Conservation Statement

Revised report (amendments by Gateshead Council) to support the repair and reuse of the building

March 2017
Old Town Hall
West Street, Gateshead

Conservation Statement
November 2016
Revised report (amended by Gateshead Council)
Revised March 2017

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What is a Conservation Statement?

Conservation is the process of actively managing change to an historic building or other heritage place in order to protect what makes it significant.

A Conservation Statement is a quick way of helping to prepare for changes which will affect such a place.

It allows us to work out what it is about the place which is important and what is not, so that the changes being planned can protect as much as possible of what makes the place special.

Conservation Statements are useful in advance of investment in a place, such as for repairs or minor works. They are also useful to inform more major planning and development activities such as extension or demolition.

Statements can also be a useful everyday tool to inform the way the place is run, funded or owned. They are useful tools to influence management and decision-making, and to raise the profile of the place amongst those that have an influence over it, such as owners, tenants and users.

A Conservation Statement can stand by itself or it can be the foundation for a more detailed Conservation Management Plan, should one be needed.

Informed Conservation

The Informed Conservation Process

Conservation Statements are based on Informed Conservation, a process which underpins historic environment conservation theory today.

Conservation is not about preventing change in heritage assets, it’s about managing change to protect what’s significant. To do this you need to know what’s significant and what’s putting that significance at risk.

Informed Conservation has four stages. Each one is addressed in this document:

UNDERSTANDING
What is this place? What are its components, features and characteristics? What’s its history?
What’s the context in which its future will be decided?

SIGNIFICANCE
What makes this place special? How important is it?
Why is it valued, and by whom? Why should we conserve it?

RISK AND ISSUES
What is putting the place’s significance at risk?
What are the threats to protecting its significance?
What are the issues to be aware of when deciding its future? How harmful could their impact be, and what are the highest priorities?

POLICY
What should we be doing to protect the place’s significance from its risks? What conservation activity is needed to protect the place? What management regime is needed to protect it?

Once these stages have been addressed, it should be much clearer how to look after the heritage asset for the future, without preventing changes which may be necessary.

Informed Conservation is good practice in managing the historic environment. For it to have effect, this Statement should be used regularly to inform the day-to-day and longer term future of the place.

North of England Civic Trust

For over 40 years we have been active in conservation and regeneration across the North East of England, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

As a CIVIC TRUST we champion public involvement in the processes that shape the environment, often working with local groups.

As a BUILDING PRESERVATION TRUST, it tackles dereliction on the high street and in the countryside, from modest local landmarks to the rescue of nationally important heritage on the brink of being lost.

As a CONSULTANCY, we provide independent expert advice to all those who need it, brokering solutions to sensitive development issues and securing the resources needed to convert liabilities into assets.

Our aim is to improve the contribution the environment makes to the quality of life for all in the region, its cultural identity and its creative potential.

In recent years we have delivered nearly £10 million of projects, generating training and jobs in areas of deprivation and contributing to the local economy. Our contribution to regeneration is in raising the standards of conservation and design, as well as education and traditional skills.

Acknowledgements

The Trust is very grateful to the following for their contributions to this study:

- Gateshead Central Library
- Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary’s
- Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums Service
- Gateshead Council officers including Clare Lacy, Stuart Norman, Geoff Underwood and Martin Wicks.

The Trust is particularly grateful to Maurice Carr and Malcolm McCreedy, caretakers at the Old Town Hall, and to building users for providing access to allow survey.

Revised Report, March 2017

The Council has revised the 2011 report by North of England Civic Trust to enable the plan to support, and inform, the marketing, disposal, repair, and re-use of the Old Town Hall.
Understanding The Old Town Hall

Brief Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC DETAILS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DATE:</td>
<td>1867-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCHITECT:</td>
<td>John Johnstone (sometimes seen as 'Johnston')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USE:</td>
<td>Originally contained council suite, municipal offices, police station, police house, magistrates court, two public halls and caretaker's house. Now used as council offices, let offices, rooms for hire as a cultural venue, and storage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERITAGE:</td>
<td>Area of archeological importance, two listed building entries (Grade II), conservation area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWNER:</td>
<td>Gateshead Council.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 Gateshead Old Town Hall is the former Victorian civic headquarters of Gateshead borough. In articulated sandstone with brick and stone rears and slate roofs, the building was the municipal heart of Gateshead for around 120 years, sitting on the edge of the town centre. Following radical post-WWII town centre redevelopment, it is now somewhat isolated. It sits alongside, and is historically associated with, Swinburne House, a group of converted Victorian buildings (also the subject of a conservation statement as a sister to this study).

Description

Introduction

1.2 To help with understanding, the site has been broken down into a series of elements based on their original design and function. The descriptions given on pages 8 to 15 include notes on construction, layout, alteration, use and general condition.

Site and Setting

1.3 The building faces west on a rectangular site which slopes down to the north. It sits on an east-west terrace cut into the higher south banks of the Tyne. Cleared plots and extensive roads around leave it prominent in views from the north and west, and with long views northwards from inside. Setting is as follows:

- SOUTH The Former Dispensary, a Georgian house in grounds, on a raised plot.
- NORTH Cleared plots used as car-parks, railway viaducts and major roads plus, further north, historic and modern buildings.
- EAST Swinburne Place with the side return of Swinburne House, plus a former house and cleared plots on a back lane.
- WEST Cleared plots used as car-parks, major roads with grass verges.

Form and Layout

1.4 The Old Town Hall is a single building originally designed to contain four basic uses:

- council suite and municipal offices,
- police station, magistrates court, law offices and what was probably a police house,
- public halls and refreshment rooms,
- hall keeper’s house.

1.5 It is in decorative ashlar and rough squared local yellow sandstone with a Welsh slate roofscape.

1.6 The listing (see page 5) suggests it was built in more than one phase and incorporated an earlier structure. The building plan and OS map evidence does not support this. It appears to be to have been built to a single plan over three years with amendments along the way, notably to the cellblock, the drill yard and the back of the central core.

1.7 The building is broadly E-shaped with a west-facing front and three varied eastern ranges stretching back from it. It is two storeys to the front and one to the rear plus, due to the lie of the land, a lower ground floor on the north side on Swinburne Street. This puts the rear of the ground floor at first floor level on Swinburne Place. There is a four storey clocktower on Swinburne Street.

1.8 There are numerous lightwells in the body of the building. Part of the lower ground floor is a windowless cellar, but no other basements were seen. No attic space was inspected. Some rear (east) rooms were not inspected.

1.9 There have been four small extensions added over the years, discussed on page 7.

1.10 Access and internal circulation is based on ground floor entrances on West Street and lower ground floor entrances on Swinburne Street on the north side.

1.11 There are two original exits on Swinburne Place, and inserted escape exits into the south service yard.

1.12 Internally there is, very loosely, a stairwell in each quarter of the building, plus a grand stairwell to the front:

- GRAND ground to first
- NORTH EAST lower ground to first
- NORTH WEST ground (originally lwr ground) to first
- SOUTH WEST ground to first (later insertion)
- REAR one original – lower ground to ground
- CELLAR lower ground to ground

1.13 Two other original staircases have been removed:

- The stair to move defendants from the police station (lower ground) directly to the court dock (ground) was presumably removed when the court closed.
- The domestic stair in the former police house (lower ground to ground) was removed to increase useable accommodation in the police station.

1.14 A lift was inserted in 2008 between ground and first floor, fitted into the south west internal angle of the E-plan.

1.15 There are three open spaces, as follows:

- FRONT SQ To the west, once an in-and-out drive with freestanding clocktower, the latter added in 1892 as a mayoral gift.
- SERVICE YD Narrow service yard on the south side.

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Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead
1.16 Over the years, several alterations have been made to internal accommodation, discussed from page 10. These have increased since World War II and have generally taken place in major phases around every 20 years:

1950s  Modernisation and extension.
1970s  Changes as a result of the creation of Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council in 1974 and the relocation of the courts and police station.
1990s  Changes to create marketable commercial office space.
2000s  Reversal of some of the above and changes for various cultural uses including the reinstatement of the Hall for performance and introduction of a lift to first floor.

Use and Condition

1.17 The range of municipal, police and other public functions which ran in the building varied considerably over the 120 years or so it was Gateshead’s civic headquarters. The treasury moved out in the 1950s, the police station and court in the 1970s, and the council chamber, civic suite and most council offices in 1987 when the Civic Centre opened. Since then, the council has continued to use part and has let part to a range of mainly social and cultural sector bodies. Most recently the Hall was leased to The Sage Gateshead.

1.18 The building is generally in a good to very good condition, with only minor concerns seen. There is regular maintenance and recent years have seen a series of larger programmed maintenance and repair activities by the Council including masonry and roof repairs and the repair of all windows, public realm works, re-wiring, and other internal upgrades.
Designations & Policy

Introduction
1.19 This section explains heritage and other relevant designations and policies covering the study area.

Archaeology
1.20 The study area is within an Area of Archaeological Importance designated in the UDP (see below).

Listed Buildings
1.21 There are two listed building entries, both Grade II:

LISTED AS: West Street (east side), Town Hall, ancillary buildings and former Police Station to rear (LB No. 1277845, listed 13.01.1983)
GRADE: II
DESCRIPT'N: *1868-70 by John Johnstone. Ashlar, Welsh slate roof. Substantial composition in neo-Romanesque style with erant details. Two storeys, two, three and two bays. Central block taller and projecting, with bays framed in pilasters supporting heavy entablature with ornamental frieze and modillion cornice. Balustraded balcony over has corner pedestals with urns (some missing) central segmental pediment with allegorical figures and plinth with larger figure above. Side sections have lower, hip ended roofs and simpler entablatures also resting on pilasters. Paired round arched first floor windows, those in centre in round arched recesses with oculi in heads. Ground floor paired segmental headed windows, banded pilasters and rusticated plinth. Round arched central entrance with nook shafts and mouldings. Set back outer entrance bays have similar doorways, the northern one up a lone flight of steps as the hill slopes down. North return has four bays of this building in similar style but with a full basement storey. Then a mid C19 Italianate ashlar building of two storeys, six bays, the left bay being a four-storey square tower with a second-floor corbel table and deeply overhanging eaves, a pyramidal roof and eccentrically placed stone chimneys. Beyond this a later two-storey, three-window aslar building of simple character. South return shows long rear part of rubble with round first floor windows in raised surrounds. This seems to be a much earlier building, possibly late C18, which was adapted and incorporated into the Town Hall complex."

Conservation Areas
1.22 The study area is within a conservation area:
NAME: Bridges Conservation Area
DATE: designated 26.04.91, extended 05.08.94
APPRASIAL: Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CACA), adopted April 2013

Other Heritage Designations
1.23 Neatly but beyond the study area, there are one scheduled monument, several listed buildings (including four at the neighbouring Swinburne House and The Dispensary), Regent and Walker terrace conservation area and several locally listed buildings including the former Lloyds TSB on West Street.
1.24 The site and its immediate setting are not affected by any world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, other archaeology designations, buildings at risk (national or local), tree preservation orders, landscape designations or biodiversity designations.
1.25 The site is in danger of becoming 'At Risk' as it becomes vacant and under-used. This can be prevented by due care to ongoing maintenance and security during periods of vacancy. Regard should be had to https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings/acc-vacant-historic-buildings.pdf/ during this/these periods.

National Policy and Guidance
1.30 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in 2012 and is supported by the Planning Practice Guide (PPG). There is extensive relevant non-statutory guidance from Historic England, CABE and other bodies such as the Victorian Society and the Historic Towns’ Forum. Historic England may have a statutory role in any future planning processed depending what future plans entail regarding the listed buildings or conservation area.

