

Ref. 01202101/Bridgewater House
Date: 2 December 2022
Subject: Design/heritage response to MCC re Bridgewater House

Introduction

This summary note on design and heritage related matters follows a meeting on site with officers and a follow up meeting at the Council offices on 18 October. Regard has also been had to written comments from the Urban Design and Conservation Officer (UDCO), dated 5 October 2022 and comments received by the Council from The Georgian Society. Lee Hutchings from Stephen Levrant Heritage Architecture has reviewed the scheme and made recommendations following discussion with the design team and with Paula Burbicka. His detailed comments are set out in the response to the UDCO and in an Addendum to the submitted Heritage Statement.

As noted, the building has been vacant since the mid 2000s and has suffered from progressive deterioration and it's special architectural and aesthetic quality as a listed building is significantly compromised. Rainwater continues to enter the building during heavy downpours and risks further damage leading to some urgency to concluding the outcome of the planning application/listed building consent so that works can commence as soon as possible.

The proposals to renovate and bring the building back to a positive residential use are to be considered in this context ie a significant public benefit will result despite certain detailed areas which will inevitably be compromised/conditioned due to the condition of the building and the need for a viable and long term future use for the building and the wider site.

The following section aims to pick up the main points raised by MCC in their letter, with all other points being picked up in the accompanying responses to the letter.

Windows

Due to the current unsafe condition of many parts of the building and the largely concealed nature of the window openings, it has not been possible to survey most of the windows within the building.

Following the site visit with MCC it was agreed that a suitably worded condition would ensure that following safe access to the building a through window condition survey will be undertaken by a specialist company, with any windows that are capable of being

retained and repaired will be, and the shutters suitably retained. If restoration is found not to be possible/viable, then like-for-like replacement windows will be designed.

Ceilings/cornicing

In the original, 18th Century former dwellings, the applicant will save, repair and reinstate where necessary all cornicing in the two principal ground floor front rooms. The approach to cornicing in other rooms will be subject to further condition surveying, viability assessment and agreement with the Council through an appropriately worded condition.

Original ceilings will not have any lath and plaster removed and instead will be fire protected by having under boarding attached on top of the lath and plaster and a protective coating applied to the in-situ cornices so that they remain exposed and visible whilst achieving a suitable level of fire protection. See detailed section in the pack provided alongside this note. An appropriate condition to be agreed.

In the 19th Century extension, the roof has largely collapsed a long time ago and the lath & plaster ceilings/cornice have largely collapsed. On the ground floor level, it is proposed to retain the now exposed brick jack-arched vaults overhead instead of reaffixing dropped lath and plaster ceilings, however, one apartment will receive a new lath and plaster ceiling and cornice in order to retain the original character of the ground floor within one area. However, this will be subject to a condition survey once safe access can be achieved and clearance of debris has been undertaken and an approach agreed subject to condition.

At first floor it is proposed to remove the very limited remaining areas of lathe and plaster and replace with plasterboard in order to achieve a 60 minute fire rating.

Front elevation – doors and windows

The fences previously proposed dividing the front garden area to Chester Road have been removed from the proposals and soft landscaping will be enhanced. It is noted that officers support the installation of the front boundary railings.

CBRE have advised in writing that the private gardens at the front are important in terms of market saleability and values (together with the private garden access entrances – see below) as outdoor space such as this to new homes in the city centre is at a premium and much less common than in other regional cities. Outdoor space to the refurbished Georgian building differentiates this scheme from other modern residential towers in the vicinity. Similarly with each ground floor apartment having its own entrance from the front garden area, again an important part of the viability assessment for these apartments.

The proposal to use “sash window doors” on the Chester Road elevation, which was a common type of garden door in high quality houses in the 18th Century, has been based on the avoidance of visually altering the high significance principal elevation and its 18th and 19th Century, multi pane sash window arrangement, which is the dominant characteristic of the elevation and the wider Grade II listed building and its past owners and uses. This

period/use/conservation appropriate design will retain the highest level of historic fabric and visual appearance, whilst offering the much needed occasional garden access for individual apartments, and will also allow natural daylight into the proposed rooms.

Rear elevation - Dormers

The applicant has reduced the size of the dormers and amended the glazing bars. This results in a better relationship with the windows below and the building. These and the rooflights represent the minimum required openings to deliver the necessary habitable space in the attic. The materials/details can be conditioned.

Side elevations

Noted that officers welcome the retention and restoration of the original/historic door to the 19th Century addition to the Great Jackson Street elevation and the suggested retention or re-instatement of the fan-light is agreed.

New doors to the east (courtyard) elevation of the 19th Century addition are only shown where strictly necessary to the proper working of the building.

Noted that proposed new doorways to the west (Crown Street) elevation are supported as well as the proposed railings.

Rainwater goods

All existing plastic gutters and downpipes will be replaced with cast iron examples representing a significant heritage benefit.

Works to roof

As noted, the original slate roof covering was removed some years ago. Some of these have been stored in the basement and their condition is mixed. It was agreed to use these original tiles from the site on the prominent elevation fronting onto Chester Road and the remainder will be new or reclaimed to match. Condition will require detail of new slates to be agreed.

New build elements

The courtyard elevations have been simplified as requested by officers and revised elevations provided (see Dwg no. 122C). The courtyard will be landscaped with details to be approved.