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PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION CONSULTANTS



DETERIORATED SOFFIT TO THE ENTRANCE PORTICO OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL NORTH BLOCK

HERITAGE STATEMENT / DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

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Prepared for

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report forms the supporting information for a listed building application for repairs required to the deteriorated soffit to the North block entrance portico of the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading.

The Heritage Statement and the Design & Access statement have been combined to avoid repetition.

The grade II* listed Royal Berkshire Hospital is understood to have been constructed in the late 1830s and the soffit to the portico is understood to be original to the building.

The building and portico are still in everyday use as a public NHS hospital, and the area experiences heavy foot traffic by the building users. It is therefore imperative that the area is returned to safe use for patients, staff, and visitors as soon as is practically possible.

The application does not involve any works to the main building itself and is limited to the entrance portico.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Listing

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: MAIN BLOCK AND FLANKING WINGS AT ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL
List entry Number: 1156091

LONDON ROAD 1. 5128 (South Side) Main block and flanking wings at Royal Berkshire Hospital SU 7272 9/161 19.3.75. II* GV 2. Main block 1839 by local architect and builder Henry Briant (who won the competition for designing the hospital). As King William IV took such a keen interest in the hospital before it was built, his Arms, not Queen Victoria's appear on the central pediment. 2 storeys and basement. Bath stone - very large ashlar blocks used to front. Slate roofs. 11 bays with 7 bay central break projecting pedimented hexastyle Ionic portico. Glazing bar sash windows.

Corner piers. Channelled basement. Astragal to moulded cornice (dentil cornice to portico) and parapet. Recessed side entrance bays. Wide steps to portico with excellent contemporary lamp tripods with guilloche ornament. Interior: colonaded stair hall, cast iron balusters to stairs which divide at landing. 1882 chapel with contemporary fittings reached from under landing. (By Joseph Morris who made considerable extensions to the Hospital at that date). The main block has flanking wings added 1865 to designs by Joseph Morris. 3 storeys also Bath stone and long side wings forming a large courtyard added 1881-2. The latter are also of Bath stone, have 5x5 end pavilions with 3 bay pedimented breaks and are linked to side wings by a Greek Doric colonade (east side) and a 1911 block (west side). In front to street is a dwarf-stone tall with moulded coping and 5 retraining ashlar gate piers with block modillions to moulded capping.

Listing NGR: SU7241272955

2.2 Site History

The Royal Berkshire Hospital Main Block was erected in the late 1830s by local builder and architect Henry Briant. The North Block faces London Road and the hospital occupies the plot bordered by the A4 London Road to the north, Craven Road to the east, Addington Road to the south, and Redlands Road to the west.

The North Block is understood to comprise three floors plus a basement level. The external walls are of large block Bath Stone ashlar. The front elevation building is symmetrical with a prominent 7 bay central break pedimented hexastyle Ionic portico. The roof covering to the portico is understood to be of natural slate, although a visual inspection from ground level shows that the roof appears to have been overlaid with bitumen asphalt sheeting – presumably to provide a temporary solution to a previous water ingress issue.

2.3 Present Use of the Building

The Royal Berkshire Hospital continues to operate in its original capacity as a public hospital facility providing care for NHS patients. Although a modern building adjoining the North Block now houses the hospital's main entrance, the North Block portico provides the

main entrance for patients, staff, and visitors accessing the building from London Road and the car park located there.

3. SURVEY

3.1 Building Defect

A survey was carried out to inspect the deteriorated plaster soffit to the main entrance portico to the North Block of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. A section of plaster had fallen from the soffit above the main entrance.

The portico soffit comprises what is understood to be the original lime plaster formed on timber laths. The roof covering is understood to be of natural slate, which appears to have been overlaid with a layer of bitumen asphalt sheet.

3.2 Fabric of the Soffit

The soffit is understood to comprise the original lime plaster finish applied to wooden laths which are nailed to timber joists above. Plasterwork of this age and type would be expected to contain horsehair as a reinforcement.



Figure 1: Area of missing / fallen plaster viewed with live plaster surrounding.

3.3 Fallen and Live Plaster

An area of plaster measuring approximately 1m² has become detached from the substrate and was found to have fallen to the portico floor below. This area is directly in front of the main entrance door.



Figure 2: Eastern end of portico soffit which may also contain areas of loose / live plaster.

In addition the area where plaster has fallen, there exists a surrounding area where the plaster is live, friable, brittle plaster which appears liable to fall at any moment subject to normal building vibrations, or strong winds or other atmospheric changes. The area of surrounding live plaster appears to measure a minimum of approximately 3/4m², although there may be further areas to either side of the portico soffit which could not be closely inspected from the current scaffold platform.



Figure 3: Western end of portico soffit which may also contain areas of loose / live plaster.

3.4 Public Safety Risk

The deteriorated live plaster in its current condition poses a risk to building users entering or exiting the building via the North Block portico. This risk has been eliminated as far as possible by cordoning off the area.



Figure 4: Close-up of edge of missing plaster; showing further loose material at risk of falling away from lath substrate.