Development Plan
1.26 ‘Planning for the Future’ Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030 was adopted in March 2015. Relevant policies include:
- CS15: Place making
- UC14: Heritage
- GC1: Central Sub-area
- GC2: Central Development Opportunity Sites
1.27 In addition, saved UDP policies which remain relevant include:
- ENV7: Development within Conservation Areas
- ENV8: Demolition within Conservation Areas
- ENV9: Setting of Conservation Areas
- ENV11: Listed Buildings
- ENV12: Demolition of Listed Buildings
1.28 The Council has also adopted informal Interim Policy Advice notes (IPAs), relevant ones being:
- IPA4: Tyne Gorge Study
- IPA17: Conservation Area Character Stmts, Strategies & Policy Guidelines NB. This is replaced by the 2013 CACA for Bridges Conservation Area

Other Planning & Development Context
1.29 In 2008 the Council published Fit For A City, a regeneration delivery strategy for the town centre to 2030. This document addresses connectivity and transport, retail and office markets, city living, culture and private sector investment.

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BROADLY CIVIC – INCLUDING COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC SUITE, COMMITTEE ROOMS AND MUNICIPAL OFFICES
BROADLY LEGAL – INCLUDING POLICE STATION, CELLBLOCK, FIRE ENGINE GARAGE, MAGISTRATES COURT AND LEGAL OFFICES
BROADLY PUBLIC – INCLUDING LARGE PUBLIC HALL WITH BALCONY, SMALL PUBLIC HALL AND BACK STAGE ROOMS
CENTRAL CORE AND CELLAR – INCLUDING LOBBY, HALL, CLOAKROOMS, WCs AND CELLAR
PROBABLE POLICE HOUSE
HALL KEEPER’S HOUSE (PLUS A FURTHER FLOOR ABOVE NOT SHOWN)
Exterior

**Discussion**

1.31 The building is designed with a grand imposing front onto West Street behind a formal square. The symmetrical front is raised on an expressed basement, the central bays pulled forward, and the roof given a steeper pitch.

1.32 Swinburne Street – the secondary frontage – is designed as a sequence of elevations forming a whole. The various uses behind are expressed in the scale of each part of the elevation: offices, court, entrance, police house. 

1.33 The principal and secondary elevations are in deeply moulded ashlar sandstone to an Italianate Classical style. Windows are rounded and moulded ashlar sandstone to an imposing stonework. The south elevation has an ashlar return (a mirror of the south elevation); 2 storey 2 bay cellblock in rough squared sandstone; 2 storey 2 bay offices in ashlar; 2 storey 2 bay offices with 1 bay return (a mirror of the south elevation); 2 storey 5 bay court and police station; 4 storey 1 bay entrance and clocktower; 2 storey 3 bay probable former police house. All in ashlar.

1.34 The rear onto Swinburne Place has an ashlar return along the former police house, and then becomes squared sandstone blocks with ashlar detailing. The south elevation is similarly treated, as are most hidden lightwell elevations.

1.35 The exterior is largely intact with parts restored. The front has extensive stonework repairs including decoration. The central pediment figure has been missing for decades. The Swinburne Street elevation is intact. The rear, it seems, was not built to the original plan – drawings show a single storey cellblock and a different plan and form to the central core rear (small hall); they also show sketched changes (eg drills yard) suggesting amendment during construction. Further study would clarify whether it was built as planned and then altered, presumably very early on. The former fire engine garage openings were converted to windows early on and the 1950s extension added above (see below). The former drill yard opening has been greatly enlarged.

1.36 The roofscape appears to be largely intact with some changes associated with the extensions (see below). All chimneys seem intact. There are historic rooflights and ridge vents over the small hall. The clocktower has a metal weather vane and its clock faces are intact (mechanism not inspected). Metal cresting seen in historic photographs atop the central section of the main front roof is gone. Access ganties have been fitted in places.

1.37 There are four small added extensions:

- **DRILL YARD** Pre-1895 two-storey extension in the drill yard, in brick and Welsh slate.
- **S.E. STAIR** Post-1916 three-storey stair and WC extension, probably two phases. Red brick and Welsh slate. Partially concealed by an adjoining building.

- **1950s** A ground and first floor extension (ie. above the lower ground floor and so appearing as first and second floors on Swinburne Place) over the former fire engine garage to enlarge the police station, in ashlar and with flat roofs.

- **LIFT & WC** A lift and accessible WC extension added in an ‘internal’ angle, in buff brick with a flat roof.

1.38 Most of these extensions are concealed by the original form and layout of the building. The most visible is the 1950s extension, in ashlar to follow the Swinburne Place theme. The others are mostly in brick of varying colours.

1.39 The most altered external space is the drill yard with the extension virtually halving its size. The concrete service yard has had later extensions removed in recent years and the gateway restored. The flanking retaining wall is rubble.

1.40 The Front Square was originally an in-and-out drive. It has been pedestrianised and resurfaced in recent years to a simple modern design in sandstone, with grass verges and large sandstone planters. There is a camber but the levels are re-graded to allow the south west entrance (originally stepped) to be wheelchair accessible. There is modern furniture. Two lampposts (restored) sit atop the boundary walls flanking the north west and south west entrances.

1.41 The square still focuses on the 1892 freestanding clocktower in the Centre, its skewed alignment following West Street rather than the Town Hall. The listing describes it as a mayoral gift and a replica of that at Victoria

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Conservation Statement
Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead
Exterior

Main Front – West Street

Recent Design & Landscaping

Queen Victoria Statue

"Commerce", "Industry" and "Justice" Carved Figures (Central one missing)

Extensive Stone Repairs

Windowless Cellar

Sandstone Planters & Modern Furniture

Secondary – Swinburne Street

Former Police House

Entrance & Clock Tower

Offices

Wingless Cellar

Door Now Window

Original Entrances, This One Now Sealed Internally

Rear – Swinburne Place

Large Hall Gallery & Former Hall Keeper’s House

Drill Yard, Entry Altered

Cell Block

1950s Extension Over Altered Former Fire Engine Garage

Former Police House

Rear – Swinburne Place

Larger Hall

Cell Block

Front Range, Side Bays & Return

Court

Clock Tower

Adjoining Building

Former Police House

Roofscape

Large Hall

Cell Block

Front Range, Central Bays

1950s Extension (Both Flat)

Court

Clock Tower

Conservation Statement

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Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead
LG: Lower Ground Floor

INTERIOR

PARTS: The lower ground floor comprises only the north range of the E-plan, plus the cellblock and drill yard off Swinburne Place at the rear. Swinburne Street has four entrances (two blocked); Swinburne Place has one from the front, a corridor to the hall keeper's house, and the vehicular entrance to the yard. There are two entries into the yard itself, from the police station and the cellblock.

ACCESS: Because of the lie of the land, the lower ground floor is accessed on the north and east sides only. Swinburne Street has four entrances (two blocked); Swinburne Place has one from the ground floor corridor above, one to the former hall keeper's house, and the vehicular entrance to the yard. There are two entries into the yard itself, from the police station and the cellblock.

STAIRS: The original north east, north west, cellar and rear stairs, plus separate stairs in the cellblock.

CIRCUITN: Circulation is complex with separate circulation routes for the office, detention and domestic areas. The upper part of the cellblock – essentially at ground floor level – is only accessible from the lower ground floor. There is a separate corridor in the cellar.

ACCOM: There are four main original groups of rooms: police offices, detention suite, and domestic rooms in what was probably a police house, plus a separate town hall cellar.

Discussion

1.42 Original plans for the lower ground floor are elusive, making of analysis of change – of which there has been plenty – not easy to understand. There seem to have been three uses – police station, domestic rooms and a separate cellar. There has been considerable change to circulation and layout, as well as modernisation and erosion of character.

1.43 The lower ground floor seems to have contained:

- An entrance and lobby in the clocktower, leading to the north east stair, the main link up to the ground floor,
- East of the entrance was what seems to have been separate domestic accommodation, probably a police house,
- West of the entrance is the former police station with front offices (generally to the north) and a detention suite (generally to the south) including a cellblock,
- At the far west end, a windowless town hall cellar originally unconnected to the rest of the lower ground floor, accessible only from the ground floor.

1.44 The entrance and lobby has seen several changes including doors knocked through, but has historic joinery. The north east stair has intact metal balusters and handrail.

1.45 The original ground floor plan marks 3 bedrooms, separate from the rest of the ground floor but linked down to the lower ground floor by a private domestic stair. So it is probably safe to conclude the lower ground floor originally had domestic living rooms unlinked to the rest of the lower ground floor, thus forming a separate two story house – a police house – in the north east corner of the town hall. It had its own front door. These rooms were later knocked through to the lobby – the 1950 ‘existing’ plans show them for the chief constable, superintendent and police tailors. The 1950 ‘proposed’ plans show the front door becoming a window and the domestic stair gone, thus leaving separate town hall offices above (see 1.61) and police offices (a CID suite) below. Layout is therefore considerably altered. A few historic features remain including doorway and window joinery, some sealed fireplaces and simple cornicing concealed by suspended ceilings.

1.46 South of the house was a single storey range with a pitched roof which was probably a fire engine garage – the police also ran the fire brigade at the time the building opened. Alterations to the existing elevation suggest an original wide opening flanked by a domestic-scale door, both now windows (see bottom left-hand image on page 9). This is slightly different to the original drawings.

1.47 By 1950, this Garage contained filing and mess rooms. The 1950s alterations removed the pitched roof, added the upper floor extension (see 1.61), and knocked-through the lower ground floor, with steps, into the former police house. This part is therefore much altered and with little historic character apart from historic timber windows.

1.48 West of the lobby is the former police station. This may originally have been under the court only – the rooms furthest west have their own entrances (two) and may have been legal offices associated with those above. Although it no longer does, the north west stair may have come down to these entries, thus providing separate legal access linked to the ‘private’ north west stair (which is not linked to the public corridors on the floors above; see 1.54). This requires further research or sight of historic plans. Throughout this part, floor levels are erratic and may have been altered.

1.49 The police station itself is divided laterally in two:

- To the front are offices. Two beneath the court are knocked together and have altered partitions, level changes and suspended ceilings. The third, beneath legal offices above, is shown on the 1950 ‘existing’ plans as knocked through to the other two, creating one large ‘general office’. This is now reversed with inserted walls creating a short corridor to one of the secondary Swinburne Street entrances. These three rooms have very few historic features or character, apart from window joinery, an altered cupboard, and three large walk-in safes (at least one being later as it blocks the other secondary Swinburne Street door).
- To the rear is the detention suite and stores, a tight layout of corridors and small, featureless rooms with little daylight. The 1950 plans mark ‘photography’ and ‘interview’ rooms, a WC, and others now used as stores. Modern WCs are inserted and walls altered. Little historic character remains, apart from some glazed tiles. The location of the dock stair directly up to the former court is sealed and was not inspected. The layout of this part will, in part, still relate to the original police use and needs further research.

1.50 Due to the lie of the land, the cellblock is reached by stairs up to from the detention suite. One stair goes directly up to the drill yard, and the other (through a metal cage gate) up to the lower cell floor. Off this is a second exit to the drill yard and a third stair up to the upper cell floor, also caged. Each floor has a barrel-vaulted corridor and a row of five barrel-vaulted cells, plus six on the upper level, all in thick-walled brick with stone dressings, painted over. Cell doors, reinforced internal and external windows, bars, caging, floors and much joinery is intact, altered in places. Cell toilet cisterns (gones) were in the corridor. The cellblock is disused apart from for incidental storage and is in only a fair condition, but it has extensive historic character.

