the substitution of iron railings for the dead wall in front. The increased cheerfulness of the place has already been felt by patients.'*

### **Heritage Significance:**

7. The fountain is grade II listed and forms part of the group of listed buildings which make up the Radcliffe Infirmary site. Its Triton statue has both aesthetic and historic value, designed by eminent Victorian sculptor John Bell and produced by London sculptor J.M. Bashfield and reflected C19th interest in the Antiquities. Bell was involved in the revival of terracotta as an artistic medium in the 1850s.
8. The fountain holds communal value as a local landmark having greeted visitors to the hospital site for over 150 years and is a part of the history of development of the site, helping understanding of Victorian values and ideals about public art and perceptions of good quality design in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its aesthetic value lies in its accomplished design, although this has been compromised by the subsequent inappropriate and uninformed repairs, and adaptation of the base, using fibreglass.
9. The porous nature of Terracotta, which expands and contracts with moisture and fluctuations in temperature adds weight to the notion that the statue was not designed as a fountain, but was adapted to meet the brief set down by the Board of Governor's meeting in June 1857. The later coating of cement mortar was an attempt to protect the fragile terracotta underneath, which in fact probably accelerated the decay.
10. In addition to the cement coating the statue has undergone other repairs over the years which has both altered the appearance of the statue, with the loss of the fine detailing and caused further deterioration of the glazed terracotta clay.

### **Policy Framework**

11. Conservation principles, policy and practice seek to preserve and enhance the value of heritage assets. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains the government's aim that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.
12. The NPPF is supported by a Practice Guide that gives advice on the application of the historic environment policies. Paragraph 78 of the guide explains the expected outcomes

*There are a number of potential heritage benefits that could weigh in favour of a proposed scheme:*

- *It sustains or enhances the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting.*
- *It reduces or removes risks to a heritage asset.*
- *It secures the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation.*
- *It makes a positive contribution to economic vitality and sustainable communities.*
- *It is an appropriate design for its context and makes a positive contribution to the appearance, character, quality and local*

*distinctiveness of the historic environment. It better reveals the significance of a heritage asset and therefore enhances our enjoyment of it and the sense of place.*

13. In relation to development affecting a designated heritage asset (e.g. a listed building) 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. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification'.*

#### **Brief description of proposals:**

- Replacement and reinterpretation of the existing Triton statue with new Coade stone statue inspired by the Fontana del Tritone in Rome
- Repair and restoration of the existing 1857 Triton statue involving the application of additional slurry coat to the surface of the statue, containing a terracotta coloured pigment. The proposal also includes for the long term preservation of the existing statue by its relocation to a site protected from the elements
- Replacement of existing pool lining, mechanical services and associated infrastructure.

#### **Impact on heritage assets:**

14. The fountain pool, including the existing pool lining, pipe work, pump etc, are also in a poor state of repair. The plinth on which the statue sits has been replaced in fibreglass coated rubble and puddle clay. Intervention is required to ensure appropriate repair. Repair work to the pool is proposed and was to be part of the consented landscaping works for the whole site, with conditions requiring a schedule of repairs. This application for a replacement Triton statue has been submitted as a separate item of work, only because the University has concluded, after specialist examination of the statue, that repair, as originally planned for, and reinstallation was not an appropriate course of action to preserve the structure and that a replacement statue would be necessary.
15. Conservators have cleaned the existing statue. The cleaning process has found the existing statue is in a much worse condition than previously thought and is such that it cannot be re-used. The porous nature of Terracotta means that the clay has contracted and expanded over time through the absorption of moisture and attrition from changing weather conditions and temperature. The ensuing water ingress and frost action has contributed to significant areas of cracking. Where repairs have been undertaken and a cementitious mortar used to cover the terracotta, the terracotta has cracked underneath. Indeed, the slurry coat may have been applied to the surface of the statue to conceal previous repairs in an attempt to provide a degree of weather protection.

