



ADDRESS: Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX

For the attention of: Josh Bailey, Planning Case Officer, Herefordshire Council

Cc: Jon Chedgzoy, Museum, Libraries & Archives Manager

DATE: 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024

NATURE OF FEEDBACK: **Objection**

Application reference number: 242506-7

**PROJECT: Planning & Listed Building Consent - Shirehall, St Peters Square. Proposed renovation, repair and refurbishment works required to Shire Hall including the introduction of a new library space within the Assembly Hall.**

Hereford Civic Society has considered the application for repair and adaptation of the Grade II\* listed Shire Hall, Herefordshire's most important civic building.

The proposed scheme recognises the significance of the building and broadly respects it. The principle for its reuse for public access and benefit is one the Society warmly supports. Important spaces with their fittings, such as survive in Courtroom 1, will be repaired and retained and this is appreciated.

Our representation therefore relates mainly to matters of detail:

### **Landscaping**

We would urge Herefordshire Council to improve the landscaping immediately adjacent to the Shire Hall. At present this is dominated by resin surfacing and impermeable asphalt affording roadways and car parking on every side. This adversely affects natural drainage and the evident qualities of the building itself. This is particularly regrettable at the front since the car parking has the effect of divorcing the Shire Hall from St Peters Square and its natural setting and approach from the City Centre as well as creating points of conflict with pedestrians. While we note the introduction of a little planting on the S side of the Assembly Hall (the historic wall-trained pear trees here are a notable feature which should be restored), we would strongly encourage a more sympathetic landscaping scheme to come forward which uses simple natural paving materials and allows for in ground planting and seating. We note that Historic England has offered to advise and this should be taken up by Herefordshire Council. The space immediately in front of the Shire Hall should not be cluttered by motor vehicles or planters at any time, other than exceptionally by emergency services.

### **Access Ramp**

The Society has significant concerns about the design of the access ramp proposed to the south of the front entrance. This would be a narrow structure wrapping around the SW corner of the building with an awkward 90 degree bend mid-way and terminating immediately in front of one of the

portico columns. It is also proposed to have a long run of glass balustrade. It is an ungainly structure which makes little effort to integrate with the form of the existing building.

Our suggestion is that the ramp needs to become part of the front forecourt landscaping, an object of beauty as much as it is of utility so that it becomes a choice to use by able and disabled people alike. It should not seem to apologise for itself or emphasise an apartheid of physical ability, as the present proposal does. The ramp therefore takes centre stage, offering a gradual ascent in stone almost from the Cornwall statue, arriving between the two central columns. In other words it acts to reinforce the connection between the Shire Hall and St Peter's Square with its monument, one which will need to be addressed when improvements are made to its public realm.

### **Bollards**

Pastiche 'cast iron effect' (ie plastic) bollards should not be used within the curtilage of the listed building. Fixed bollards may be timber (oak) or indeed cast iron. Moveable ones may be steel and it is recommended a match for existing ones at Widemarsh Street or Castle Street which retract.

### **Library Entrance**

While we have no objection to the introduction of a glazed internal porch and doors to the proposed library, we are concerned that the doors are to be pivoted into the visitor just as he/she has ascended the stairs. We would prefer horizontal sliding doors, assuming they are to be automatic. If they are not to be automatic but require manual operation or a manual option in the event of fire and power outage, a revolving door here would be the neat solution.

### **Main Entrance**

A similar glazed internal porch is proposed for the main entrance and this also is shown in Glazzard's application drawings as being hinged outwards into the face of the visitor arriving up the portico steps, potentially alarming as these would be automatic. Here space may not allow for horizontal sliding doors, so a revolving door could be the option subject to disability access compliance.

### **Cycle Parking**

Five Sheffield stands allowing for a maximum of ten cycles are proposed for the new glazed canopy at the S side entrance to the Learning Centre. These would be wholly insufficient, although it is appreciated they would be under cover. We should be encouraging far more people to arrive by cycle than this (and discouraging them from arriving by private car). The Design and Access Statement makes mention of cycle stands for St Peters Church and those outside Sunderlands in St Peters Square, but these are outside the application site boundary and may not be included in the figure for cycle provision. It is not clear from the application whether the existing small provision at the far E side of the car park site will be upgraded – one assumes not.

### **Existing glazed canopy.**

We would object to the replacement of the existing glazed canopy or porte cochere. This is a late Victorian or Edwardian feature of historic interest. Listed building consent was been obtained for the repair of this structure (see P202386/L) in 2020 and it remains that this is the correct approach to take.

## **Lath and Plaster Ceilings**

It is noticed that lath and plaster ceilings are proposed for restoration in historic areas, chiefly courtroom 1. This is admirable but while not strictly a planning matter, it should be remembered that a recently renewed lath and plaster ceiling came down in one of the members' rooms about four years ago and narrowly missed Cllr Phillips. The ceiling had not been specified or installed correctly so it is most important renewed ceilings are specified and constructed by conservation architects and builders.

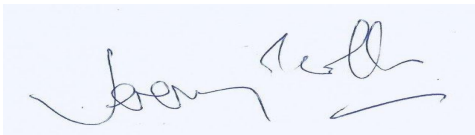
## **Suspended ceilings**

Many of the new ceilings are suspended and constructed using mineral ceiling tiles. This is fine in public areas as a means of covering ugly service M&E ducting, e.g. in the basement education spaces. However in storage, plant and other spaces not used by the public there seems no need to do this. Suspended ceilings destroy the proportions of a room and when very low can make them feel oppressively cramped. They also make maintenance of services more difficult and for cost reasons they may be omitted where not strictly required.

## **Drainage**

We would have concerns about the introduction of modern galvanised steel or plastic covered ACO channel drains within the curtilage of the listed building as is proposed on the south side of the Shire Hall. Traditional storm drains with cast iron grates would be more acceptable in heritage terms. While we note from the e-mail from Glazzards of 11<sup>th</sup> November that the area of impermeable hard surfacing round the Shirehall will not be increased; equally there is no real undertaking to decrease it in the interest of improving natural drainage and this should be addressed by reference to our comments on landscaping

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. The signature appears to read 'Jeremy Milln' and includes a horizontal line at the end.

Jeremy Milln FSA, Chair

for and on behalf of Hereford Civic Society

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