1.51 The cellar is reached by its own stair from the central core on the ground floor. A corridor leads to two large brick vaulted rooms. What is probably a coal chute is seen on modern plans and in an historic photo. There may also have been two small windows, not now visible externally. Walls are unfinished brick and rubble, painted. The cellar does not seem to have been connected originally to the rest of the lower ground floor, but was knocked through later. This is now reversed and a cupboard created at the junction. The cellar is used for storage and its condition is unclear.

1.52 The drill yard, plant room (rear of large hall), and the lower level of the drill yard extension were not inspected.

INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES

LAYOUT: Much altered throughout the police house, fire engine garage and police station offices. Detention suite less altered. Cellblock intact. Some is reversible but original plans are elusive.

STAIRS: Original north east (balustrades, handrail), cellar and cellblock stairs intact. North west stair and police house stair gone. Dock stair inaccessible.

FLOORS: Some levels altered. Mostly modern finishes.

PLASTER: Little decorative seen. Simple cornicing in the former police house, concealed and damaged.

WINDOWS: All principal and some secondary windows including surrounds and dado panelling below seem intact. Some later, some altered. Two internal leaded glass panels, possibly re-used.

DOORS: Most internal doorways are altered or modern; some surrounds are intact or re-used.

JOINERY: Little other historic joinery seen. Some office skirting altered. One altered built-in cupboard.
FIREPIECES: Two domestic ones in the former police house.

OTHER: Three walk-in safes with shelving, one blocking an original doorway. Glazed tiles in a former WC. Extensive intact features in the cellblock including doors, windows, caging and joinery.
**LG: Lower Ground Floor**

- **Ledeated Glass Panels, Possibly Re-used**
- **Much Change in Circulation and Layout in Former Police House. Mostly Modernised, Some Features Intact**
- **Former Police House Front Door Now a Window**
- **Former Police House Domestic Staircase Removed**
- **Altered Built-in Cupboard**
- **Former Dock Stair Up to Court, Not Inspected**
- **Three Offices with Altered Partitions and Eroded or Concealed Character**
- **Expected Position of Original 'Private' North West Stair, Gone. Probably Linked to Street Doors**
- **Former WC's Now Office and Cupboard, Altered**
- **Later Safe Blocks Original Doorway**
- **Cellar Rooms Have Unfinished Walls and Are Effectively Windowless**
- **Coal?**

- **Much Altered Character of Probable Former Fire Engine Garage, Few Historic Features**
- **Historic Character and Features Intact But Slightly Altered, Over Both Floors of Cellblock**
- **This Area is Not as Per Historic Plans, But Probably Built Differently Rather Than Altered Later. Vehicular Opening Widened, and Heightened Later**
- **Steps Down from Ground Floor South Corridor**
- **These Rooms and Former Drill Yard Not Inspected**
- **Stair Up to Upper Cellblock Floor**
- **Inmate Route to Former Drill Yard**
- **Stair Up to Lower Cellblock Floor**
- **Police Route to Former Drill Yard**
- **Windowless Photography and Interview Cells**
- **Inserted WC's**
- **Glazed Tiles Survive in Original WC**
- **Blocked Hatch, Purpose Unclear**
- **Detention Suite and Other Rooms, Now Stores, with Little Historic Character But Layout Needing Further Research**
- **Inserted Access Now Blocked by Built-in Cupboard**
- **Unfinished Walls in Cellar Stair and Corridor**

Conservation Statement
Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead

REVISED REPORT March 2017
G: Ground Floor

**INTERIOR**

| PARTS: | The ground floor comprises all parts of the E-plan – the main front range and the three ranges heading east towards Swinburne Place. |
| ACCESS: | Because of the lie of the land, the ground floor is accessed at the west end only, by three entrances – main, south and north. There are also minor escape accesses on the south side. |
| STAIRS: | All stairs pass through the ground floor – the original grand, north west, north east, cellar and rear stairs, plus the later south west stair and other rear stair. The inserted lift starts here. |
| CIRCULATION: | Circulation is a north-south corridor in the main front range, a shorter second north-south one in the central core, a long west-east corridor in each of the north and south ranges, and later corridors inserted at the north east end. Part of the ground floor – the upper cellblock level – is only accessible from the lower ground floor. |
| ACCOMMODATION: | Rooms include the large hall, small hall, former magistrates court, and a range of offices (some interlinked), plus secondary service space. |

**Discussion**

1.53 This, the main floor of the Town Hall, has principal accommodation for the original public and legal uses of the building, plus a range of office and service space. The basics are largely intact but with some organisational changes. Many rooms retain strong historic character but changes of use and modernisation have eroded parts.

1.54 The basic ground floor layout is largely intact:
- The main front range’s street lobby leads to a grand hall at the centre of the principal north-south corridor on the east side. Off of this are the grand stair and, on the west side, principal ground floor rooms, mostly interlinked which describes their controlled, political use, allowing discreet movement between them without using the public corridor. At each end of the corridor are the original north west and south west street entrances (the former now an escape only) plus the inserted south west stair.
- In each of the north and south ranges, a long corridor heads east from the north-south corridor.
- That on the north side heads towards the north east stair, accessing the small hall, the former court and former legal offices. Within these is the north-west stair, unlinked to the corridors, illustrating its private use within the former legal offices. At the east end are altered and inserted corridors in the upper part of the former police house and the 1950s extension.
- The corridor on the south side accesses the small hall, large hall and its secondary spaces, stepping down to an escape exit at the rear.
- Between the two west-east corridors, in the central core, is a second north-south corridor, now sealed at one end. Off this runs the cellar stair.

1.56 The hall, grand stair and original corridors are intact including marble columns and four decorative iron gates to control access between different parts of the building. The original public route from the hall to the central corridor is blocked by a modern reception desk. The lobby has Art Deco early to mid twentieth century internal doors. The north west and north east staircases have decorative metal balusters (some missing) and intact hardwood handrails. The inserted south west stair is a complete metal structure with open grid treads, decorative metal balustrade and wooden handrail. A few fire partitions are added to the corridors. There are modern floor surfaces throughout.

1.58 The office rooms have generally intact joinery (door, window, skirting, rails), some fireplaces (some gone, some sealed up), and much cornice and ceiling rose plaster. Some of the plaster is damaged, and most is hidden by suspended ceilings. Some rooms seem to have been comprehensively modernised with fireplaces removed, walls clad to picture rail height (possibly concealing original skirting beneath), plain skirting applied on top, and suspended ceilings added. This may have begun in the 1950s (see page 25). There are two walk-in safes, one broken out as a store off the hall. Rooms at the south end of the main corridor are most altered, associated with the 2008 lift extension.

1.57 The former court is dramatically altered. The original formal arrangement of magistrates’ platform, benches, dock, public gallery and other furniture is wholly gone, and the room partitioned in two. This presumably took place after the court function moved off-site in 1976. There is no sign of the sealed-up dock stair from the lower ground floor. Decorative dado plaster survives on the walls and the ante room arrangement is largely intact. The suspended ceiling cavity was not inspected for any ceiling plaster survival.

1.58 The volume of the large hall is intact. It became the council chamber in the 1970s and, in the 1990s, it took a full-size steel mezzanine office structure, now gone. Its deeply moulded decorative plaster is extensive, including rounded coffered ceiling, gallery front and proscenium. The design might be re-worked. The gallery looks extended; rooms beneath it, now storage and WCs, began as second-class refreshment rooms. The stage and wings are altered; part is a modern collapsible structure. Flooring is modern.

1.59 The evolution of the small hall, which began as the first-class refreshment room, is unclear but the design may have changed during construction. Original drawings show it today’s depth with separate offices on the east side, and a different roof form. An existing dissolved door in the north east corner of this with, the deeply moulded plaster barrel vaulted ceiling with noflights and high-level ledged windows do not. Either it differed from the original drawings when built, or it has been altered and the plasterwork added. If so, this change was early.

1.60 The interlinked layout of original cloakrooms and WCs in the central core is intact, but the WC divisions and use are gone. Decorative finishes and fireplaces survive, plus a large over-mantle mirror with decorative plaster surround in what was the ladies’ cloakroom.

1.61 The form of the former police house also does not seem to tally fully with historic plans and so may have been built slightly differently. It was not linked originally to the rest of the ground floor but has been knocked through at the north east stair to convert its original domestic rooms into Town Hall offices. Its own stair from the lower ground floor was removed, separating the house into two separate floors of offices. The 1950s extension replaced a pitched roof over the former fire engine garage, giving more space. Two lightwells were included, now altered, as internal partitions. The rooms here have modernised character with some historic features, including domestic timber and tiled fireplaces, and some 1950s tiling, painted over.

1.62 The extension in the drill yard has a modern kitchen reached through altered openings on the south corridor.

**INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES**

| LAYOUT: | Very intact with some organisational changes, eg. at the former police house and around the lift & WC extension. Office interlinking intact. |
| STAIRS: | Originals and later insertions intact, apart from former police house domestic stair, gone. Decorative balusters have minor losses. |
| FLOORS: | Modern finishes. |
| PLASTER: | Extensive and detailed historic plasterwork in the large hall and small hall, and some features remaining in the former court. Former court ceiling survival is unknown. Elsewhere, copious decorative coffer and ceiling rose plasterwork intact, most concealed by suspended ceilings. Some damaged or missing. Some walls are fully clad to picture rail height. |
| WINDOWS: | All windows, including leaded and coloured glass, surrounds and dado panelling below, seem original. Some minor alterations, particularly in the former police house. |
| DOORS: | Most internal doorways seem intact although some doors themselves are modern or over-clad. Some original surrounds are gone, eg. where part of a comprehensive room modernisation. Modern doorframes are simple. |
| JOINERY: | No court joinery survives. Much original skirting survives, some altered or concealed. No WC stall joinery survives in the service core. |
| FIREPIECES: | Several marble and timber/tiled fireplaces are intact, though sealed. Survival of... |
plates behind not inspected. At least one over-
mantle mirror.

OTHER: Marble columns and four original iron security
gates in the hall. Two walk-in safes, one
altered. Inserted metal south west stair.
Simple, altered character in 1950s extension. Partitions altered

Upper level of cellblock only accessible from lower ground floor. Historic character and features intact

This area (cellblock, drill yard and small hall) is not as per historic plans, but probably built differently rather than altered later

Simple or modernised character of secondary spaces

Some change in circulation and layout in former police house. Mostly modernised, some features intact

Former police house domestic staircase removed

Purpose of small extension unclear

All fittings in former magistrates court gone. Room subdivided. Perimeter plaster and joinery intact. Ante rooms intact. Suspended ceiling (cavity not inspected). No sign of dock stair from below

Original 'private' north west stair unconnected to corridors. Character intact

Circulation route from hall to central core blocked by modern reception counter

Interlinking of offices illustrates political use; movement not using public corridors

Small hall (originally first-class refreshment room) has extensive historic plasterwork, joinery and leaded glass

Some historic character remains; WCs gone

Much historic character remains

Large hall intact with restored historic plaster including ceiling, windows gallery front and proscenium

Some historic character remains. WCs gone

MUCH HISTORIC CHARACTER REMAINS

Interlinked offices, some modernised. Suspended ceilings conceal historic plasterwork

South west entrance (ground altered to give level access)

Main west entrance

North west entrance (disused)

Stage altered

Fire / draft screens inserted in all corridors / stairs

Sealing one end of corridor interrupts intended flow of movement in central core

Notable change in layout, circulation and character of original backstage area, office and lightwell

Inserted south west stair, historic metalwork

Grand hall intact with marble columns and iron 'stop gates'

Original walk-in safes, north: broken out to hall. South: intact

MUCH HISTORIC CHARACTER REMAINS IN INTERLINKED OFFICES, SOME MODERNISED. SUSPENDED CEILINGS CONCEAL HISTORIC PLASTERWORK

North west entrance (disused)

Main west entrance

Originally second-class refreshment rooms

Original 'private' north west stair unconnected to corridors. Character intact

Circulation route from hall to central core blocked by modern reception counter

Interlinking of offices illustrates political use; movement not using public corridors

Main west entrance

North west entrance (disused)

Simple, altered character in 1950s extension. Partitions altered

Upper level of cellblock only accessible from lower ground floor. Historic character and features intact

This area (cellblock, drill yard and small hall) is not as per historic plans, but probably built differently rather than altered later

Simple or modernised character of secondary spaces

Some change in circulation and layout in former police house. Mostly modernised, some features intact

Former police house domestic staircase removed

Purpose of small extension unclear

All fittings in former magistrates court gone. Room subdivided. Perimeter plaster and joinery intact. Ante rooms intact. Suspended ceiling (cavity not inspected). No sign of dock stair from below

Original 'private' north west stair unconnected to corridors. Character intact

Circulation route from hall to central core blocked by modern reception counter

Interlinking of offices illustrates political use; movement not using public corridors

Small hall (originally first-class refreshment room) has extensive historic plasterwork, joinery and leaded glass

Some historic character remains; WCs gone

Much historic character remains

Large hall intact with restored historic plaster including ceiling, windows gallery front and proscenium

Some historic character remains. WCs gone

MUCH HISTORIC CHARACTER REMAINS

Interlinked offices, some modernised. Suspended ceilings conceal historic plasterwork

South west entrance (ground altered to give level access)
1: First Floor

INTERIOR

PARTS: The first floor comprises the main front range of the E-plan and secondary accommodation in the central core. Also on this level are the clocktower and the large hall’s gallery.

