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Prepared for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council by:

GVA
65 Gresham Street
London EC2V 7NQ
telephone +44 (0)844 9020304
facsimile +44 (0)20 7911 2560
web gva.co.uk

Allies and Morrison
85 Southwark Street
London SE1 OHX
telephone +44 (0)20 7921 0100
facsimile +44 (0)20 7921 0101
web alliesandmorrison.com
Introduction

This brief provides guidance for the future of the existing Town Hall and Assembly Hall building in Tunbridge Wells. It has been prepared in the context of the plans to develop a new office building and civic suite and a new theatre on sites overlooking Calverley Grounds.

This new development will render the existing buildings surplus to requirements. However, given their important heritage value and their contribution to the wider townscape of the Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Conservation Area it is important that they are given a viable and sustainable new life once they are vacated. This point has been clearly stated by the Council Members and amplified through public consultation and through engagement with key stakeholders including Historic England.

The context for the new development is framed in planning policy, including a specific Planning Framework document adopted in July 2017 which defines the broad parameters for both the new buildings and the re-use of the existing listed buildings.

This document provides further, more detailed, guidance for the options to re-use the existing buildings. This is intended to highlight the possibilities for future adaptations but also to identify key aspects of the buildings which should be protected within any proposals in order to preserve the value and character of the buildings and their contribution to the wider townscape.

Potential uses such as innovative workspace, business, academic use, hotel or residential use could all be considered as potentially suitable for the building, subject to commercial viability.

Planning policy context

The following elements of policy and existing research and guidance are relevant to the development of future options for the buildings:

The Town Hall site falls within the Crescent Road/Church Road Area of Change. The relevant policy extract (AL/RTW 2A) is included as appendix one to this document.

Appendix two provides the relevant extract from the Tunbridge Wells Civic Development Planning Framework July 2017 and sets out the basic parameters for future remodelling.

The listing descriptions for both buildings are provided in appendix three.

Details of the Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Conservation Area appraisal can be accessed online via the Council’s webpage using this link https://goo.gl/fha0Wp

A detailed Conservation Statement for the wider group of buildings was prepared in 2013 by the Architectural History Practice for TWBC and Historic England and provides more detailed research and analysis of the buildings. This can be provided by TWBC on request.
Neighbouring projects

Any proposals for the re-use of the Town Hall and Assembly Hall building should be considered in the context of other adjoining projects. These include the redevelopment of the former cinema site on the opposite corner of the main junction, the cultural and learning hub project in the existing library and the potential adaptation and re-use of the police and magistrates building in due course.

The scheme known as the Belvedere on the former cinema site has recently been submitted for planning consent by developers Altitude Real Estate and proposes a substantial mixed use scheme including restaurants and shops, a boutique cinema, office space and over 100 apartments.

The Cultural and Learning Hub project involves substantial remodelling of the existing library, museum and adult education building to create a new community facility for education and culture which will also incorporate visitor information and council service gateway.
2 EXISTING BUILDINGS

Introduction

The existing Town Hall is the centrepiece of the civic cluster, occupying the dominant corner site at the junction of Mount Pleasant Road and Crescent Road. It is currently the main site for the council offices, council chamber and members robing rooms. The building has two generous storeys, along with a basement level and a limited element of rooftop development, with a courtyard in the centre.

The Assembly Hall forms the eastern section of the block. Its current use as a theatre is limited by poor back-of-house facilities and its lack of space, which, together with the capacity and layout of seating, makes it less attractive to touring shows. The building is comprised of an elegant art-deco style lobby with stairs leading to the main theatre space; a simple rectangular box with single large rake of seating above a flat floor.

The 1930s neo-Georgian style buildings are Grade II Listed, thus requiring the preservation and enhancement of the buildings. It is also located with the town centre conservation area. There are significant opportunities to improve the setting of the buildings through public realm enhancements.

