

SITE PLAN

BEXHILL

RR/2024/402/L

Town Hall  
London Road  
Bexhill



## Rother District Council

Report to	-	Planning Committee
Date	-	18 April 2024
Report of the	-	Director – Place and Climate Change
Subject	-	Application RR/2024/402/L
Address	-	Town Hall, London Road, Bexhill, TN39 3JX
Proposal	-	Removal of existing lath and plaster ceiling to Committee Room and replace with new Savolit board and lime hair plaster. Make good and replace cornice like for like.

[View application/correspondence](#)

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**RECOMMENDATION:** It be **RESOLVED** to **GRANT (LISTED BUILDING CONSENT)**

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**Director: Ben Hook**

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<b>Applicant:</b>	<b>Rother District Council Estates</b>
<b>Agent:</b>	<b>DGC Consultants</b>
<b>Case Officer:</b>	<b>Miss I. Wilson</b> (Email: <a href="mailto:Isla.Wilson@rother.gov.uk">Isla.Wilson@rother.gov.uk</a> )

<b>Parish:</b>	<b>BEXHILL CENTRAL</b>
<b>Ward Members:</b>	<b>Councillors C.A. Bayliss and R.A. McCourt</b>

**Reason for Committee consideration: Site owned by Rother District Council**

**Statutory 8-week date: 29 April 2024**

**Extension of time agreed to: N/A**

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### **1.0 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The application seeks Listed Building Consent for the removal of existing lath and plaster ceiling to the Committee Room and replace with new Savolit board and lime hair plaster. Make good and replace cornice like for like.
  - 1.2 The view is taken that the proposal would have a negligible impact upon the Listed Building. Having regard to Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is considered that the proposed works, by virtue of materiality, design and appearance would not cause detriment to the setting and special architectural and historic character and interest of the listed building as a designated heritage asset, and as such would comply with Policy EN2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy and paragraphs 135, 205 and 206 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).
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## **2.0 SITE**

- 2.1 Bexhill Town Hall is a Grade II Listed example of a smaller town hall, dating to the late 19th century, which was extended in the early 20th century and late 20th century. It is not within a conservation area but is within the setting of the Bexhill Town Centre Conservation Area and is nearby to The Lane Memorial (Listed Grade II).
- 2.2 Bexhill Town Hall was statutory listed under Grade II in 2022. The principal reasons for listing were due to architectural interest including, the use of Jacobean freestyle architecture, the cohesive quality of its 1907 extension in relation to the original 1884 building, the plan form and interior including fixtures and fittings of key civil spaces, and indeed for the building's historic interest relating to the newly established urban conurbation of the late 19th century.
- 2.3 It is also noted that the original building and subsequent extension in 1907 were designed by Henry Ward. Ward's other notable works include Hastings Town Hall, the now known as 'His Place Church' in Hastings and the 1927 Debenhams building in Hastings. Ward adopted an alternative architectural style for Bexhill developments that also included St Stephens Church and St Andrews Church, which concentrated on the use of red brick with sandstone detailing which is still a legible materiality in the town.
- 2.4 The site is located within the Bexhill Development Boundary (Development and Site Allocations Local Plan).
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## **3.0 PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 This application relates specifically to the Committee Room within the first floor of the Town Hall.
- 3.2 Following a partial collapse of the ceiling within the Committee Room, it was agreed that one bay of the ceiling was to be removed to inform upon the reason of failure and the proposed repair strategy. It is noted that no previous signs of failure were evident, prior to the incident.
- 3.3 It is proposed to replace the existing defective ceiling. It is proposed to remove the existing lath and plaster ceiling and retain where possible the existing mouldings, cornices and pilasters making good as necessary, where they can be preserved. Like for like replacements will also be used where necessary. It is then proposed to supply and install a new Savolit board with lime hair plaster to provide a finish that will replicate the existing. Savolit board is a wood fibre board that is vapour permeable and compatible with traditional finishes such as lath and plaster. As a larger board, it will provide a greater resistance to floor spring, but to which a lime mortar can be applied to replicate the textured finish of a traditional lime hair plastered ceiling.
- 3.4 The following reasoning for the proposed installation of the new Savolit board and lime hair plaster has been provided, within the submitted details (Structural Engineer's Letter – Dated: 29 February 2024):