ACCESS: There are no external accesses at first floor.

STAIRS: The main front range is reached by the grand stair (original), north west stair (original), south west stair (insertion) and lift (insertion). The central core is reached by the grand stair. The two separate rear parts are reached by the north end stair (this part an addition) and rear stairs (one original, one insertion) respectively.

CIRCULATION: Circulation in the main front range is a single north-south corridor off the grand stair. Rear parts are not linked at this level with the front.

ACCOMMODATION: Rooms include the former council chamber, a series of smaller committee and office rooms (some interlinked, plus secondary service space. Some of the latter is in the central service core off the grand stair’s half landing.

Discussion

1.63 Originally the main municipal part of the Town Hall, the first floor’s character has altered due to modernisation and changes in use, but the basics are largely intact.

1.64 The layout of the front range is straightforward. The grand stair leads up to a single north-south corridor off the grand stair. Off this are principal rooms to the west and east side. The inserted north west stair supplements the grand stair, whilst the south corridor on the west returns at both ends. The inserted south west stair was subsequently replaced by WCs. As part of the 1950s extension, the north east stair was extended by another level to add a new police photography room, a use which was previously in the lower ground floor detention suite. This has a flat roof.

1.65 The sequence of change at the rear of the large hall is unclear without further survey and research but it seems the gallery was rebuilt or enlarged by taking over the Hall Keeper’s House and requiring the addition of a second rear stair, added outside the footprint of the original building (and possibly in more than one phase). The original rear stair now only goes from lower ground to ground. The original domestic rooms above are now much altered as a modern control room for the large hall. Upper part not inspected.

1.66 This layout is very much intact, particularly the principal rooms, most of which are interlinked. This describes the original controlled, political use of the rooms, allowing discreet movement between them without using the public corridor. The north-west stair is also unlinked to the corridors, describing its discrete use within the former legal offices.

1.67 One dividing wall is gone at the north end, and an original office at the south end has had a walk-in safe removed and dividing walls altered to insert a corridor, onto which opens the 2008 lift and WC extension, with a much modernised character. Original WCs at both ends are gone, one for an office, one for the south west stair. As original plans of the secondary central core rooms have not been seen, it is unclear exactly what changes here have been made, but they seem to be based on subdivision of larger rooms into smaller ones, leaving WCs intact.

1.68 Throughout, historic character is slightly eroded by changes in use and modern fixtures and finishes. The greatest loss is in the former council chamber where the original formal arrangement of joinery seating and desks is wholly gone, presumably when the chamber use moved to the large hall in the 1970s. Decorative ceiling plaster, stained glass and doorway and other joinery is intact, but flooring and heavy wall trunking and pelmets are modern. The grand stair and coffered ceiling are intact but with modern flooring. Carved stone plaques recording the Mayors of Gateshead (1836 to 1973) adorn the landing wall. The north west and north east stairs have original decorative metal balusters but modern flooring.

1.69 Other first floor rooms have intact joinery (door, window, skirting, rails), some fireplaces (some gone, some sealed up), and much cornice and ceiling rose plaster. Some of the plaster is damaged, and most is hidden by suspended ceilings (including in the north west stair). Some rooms seem to have been comprehensively modernised with fireplaces removed, walls clad to picture rail height (possibly concealing original skirting beneath), plain skirting applied on top, and suspended ceilings inserted. This may have begun in the 1950s (see page 25). Another room has a modern tongue-and-groove clad wall.

1.70 The rear parts of the first floor are secondary and unconnected to the front range. Both seem altered:

- Historic plans show the upper parts of the Swinburne Street clocktower reached by a stair in the tower itself, accessed off a half landing on the north east stair. If this was indeed how it was built, then this stair was subsequently replaced by WCs. As part of the 1950s extension, the north east stair was extended by another level to add a new police photography room, a use which was previously in the lower ground floor detention suite. This has a flat roof.

- The sequence of change at the rear of the large hall is unclear without further survey and research but it seems the gallery was rebuilt or enlarged by taking over the Hall Keeper’s House and requiring the addition of a second rear stair, added outside the footprint of the original building (and possibly in more than one phase). The original rear stair now only goes from lower ground to ground. The original domestic rooms above are now much altered as a modern control room for the large hall. Upper part not inspected.

INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES

LAYOUT: Very intact with minor changes to room subdivisions at either end. Interlinking intact.

STAIRS: Originals and later insertions intact (apart from alterations to the north east stair), including decorative balusters, with minor losses.

FLOORS: Modern finishes.

PLASTER: Grand stair coffered ceiling and former council chamber decorative ceiling intact. Elsewhere, copious decorative cornice and ceiling rose plasterwork intact, most concealed by suspended ceilings. Some damaged or missing. Some walls are fully clad to picture rail height.

WINDOWS: All windows, including leaded and coloured glass, surrounds and dado panelling below, seem original. Some minor alterations.

DOORS: Most internal doorways seem intact although some doors themselves are modem. Some original surrounds are gone, eg. where part of a comprehensive room modernisation.

JOINERY: No council chamber joinery survives. Much original skirting survives, some altered or concealed. Much historic WC stall joinery in the service core.

FIREPIECES: Several marble fireplaces are intact, though sealed. Survival of plates behind not inspected.

OTHER: Carved wall plaques record Gateshead mayors. Decorative windows have symbolic depictions of notable figures, events or symbols.
1: First Floor

- SIMPLE ROOMS IN 1950s EXTENSION
- ORIGINALLY A STAIR HERE, LATER REPLACED BY WC?
- GRAND STAIR AND CEILING INTACT. MODERN FLOORING
- ORIGINAL 'PRIVATE' NORTH WEST STAIR UNCONNECTED TO CORRIDORS. CHARACTER INTACT BUT SUSPENDED CEILING
- ORIGINAL WC REMOVED AND WALL KNOCKED THROUGH
- FIRE / DRAFT SCREENS INSERTED IN CORRIDORS
- INTERLINKING OF OFFICES ILLUSTRATES POLITICAL USE; MOVEMENT WITHOUT USING CORRIDORS
- MUCH HISTORIC CHARACTER REMAINS IN INTERLINKED OFFICES, SOME MODERNISED. SUSPENDED CEILINGS CONCEAL HISTORIC PLASTERWORK
- SIMPLE OR MODERNISED CHARACTER OF SECONDARY SPACES
- CONTROL ROOM IN MUCH-ALTERED ROOMS OF FORMER HALL KEEPERS' HOUSE
- PARTITIONS ADDED AND LAYOUT CHANGED. CEILINGS INTACT AND EXPOSED. SOME WC JOINERY INTACT
- WALK-IN SAFE BROKEN OUT
- NOTABLE CHANGE IN LAYOUT, CIRCULATION AND CHARACTER OF ORIGINAL MUNICIPAL OFFICE AND LIGHTWELL FOR ADDITION OF LIFT & WC EXTENSION
- CARVED PLAQUES ON LANDING RECORD MAYORS OF GATESHEAD
- WC ALTERED AND PART OF FLOORPLATE REMOVED FOR INSERTION OF METAL SOUTH WEST STAIR
- COUNCIL CHAMBER FURNITURE & FITTINGS GONE, PLASTER, WINDOWS AND SOME JOINERY INTACT
- MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF GATESHEAD
- FMR COUNCIL CHAMBER
- CIRCULATION & SERVICES
- LARGE HALL GALLERY
- OFFICES
- WALK-IN SAFE
Conservation Statement
Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Front office with altered built-in cupboard

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – FORMER POLICE HOUSE
Typical office from former domestic room. Fireplace in situ

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – DETENTION SUITE & ROOMS
Altered & largely windowless rooms. Purpose of hatch unclear

LOWER GROUND FLOOR / GROUND FLOOR – CELLEBLOCK
Cellblock floor with intact joinery and painted masonry

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – ENTRANCE
Lobby & hall are simple with altered walls but historic joinery

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – FRMR FIRE ENGINE GARAGE
Plain 1950s rooms with little historic character

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – CELLAR
Cellar stair and corridors are functional and unfinished

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – CELLAR
Typical cells interior. WC cisterns (gone) are in corridor, not cell

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Partitions altered in front offices, windows intact

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Simple cornice work hidden by suspended ceilings

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Fireplace removed. Original entrance blocked inside walk-in safe

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Altered historic doors. WC's inserted in former domestic room

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Only a few historic features eg. glazed tiles, lighthouse windows

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Caging around stair to upper floor. Inmate route to drill yard

LOWER GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES
Former windowless interview room. Historic joinery is in situ
Conservation Statement
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Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead

GROUND FLOOR – HALL AND CORRIDORS
Marble columns and metal stop gate in main hall

GROUND FLOOR – LARGE HALL
Proscenium restored, stage altered, some modern

GROUND FLOOR – SMALL HALL
Restored plaster and leaded glass with historic rooflights

GROUND FLOOR – COURT
Some historic plaster and joinery, no court furniture intact

GROUND FLOOR – SOUTH WEST STAIR
Inserted metal structure. SW entrance is now accessible

GROUND FLOOR – LATER REAR STAIR
Stair and WCs in post-1916 SE extension to rear of large hall

GROUND FLOOR – NORTH EAST STAIR
Intact joinery and metalwork, Glazed partitions inserted

GROUND FLOOR – NORTH WEST STAIR
Intact joinery and metalwork including court toilets

Long corridors are simply decorated. Exit from south corridor

Gallery probably extended. Control box inserted

The small hall is a café, kitchen in the drill yard extension

Suspended ceiling and partition harms original room volume

Some partitions and door joinery are inserted, some historic

Restored plasterwork, intact leaded glass, modern flooring

Inserted draft lobbies. Purpose of small corner door unclear

Various ante rooms intact, fittings and surfaces modernised
GROUND FLOOR – OFFICES

Typical office with intact joinery and fireplace

Suspended ceilings have lead to harm to historic plasterwork

Secondary corridor now semi-private, one end blocked for plant

GROUND FLOOR – CENTRAL CORE

Suspected ceilings are pulled back from windows

Some ceiling roses are gone

Former gents and ladies cloakrooms have many intact features

Window joinery. Central WC's all removed, windows altered

GROUND FLOOR – FORMER POLICE HOUSE

Some doors seem original but boarded over to conceal panels

Some fireplaces gone. Walk-in safe broken out as cupboard

Former gents and ladies cloakrooms have many intact features

Plaster, joinery and fireplace (sealed) intact in corner bedroom

GROUND FLOOR – 1950s EXTENSION

Safe, left. No suspended ceilings in some rooms.