Key considerations

The existing Town Hall building is characterised by a strong corner tower presence and side wings which are superficially symmetrical. This tower and the rest of the outer range of buildings form an important part of the historic townscape and are important features to retain and enhance.

To the rear of the site, the large box of the Assembly Hall theatre has less of an impact on the townscape as despite its bulk as it is screened on all sides by other buildings. Similarly, the fly tower is relatively obscured from view.

The Council Chamber is located in a projecting element in the centre of the courtyard, on the same orientation as the corner tower. It has no visible impact on the street, but it does significantly constrain the potential for successful re-use of the rest of the building around the courtyard.

There is a significant level change between the floor level in the building and the external ground level which various substantially around the edge of the building. Coupled with the existing listed status of the buildings this limits the opportunities to create new entrances into the building. Similarly the listed nature of the existing building may also limit scope for new window openings to be created.

It is important for the long term future of the listed buildings that a viable and sustainable future use is established. This should balance the desire to retain and protect the character of the existing buildings with the need to adapt them to ensure their ongoing usability.
Existing roof-top extension which sits behind the tall parapet wall

Council chamber wing, which projects into the courtyard

War Memorial

Central Town Hall entrance facing onto the main junction with a dominant tower feature

9 and 10 Calverley Terrace, the remaining pair of original Decimus Burton buildings

Theatre fly tower

Police Station and Magistrates Court (disused) part of the core civic group

Existing library building, part of core civic group

Assembly Hall entrance
The trees screening the western elevation of the group are a post-war addition, and somewhat disrupt the symmetry of the group.

There is an existing late twentieth century roof top extension on part of the building. The edge of the flat roof and the guardrail are just visible from the street.
A photograph of the buildings from around 1950, showing the original form of the public realm and the almost complete absence of trees.

The existing Assembly Hall frontage has a distinct and more flamboyant entrance within the group of buildings, but is a relatively plain structure to the rear.

The tower is a strong presence on the junction and creates an impression of symmetry to the group of buildings. It should remain a dominant feature in any scheme which modifies the external appearance of the group.

The stone banding course and consistent parapet height is a unifying element to the group.

The steps directly approaching the entrance are a post-war addition.

Windows to basement rooms with potential for habitable space.
3 OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction
The following sequence of images demonstrates a conceptual approach to the remodelling of the buildings in order to bring them into a sustainable long-term use.

The main body of the Assembly Hall auditorium is considered unlikely to find a new use owing to its particularly large scale. The council chamber has a significant impact on the environment within the courtyard, but is not visible from the public realm. Both of these elements may therefore be considered for removal in order to open up the possibilities of the site for new uses.

It has been identified that there is potential to add space at roof level. Given the tall parapet wall this could be up to two floors of additional space without challenging the scale and significance of the existing central tower.

There is scope for significant development on the site of the Assembly Hall within the scale and massing defined by the existing volume, and notably the height of the theatre fly tower. Keeping this development separate from the existing building in terms of floor plates would allow for more standard floor-to-floor heights to be used. This could increase the number of floors of habitable space compared to the existing building.

These opportunities have been previously tested with Council Members, with the general public and with key stakeholders including Historic England. However, it should be noted that no formal pre-application discussion has been undertaken and that works to a listed building require an intervention of high quality. It must also be noted that no structural survey work has been undertaken to inform these initial concepts.
The following pages outline a number of concepts which have been identified through the process of studying the existing building, including ways in which some of the more challenging aspects of adapting the building might be tackled.

Potential scope for new development including further rooftop development to the rear of the site and development up to the silhouette of the existing Assembly Hall fly tower.
Council chamber and courtyard
The existing council chamber is located within a limb of building which projects into the courtyard. The chamber itself is not regarded as being of particular quality when compared to some examples of the same period and when compared to other parts of the building such as the stairs.

Options for the modifications to the building could explore the removal of the chamber and the rooms below to open up the courtyard and thereby improve the outlook and amenity of all the rooms facing into it.

