

HEBDEN BRIDGE TOWN HALL

CONSERVATION STATEMENT

BACKGROUND

Hebden Bridge Town Hall has recently been passed to community ownership by Calderdale Council. The new owners, Hebden Bridge Community Association intends to maintain the Town Hall in public ownership and continue its function as the centre of community and civic life for the town.

The Town Hall is a flamboyant Edwardian structure built in stone with a slate roof with the first floor Council Chamber announced by large mullioned oriel windows on both front and rear elevations. It was built in 1897 at much the same time as the new St Georges Bridge, and soon after the adjacent Fire Station was added in matching style. These buildings, together with the bridge approach are an important reminder of the wealth and civic pride in the town at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1901 a Transmission Station was erected behind the town hall and along the River Hebden, by Halifax Corporation to power the new tram service between Halifax and Hebden Bridge. It only functioned until 1917 and later became the Town Library. It was converted to council offices in 1977 with a link to the Town Hall.

Prior to the introduction of these civic structures the site was occupied by a cluster of back to back cottages with iron works and textile mills close by.

Existing buildings on the site now include the Town Hall itself and Fire Station, the former Transmission Station with link block and various other accretions of little value. The remainder of the site is at present used as a car park.

The Town Hall is a Grade II listed building. The Transmission Station is not mentioned in the listing although it is attached via a 1960's link building and therefore fall within its curtilage.

THE PROPOSED SCHEME

The proposed scheme seeks to refurbish the Town Hall, appropriately retaining its original use as a civic centre owned and used by the community. The Fire Station with its large opening will become the main entrance with reception and exhibition space. The old Council Chamber, complete with panelling and furniture, will continue in its original use. Other rooms within the Town Hall will be refurbished with inappropriate partitions removed. They will include a Function Room on the ground floor with the remaining spaces used for meeting rooms and offices. Care will be taken to retain and repair all original features. The glazed link on the rear elevation, a later addition, will be removed to reveal the original oriel window. However, the less important lower windows will be partially obscured by a circulation link. Demolition of the transmission station and 1970's linking block will enable more of the original rear elevation to be seen and appreciated.

NEW BUILDINGS

The proposed scheme also includes a significant new-build element comprising an auditorium seating 200 with associated bar and cafe and a block of rooms for renting to a wide range of creative enterprises including offices, hot desks, business lounge and support.

The enterprise centre will be situated on Hangingroyd Lane reflecting the line of cottages which once occupied this site. The new buildings will be honestly modern and functional but will respect the surrounding townscape in terms of massing and materials.

PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF THE OLD TRANSMISSION STATION

The proposal includes demolition of the Transmission Station in order to facilitate the creation of an external courtyard, linking all elements of the project and enhanced by a south east facing riverside frontage. Demolition will also facilitate easier access between all the elements of the scheme.

In order to assess the impact of demolition it is necessary to understand the significance of the building in conservation terms. The Transmission Station is a two storey, stone built structure with a slate roof. Ground floor windows are large and rectilinear while the upper floor has small arched openings. The projecting gutter supports provide a modest decorative feature. There are no obvious signs of its original purpose and its original function is not well known within the town.

SIGNIFICANCE

The building has significance for the following reasons:

- **Civic Centre:** It is part of a group of buildings including St George's Bridge, the Town Hall and Fire Station which all reflect the height of industrial activity and civic pride in the town.
- **Its original use as a Transmission Station for trams:** The introduction of trams to Hebden Bridge is of historical significance with few physical reminders that this transport system ever existed.
- **It is part of the weft and warp of the old industrial town centre.** Hebden Bridge itself is of exceptional significance as an example of early industrial settlement at the heart of the textile industry with the nearby Packhorse Bridge at its centre. Although the transmission station is only of modest architectural merit, any loss of historic buildings within the town centre is regrettable.
- **Listing:** Although the Transmission Station is not mentioned in the listing of the Town Hall, it is attached and is therefore within the curtilage. It also occupies a central position in the Conservation Area.

ADVANTAGES OF DEMOLITION

Recent planning policy stated in PPS5 states that re-use of existing buildings is often a preferred option in terms of sustainability. However the proposed scheme offers the following advantages:

- **Improved rear elevation to Town Hall:** Demolition of the link block would allow better views and understanding of the rear elevation to the Town Hall.
- **Access:** Retention of the old transmission Station involves additional levels to an already complicated scheme and DDA compliance using ramps and lifts, is more difficult to achieve.
- **New courtyard:** The proposal includes an south facing courtyard with riverside frontage which links all the elements of the scheme and creates an attractive outdoor space for public use.
- **Light and Views:** The courtyard arrangement offers better light and views for the proposed new buildings than would be possible if the old transmission station was retained.
- **Townscape:** The reinstatement of buildings in Hangingroyd Lane and corner link to the Fire Station will re-establish the old street pattern and complete the market place elevation. The new buildings respect their context in terms of height, massing and materials.
- **Community benefits:** The scheme provides considerable community benefit through the retention of public functions and ownership of the Town Hall and additional facilities including hall, seminar space and café.
- **Economic benefit:** The scheme provides significant economic benefit, providing managed enterprise workspace and business hub to support small business in the area.

INTERPRETATION

Arguments for and against demolition of the Old Transmission Station must be weighed against each other by all parties but I would strongly recommend that, whatever the outcome, some form of interpretation is included in the scheme, recording the important history and development of all the buildings on the site.

Jessica Sutcliffe
2010

June