An inventory is needed of surviving historic furniture, art, etc

Route from hall to former cloakrooms enlivened by leaded glass but blocked by modern reception desk (not shown)

Plain 1950s rooms with little historic character

Conservation Statement
Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead
FIRST FLOOR – GRAND STAIR

Grand stair and landing with mayoral plaques

Plaster, stone and leaded glass (some symbolic) intact

Modern stair and corridor flooring. Inserted draft lobby

Altered WC (now kitchen) to make way for south west stair

FIRST FLOOR – FORMER COUNCIL CHAMBER

Original fittings gone and some modern additions

Windows, ceiling and some joinery intact

‘Private’ north west stair unlinked to corridors, joinery intact

FIRST FLOOR – OFFICES

Typical first floor office. Fireplace and some joinery intact

Some are consciously modernised, including wall panelling

Suspended ceilings are pulled back from windows

Suspended ceilings conceal intact plaster in most rooms

FIRST FLOOR – MEZZANINE

Intact plasterwork and window joinery

Inserted partitions

Cupboard and WC joinery intact, modern surfaces
Historical Notes

Gateshead to the nineteenth century

1.71 Gateshead was granted borough rights in 1164 and grew from the Tyne bridgehead, near St Mary’s church. There were markets from 1264 and, by 1576, it had 400 householders. From the seventeenth century, the town’s industrial potential was exploited through coal, iron, glass, chemicals, rope, railways and heavy engineering. A new Gateshead Borough Council was created in 1835 and it became a county borough in 1880, expanding southwards with nineteenth century residential suburbs and industry.

1.72 The town’s main thoroughfare was High Street which carried the Great North Road over the Tyne. By c.1830, High Street’s back lane was formalised as a second, parallel north-south route to be called West Street.

The first council and police offices

1.73 In 1835, the council first met in a solicitor’s office and continued in temporary and let premises until, in 1844, a house at Greensfield, close to the railway station on the edge of the then town centre, was acquired as a town hall. The Gateshead police constabulary was set up in 1836, and a new police house was probably built alongside the town hall. As the railways grew nearby, the site soon became unsuitable, generating the need for a new location.

Designing the new town hall

1.74 The council acquired a large piece of ground from Sir Walter James between High and West Streets, south of the town centre. In 1863, it ran a competition for a town hall which was won by John Johnstone, architect of Newcastle’s 1850 town hall; second prize went to Edward Watson. After some disagreement within the council, the town surveyor was asked to prepare a design based on both.

1.75 The project soon developed problems, notably a lengthy debate about which street the building should face. 1865 plans for a town hall facing High Street were agreed at a cost of £22,300 but, as construction began, foundations hit a worked coal seam, and nearby buildings collapsed.

Work stopped. The council and police court took up temporary residence in the Queen’s Head Inn.

1.76 On a second call for designs, Johnstone’s plans for a West Street town hall, costing £12,000, were selected. Work began in 1867 and a foundation stone was laid on 11 June 1868 by mayor Robert Newall. The building was opened on 3 January 1870 by mayor William Brown. The crowds were so great that a stand collapsed, causing a fatality.

1.77 The building was designed as a large complex containing several uses, for the council, municipal services, police station, fire engine house, courts, large public hall and first- and second-class refreshment rooms.

Municipal growth

1.78 Dramatic reform of English local government took place in the nineteenth century, starting with the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. Poor law, health and sanitary acts followed, notably in 1873 and 1875, and then local government acts in 1888 and 1894. Other local services, eg. education, were addressed in other acts. By the 1890s, there was great momentum in the provision of a wide range of municipal services at a local level. With it came the need for new accommodation to house their administration.

1.79 At the same time, policing in England and Wales underwent similar expansion. The 1835 Act established watch committees which became compulsory police forces in 1856. The first CID was established in 1878, and forces grew until many began to be merged in the 1940s.

1.80 Although the nature of the accommodation in the Town Hall changed little, the uses to which it was put changed considerably throughout its life. Trade directories list a range of uses in the building over the years, including:

- town clerk (equivalent to today’s chief executive)
- borough accountant / treasurer
- borough rate collector
- borough surveyor
- borough engineer
- inspector of nuisances
- sanitary inspector
- medical officer of health
- weights and measures officer
- burial board
- school board
- magistrates court and clerk
- county court and registrar
- borough police officer
- chief constable / superintendent
- fire brigade
- hallkeeper

1.81 Adjacent commercial buildings on Swinburne Street were gradually taken over by the council as overspill offices. Next door, four adjoining buildings – post office, public library, building society and bank – eventually became amalgamated into one building, called Swinburne House, into which many municipal functions grew from the Town Hall during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Post-War redevelopment

1.82 After World War II, intense investment in the Town Hall took place every twenty years or so, coinciding with changes in local or national municipal structure.

1.83 The 1950s saw modernisation of key rooms, addition of the extension above the former fire engine garage and perhaps cleaning the main elevations (see page 25). In 1954, the treasurer’s department moved to a new building at Shipcote (described then as ‘Civic Centre First Stage’).

1.84 A 1970s phase responded to the creation in 1974 of Northumbria Police (the Gateshead force had already been absorbed by the Durham Constabulary in 1968) and also the new Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, meaning it took on more duties. A new police station was opened on the southern edge of the modern town centre in 1972, followed by new courts in 1976. Relocation of these uses allowed expansion of municipal uses in the Town Hall.

1.85 Duties grew again in 1986 when Tyne & Wear County Council was abolished and, by this time, the Town Hall was no longer suitable. Gateshead’s large new Civic Centre opened on Regent Street in 1987, and the Town Hall’s time as municipal headquarters was up, after almost 120 years. It had been listed at Grade II four years earlier.

John Johnstone (1814-1884)

John Johnstone was a Scot born in Kilmarnock in 1814, the son of a building contractor. He trained as an architect under both Sir George Gilbert Scott and William Boyton Moffatt, and practiced first in London. In 1855, he came to Newcastle and started a practice with W A Knowles, taking offices at 6 Clayton Street West. He later practiced by himself. He lived for many years at 4 Winchester Terrace, Newcastle (now in Summerhill Conservation Area).

He worked widely across the north: “in all parts of Durham and Northumberland his designs in stone and brick may be seen in churches, chapels, public institutions, and offices, while not a few distant towns have some specimen of his inventive and constructive powers.” (Newcastle Chronicle, 29 Sept 1884). His work included:

- town halls for Newcastle (1858-63), Gateshead (1867-70), Bishop Auckland (assisted, 1860-2), Hexham (1865-6), and Dumfries,
- a range other public buildings including the Corn Exchange in Berwick-upon-Tweed, the Mechanic’s Institute at North Shields (1857-8) , several board and church schools including at Wallsend, and Gateshead’s first public library (1885) on Swinburne Street (now part of Swinburne House),
- religious buildings including cemetery chapels (eg. St John’s, Newcastle, c1856), Presbyterian churches (eg. Hebbum), and a synagogue in Newcastle (1880),
- commercial, including the County Hotel (1874) on Neville St / Grainger St. and for the Newcastle & Gateshead Gas Co, Grainger St (1884-6), Newcastle,
- housing, from industrial tenements (eg. Garth Heads, Newcastle, 1869) to private houses (eg. Coxedge).

Johnstone’s designs were high on the shortlists for both Liverpool’s Exchange and Manchester’s Assizes Courts. He became a respected member of the profession, notably in the fields of valuation and arbitration. He was president of the Northern Architectural Association in 1876. He died suddenly in 1884, aged 70, at a brick yard in Wallsend whilst supervising extension of the Buddle Schools (1876), one of a series he built there. The schools’ design displayed his roots in the use of criss-crossed gables, a typically

Conservation Statement

Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead

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During the post-War period, the town centre was radically altered by comprehensive redevelopment. Much of nearby West Street, Swinburne Street and High Street was demolished after 1971 and major new roads laid out. Bridges Conservation Area was not designated until 1991.

The last few decades

The Council retained the (renamed) Old Town Hall in its portfolio, and continued to use it for offices and storage. The 1990s saw another phase of investment. Training organisation MARI let the building in 1987 and, in 1993, a full-size mezzanine structure was added in the large hall to create two levels. MARI left in 2001 and the mezzanine was removed in 2006 to re-establish the hall’s cultural use. The council’s learning and culture department used the building extensively in the 2000s, helping to establish a new cultural identity, reinforced by its use by two major organisations:
- North Music Trust and Northern Sinfonia, from the late 1990s until the Sage Gateshead opened in 2004.
- Tyneside Cinema, whilst its Newcastle home was redeveloped and restored in 2007-8.
- Sage Gateshead are the most recent tenants (vacating in December 2016) using the building for wedding functions and other gatherings as well as for rehearsal space and offices.

In recent years, the Old Town Hall has seen extensive repair and conservation to the value of approximately £2m. Works include major repair of external fabric, redesign of the front square (2006) which were partly supported by the Lottery-funded Townscape Heritage Initiative which ran in the Bridges Conservation Area in the early 2000s. The contribution was c£365k. Other works included: office refurbishment and rewire (2006), performance hall demolition and refurbishment (2007), fire protection and waterproofing (2009), a lift and accessible WC extension (2010), improvements to performance hall (2012).

Sources

The above historical notes are compiled from:
- graduate Newcastle University student
- *Oxberry Gateshead Scraps, Vols 2 and 3* (Gateshead Library, L908.9)
- Newcastle Chronicle, 29 Sept 1884
- Newcastle Journal, 30 Sept 1884
- Building News, 5 Oct 1884, p536-7
- RIBA Database of British Architects (searched 25.05.2011)
- Trade directories covering Gateshead, as follows:
  - Christie’s: 1876-77
  - Kelly’s: 1886, 1902, 1921, 1925
  - Directory of Gateshead: 1873 and 1884
  - various historic building plan records held by Tyne & Wear Archives Service (CB.GA/BC/1/1-13)
- listing descriptions (see page 5 above)
Conservation Statement

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Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead

ABOVE: ILLUSTRATION OF THE TOWN HALL c1900s, POSSIBLY DURING 1906 CELEBRATIONS ON OPENING OF THE KING EDWARD BRIDGE. LEFT: c1910, NOTE METAL CRESTING ATOP THE CENTRAL FRONT ROOF, NOW GONE. NOTE ALSO THE VEHICULAR DRIVE IN FRONT, ALSO NOW GONE. BELOW LEFT: 1950s, FOLLOWING PROBABLE STONE CLEANING. BELOW: EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, SHOWING THE BUILDING (DISTANT, LEFT) FITTED IN TO THE SWINBURNE STREET STREETSCAPE. ABOVE RIGHT: THE 1956 VISIT BY MISS GREAT BRITAIN. NOTE THE MODERNISED ROOM WITH PANELLING TO PICTURE RAIL.

ABOVE: LITTLE BEN ON WEST STREET, 1960s, SHOWING THE TIGHT DEVELOPMENT PATTERN WHICH WAS LATER CLEARED. BELOW: THE TOWN HALL IN ITS WEST STREET SETTING IN 1972, ALL OF WHICH WAS CLEARED FOR NEW OR WIDENED ROADS

RIGHT TOP: POLICE FIRE BRIGADE ON WEST STREET. RIGHT: POLICE VAN OUTSIDE THE SWINBURNE STREET POLICE STATION ENTRANCE. RIGHT BELOW: POLICE FIRE CREW ON SWINBURNE PLACE, NOTE THE DRILL YARD ENTRANCE BEHIND. RIGHT BOTTOM: POLICE 'UTILITY VAN' IN THE SAME POSITION AS ABOVE, NOTE THE VEHICULAR ENTRANCE IS NOW ALTERED.