Roof-top development
The existing parapet wall is almost a full storey-height tall. This eliminates the potential for development at that level to have any kind of external view. This could be usefully addressed by developing a two storey roof top addition, with an upper level which is set back but which then benefits from views out. In the case that this was residential development or hotel use this could be develop as upside down duplex units with the living space on the upper floor to benefit from views and bedrooms at the lower level with small courtyard areas behind the parapet wall.
**Basement**
There are significant areas of existing basement within the building. Some of these are completely below ground, but would be suitable locations for storage, plant, gym, etc. Some spaces facing into the courtyard open into basement areas and so could potentially be successfully used as stand-alone spaces. There are a number, including those which have windows onto the street which are useable as secondary habitable spaces and could be exploited as part of duplex units.

**Parking**
The potential development of a new element of building on the existing Assembly Hall site allows for the possibility of parking to be incorporated into the development. This could be either as enclosed under-croft parking or potentially also as basement parking subject to viability. Access to the parking would be obtained via Monson Way in the location of the existing service access to the rear of the theatre.

Some dedicated parking may also be possible in Monson Way and Civic Way.
Adapting the structure
The structure of the existing building lends itself readily to re-use for functions such as residential, education, business or hotel use. The spaces facing onto the streets are generous, and flats or suites may be formed by amalgamating existing rooms and leaving much of the core fabric in place. The same can also apply to the spaces facing into the courtyard, although these rooms are not as deep. Options could be explored to build into the courtyard to increase the depth of the rooms, creating better proportioned spaces and improving the net to gross ratio of the building.

Working with the scale of the spaces
The existing spaces in some parts of the building have very generous ceiling heights. Although it is not considered likely that full duplex units will be possible within these rooms, it may be possible to incorporate elements such as mezzanine platforms to increase space and to add to the characterful use of spaces.
Relationship to the Police Station site

The lane which currently runs between the flank of the Assembly Hall and the neighbouring police station building is relatively narrow. Any new development on the Assembly Hall site is likely to be in a slimmer building than the bulky existing structure. This allows for a more generous environment to be created, with sufficient off-set to overcome the potential inter-visibility issues between rooms in the two buildings.

Assembly Hall lobby

The existing Assembly Hall lobby is an attractive and generously-proportioned space. It remains a notable element of the listed building, but is significantly more generous than a residential entrance would need to be. As the lobby has a good frontage directly onto the street, options to convert the space to use as a bar, restaurant or other similar use may be considered as a way of giving it a viable future use.
Potential for upper rooftop spaces to have excellent views out over the landscape. In the case of residential development, inverted duplex units would ensure that living spaces benefit from the view.

Remodelled Civic Way to create improved public realm

Cultural and Learning Hub project being developed separately on the neighbouring library site

Some areas of the basement open into generous light wells within the courtyard. Others are partially above ground and have low level windows to the street, offering potential for habitable rooms.
Potential for a new building on the site of the existing Assembly Hall, working with the substantial scale and massing of the existing building to provide new accommodation.

Existing Police and Magistrates building (court no longer in use).

Central courtyard created as a result of the removal of the Council Chamber wing.

Potential for undercroft parking to be incorporated in the elements of new development. Basement parking may also be possible below new elements of building.

Existing lane which could be opened up to more general access as part of the re-development of the adjoining Police and Magistrates building.
Policy AL/RTW 2A: Crescent Road/Church Road Area of Change (extract from site allocations DPD 2016)

The area shown on the Royal Tunbridge Wells & Southborough Proposals Map is designated as an Area of Change.

