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**Item No:** 7.5

**Application:** 190551

**Applicant:** Colchester Borough Homes

**Proposal:** Face bed new ashlar in Portland Whit Bed Stone to re-establish inscription to Foundation Stone

**Location:** Colchester Borough Council, Town Hall, High Street, Colchester, CO1 1PJ

**Ward:** Castle

**Officer:** Eirini Dimerouki

**Recommendation:** Approval of listed building consent subject to conditions

## **1.0 Reason for Referral to the Planning Committee**

- 1.1 This application is referred to the Planning Committee because the applicant is Colchester Borough Homes on behalf of the Borough Council.

## **2.0 Synopsis**

- 2.1 The key issue for consideration is the impact of the proposed works on the heritage significance of the Town Hall, a grade I listed building..

## **3.0 Site Description and Context**

- 3.1 The application relates to the Town Hall in High Street. The building is listed at Grade I and its list description is as follows:

*“1898, by John Belcher. Exceptionally rich design in free classical style: red brick and Portland stone. 3 storeys, lowest one stone-faced with central entrance, carved brackets to porch support balcony above. 3 pairs of engaged Corinthian columns rise through 1st and 2nd storeys to support 2 segmental and one triangular pediment. Large coat of arms above latter, breaking balustrade to roof. Statues in high relief between 2nd storey windows. Victoria tower, on return, rises above pair of bay windows. 162 ft high topped by statue of St Helena. Lower stage of brick, upper part of stone: very elaborate with 4 bronze ravens and 4 stone figures - Fishery, Engineering, Military Defence , Agriculture. One of the bells is from the Old Town Hall. Circa 1400 (RCHM).”*

- 3.2 The Town Hall is located in Colchester Conservation Area No. 1 and is one of Colchester’s landmarks. The impressive building is a key focal point in the views along High Street, while the tower dominates the skyline and is a significant element of the townscape.

- 3.3 The proposals relate to the foundation stone which is located at the eastern end of the building’s High Street elevation. The Portland stone plaque commemorates the occasion when it was laid with an inscription that contains the names of dignitaries who laid the stone, the date of the event, the Architect’s name and the name of the Town Clerk in post at the time.

- 3.4 Today, the stone is in a poor condition, as wetting and drying cycles, salt migration and frost action have resulted in delamination and deterioration of its surface, leaving the inscription largely and increasingly unreadable.

## **4.0 Description of the Proposal**

- 4.1. The proposal involves face bedding a new 735mm x 550mm x 75mm (thick) ashlar block in Portland Whit Bed Stone with new hand worked text / letters to match original inscription. The template drawing for the engraving is based on a rubbing taken on site, while the wording is obtained from the official programme of the event.

## **5.0 Land Use Allocation**

### **5.1 DP6 Town Centre Uses**

## **6.0 Relevant Planning History**

- 6.1 C/COL/03/1846 - Change of use from Civic Hall and Council Offices to Civic Hall and Council Offices and commercial functions/business meeting rooms - Town Hall, High Street, Colchester – Approved 12/12/2003.
- 6.2 090383 - Creation of new gated entrance and flight of steps with landings to form accessible route to building together with new stepped access to churchyard. Installation of stair lift with support guide rail and new external lighting – Town Hall Chambers Churchyard, St Runwalds Street, Colchester – Approved 08/07/2009.
- 6.3 090735 - Creation of new gated entrance and flight of steps with landings to form accessible route to building together with new stepped access to churchyard. Installation of stair lift with support guide rail and new external lighting - Town Hall Chambers Churchyard, St Runwalds Street, Colchester – Approved 27/08/2009
- 6.4 091425 - Internal decorations to the moot hall area, rewire works to moot hall and council chamber, external fabric repairs and decorations and the insulating of the roof void above the moot hall – Town Hall, High Street, Colchester – Approved 21/01/2010.
- 6.5 111289 - Listed building application to install an additional handrail to the main internal staircase – Approved 18/11/2011.
- 6.6 120371- Proposed installation of four micro antennas below the cupola of the Town Hall Tower to provide a wide area Next Generation Access broadband service to residents and businesses of Colchester Borough – Approved 10/05/2012.
- 6.7 120349-Listed building application for new extractor hood installed in Kitchen – Approved 22/08/2012
- 6.8 132801- Alterations to lower ground floor to relocate CBC CCTV monitoring centre. Installation of relocated emergency generator into external courtyard at basement floor. Installation of new exhaust flue from generator and air con air duct – Approved 04/02/2014.
- 6.9 132802- Alterations to lower ground floor to relocate CBC CCTV monitoring centre. Installation of relocated emergency generator into external courtyard at basement floor. Installation of new exhaust flue from generator and air con air duct – Approved 21/02/2014
- 6.10 120301-Upgrade of existing emergency lighting system– Approved 24/05/2012.