DATE N/K (www.gatesheadboroughpolice.com)

1902 (GL007839)

1956 (GL007685)

1950s (GL001370)

1910 (GL001369)

1950s (GL001370)

1960s (GL008638)

1972 (GL008631)

c.1902 (GL007639)

c.1900s (GL001474)
Significance

Significance is what makes something in the historic environment worth conserving. We shouldn’t conserve for conservation’s sake. We do so because we want to protect and enhance the place’s special interest. We judge this by evaluating how significant it is. We can then know how conservation could proceed.

What is Significant?
Significance often relates to the fabric of the place. Looking after the place’s actual historic material will usually protect the significance it embodies. This is why we have basic conservation principles such as:

- **MINIMUM** Change as little of the historic fabric in a place as possible.
- **INTERVENTION** Ensure that change can later be undone without lasting harm.
- **REVERSIBLE CHANGE**

But significance can also relate to less tangible things. For example, a battlefield is significant because of the event that took place there, rather than necessarily the physical nature of the land. And a statue could potentially be taken down and rebuilt elsewhere without harming significance.

Significance can also come from a place’s contents (e.g. furniture, archives, collections), and from its setting, too.

Types of Significance
Heritage assets can be significant for many reasons, and in different ways to different people. We can evaluate significance in many ways, for example by using terms like architectural, archaeological, historical, etc.

But, now, we tend to evaluate significance using four overarching themes. These cover all the different ways a heritage asset can have heritage value, and to whom:

**EVIDENTIAL**
What does study of the place reveal? What evidence does it hold of its past? This measure relates to the physical fabric of the place, and its role as the main source of information on the place and its past. Under this heading, **age and rarity** are important in evaluating, but are not always paramount. The less historic fabric there is (e.g. where it’s been removed or replaced), the less it can be used to evaluate significance. But, sometimes, incomplete physical remains are all that’s left to judge significance (e.g. archaeological deposits).

**HISTORICAL**
What’s the place’s story? How can it connect the past to the present? This measure is about what the place can tell us about the past, either by illustrating it or by association. **ILLUSTRATIVE** significance is how the place can physically demonstrate the past, helping to understand and interpret it. Significance can be increased if the place is still in its historic use. **ASSOCIATIVE** significance is where a place is linked to important people or events, or to movements or cultural expression, such as in art or politics. Here, rarity, authenticity, and completeness are important. But a place can still have significant history even when altered – it may be the very evolution of a place over time which is itself significant.

**AESTHETIC**
Is the place stimulating to the senses? Is it inherently attractive, eye-catching or inspiring? This can be by conscious **DESIGN**, such as the proportions or detailing of a building or the layout and planting of a landscape, or it can relate to a specific style, movement, patron or designer. Here, **quality, craft, innovation and influence** are key. But aesthetic merit can also come **FORTUITOUSLY**, such as the organic growth of a medieval village, or an unplanned juxtaposition of man-made and natural features. It can also come from the way fabric has been **aged by time** or touched by nature. Aesthetic significance is primarily **visual** but can also relate to the other senses.

**COMMUNAL**
What does the place mean to people? How important is it to a community’s **collective identity**? Is it a **cherished resource**? Where significance is linked emotionally to identity, significance is often **SYMBOLIC** or **COMMEMORATIVE**. Such links may not always be positive (e.g. war memorials). The **SOCIAL** significance of a place comes from its links to a community’s **identity or social practices**, such as a church or political building. In some places, this can relate more to the place’s use than its physical fabric (e.g. a new church on an old site of worship), but in others it is the actual fabric which is venerated (e.g. Stonehenge). Communal values are closely linked to Historical ones.

How Significant?
Significance can be graded, using simple systems such as:

- **HIGH**
- **EXCEPTIONAL**
- **INTERNATIONAL**
- **MEDIUM**
- **CONSIDERABLE**
- **NATIONAL**
- **LOW**
- **SOME**
- **REGIONAL**
- **MARGINAL**
- **LOCAL**

Significance can also change over time. For example, World War II infrastructure remains are generally valued more now as heritage assets than they were a generation ago.

Recognition
The significance of a heritage asset is often recognised by it being designated, e.g. as a listed building, conservation area or registered park and garden, etc. But heritage assets are not significant because they are designated; they are designated because they are significant. It is therefore not enough just to know that an asset is significant, we need to know why.

Conservation Statement
Gateshead Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead
Significance

STAGE TWO

2.1 This stage sets out what makes the Old Town Hall important enough to conserve. The grading scale used for this assessment is as follows:

- **EXCEPTIONAL** Aspects which are seminal to understanding the place and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would destroy or greatly compromise its significance.

- **CONSIDERABLE** Aspects which go a long way to help understand the place, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would notably diminish significance but not destroy it.

- **SOME** Aspects which contribute to or complement understanding of the place but are not intrinsic to it, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would not unacceptably harm its significance.

- **MARGINAL** Aspects which have only minor links with the place or which could be considered intrusive, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would cause little if any harm or could bring about positive enhancement.

2.2 A summary Statement of Significance is given at the end of this section. For more information on significance, see the box on the previous page.

Evidential Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXCEPTIONAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONSIDERABLE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SOME</strong></th>
<th><strong>MARGINAL</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2.3 The building is very intact at a basic and, in some parts, a detailed level. The amount of original fabric can reveal much about its history, and so is important. This varies across the site depending on rarity and intactness.

**Municipal Use**

2.4 As a Victorian town hall, it is not rare nationally, but it is unique in the county, shown by a search of the National Heritage List (www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/). The grading scale varies across the site depending on rarity and intactness.

**RISKS & POLICY**

2.5 North Shields Town Hall is a mix of institutional and public buildings from 1837 and only fully acting as a town hall from 1849. Newcastle’s and Sunderland’s are gone, and other places had no Victorian town hall (eg. South Shields’ and Wallsend’s are early twentieth century). So Gateshead’s is the only surviving purpose-built Victorian town hall in Tyne & Wear and so is vital evidence of a continuum of local government from early halls such as Newcastle’s Guildhall (1555, Grade I) and South Shields Town Hall (1798, Grade II) to modern civic centres (eg. Newcastle, 1956-65, Grade II*).

2.6 In the region, many smaller settlements have smaller Victorian town halls (eg. Corbridge) but there are only four good peers of a similar scale, two involving Johnstone:

- Bishop Auckland (1860-62, Johnstone modifying a design by J P Jones, Grade II*)
- Darlington (1863-64, Alfred Waterhouse, Grade II)
- Hexham (1865-66, Johnstone, Grade II)
- Middlesbrough (1883-9, G G Hoskins, Grade II*)

2.7 So Gateshead has one of only five comparable listed Victorian town halls in the north east, three of which are by (or modified by) Johnstone. This adds significantly to the building’s status as evidence of large scale Victorian civic architecture, and of the work of one of the leading architects in the field. (Durham’s Victorian town hall is part of an older complex, and Hartlepool’s is only a public hall.)

**Police and Court Use**

2.8 As a Victorian police station and court, it is less rare. The National Heritage List produces these comparators for ‘police’ and ‘court’ (results may not be complete):

**SEARCH RESULTS FOR POLICE STATIONS AND COURTS IN Tyne & Wear, 1837-1901:**

- 2 NEWCASTLE
- 1 GATESHEAD
- 1 SUNDERLAND
- 0 SOUTH TYNE SIDE
- 0 NORTH TYNE SIDE

**SEARCH RESULTS FOR POLICE STATIONS AND COURTS IN THE NORTH EAST, 1837-1901:**

- 1 BARNARD CASTLE
- 1 BERWICK-UPON-TWEED
- 1 BLYTH
- 1 DURHAM
- 1 HARTLEPOOL
- 1 STOCKTON
- 1 WHITTINGHAM
- 1 WOOLER

2.9 Combined police stations and courts in Whittingham (1859, Grade II) and Woolner (1850, Grade II) are smaller. Three more at Hartlepool (1871, W Crozier, Grade II), Blyth (1896, J Cresswell, Grade II) and Berwick (1899-1900, R Burns Dick, Grade II) are bigger and later than Gateshead’s.

2.10 The rest are courts only. Former county courts at Stockton (1860s, Grade II), Newcastle (1862, Grade I) and Sunderland (1876, Grade II) will be good comparators; the latter two have intact court furniture and Sunderland’s is still in that use. County courts at Durham (Grade II*) and Newcastle’s Moot Hall (Grade I) are both 1870s alterations to 1811 buildings; both still have court furniture. Barnard Castle’s 1840 police station (Grade II) was formerly a magistrates court, survival unknown.

2.11 So Gateshead seems to have one of six listed combined Victorian police stations and courts in the north east, and it is at the larger end of the scale. It is possibly the only one combined with municipal uses into a town hall.

2.12 (Other related Victorian listed buildings include non-purpose-built police stables in Newcastle, and river police offices in S Shields. Newcastle’s important central police, court and fire station complex is much later, at 1931-3.)

**Public Hall**

2.13 Due to the high number of likely comparators, it has not been possible to research comparable public halls in the scope of this commission. Neither hall will be rare, both are altered and the large hall is restored. But they are both likely to compare reasonably favourably in terms of the evidence they show for the building type and period.

**Evidence**

2.14 Much, but not all, of the detailed fabric and character is important to this evidence. The building’s forms and principle façades are key, as are authentic components of these (eg. roofscape and joinery fabric). Internally, the intact layout is important to understanding the purpose and arrangement of the specific uses within the building; harm is caused where this is lost, eg. in the former police house.

2.15 The scale and, where it survives, detail of key room volumes – hall, grand stair, former council chamber, former court, large hall and small hall – are very important to this evidence. The lack of court and council chamber furniture and the loss of the court room volume (through partition and suspended ceiling) harms this evidence compared to, say, Middlesbrough’s intact council chamber and most of the courts identified. Interlinked offices are important, especially where features survive (eg. fireplaces, safes, plaster, joinery). The rear and side façades and secondary internal rooms are useful evidence of the buildings’ history.

2.16 The police station is generally less important under this heading due to the level of change. But its layout and features (eg. cells) needs further research compared to the other stations identified before a firm conclusion can be drawn on the significance of the evidence that survives.
Conservation Areas and Archaeology

2.17 In the conservation area context, the building has considerable evidential significance. It is excellent evidence of the architectural vigour which characterised Gateshead town centre in the mid to late nineteenth century, and, together with Swinburne House, it forms part of one of the strongest building groups in the Bridges Conservation Area. There is no other part of the town centre – whether in a conservation area or not – which can reveal so much in such a focussed group about the late nineteenth century, and there is nothing like it in the borough’s other conservation areas.

2.18 There may be considerable potential for archaeological evidence under the site. Even though parts will have been dug for foundations, there are no fully sunken basements so intact deposits may survive.

Historical Significance

EXCEPTIONAL CONSIDERABLE SOME MARGINAL

2.19 The building is crucial to the story of Gateshead’s Victorian history, which it can help illustrate at both a general and detailed level. It is one of the few buildings in the town which can tell this story in a comprehensive way.

Victorian Gateshead

2.20 The formality and elegance of the building’s presence in the landscape illustrates the strength, wealth and pride of those who built it. At a time when Gateshead was driven by heavy industry, the Town Hall would have been the ultimate symbol of growth, stability and ambition.