A masterplan shall be prepared by the developer(s) with the involvement of the Borough Council, stakeholders and the local community. The masterplan shall indicate the distribution, scale and quantum of proposed uses together with areas of open space/public realm, vehicular access, parking provision and pedestrian routes into and within the site. Proposals will be expected to deliver:

- civic, educational, cultural and leisure uses: these shall include library, museum, adult education and theatre facilities, including the facilities to be provided by the Cultural and Learning Hub. There shall be no loss of existing educational, cultural and leisure facilities, or public or ceremonial civic functions from the Area of Change unless suitable alternative provision has been secured elsewhere in the town centre
- retail development: incorporating approximately 15,000sqm (net) additional comparison retail floorspace (A1) which may include a new department store and other units of varying sizes. Retail uses should be provided on the ground floor to ensure active retail frontages

Other uses may also be delivered as part of the redevelopment and refurbishment of sites within the area. Appropriate uses could include:

- restaurants and cafés: development could provide restaurant and café facilities
- market facilities: development could provide enhanced market facilities, which may include the provision of permanent facilities
- hotel and conference facilities
- office (B1): high quality (B1) office space
- residential use: supplementary to the other uses
- parking: any development should reinstate at least the same amount of public car parking spaces within the Area of Change, with the provision to include additional or fewer spaces as considered necessary, subject to the latest available evidence

Development shall contribute to transport improvements, to include the Royal Oak junction Bayhall Road, Church Road/ Mount Pleasant junction, Church Road/A26 (London Road) junction and Garden Road/Victoria Road/ Camden Road junction.

Proposals for redevelopment and refurbishment within the Civic Complex/Crescent Road Area of Change shall accord with the following principles:

- a Conservation Statement must be produced to inform the masterplan and guide the redevelopment and refurbishment of sites, buildings and spaces within the Area of Change. This will focus on the heritage assets within the area (including listed buildings such as the Assembly Hall Theatre, Police Station, Magistrates’ Court, Town Hall, War Memorial and Nos 9-10 Calverley Crescent) and also address any potential Local Heritage Assets
- proposals must be of a high quality design and shall demonstrate how they conserve and enhance the Conservation Area
- proposals must be accompanied by an Air Quality Assessment and appropriate mitigation measures
- any proposals affecting the Town Hall will be expected to retain significant features, such
as the main entrance, staircase and Council Chamber in situ and allow their continued use for civic functions and other compatible uses

• key views into, and within, the Area shall be protected. These are likely to include views of the main Town Hall entrance and views down Mount Pleasant Road

• opportunities should be explored to create a series of new public spaces and interlinking routes to promote better access for cycling and walking

• development will be expected to provide or enhance green infrastructure links within the area and to provide public art, which may include water features

• proposals shall promote the use of high quality, locally distinctive materials and features

• proposals should explore the potential to enhance the lighting of the area to promote public safety and improve the night-time setting of historic buildings and the associated public realm

Proposals for developing part of the Area of Change shall not compromise the wider aims and comprehensive redevelopment of Policy AL/RTW2A and wider Core Strategy objectives.

Key

- Site boundary
- Listed buildings
- Primary shopping area
- Retail/mixed use development sites allocated in the Local Plan
- AL/RTW2A: Civic complex/Crescent Road area of change
- AL/RTW2I: Mount Pleasant car park

Fig 1 Existing policy designations
Context
The existing Town Hall is the centrepiece of the civic cluster, occupying the dominant corner site at the junction of Mount Pleasant Road and Crescent Road. It is currently the main site for the council offices, council chamber and members robing rooms. The building has two generous storeys, along with a basement level and a limited element of rooftop development, with a courtyard in the centre.

The Assembly Hall forms the eastern section of the block. Its current use as a theatre is limited by poor back-of-house facilities and its lack of space, which, together with the capacity and layout of seating, makes it less attractive to touring shows. The building is comprised of an elegant art-deco style lobby with stairs leading to the main theatre space; a simple rectangular box with single large rake of seating above a flat floor.

The 1930s neo-Georgian style buildings are Grade II Listed, thus requiring the preservation and enhancement of the buildings. It is also located with the town centre conservation area and within the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A).

Objectives
• To protect the Grade II Listed buildings and the historic fabric of the surrounding townscape;
• To provide suitable alternative uses for the building which work well in the town centre context; and
• To improve the setting of the civic buildings by ensuring a high quality public realm.