16. It is not possible to remove the slurry coat without damaging the terracotta underneath. Instead a further protective coating will be applied to the surface of the statue, containing a terracotta coloured pigment to conceal the previous repairs and restore the colour of the original finish. The harm to the quality and appearance of the existing statue has already taken place. These works of salvage, conservation repair and reinstallation in a covered location will save the original statue from being lost entirely. It is intended that the statue will be relocated to Osler House, which is the social club for medical sciences division. They are very keen to have the statue, because of the association with the Radcliffe infirmary.
17. As with the existing statue, the replacement statue will be a reinterpretation inspired by the original Fontana del Tritone fountain in Piazza Barberini, Rome, Using the same techniques as Bashfield would have used in 1857. The new statue will be created using a plaster mould with final detailing carried out by sculptors prior to firing. It will be a copy of a triton statue, recently installed on the North Terrace of Ferne Park, for Lord and Lady Rothemere, which has the same scale, composition and aesthetic as the Radcliffe Infirmary one.
18. The new statue will be produced in Coade Stone so will last 150- 200 years. Coade Stone is a composition of clay fired in a kiln at a very high temperature to produce a versatile and highly durable sculptural medium that is impervious to both rain and frost. Coade stone was introduced in 1769 and the ease with which it could be moulded made it suitable to meet a demand for large statues, sculptures and sculptural facades that would be resistant to weathering. Its constituents are grog, crushed flint, fine quartz, crushed soda lime glass and ball clay and fired at very high temperatures. Coade stone was by used by Wyatt for the sculptural friezes on the Radcliffe Observatory.
19. The new statue is proposed to have a creamy buff colour finish to reflect surrounding building stone. As part of the restoration works it is also intended to replace the modern fibreglass coated rubble fill and puddle clay plinth and replace it with block work faced with stone to provide a 'rocky outcrop' similar to the one at Ferne Park in Wiltshire.
20. The fountain and the courtyard represent the University's shop front and appropriate maintenance and management of the quasi public realm will be a high priority for the University. It is intended that the landscape around the ROQ site will be managed by the University Parks team and a condition is attached to the existing permission requiring details of the management plan, but to be clear about the extent of this management regime in relation to the fountain a condition is recommended here to require details and implementation strategy.

## **Conclusion**

As a part of the current permitted works for restoration of the fountain it has become clear that the existing Triton statue is in very poor condition and the appropriate course of action to preserve it is to display it under cover (after conservation works

are completed). This application is for a replacement of the statue with another that has a very similar aesthetic and scale, but using a different historic material and one that is designed specifically to withstand weathering.

Officers are satisfied that replacement of the existing Triton statue is justified, that a publicly accessible location for the repaired existing statue can be secured, that the proposed replacement and its colour is appropriate, that the use of Coade stone will make the statue durable in the conditions in which it will sit and that there will be an effective management regime for the fountain. To ensure its proper maintenance

Approval is recommended

### **Human Rights Act 1998**

Officers have considered the Human Rights Act 1998 in reaching a recommendation to grant listed building consent, subject to conditions. Officers have considered the potential interference with the rights of the owners/occupiers of surrounding properties under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Act and consider that it is proportionate.

Officers have also considered the interference with the human rights of the applicant under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol caused by imposing conditions. Officers consider that the conditions are necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest. The interference is therefore justifiable and proportionate.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

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 grant consent subject to conditions, officers consider that the proposal will not undermine crime prevention or the promotion of community safety.