- 6.11 160415- Proposed removal of 1x plasterboard stud work, non-load bearing wall to reinstate original room size – Approved 01/04/2016.
- 6.12 160502- Installation of a new bench on raised platform in front of the existing bench in the council chamber, including new access ramp to provide wheelchair access and associated repositioning of adjacent fixed seating and benches. The works are desired to be fully reversible so that the chamber can be returned to its existing configuration – Approved 31/05/2016.
- 6.13 161058- Restoration of clock face, including removal of opal glass, and replacing glass with opal perspex – Approved 05/07/2016.

## **7.0 Principal Policies**

- 7.1 Planning law requires that applications for Listed Building Consent must be determined in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which requires that “In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall 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.” .
- 7.2 The National planning Policy Framework (NPPF) must be taken into account in planning decisions and is a material consideration, setting out national planning policy. NPPF’s Section 16 “Conserving and enhancing the historic environment” provides the guidelines for the protection and conservation of heritage assets, including listed buildings. Paragraph 193 determines that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Paragraph 194 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraphs 195 and 196 identify and deal with two levels of harm respectively: substantial and less than substantial harm linking their justification to the public benefits that can potentially outweigh them.
- 7.3 Moreover, planning applications must be decided in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Continuing the themes of the NPPF, Colchester Local Plan 2001-2021 includes the adopted Colchester Borough Core Strategy (adopted 2008, amended 2014) which adds detail through local strategic policies. Particular to this application, the following policies are most relevant:
- UR2 - Built Design and Character
  - ENV1 - Environment

- 7.4 In addition, also relevant are the adopted Colchester Borough Development Policies (adopted 2010, amended 2014):
- DP1 Design and Amenity
  - DP14 Historic Environment Assets
- 7.5 Further to the above, the Historic England Good Practice Advice Notes 1-3 (March 2015) should also be taken into account in the decision-making process for applications affecting listed buildings or the historic environment generally.

## **8.0 Consultations**

- 8.1 The stakeholders who have been consulted and who have given consultation responses are as set out below.

### **8.2 Historic England**

“Thank you for your letter of 5 March 2019 regarding the above application for listed building consent. On the basis of the information available to date, we do not wish to offer any comments.”

### **8.3 The Victorian Society**

“ We have no objections in principle to the re-facing of the existing foundation stone. The contribution this stone makes to the significance of the Grade I-listed Town Hall is focused in the inscription rather than the stone itself, and we consider the renewal of this inscription acceptable. Nonetheless, the foundation stone is an important if small textural element of the principal façade of the Town Hall, and any changes must be considered carefully in order to avoid harm. The choice of bed for the Portland stone is crucial, as is the quality of the letter-cutting. The stone itself must be carefully matched to the existing and surrounding stones, and we suggest that your authority’s conservation officer approve the choice of stone before any work is done. The character of the inscription is very important, both in terms of the letter forms and the profile of the grooves with which those forms are cut into the stone. To ensure that the new inscription matches the original as closely as possible the letters must be cut by hand, and the letter cutters must be carefully selected.”

- 8.4 In addition to the details reported above, the full text of all consultation responses is available to view on the Council’s website.

## **9.0 Parish Council Response**

- 9.1 Not Parished

## **10.0 Representations from Notified Parties**

- 10.1 None received at the time of the report drafting.

## **11.0 Parking Provision**

- 11.1 N/A

## **12.0 Open Space Provisions**

12.1 N/A

## **13.0 Air Quality**

13.1 N/A

## **14.0 Planning Obligations**

14.1 This application is not classed as a “Major” application and therefore there was no requirement for it to be considered by the Development Team and it is considered that no Planning Obligations should be sought via Section 106 (s.106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This application is for listed building consent only.

## **15.0 Report**

15.1 The main issue raised by this application is the effect that the proposed works would have on the special interest of this Grade I listed building. Key considerations for the works are:

- the sufficient justification for the proposals;
- the suitability of proposed materials and execution of the works; and
- the impact of the proposed works on the special interest of the heritage asset

### Sufficient justification of the proposals

15.2 Historic England’s Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008) identify four main heritage values that are associated to historic assets: evidential value; historical value; aesthetic value; and communal value. The Town Hall’s exceptional interest is the sum of these values can be ascribed to the Grade I listed status of the building.

15.3 The foundation stone is a feature that contributes to these heritage values:

- Evidential value (derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity): the stone provides a record of the building’s construction, marking the beginning of the works and providing evidence for their length (four years, as the building was completed in 1902).
- Historical value (derives by the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present - it tends to be illustrative or associative): by commemorating an important civic event of Colchester’s history and by its association to the notable people who were involved.
- Aesthetic value (derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place): the foundation stone is not a

decorative feature of the building but it is situated on a visible location on street level and therefore its poor condition reflects on the asset's aesthetic qualities and detracts from its appearance.

- Communal value (derives the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory- it can be commemorative and symbolic, social and spiritual): as an expression of community effort, collective experience and memory associated to the construction of the most important civic building of Colchester.

- 15.4 The deterioration of the stone's surface and the loss of its inscription undoubtedly affect its potential to contribute effectively to these values and therefore the need for remedial repairs is considered sufficiently justified.