- 3.4.1 *“Because of the ongoing 2nd floor office use, it is my recommendation that a more serviceable ceiling should be considered that would be better suited to resist dynamic effects.*
- 3.4.2 *To preserve the condition of the timbers, it is important that the replacement ceiling should be vapour permeable and an appropriate alternative to lath and plaster would be to use a woodwool board, such as 15mm Savolit, as a carrier for lime plaster finish. The board would need to be secured to the joists using stainless steel screw fixings and because of the variation in the original plaster thickness, the joists would need to be battened out to address that.*
- 3.4.3 *Traditional three coat lath and plaster with an average thickness of 25mm would have a typical dry weight of around 0.5KN/m<sup>2</sup> however, the Committee Room ceiling could easily be twice as heavy as that, due to its thickness. By comparison, the weight of a Savolit boarded ceiling, with lime plaster finish (including battening out) would be of the order of 0.3KN/m<sup>2</sup>, thereby significantly reducing the load on the joists.”*
- 3.5 The following notes relate to the proposed works to the ceiling and have been provided within the submitted Drawing No. DGC-22404/02 - Proposed Works: First Floor Plan: As Proposed – Dated: 01/03/2024:
- 3.5.1 *“N1.01: Prior to the commencement of works, a mould is to be taken of the undamaged cornice so that if in the event that a section disengages and falls it can be replicated exactly like for like and the new section inserted and joins made good with lime hair putty / NHL cream grout or similar and approved.*
- 3.5.2 *N1.04: Existing wall panelling to be protected temporarily for the duration of the works to prevent damage or mortar splashes.*
- 3.5.3 *N1.05: Existing decorative fire surround to be protected temporarily for the duration of the works to prevent damage or mortar splashes.*
- 3.5.4 *N1.06: Existing decorative door surround to be protected temporarily for the duration of the works to prevent damage or mortar splashes.*
- 3.5.5 *N1.07: Carefully remove the remaining lath and plaster ceiling following partial collapse including all associated fixings. Should it be required to provide sound insulation this will be a flexible type contained within the existing floor void, type and specification to be conditioned. Supply and fit new battens / firings to provide a level surface onto which 15mm Savolit Plus boards are to be fixed and finished with two-coat NHL lime hair plaster. NOTE the finished ceiling is to match the existing ceiling finish to ensure that the existing cornice detail around the perimeter of the room is not adjusted to accommodate the replacement ceiling. The existing cornice will be repaired locally as necessary using lime hair putty plaster to match existing.*
- 3.5.6 *N1.08: Existing decorative down stands to be retained and repaired as necessary. If required and in accordance with the structural engineers recommendation stainless steel reinforcement to be used to stitch cracks and made good with lime hair mortar to match existing.”*
- 3.6 As part of the investigation, the Leaders Room ceiling was also inspected, and no evidence of plaster detachment was found. There was one area at the

southwest corner of the room where there looks to have been some minor water ingress in the past, which has resulted in a small area of the heavy lincrusta type paper peeling away. The area was dry at the time of inspection and as far as could be determined, the plaster appears to be sound. No works are required to the Leader's Room - the existing ceiling and details are to be retained.

- 3.7 It has been noted on the submitted details that the Member's Room's existing ceiling is of suspended, metal framed tiles and, above that, appears to be of plasterboard and therefore no remedial works are required.
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## **4.0 HISTORY**

- 4.1 RR/97/1214/A Internally illuminated poster panel forming integral part of a replacement bus shelter – APPROVED CONDITIONAL (17.07.97)
- 4.2 RR/2019/109/P Erection of new lift lobby extension and ramp to the rear of the finance building – APPROVED CONDITIONAL (14.03.19)
- 4.3 RR/2019/1928/P Installation of velux windows in roof – APPROVED CONDITIONAL (14.10.19)
- 4.4 RR/2022/1784/P Proposed demolition of existing offices and outbuildings to rear of site, construction of new building comprising offices, civic and event space, cafe, and creation of new access; refurbishment of existing Town Hall, including part-removal of later additions; removal of access ramp; and associated landscaping and infrastructure works – REFUSED (24.10.22)
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## **5.0 POLICIES**

- 5.1 The following policies of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 are relevant to the proposal:
- EN2: Stewardship of the Historic Built Environment
  - BX2: Bexhill Town Centre
- 5.2 Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 confers a statutory duty to local planning authorities when considering whether to grant Listed Building Consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the Listed Building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 5.3 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 confers a statutory duty to local planning authorities when exercising planning functions, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework, Section 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) and Planning Practice Guidance are also material considerations.
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## 6.0 CONSULTATIONS

### 6.1 Planning Notice

- 6.1.1 No representations received.

### 6.2 Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council – **NO RESPONSE**

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## 7.0 APPRAISAL

- 7.1 The main issue for consideration is the impact of the proposal on the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building. The comments of the Council's conservation consultants are included within this report.

### 7.2 Impacts upon the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building.

- 7.2.1 Policy EN2: 'Stewardship of the Historic Built Environment' of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy, states development affecting the historic built environment, will be required to:

*"(iii) preserve, and ensure clear legibility of, locally distinctive vernacular building forms and their settings, features, fabric and materials, including forms specific to historic building typologies."*

- 7.2.2 Policy BX2: 'Bexhill Town Centre' of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy, states in part (vi) that the strategy for Bexhill Town Centre is to:

*"Ensure that development and change respects and, where appropriate, enhances the late Victorian/Edwardian character of the Conservation Area"*.

- 7.2.3 Paragraph 205 and 206 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023) states that:

- 205. *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 the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.*
- 206. *Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.*

- 7.2.4 The proposed works are for the repair and replacement of defective material to the ceiling of the Committee Room, following a partial collapse. The investigative works conducted shortly after the partial collapse occurred, note that the float coat (a coat of undercoat plaster) was of extreme thickness. Although a float coat is intended to provide a level base, in this instance, the

amount of plaster used contributed to significant degree of weight upon the lathes, increasing the potential of failure.

