



c/o 21 Venns Lane, Hereford, HR11DE

For the attention of: Paul Walker, Chief Executive, Herefordshire Council

Cc: Roger Allonby, Head of Economic Development; Jonathan Pritchard, Senior Project Manager; Josh Bailey, Planning case officer; Jon Chedgzoy, Museum Libraries & Archives Manager, Damian Etheraads, Museum & Art Gallery lead; Debra Lewis, Senior Conservation Officer

DATE: 28th November 2024

NATURE OF FEEDBACK: General Comments post 230385-6

Dear Mr Walker,

Hereford Library & Museum, Broad Street

Following a recent meeting of the Society's Conservation and Planning Group which meets periodically to review applications in the City, it was agreed to write again concerning the works proposed for the Museum/Library building in Broad Street.

Obviously we are aware that the 230385-6 scheme has the benefit of planning consent and the general support of the Society and Hereford Museum Service Supporter Group (HMSSG).

The Society's misgivings about the addition of a fifth floor and roof terrace restaurant were not strongly articulated at the planning stage because they are rather more about viability and operation. However, we are aware of the cost pressures facing the project and that a certain trimming of ambition may be required in line with similar pressures which have obliged some reprofiling of the spend for other STF projects. We continue to have doubts about the income projections for the restaurant and whether its business case can genuinely be said to be supported by a high enough CBR to justify the investment.

In operational terms we tend to feel that the access arrangements to the roof level as proposed may prove inadequate and the attractiveness of a restaurant here inferior, given it will not offer the quality of view as from the terraces at the Left Bank or Castle Green Pavilion with which it would be in competition.

We also have significant concerns about the placing of a commercial catering kitchen, washing and public lavatory facilities in spaces above exhibition galleries and the Woolhope Room. To allow wet operations in these areas would be inconsistent with the sensible decision to install a dry fire suppression system. At the feasibility stage, the report from Prince and Pearce suggested a catering offer at ground level and, while more modest, this would seem realistic. Lavatories should remain downstairs, or even at Aubrey Street level at the rear of the building with accessible/disabled WCs at the front. An overflowing basin or lavatory blocked by a visitor incautiously discarding wet wipes has the potential to be disastrous for precious collections underneath.

A considerable concern is for the barrel vault over the 1912 exhibition space with its excellent translucent glass and moulded ribs and muntins. It has been presented that this must come down for

structural reasons, but the report on this from the structural engineer Barnsley Marshall (Feb 2023) does not say there is anything wrong with it; only that it would be better to take it down to make it easier to add an additional floor. The comment in HMSSG's Autumn News that 'the barrel vaulted glass ceiling is most likely beyond saving' is not therefore accurate.

So loss of the ceiling, to which the Conservation Officer strongly objected, is driven only by a desire to add structure above it. It is obviously a planning judgement as to whether the benefits of such a structure, in this case for an education room, lavatories and terrace, outweigh the loss of the barrel vaulted ceiling or cannot be delivered by other means, but we do not propose to revisit that argument here.

However we do seriously question the assumption a roof-top restaurant will support the revenue costs of the Museum to anything like the level assumed by the scheme promoters. Indeed we could see that, after the initial excitement from local people has tailed off and it becomes reliant on museum visitor income, it may lose out to more accessible local venues such as the Cathedral cafe, DKP or the Rule of Tum which are all ground level. The offering at All Saints has mezzanine seating which many choose, but it is a single short flight of steps and still most people opt for the ground level covers.

Our contention is therefore that the proposed additional structure above the galleries should be omitted for cost and for operational reasons, as well as good conservation ones. This would allow visitors to appreciate the 1912 barrel vaulted ceiling cleaned and relit as intended as well as the original 1874 skylights restored over the middle exhibition gallery and those over the entrance hall whose effect, having recently been revealed by the removal of poor quality 20th century accretions, is absolutely wonderful.

A more modest 'tea and cake' type catering offer could be set up either within the retail area to the right as you enter the building or to the left with a relocated orientation exhibition. The left hand space offers the option of street 'spill-out' via the old doorway in the left hand arcade.

The museum started its life as both a museum and a library with the intended purpose of "*...furthering the study of the natural, historical and social environment of Herefordshire...*". The provision of educational space within the museum is germane. Rather than so much of it being given over for storage, some of the basement areas could be used as education rooms as indeed is the intention for the basement rooms under the proposed library at the Shire Hall.

On balance we feel that scaling back the ambition of this project would be prudent financially and operationally. It would deliver significant benefits for conservation of the historic building while remaining truer to its core role as a facility for public education and the preservation of the material evidence of Herefordshire's history and archaeology. Subject to STF Board and Government approval it may also help to deliver essential improvements to the scheme for the Shire Hall, currently subject of a planning and listed building application, about which we have written separately.

Yours sincerely



City Cllr Jeremy Milln FSA, Chair

for and on behalf of Hereford Civic Society

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HEREFORD CIVIC SOCIETY DISCLAIMER: Comments submitted in respect of planning permission or listed building consent applications to Herefordshire Council will have been drafted by HCS caseworkers to reflect the generality of view of the Society and do not necessarily reflect the views of all members.