#### Suitability of the proposals

- 15.5 The proposals are analysed for their suitability for their impact on the heritage asset as follows:

- Material: the Portland Whit Bed Stone was chosen for its greater resistance to salts etc and specifically selected clean (relatively clear of shell) in order to achieve a more satisfactory result for the carving. The 'hard Brown Portland' which is mentioned in the programme of the event cannot be sourced. The name was possibly is a colloquial term from the time or could relate to a former quarry, as a Portland Stone of this colouration would be considered defective, or sub-standard.
- Method of repair: the existing stone will be carefully cut back to allow a section of new 735mm x 550mm x 75mm (thick) ashlar to be fixed in place with Stainless Steel pins and bed on a Lime/Portland Stone dust mortar. The thickness of stone (75mm) has been selected to achieve greater visual integration with the existing stone, whereas the selection of a thinner embedded repair would more likely read as a planted-on section of stone. The new stone will be cut and carved in the workshop as it is impractical to work this on site.
- Design: the inscription will be reproduced by new hand worked letters, based on a rubbing taken from the existing stone and including the wording obtained from the official programme of the day when the stone was laid.
- Craftsmanship: the works will be carried out by a company registered with the 'Stone Federation Great Britain', to ensure proper expertise and experience of the personnel who will carry out the works.
- Maintenance: some concerns involve the pressure washing of the adjacent public areas which may affect the stone surface. To minimise this risk, the operatives who carry out this works must be made aware of the hazard and instructed to take additional care when working around stonework. Additionally, it is proposed that a fine shelter coat of Lime/Portland Stone dust mortar is applied periodically on the stone for more efficient protection.
- Alternative options: a different approach that would keep the existing stone without cutting away a section would involve the reworking of the

stone's surface. However this idea was dismissed as it would be impractical to carry out the work on site due to the stone's location, the new surface would no longer be flush with the adjacent stones and the reworking could accelerate the rate of the stone's decay and damage, exposing its inner core.

- 15.6 The review of the proposals demonstrate that careful consideration has been given to ensure that the new stonework will replicate accurately the historic foundation stone, will integrate seamlessly into the surrounding surface and will be resistant to decay.

#### Impact of the proposed works on the special interest of the heritage asset

- 15.7 As discussed above, the foundation stone contributes to the heritage values that comprise the building's great significance. Its contribution is mainly associated to the content of its inscription rather than the stone itself and therefore the loss of the engraving would have a detrimental impact to these values. As the proposal requires some loss of historic fabric in order to achieve the renewal of the inscription, it can be argued that the intervention involves a level of non-substantial harm to the historic asset. However, the benefit from the restoration of the historic engraving is considered sufficient enough in order to outweigh this harm, as it will ensure the foundation stone's contribution to the special interest of the Town Hall.

## **16.0 Conclusion**

- 16.1 To summarise, the proposed works are considered fully justified to ensure the contribution of the foundation stone to the heritage values of the building, while the limited non-substantial harm caused by the loss of original fabric, is not considered to have a significant effect on the special interest of the Town Hall and any harm caused be sufficiently outweighed by the benefits of the stone's restoration.

## **17.0 Recommendation to the Committee**

- 17.1 The Officer recommendation to the Committee is for:

### **APPROVAL of Listed Building Consent subject to the following conditions:**

#### **1. ZAB: Time Limits for LBCs**

The works hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this consent.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 18(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

#### **2. ZLA: Only Works Shown Within Application**

This approval is limited to the works shown on the approved:

- Drawing COR386776 B-0001, Location Plan
- Drawing COR386776 B-0002, Foundation Stone
- Access, Heritage and Planning Statements



- Assessment of Significance

and does not indicate approval for associated or enabling other works that may be necessary to carry out the scheme. Any further works must be submitted to and approved, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority prior to any works commencing. Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to the scope of the permission and to ensure that the historic building is preserved from any other potentially harmful works.

### **3. ZBB: Materials as Stated in Application**

The materials to be used shall be those specified on the submitted application form, the Access, heritage and Planning Statements and the Assessment of Significance.

Reason: To ensure that materials are of an acceptable quality appropriate to the listed building.

### **4. Non Standard Condition – Sample to be agreed**

Prior to the removal of the existing foundation stone, a sample of the proposed replacement stone including bedding shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Council's Historic Buildings and Areas Officer.

Reason: To ensure that materials are of an acceptable quality appropriate to the listed building.

## **18.0 Informative**

18.1 The following informative are also recommended:

### **1. ZUA: Informative on All Listed Building Consents**

PLEASE NOTE: This listed building consent relates solely to the plans, drawings, notes and written details submitted with the application or as subsequently amended in writing and referred to in this notice. Any variation of the works or additional works found necessary before work starts or while work is in progress or required under the Building Regulations, or by the County Fire Services or environmental health legislation may only be carried out after approval by the Local Planning Authority. Unauthorised modifications, alterations or works not covered by this consent may constitute an offence under Section 9 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and may render the applicant, owner(s), agent and /or contractors liable to enforcement action and/or prosecution.