**Background Papers:** 12/01508/LBC

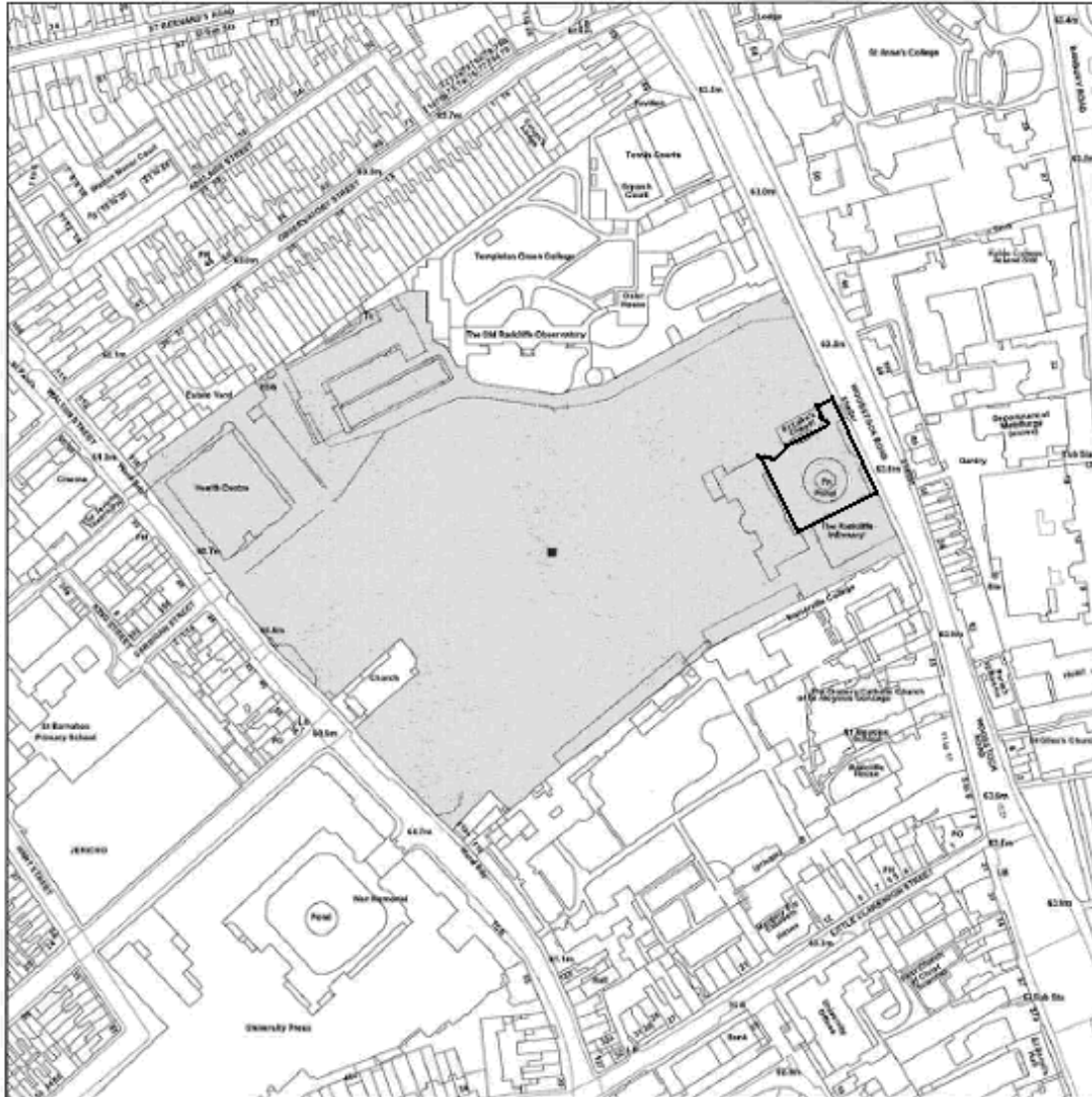
**Contact Officers:** Nick Worlledge/Sarah Billam

**Extension:** 2147/2640

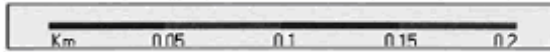
**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2012

# 12/01508/LBC - APPENDIX 1

## Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Woodstock Road



Scale : 1:2500



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011.  
Ordnance Survey 100019348.

Organisation	Oxford City Council
Department	Planning
Comments	
Date	02 August 2012
SLA Number	100019348