3.5 Cause of the Plaster Deterioration

Horsehair reinforced lime plaster is a stable and long lasting material which will withstand normal continued vibration and minor building movement, however, holes are common in plasterwork which has been water damaged. It is likely that at some point in the past a leak has developed from the roof covering above.



Figure 5: Portico roof viewed from the west showing overlaid possibly deteriorated bitumen asphalt sheeting.

This diagnosis is supported by the presence of the current overlaid bitumen asphalt sheeting to the portico roof. There may have been a number of slipped or deteriorated slates or ridge tiles leading to water ingress in the area above the fallen plasterwork.

It is unclear how long the overlaid temporary roof sheeting has been in place for. It is possible that this waterproof covering has itself deteriorated and may be allowing water to penetrate and saturate the plaster soffit.



Figure 6: Overlaid bitumen asphalt sheeting to East slope of portico roof.

4. HERITAGE STATEMENT

4.1 Listed Building

Buildings are listed for special architectural or historical character and are graded I, II* and II. All listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

In the year 1975 the main block and flanking wings were given a grade II* listing. This listing was later incorporated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The grade II* listed Royal Berkshire Hospital is understood to have been constructed in the late 1830s and the soffit to the portico is understood to be original to the building.

4.2 External Features

The central Ionic portico to the north elevation is constructed of Bath Stone ashlar blocks with the roof of that part of the structure supported by 6 pedimented columns.

The soffit to the portico comprises what is understood to be original lime plasterwork on a substrate of wooden laths. The roof covering is understood to be of natural slate, which appears to have been overlaid with a layer of bitumen asphalt sheet.



Figure 6: Front Elevation



Figure 7: Front Elevation



Figure 8: Area of damaged plaster



Figure 9: close up of timber laths



Figure 10: close up of roof covering

5. DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

5.1 Use

The Royal Berkshire Hospital continues to operate in its original capacity as a public hospital facility providing care for NHS patients. Although a modern building adjoining the North Block now houses the hospital's main entrance, the North Block portico provides the main entrance for patients, staff, and visitors accessing the building from London Road and the car park located there.

The application relates to works to repair the damaged plaster to the underside of the portico soffit and the roof covering.

5.2 Accommodation

The accommodation will not be altered in any way.

5.3 Layout

The layout of the building will not be altered in any way.

5.4 Scale

The scale of the building will not be altered in any way.

5.5 Access

The site access will not be altered in any way. Temporary access may be necessary due to safe working platform, as figure 7.

5.6 Parking

The existing car parking spaces will not be altered in any way.

6. RECOMMENDED REMEDIES

6.1 Deteriorated Plaster Portico Soffit

Following a full inspection of the entire portico soffit from a suitable access scaffold platform, and consultation and approval from the Conservation Officer, we recommend that any deteriorated and live plaster be stripped to sound material surrounding. The condition of the wooden laths should be assessed, although there does not appear to be any deterioration to these from the initial visual inspection.

We recommend that the plasterwork is then patch repaired using a traditional lime plaster to match the existing, with an appropriate material used as reinforcement to ensure the strength and longevity of the repair.

6.2 Possible Water Ingress from Roof Covering

The roof covering appears to have been overlaid with bitumen asphalt sheeting. It is unclear how long this temporary repair has been in place, nor its condition. It is likely that a previous roof leak due to slipped or broken roof slates or ridge tiles is the reason why the bitumen asphalt sheeting has been applied; it is also likely that the overlaid waterproof sheeting has now reached the end of its life and is itself allowing water penetration.

We recommend that the existing roof covering be visually inspected as soon as it practically possible. Should (as suspected) the bitumen asphalt layer be found to be defective we recommend that, following consultation and approval by the Conservation Officer, this external temporary protective layer be carefully stripped to allow inspection of the roof slates below.

Depending on the condition of the underlying roof covering, individual replacement slates or ridge tiles may be recommended to be applied; alternatively the full replacement of the portico roof may be more appropriate to ensure the long term protection of the building fabric below and a manageable future maintenance liability. Any such decision would need careful consideration and approval from the Conservation Officer.

7. POINTS OF REFERENCE

- Powys, A.R. 'Repair of Ancient Buildings', SPAB, 1929
- Hunt, R. & SUHR, M. 'Old House Handbook: A Practical Guide to Care & Repair', SPAB, 2008

8. SCHEDULE OF WORK

8.1 Portico Roof

- Once further investigative opening work has been carried out to ascertain the roof makeup a detailed specification will be written.
- Anticipated works may consist of spot / repair replacement slate tiles to match the existing or full replacement.

8.2 Portico Soffit

- Prepare a lime-putty mixture. One part lime putty to three parts sharp sand. Mix in goat hair to reinforce the mix. Allow for a mix to cover approximately 5m²
- Any additional areas will be identified by inspection.
- Allow to replace any damaged timber laths, approximately 1/3 of defective area. Secure with stainless steel fixing nails.
- Undercut the perimeter plaster to allow the patching material to nest under the existing secure plaster.
- Spray the lath with water until damp.
- Apply a thin layer of plaster to the hole, allow to wait 10 minutes before applying the next layer.
- Make sure the plaster is set before applying the final coat.
- Leave the plaster to cure, ensure the area is covered with sacking or tape plastic sheeting over the new plaster to stop it drying out too quickly.