- 7.2.5 It is proposed to reuse the decorative materials or provide like for like copies where possible to ensure that the characterful feature of the strapwork ceiling and the cornicing and pilasters remain legible. The proposed materials and methods of repair are all in keeping with the age and significance of the building and will create a like for like final finish.
- 7.2.6 Whilst it is considered that the proposed changes would result in the potential replacement of some limited historic fabric, however given this is defective and that there was no visual sign of failure preceding the collapse, the proposal to replace with a modern material (compatible to the historic fabric in terms of breathability and in accordance with BS7913) is supported to ensure that the room is safe for persons to enter and will ensure its continued use.
- 7.2.7 The proposed works would preserve the aesthetic value of the building internally as there will be no visual change and all mouldings / cornices will be replicated like for like. It is considered that there will be no negative impact on the aesthetic value of the building.
- 7.2.8 The proposed method of works will ensure for the longevity of this part of the building. To merely restore the ceiling using the same approach could lead to another failure and collapse. The use of Savolit board to make up the excessive thickness is considered pragmatic, sympathetic and compatible with the historic building.
- 7.2.9 It is noted that the Town Hall is located within the setting of the Bexhill Town Centre Conservation Area and is nearby to The Lane Memorial (listed grade II). It is considered that as the works are internal to the building, no impact to the setting of the heritage assets will be established through this proposal.
- 7.2.10 The listing description refers to the building's aesthetic value internally and restoration of this is a principal concern. In its current condition the room cannot be used due to health and safety concerns. The proposed works will ensure that the civic function of the room remains legible. Based upon the information provided, there is no cause for objection to the proposed works.

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## **8.0 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 In summary, having regard to Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is considered that the proposed works, by virtue of materiality, design, and appearance would not cause detriment to the setting and special architectural and historic character and interest of the Listed Building as a designated heritage asset, and as such would comply with Policies EN2 and BX2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy and paragraphs 135, 205 and 206 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

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## **RECOMMENDATION: GRANT (LISTED BUILDING CONSENT)**

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## CONDITIONS:

1. The work to which this consent relates shall be begun before the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which this consent is granted.  
Reason: In accordance with 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 be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and details:  
Structural Engineer's Letter – Dated: 29 February 2024  
Ref: DGC22404 - Design and Access Statement - Date of Issue: 4 February 2024  
Drawing No. DGC-22404/02 - Proposed Works: First Floor Plan: As Proposed – Dated: 01/03/2024  
Drawing No. H6312/01 - GENERAL ARRANGEMENT OF COMMITTEE ROOM AND ASSOCIATED AREAS AT TOWN HALL BEXHILL-ON-SEA, EAST SUSSEX – Dated: Feb 2024  
Planning Portal Reference: PP-12857258v1 – Location Plan – Date Produced: 04-Mar-2024  
Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.
3. The materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted shall be as described within the application, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.  
Reason: To safeguard the historic fabric and the special architectural and historic character of the Listed Building in accordance with Policy EN2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.
4. The process of 'removal of existing lath and plaster ceiling to Committee Room and replace with new Savolit board and lime hair plaster. Make good and replace cornice like for like' of the development hereby permitted shall be as described within the application, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.  
Reason: To ensure that the development is in keeping with the character and/or appearance of the existing building and to safeguard the historic fabric and the special architectural and historic character of the Listed Building having regard to Policy EN2 (i & ii) of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.
5. In the event that unforeseen circumstances prevent the works from being carried out as per the approved plans/details. Revised plans and details may be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval. Once approved the works shall be carried out in accordance with the revised plans/details and retained as such thereafter.  
Reason: In the interests of ensuring a timely completion of works and to avoid undue risk to the heritage asset having regard to Policy EN2 of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.
6. Prior to the commencement of works, a mould is to be taken of the undamaged cornice so that if in the event that a section disengages and falls it can be replicated exactly like for like and the new section inserted, and joins made good with lime hair putty / natural hydraulic lime (NHL) cream grout or similar.  
Reason: To avoid undue risk to the heritage asset and to ensure that the development is in keeping with the character and/or appearance of the existing



building and to safeguard the historic fabric and the special architectural and historic character of the Listed Building having regard to Policy EN2 (i & ii) of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.

7. As noted on Point N1.07 within Drawing No. DGC-22404/02 - Proposed Works: First Floor Plan: As Proposed – Dated: 01/03/2024, should it be required to provide sound insulation during the works (flexible type contained within the existing floor void), details of the type and specification should be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval before works commence. Once approved the works shall be carried out in accordance with the details and retained as such thereafter.  
Reason: To avoid undue risk to the heritage asset and to ensure that the development is in keeping with the character and/or appearance of the existing building and to safeguard the historic fabric and the special architectural and historic character of the Listed Building having regard to Policy EN2 (i & ii) of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.
  
8. For the entirety of the works, the existing decorative fire surrounds, decorative door surrounds and wall panelling is to be temporarily protected to prevent damage and mortar splashes.  
Reason: To avoid undue risk to the heritage asset and to safeguard the historic fabric and the special architectural and historic character of the Listed Building having regard to Policy EN2 (i & ii) of the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy.