

The application seeks listed building consent for modifications to the existing balustrade of the South East and North West Galleries to the Great Hall at Keele Hall.

Keele Hall is a Grade II* Listed Building which is situated within the Keele Hall Conservation Area as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map. The application site is within the Grade II Historic Park and Gardens at Keele Hall.

The decision on this application was deferred at Planning Committee on the 28 February for a site visit.

The statutory 8 week determination period for the application expired on 15 March 2017

RECOMMENDATION

PERMIT subject to the following conditions;

- 1. Time limit**
- 2. Materials as stated on application form / drawings**
- 3. In accordance with the approved plans**

Reason for recommendation

The proposal would preserve the special character and appearance of the Grade II* Listed Building and there are no factors which weigh against it.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with this application

Discussions have taken place between the Councils Conservation Officer and the applicant prior to the submission of the application. This is considered to be a sustainable form of development and so complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

KEY ISSUES

The application seeks listed building consent (LBC) for modifications to the existing balustrade of the South East and North West Galleries to the Great Hall at Keele Hall involving the introduction of a new, higher handrail. The application is a resubmission following the refusal, by Planning Committee, for application reference 16/00207/LBC which also involved modification of the existing balustrade of the galleries above the Great Hall but also included modifications to the balustrade to the landings to the four storey stairway situated in the North East wing. The previous proposal was refused because the proposed alteration would be harmful to the special interest of the Grade II* Listed Building without sufficient justification for such alterations.

As with the previous application, the only issue to address in the determination of the application is whether the proposal preserves the special character and appearance of the building.

In assessing applications for LBC the Planning Authority is required to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF indicates that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the assets conservation. The more important the asset the greater the weight should be and any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

Policy CSP2 of the Core Spatial Strategy seeks to ensure that buildings of particular heritage value are safeguarded. Policy B6 of the Local Plan states that the Council will resist alterations or additions to a listed building that would adversely affect its character or its architectural or historic features.

The current application, as indicated above, no longer seeks LBC for the modification of the North East Wing stairway and relates only to the modifications to the South East and North West galleries of the Great Hall. The Great Hall has three bays with ionic columns set across the gallery with a brass balustrade attached to the stone columns with brackets. The modifications proposed within the current proposal, as in the previous scheme, is the introduction of a new handrail in 40mm tubular brass, ammonia aged to match the existing attached by brackets to the stone columns as closely reflecting the existing balustrade appearance.

The University have carried out an audit that has demonstrated that the safety of users of the hall is compromised. The existing handrail is currently at a height of 0.87m (below waist height for many people) which is in excess of 200mm below the current Building Regulations recommended height. There is a falling distance in excess of 6m from the galleries. As the galleries to the Great Hall are freely accessible for users of the Hall this is an unacceptable safety risk.

The University have submitted a scheme for what they believe is the option that would result in the least interference to the existing structure - the introduction of the additional handrail that will increase the overall height of the balustrade to each gallery to 1.1m. In establishing this as the preferred option two other options have been discounted by the University as follows:

- Closing of the gallery areas to members of the public. The indication provided is that this may be feasible for the North West gallery, but is not feasible for the South East gallery as this forms part of the main circulation and fire escape route.
- Replacement of the existing balustrades is considered a last resort as the balustrades are original features of the Hall.

The overall significance of this part of the building is high and its appearance is important and in accordance with paragraph 132 of the NPPF consideration has to be given as to whether the special character and significance of Keele Hall will be harmed by this alteration. It is your Officer's view that as the new rail will match the existing top rail and will be fixed in the same manner as the existing handrail, using brackets of the same design as the original, the overall significance of this part of the hall will be retained and not harmed by this addition. This view is shared by the Council's Conservation Officer and Historic England.

In conclusion it is considered that the proposal would preserve the special character and appearance of the Grade II* Listed Building and there are no factors which weigh against it and therefore listed building consent should be granted.

APPENDIX

Policies and Proposals in the approved Development Plan relevant to this decision:-

[Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy \(CSS\) 2006-2026](#)

Policy CSP1: Design Quality
Policy CSP2: Historic Environment

[Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan \(NLP\) 2011](#)

Policy B5: Control of development affecting the setting of a Listed Building
Policy B6: Extension or Alteration of Listed Buildings
Policy B9: Prevention of harm to Conservation Areas
Policy B10: The requirement to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a Conservation Area
Policy B13: Design and Development in Conservation Areas
Policy B14: Development in or adjoining the boundary of Conservation Areas

Other material considerations include:

[National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) \(2012\)](#)

[Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\) \(2014\)](#)

Relevant Planning History

16/00207/LBC – Modifications to balustrade – Refused 2016

Views of Consultees

Historic England advises that despite some changes and alterations, the Great Hall retains much of its original character and as such any alterations must be carefully considered. Attention is drawn to the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, regarding the preservation of listed buildings and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, and section 12 of the NPPF.

They are aware of the University's concerns regarding the safety of students, staff and visitors, and the need to augment the existing balustrade. Having discussed the scheme in detail with your conservation adviser last year, they are satisfied that the currently proposed solution will have limited visual impact and will not harm the special significance of this important building.

The **Conservation Officer** states the proposal affects the interior of the Great Hall – described in the listing as a 'late medieval/early Renaissance style with a 3 bay arcade at each end with gallery above'. The gallery above at each end has 3 bays with ionic columns and set across the gallery is a brass balustrade applied to the stone columns with brackets.

An audit has been undertaken by the applicant to identify issues of safety to the hall and considered that the main risk is the low height of the rail in the gallery area of the Great Hall, which has unrestricted access, results in a low tipping point that is unsafe.

The proposal is to add a rail above the existing balustrade on each side which will be matched to the existing top rail in terms of material, colour, profile and fixing and will be fixed on the same plane directly above the existing top rail. In line with paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework consideration has been given to the special character and significance of Keele Hall will be harmed by this alteration and it is considered that that overall significance of the Hall will be retained and not harmed by this addition and is justified as it addresses an existing risk.

Whilst some reservations about the proposal was raised and it was suggested that the whole balustrade could be lifted up and sat on a stone plinth, the **Conservation Area Working Party** raised no objections and felt that the change to the character of the balustrade whilst material, was acceptable.

The views of **Keele Parish Council** are that they have no comments to make on the application.

Representations

None received to date

Applicant/agent's submission

The application is supported by a Heritage & Design Statement. All of the application documents can be viewed at the Guildhall and on <http://publicaccess.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online-applications/PLAN/17/00030/LBC>

Background Papers

Planning File
Development Plan

Date report prepared

8th March 2017