2.21 The debate over which direction the building should face – east or west – adds interesting colour to a common story of the time: where to site and how to design probably the most important building a local authority will ever commission. When built, land between High Street and West Street was an organic jumble of dead-ends, yards and lanes. The Town Hall’s cleared plot imposed grand planning on this and the building became an instant anchor for development nearby, with buildings on Swinburne Street soon taking their cue from its controlled grandeur. It remains a firm anchor in this part of the conservation area today, despite major changes nearby.

2.22 Although much of the product of Gateshead’s Victorian commercial success survives, huge sections of the historic town are now gone. It is not always easy to tell the town’s late nineteenth century story as industrial corridors are now redeveloped or cleared, and most of the town centre comprehensively redeveloped. The long-term future of large suburbs of workers’ housing is also being debated. So remnants of Victorian Gateshead – of which the Old Town Hall is the leading part – are very important to being able to physically illustrate the wealth and pride which drove the town’s development at that time.

2.23 Inside, the various uses can be demonstrated using the layout and rooms which survive. The combination of municipal, political and legal uses is key to the date of the building. In this respect, the ‘set’ is harmed by the loss of almost any sense of the fire engine garage. So, too, the loss of internal fittings harms the ability of the place to tell its own story, even in some of the smaller rooms such as those off the former council chamber which were once for the mayor but are now no different to most of the others. This is easier in more intact parts, such as the cells which can be used to atmospheric effect in bringing law enforcement tales to life. So those features which can be used to illustrate stories are very important, such as the safes, stop-gates, the ‘private’ northern west stair, and the dock stair which, although sealed, is crucial to illustrating the route from cell to dock and to understanding the purpose of the court and its relationship with the police station below.

Municipal Gateshead

2.24 The Old Town Hall has exceptional historical significance as the place to illustrate the story of the town’s nineteenth and twentieth century municipal growth.

2.25 Along with the adjacent Swinburne House, the Old Town Hall was Gateshead’s first fully-fledged municipal headquarters and is key to understanding the growth of the borough. This civic history is a fundamental story to tell locally, and the Old Town Hall is fundamental to it as the base from which the borough was regulated for up to 120 years, both by the council and the police force.

2.26 As civic headquarters for key functions including town clerk (chief executive) and treasury, many of the local political and social decisions which guided Gateshead between the late 1870s and the late 1960s will have been made here. The former council chamber and large hall, which took this use, are particularly important to this.

2.27 The physical evolution of the building helps tell this story, too. The uses of the original rooms and their later alteration and expansion can be used to illustrate the range of municipal functions housed there. Historic plans are also useful to telling the story, including the 1950 plans of the lower ground floor where original plans are elusive.

2.28 How this building compares to others in telling the wider history of local government and policing in England has not been researched here. Other town halls and police stations will bring a different angle to the country’s history. At Gateshead, the story of the building’s birth is very distinctive and is linked to the growth of the railways, a definitive industry for the town. Equally distinctive is that of the building’s endurance into the late twentieth century whilst others were demolished. Nonetheless, there are other old town halls, police stations and courts still in use in the north east today which could, in theory, tell their story much better.

Aesthetic Significance

EXCEPTIONAL CONSIDERABLE SOME MARGINAL

2.29 Sandstone Victorian buildings, Classical in style, define many of the town centres of Tyne & Wear. But buildings of this period, style and quality are rare in Gateshead town centre, especially of this stature and, when considered with Swinburne House, in this group quantity.

2.30 The building has a strong well-informed style which makes it a powerful piece of architecture. It has sound Classical proportions and careful detailing which mark it out as a piece of work by an experienced architect.

2.31 External detail adds considerably to the overall quality including the carving, metalwork and, in particular, symbolic work in stone and glass. The robust Romanesque articulation of the principal façade is accomplished and well-detailed, the central symmetrical emphasis creating intense institutional grandeur enhanced by the breathing space created by the front square and the complementary presence of the later freestanding clocktower. The copious embellishment and decoration adds both gravitas and delight, with symbols of the use, period and borough.

2.32 The secondary Swinburne Street elevation responds expertly to the nature of the town centre at the time by being designed as a series of harmonised façades rather than one monolithic whole. This demonstrates an understanding of the organic, fragmented growth of the town centre into which it was added. Group value with later Swinburne House, on Swinburne Street and Swinburne Place, is one of its greatest aesthetic strengths. The 1950s extension – by far the most visible one – is neatly respectful.

2.33 As well as the ‘presentation’ qualities, there is some significance from the functional Swinburne Place elevation, and from the intricate, multi-faceted appearance of the roofscape. The latter is only visible from within Swinburne House and obliquely from the back lane. Throughout, the exterior, the sheer quantity of well-aged local sandstone – ashlar and rubble – and Welsh slate is striking.

2.34 Internally, the layout has logical planning related to historic use, some of it very carefully considered such as the ‘private’ north west stair. The interlinked offices allowing access without public visibility is distinctive of the building’s uses. Views along long corridors and the stateliness of the grand stair are visual symbols of the borough’s status – the proverbial ‘corridors of power’. The number of lightwells helps understand the period in which the building was designed. Despite ever-changing space requirements due to municipal evolution, most of the building seems to have remained fit for purpose. Only the fire engine garage and police station intensively altered their form and function.

2.35 Detailed decoration of the interior is high quality. Key parts have rich and spirited detail, designed to convey stability and wealth (eg. former council chamber), authority and reverence (eg. former court) or just visual delight (eg. small hall). Surviving finishes and features in the hall, grand stair, former council chamber, large hall, small hall (and the former court?), ceiling cavity not inspected) is particularly
striking. These would have been greater were there original joinery, furniture and other fittings. Plaster in other main rooms is crucial to their historic character even if currently it is hidden from view. Other designed features contribute greatly to the architect’s vision for the interior including marble, metalwork, leaded and coloured glass, fireplaces and copious window, door and other joinery. Without this decoration, an understanding would be lost of the room’s intended purpose and the building’s role as a proud municipal symbol for Victorian Gateshead.

2.36 The internal decoration of secondary spaces is also high quality, and an important part of the buildings’ period style, but it is generally plainer and less critical to the aesthetic. Where it exists in anything like its original form, neat historic plasterwork does add to rooms’ significance.

2.37 The cellblock is not designed to be attractive but its largely unaltered Victorian jail character has an undeniable aesthetic tone important to the building’s history.

2.38 The appearance of historic windows and doors is very important to the aesthetic significance of the façades and also, with their trim and surrounds, to the interior. The character of nineteenth century joinery is a major part of the authenticity and visual appeal of Victorian buildings and, as it survives in such great quantities here, it is crucial to the Old Town Hall’s aesthetic significance.

Conservation Area

2.39 The Old Town has EXCEPTIONAL aesthetic significance as a major contributor to Bridges Conservation Area due to its architecture, size and prominence. The conservation area is characterised by a series of set pieces rather than a single coherent townscape. The sandstone grandeur of the Old Town Hall combines with the adjacent Swinburne House, others on West Street, and the road layout they are on, to create an attractive, authentic scene of great character. This significance includes the rear elevations and back lane off Swinburne Place.

The Architect

2.40 Johnstone’s work was commonly robust in form and high quality in detail. Gateshead Town Hall compares very favourably with its main comparators in his portfolio at Newcastle (demolished 1969), Bishop Auckland (Grade II*) and Heswall (Grade II), all of which excel in their informed Classical and Gothic revival styles in sandstone. Newcastle’s was hobbled from the start by its site and saw out its 110 years or so under constant pressure for change. The other two have been far more fit for purpose and are now in new uses. His flair for grand articulation, striking composition and powerful roof forms can also be seen in the County Hotel (Grade II), the soaring Gas Company offices (Grade II), the elegantly detailed Corn Exchange in Berwick (unlisted, much altered). It is even evident in the simple yet confident Garth Heads (Grade II) where symmetry and a central roof emphasis echo Gateshead Town Hall’s main front. The Town Hall is one of the key surviving works in his portfolio.

2.41 On his death, Johnstone was seen as “one of the oldest and most esteemed architects in the north,” (Newcastle Journal, 30 Sept 1884) and as someone who “can fairly rank as a worthy successor to Grainger in the work of obtaining for Newcastle the rank of an architectural town” (Newcastle Chronicle, 29 Sept 1884).

Communal Significance

2.42 This was not formally researched for this study, but some conclusion can be drawn from the work carried out.

2.43 The average Gateshead citizen would be likely to have a firm opinion about the Old Town Hall. It is likely to register strongly as a significant old building which people would recognise as an important symbol of the borough’s social history. As a major civic building, the Old Town Hall has automatic communal significance, being symbolic of 120 years of municipal leadership in one of the region’s major industrial boroughs. The type and layout of uses, and changes to them over time (eg. the relocation of the council chamber) are symbolic of the growth and authority of the council and police force which regulated it.

2.44 The place’s high symbolism and identity is displayed in some of the architecture, notably the symbols of the use, period and borough on the main elevation in stone and glass. More generally, the building is a recognisable image of Gateshead, not so high in the wider public consciousness as the Angel of the North, the Sage Gateshead or the Sage Gateshead Millennium Bridge, but one which nonetheless will be important locally and probably across Tyne & Wear.

2.45 People will remember the range of uses in the Town Hall, either from working there or visiting it. This will generate positive feelings for many (especially, no doubt, linked to social activities in the large and small halls), but there will also be some negative memories, especially for those who were on the wrong side of the law. These memories will be many and varied and, for such a central, definitive building of Gateshead’s past, they will combine to generate very high social significance for the place. This may get lower over time but, importantly, the building continues to generate new social significance today. The significance of even relatively recent uses should not be underestimated – its use as the foundation of the Sage Gateshead and the temporary home of the Tyneside Cinema, two great regional cultural institutions, has helped start a convivial new chapter in its life.

2.46 The presence of Swinburne House next door adds to the Town Hall’s communal significance, but it would not be fatally harmed without it – the Town Hall is a building of great consequence in its own right.

Significance Diagrams

2.47 The diagrams on the next two pages summarise the overall heritage significance of the fabric and room volumes at the Old Town Hall.

2.48 Fabric is shown solid and room volumes as tints.

2.49 The diagrams are summaries only. Within each room or stretch of fabric there will be individual elements of higher or lower significance than indicated here. As discussed in the final section of this study, the significance of every part of any fabric and space to altered should be fully understood before agreeing any change.

EXCEPTIONAL: Aspects which are seminal to understanding the place and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would destroy or greatly compromise its significance.

CONSIDERABLE: Aspects which go a long way to help understand the place, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would notably diminish significance but not destroy it.

SOME: Aspects which contribute to or complement understanding of the place but are not intrinsic to it, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would not unacceptably harm its significance.

MARGINAL: Aspects which have only minor links with the place or which could be considered intrusive, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would cause little if any harm or could bring about positive enhancement.

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Significance Diagrams (see previous page)
Summary Statement of
Significance

2.50 Gateshead Old Town Hall is the only surviving purpose-built Victorian town hall in Tyne & Wear and so is vital evidence of a continuum of local government in the county. As one of only five comparable listed Victorian town halls in the north east, it is excellent evidence in the region of a key Victorian architectural theme – civic.

2.51 Historically, it is definitive of Gateshead’s place in Tyne & Wear’s nineteenth century heyday, the ultimate municipal symbol of growth, stability and ambition. The mix of original uses describes its place in history. Such remnants are very important to physically illustrating this chapter in the town’s development, especially as many other components of the story are now gone.

2.52 The Old Town Hall was Gateshead’s first fully-fledged civic and police headquarters. It is the place to illustrate the town’s nineteenth and twentieth century municipal growth, but other places do have more intact Victorian council chambers and courts. The building is strongly associated with adjacent Swinburne House into which it grew.

