

REPORT SUMMARY

REFERENCE NO - 24/00009/LBC		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL Listed Building Consent - Install new helical bars in the southeast external walls at high level and low strength thixotropic epoxy resin in the cracks in the fly tower walls		
ADDRESS Assembly Hall Theatre Crescent Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2LU		
RECOMMENDATION GRANT subject to conditions (see section 11 of report for full recommendation)		
SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remediation works are considered necessary; • Helical bars are an accepted method of fortifying brick walls; • The installation of the bars would not result in the loss of historic fabric; • The proposed works would not harm the significance of the listed building. 		
INFORMATION ABOUT FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF PROPOSAL The following are considered to be material to the application: Contributions (to be secured through Section 106 legal agreement/unilateral undertaking): N/A Net increase in numbers of jobs: N/A Estimated average annual workplace salary spend in Borough through net increase in numbers of jobs: N/A The following are not considered to be material to the application: Estimated annual council tax benefit for Borough: N/A Estimated annual council tax benefit total: N/A Annual New Homes Bonus (for first 6 years): N/A Estimated annual business rates benefits for Borough: N/A		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is the landowner.		
WARD Park	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL N/A	APPLICANT Paul Doherr, TWBC Property And Estates
DECISION DUE DATE 11/03/24 with agreed Extension of time	PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE 12/02/24	OFFICER SITE VISIT DATE 10/01/24
RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY (including appeals and relevant history on adjoining sites):		
Planning Application		
Reference Number: 21/03715/LBC Proposal: Listed Building Consent: Installation of helical bars to the external brick wall on roof J Decision PER		

Date: 08/04/22

MAIN REPORT

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF SITE

1.01 The Assembly Hall is located adjacent to the Town Hall and faces onto Crescent Road. The Assembly Hall and the Town Hall form the municipal buildings of the town and host Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Assembly Hall Theatre.

1.02 The building was listed at Grade II in 1995 and the list description as follows:

Town Hall. 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 doorcase 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.

1.03 A brick built 'fly tower' – a large void into which background sets and rigging are hoisted in a theatre – is located on the north-east corner of the building's roof.

2.0 PROPOSAL

2.01 This application seeks Listed Building Consent for the installation of helical bars in the south east external walls at high level and the insertion of low strength thixotropic epoxy resin in the internal and external cracks in the fly tower walls.

2.02 'Helical bars' are metal spiral rods that are inserted between brick courses and then hidden behind replacement mortar. They are a recognised method of strengthening walls and, in this case, would be used to repair cracks in the south east external/parapet walls of the building.

2.03 Epoxy resin would be used to repair cracks in the fly tower walls, where the use of helical bars would not be suitable due to access issues. A suitable mortar mix would be used to replace mortar removed in order for the insertion of helical bars and epoxy resin. This mix would match the existing.

3.0 SUMMARY INFORMATION

N/A

4.0 PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

- Listed Building: Grade II – *statutory duty to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*.

5.0 POLICY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006

Policy EN1: Development Control Criteria

Tunbridge Wells Borough Core Development Strategy 2010

Core Policy 4: Environment

Submission Local Plan 2021

Policy EN4: Historic Environment

Policy EN5: Heritage Assets

6.0 LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

6.01 A site notice was displayed at the site outside the entrance to the Assembly Hall Theatre. The application was also advertised in the local press.

6.02 No representations were received.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

TWBC Principal Conservation Officer

7.01 This work is part of an ongoing series of interventions into the brickwork of the Town Hall complex. The works are necessary and structural engineers advice has been sought to ensure the repairs are appropriate. On the basis of the above I would raise no objections to the continuation of these works.

8.0 APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING COMMENTS

8.01 These works are essential to repair and strengthen the building by way of low impact remedial measures of appropriate materials to prevent further damage to the building from movement and improve the weathertightness of the structure. Any small amount of harm to the fabric is considered to be outweighed by the benefits of the proposal and will result in less than substantial harm to the heritage of the building. The impact of the work to the building is minimal and we do not believe that these measures will cause any harm to its significance.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PLANS

Application Form;

Location plan, Roof plan, Elevations A, B and C (L27M1P3K1 BR1 A)

Structural Engineers report by Ellis Structures dated 27.09.23

Structural Engineers report by Evans & Langford LLP dated 17.03.23

Heritage Statement.

10.0 APPRAISAL

10.01 The main issue is considered to be:

- Impact on the character of the listed building.

Impact on the character of the listed building

10.02 When considering applications for Listed Building Consent, Local Planning Authorities (LPA) have a statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of

preserving listed buildings and their settings. This includes any features of special architectural or historic interest.

- 10.03 Similarly, the NPPF requires LPAs to assess such applications in light of details that are proportionate to the heritage asset's importance. LPAs should also take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of such heritage assets and of putting them to a viable use that is consistent with their conservation.
- 10.04 Based on the submitted documents and the specialist advice received, enough information has been provided to fully assess the impact of the proposal on the Assembly Hall's significance and whether a viable use can be sustained.
- 10.05 It is evident from the details provided that the south east external/parapet walls and the internal and external walls of the fly tower have experienced fabric issues, namely cracking, due to age, weathering and historic movement of the structure. The cracking has allowed water to penetrate the building and cause damage to plaster, woodwork and decorations in the auditorium area, stage, lighting box, follow spot box and escape stairs at the front of the building. It is therefore accepted that remedial works are necessary.
- 10.06 In such cases, the intervention should be appropriate and proportionate, as well as being the minimum required in order to preserve as much historic fabric as possible. Structural engineers reports have been obtained to identify the cause of the cracking and to outline appropriate remedial works.
- 10.07 The cracking to the south east facing external walls would be repaired by way of helical bar installation, with final pointing in mortar to match the existing. The use of helical bars is an accepted method of repairing cracks to brick walls and they would be a subtle and proportionate response. As such, their installation is considered to constitute reasonable works that would not harm the special character of the heritage asset.
- 10.08 The cracking to the internal/external walls of the fly tower would be repaired by the insertion of low strength thixotropic epoxy resin to the full depth of the cracking, to bond the wall through its full width to prevent any future movement. Final pointing would be carried out in mortar to match the existing. This would be a subtle and proportionate response that would preserve the special character of the heritage asset.
- 10.09 The Principal Conservation Officer's comments further demonstrate that the proposed works are acceptable and that there would be no visual impact. No historic fabric would be lost either and the replacement mortar is considered appropriate.
- 10.10 Lastly, the repair of the external wall structure and fly tower would enable the Assembly Hall Theatre to continue in its use as a commercial venue and this would, in turn, help to sustain the whole building in its current use. This is clearly consistent with the building's conservation and represents its optimum viable use.
- 10.11 As a result, the application is considered to comply with Chapter 16 of the NPPF, Policy EN1 of the Local Plan, Core Policy 4 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Policies EN4 and EN5 of the Submission Local Plan 2021.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION – GRANT Subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years

from the date of this decision.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 18 of the Town and Country 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 not be carried out except in complete accordance with the details shown on the following submitted plans and documents:

Location plan, Roof plan, Elevations A, B and C – Drg no. L27M1P3K1 BR1 A

Reason: To clarify which plans and documents have been approved.

- (3) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the details of external materials specified in the application which shall not be varied without details being first submitted to and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity.

Case Officer: Hayley Starkey

- NB For full details of all papers submitted with this application please refer to the relevant Public Access pages on the council's website.
The conditions set out in the report may be subject to such reasonable change as is necessary to ensure accuracy and enforceability.