Development parameters
The existing Town Hall building is characterised by a strong corner tower presence and side wings which are superficially symmetrical. This tower and the rest of the outer range of buildings form an important part of the historic townscape and are important features to retain and enhance.

To the rear of the site, the large box of the Assembly Hall theatre has less of an impact on the townscape as despite its bulk it is screened on all sides by other buildings. Similarly, the fly tower is relatively obscured from view.

The Council Chamber is located in a projecting element in the centre of the courtyard, on the same orientation as the corner tower. It has no visible impact on the street, but it does significantly constrain the potential for successful re-use of the rest of the building around the courtyard.

It is important for the long term future of the listed buildings that a viable and sustainable future use is established. This should balance the desire to retain and protect the character of the existing buildings with the need to adapt them to ensure their ongoing usability.

There is a significant level change between the floor level in the building and the external ground level which various substantially around the edge of the building. Coupled with the existing listed status of the buildings this limits the opportunities to create new entrances into the building.

Potential uses such as office space, academic use, hotel or residential use could all be considered as potentially suitable for the building, subject to commercial viability.

In order to render the structure more usable it may be possible to undertake significant modifications whilst retaining and protecting the essential character and contribution to the townscape. Any additions to the silhouette of
the Assembly Hall and new development to the roof of the existing building should respect the form and symmetry of the building and the prominence of the corner tower.

The public realm around the site should be improved. In particular, enhancements will be sought to improve the setting of the War Memorial.

Public use of the buildings would imply retained public access to the space with opportunities for revised treatment such as seating and market stalls. A more private use such as residential-led development would benefit from reduced access to the edge of the building and private landscaped garden space replacing Civic Way.

Consideration should be given to the potential development of the Police Station and Magistrates Court to the east of the site. Flexibility should be built into the design of the redevelopment to ensure that a range of options can be explored for the adjacent site. Delivery of this development and re-use of the existing building is contingent on the completion of the proposed new theatre and office building and civic suite which will allow for the buildings to be vacated.
Town Hall listing description
Grade II

Built in 1939, one of a series of linked municipal buildings designed by Percy Thomas and Ernest Prestwich after a competition in 1934. Neo-Georgian with “Moderne” details. Brown brick in Flemish bond with Portland stone dressings, band below cornice and band above plinth. Flat roof. Symmetrical building of 2 storeys of splayed shape. Centre has 3 bays. Centre has raised parapet with shield and the motto "Do well Doubt not", flanked by giant pilasters and giant round-headed window with balcony and stone architrave with double doors. Two flights of stone steps with circular planters by doocase and rectangular planters by steps. One 20-pane sash on each side. Seven sashes to right side elevation and 12 to left. Interior has marble staircase of white marble with black marble plinth and coping. Giant stylised pilasters and gilded stylised Greek Key decoration to cornice. Original circular and half-cylindrical light fittings. Council Chamber has Greek Key design to ceiling and balcony. Domed vestibule.

Assembly Hall listing description
Grade II

Built 1939 by Percy Thomas and Ernest Prestwich after a competition in 1934 to design a complete set of municipal buildings. Moderne’ details. Brown brick with stone coping and band with ‘ASSEMBLY HALL’. Five bays. Front 3 bays project with 3 narrow windows with 6 vertical metal panes with lotus motif. Above are sculptural stone panels of female figures in classical dress depicting Dancing, Drama and Music. End bays have smaller casements with 6 vertical panes. Ground floor has five double doors with flat canopy above ramped up at the sides with globular lamps on rounded plinths. The foyer has black full-height columns with gold mosaics and stylised Greek key design decoration. Staircases with metal handrail and marble floor. Auditorium has original proscenium with rectangular motif decorations and similar decorations to ceiling of hall. Walnut dado panelling. Balcony.
APPENDIX 4 - EXISTING TOWN HALL PLANS