2.53 Architecturally, buildings of this period, style and quality are rare in Gateshead. It is very intact and much – but not all – of detailed fabric and character is important, notably the building form, the two main façades and their components (eg. windows), the roofscape, internal layout, the room volumes, and much of the internal decoration.

2.54 The building uses a well-informed Romanesque style with sound proportions and careful detailing. To the front, symmetry creates intense institutional grandeur enhanced by the front square and the complementary freestanding clocktower. Copious decoration in stone, metal and glass adds gravitas and delight, including symbols of the use, period and borough. The Swinburne Street front responds well to the organic town centre into which it was added.

2.55 Internal layout has logical planning carefully related to the arrangement of original uses. It remains largely unaltered (apart from at the former fire engine garage and police house). Internal decoration is high quality with joinery, plaster, glass, marble, metal and other features (eg. safes) adding to rooms’ significance. This includes offices and some secondary rooms. Principal rooms were designed to convey wealth, authority and delight, especially the hall, grand stair, large hall and small hall; the former court and council chamber have lost original furniture and fittings but retain some finishes (some concealed). The cellblock is very intact with an aesthetic quality key to the building’s history. The appearance of the large quantity historic window and door joinery is crucial to the authentic significance of the façades and also, with their trim, to the interiors.

2.56 Significance is notably enhanced by John Johnstone, the architect. He designed three of the five comparable listed Victorian town halls and was highly regarded during his career. He had a flare for grand articulation, striking composition and powerful roof forms, and was capable of informed work in a range of Classical and Gothic styles. The Town Hall is one of the key surviving works in his portfolio.

2.57 As a major civic building strong on symbolism and identity, the Old Town Hall has considerable communal significance. It symbolises 120 years of municipal leadership in one of the region’s major industrial borough’s. Many will look on it with great affection (not least due to social activities in the public halls), but others – mainly those on the wrong side of the law – may not have such positive memories. It continues to generate new communal significance today as an emerging cultural venue.

2.58 Together with Swinburne House and others nearby, the Old Town Hall is part of one of the best set-pieces in Bridges Conservation Area. It is excellent evidence of the commercial vigour which drove development in Gateshead town centre in the mid to late nineteenth century. It combines superbly with the adjacent Swinburne House and the townscape around (including the road layout and rear) to create an attractive, authentic scene of great grandeur. There is no similar surviving group in the town centre or in any other Gateshead conservation area. It remains a major anchor in the town centre, despite being quite isolated.

2.59 There is considerable potential for archaeological evidence under the site as, although it has deep foundations, there are no sunken basements.
STAGE THREE

Risks & Issues

3.1 With a clear understanding of why the Old Town Hall is significant, this section sets out how that significance might at risk. The degree to which significance is at risk governs the policies set out in the final stage.

Physical Condition

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<th>RISK TO SIGNIFICANCE:</th>
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3.2 The condition of the Old Town Hall is generally good to very good (no formal inspection has been made for this study). There is one large, noticeable area of water penetration, on the court part of the Swinburne Street elevation probably caused by a blocked gutter, which may be historic.

3.3 There is little other visual evidence of water ingress, vegetation growth, decay or neglect. Sealed chimney breasts will reduce ventilation. There is likely to be some cementitious pointing which will speed stonework decay over time. Some rooms are un- or under-used, which risks keeping signs of decay out of sight, notably in the cellblock.

3.4 The original build seems sound, and there are no obvious structural issues (again, no formal inspection was carried out for this study).

3.5 There is evidence of long term regular maintenance and programmed repair. This stems from its status as a key operational Council building, but attention does not seem to have greatly reduced since the building was no longer needed operationally. This indicates a generally sound asset management approach which should continue.

3.6 The importance of building maintenance cannot be overstated. Regular small-scale investment in maintenance and repair is almost always substantially cheaper and easier than the cost and disruption of recovery. Preventing water ingress whilst allowing the building to 'breathe' is fundamental to responding to traditional buildings' needs.

**MAIN ISSUES**

- **PRIORITY** Regularly monitoring and addressing issues as they arise, in particular in un- and under-used rooms.
- **PRIORITY** Addressing evident water dispersal and penetration issues.
- Sustaining maintenance and repair regimes at a level appropriate to the building's fabric and character.

Previous Alterations

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3.7 The changes which the building has seen over time have had some impact on its heritage significance, but these have only been overpowering in a few places.

3.8 The building is very intact in basic form, layout, room volumes and some decoration. There has been loss and addition, leading to historic character erosion and modernisation. The exterior is generally more intact.

**LOSS**

- Comprehensive loss of fittings and finishes in some key rooms has notably harmed their significance.
- Elsewhere, the general erosion of features, finishes and decoration (eg. joinery, plaster, fireplaces, floors, safes) has deadened some rooms’ character and dulled the overall historic sense of the interior. Some rooms have been consciously modernised. Harm to plaster has been encouraged by suspended ceilings.
- Loss of partitions and circulation has caused harm, eg. probable loss of lower part of north west stair.
- Integrity is hardest hit in the lower ground floor, the rear of the large hall, and around the lift and WC extension. Layout, volumes, features and finishes are harmed.

**ADDITION**

- Extensions are generally low significance but are not visually intrusive. The 1950s extension is respectful.
- Most additions have added to rather than wiped out what existed (eg. suspended ceilings; court partition). Some are respectful (eg. the design of the south west stair; siting of the lift and WC extension) or in less sensitive locations (eg. the control room).
- Some have been for regulatory reasons (eg. corridor subdivision, much of the lower ground floor).
- Many additions are reversible without much harm, eg. room partitions and some suspended ceilings.

**MAIN ISSUES**

- Erosion of internal character through loss and addition.
- Securing reversal of harmful changes, where possible.
Policy Context

Generally, the policy context offers little risk and should actively protect the significance of the place. This includes the current asset management proposals.

There could be huge risk if the current major, high-level planning and regeneration activity in and around the town centre does not take full account of the building’s significance. But this threat does not currently seem to be present.

Within the March 2015 adopted ‘Planning for the Future’ Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-The Central Sub Area Policy (GC1) states that traffic will be removed from the portion of West Street directly outside the Old Town Hall and that pedestrian links from Old Town Hall to surrounding destinations will be improved. Most significantly the Policy identifies this area (Old Town Hall Area) for Mixed Use Development

Policy GC2 of the CSUCP defines the permitted uses within this development area and makes clear that development must, restore and enhance the Old Town Hall, along with Swinburne House and the Old Dispensary. The Policy is clear on the parameters of development, identifying car park locations, public green space and the need to redefine the historic street pattern.

The study area is within the Bridges Conservation Area (designated in 1991 and extended in 1994). The Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CACA) was adopted in April 2013 and is a useful tool. There is however no Management Plan in place. To ensure the best approach to environment management, any major townscape remodelling here must be informed by the CACA and reflect current best practice.

Current asset management proposals should protect or enhance significance, especially through reversing insensitive changes in the former council chamber and court. The success of reinstating lost features (eg. joinery, plaster, flooring) will depend on design integrity – either as authentic restoration or high quality complementary work. In external works, care must be taken not to clutter the simplicity of the front square.

MAIN ISSUES
- Preparing a conservation area management strategy for the Bridges Conservation Area reflecting best practice.
- Ensuring the ongoing high-level visioning and decision-making in and around the town centre take full account of the building’s heritage significance.
- PRIORITY Ensuring design integrity and sound conservation principles during implementation of current asset management proposals.

Setting

This is one of the biggest problems. As was typical for the Victorian period, the building was designed to be a focal point in a cohesive townscape showing commercial vigour, municipal stability and civic pride. This was heavily damaged by the radical re-ordering of the development pattern north of today’s town centre, and the loss of many historic buildings. The legacy of such post-WWII planning and development continues to dog Gateshead town centre.

So, the Old Town Hall is unusually prominent above sites and roads as land drops to the north and west. The front square (originally an in-and-out drive) was designed to make the main façade a local spectacle and to give it ‘breathing space’, but today’s vast expanse of open space beyond the square is out of scale, creating needlessly long views of it which belittle its status in the scene.

Enclosing a smaller-scaled space and shortening views of it by introducing new development would be an ideal way forward. This would realise its potential as the principal anchor for the scale and quality of planning, urban design and architecture needed to bring new order to this part of the town centre. Keeping glimpses from major routes to the north would ensure its high aesthetic and communal significance is protected.

This pivotal role in future planning and design is important in the light of the risks posed by on-going comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre to the south. If the building is to be dwarfed by a new town centre to the south, then it must be allowed to govern new development to the north.

MAIN ISSUES
- PRIORITY An unnecessarily prominent building which is intended to be an anchor point of a cohesive townscape. Enclosing an appropriately-scaled front square (whilst protecting glimpses) would reinforce its status.
- PRIORITY The building group should be used as an anchor for future planning, urban design and architecture.

Access – Outside

Being in the town centre albeit at the edge, getting to the building is generally quite easy.

Pedestrian access from the town centre to the south on West Street is good. But from the north, east and west it is significantly challenged by an extensive road network and complex junctions. The issue of poor links from the quays to the town centre has been taxing for several decades, and continues to require a broad, high level solution rather than one focussed just on the needs of the Old Town Hall. This is reflected in the aforementioned CSUCP Policy GC1.

Vehicular access is generally good. Getting to this part of West Street is a little convoluted for the uninitiated.

There is no on-site parking and virtually no capacity for it. The former drill yard and service yard have vehicular access but very limited capacity (as well being emergency escape routes), and are not generally used for parking. The one option for on-site demolition would only marginally increase car-park capacity. Current parking needs are met by town centre public car-parking, the site directly opposite being the main resource nearby. Any risks to the building from a lack of parking should be managed by continuing to rely on public car-parks and exploiting town centre public transport links.

MAIN ISSUES
- PRIORITY Securing high level resolution to the long term poor pedestrian links between the quays and town centre.
- Not over-complicating vehicular access.
- Ensuring demands for parking are managed through public provision and public transport links.
Access – Inside

3.23 Emergency escape meets current standards but the building would be likely to take more people were its escape capacity greater. This is hampered by the intricate building layout.

3.24 Disabled access is fair to good, sensitively achieved through alteration. Level access from the street is cleverly done but, internally, the lift does not reach the lower ground floor and overall disabled provision may not meet best practice. Issues will include doors, signage, refuges and surfaces. Disabled access in historic buildings is a specialism which requires careful thought and healthy collaboration to make reasonable adjustment without prejudicing significance.

3.25 There is also some risk to the ‘experience’ of the building. It is designed to be entered and circulated in a particular way, which contributes to significance. Where this is altered, significance can be harmed. The hierarchy of spaces beginning at the front square and moving through the lobby, hall, grand stair, corridors and into the main spaces is best experienced in the way intended by the architecture. Dividing the building up internally by blocking, reversing or otherwise interfering with the intended flow of such routes could cause harm. This has already happened in a low key way by inserting the reception counter and sealing up one end the secondary north-south corridor, thus interrupting intended flow through the ground floor. This is secondary space so harm is not high, but it is evidence of potential harm nonetheless.

3.26 It is of great significance that the original front door remains in this use; having the whole building’s main entrance from, say, Swinburne Street would cause harm.

MAIN ISSUES
- Improving emergency escape capacity and disabled access could cause harm if not carefully designed.
- PRIORITY Internal circulation and the ‘experience’ of the building should be protected where it contributes to significance.
4.1 Protecting the Old Town Hall’s significance from those aspects which are putting it at risk will involve conservation and management actions. These should be shaped by a clear strategy of policies which can influence the decisions being made.

4.2 The policies set out here should be used day-to-day as well as for more major, longer term decision-making.

4.3 This Conservation Statement should be reviewed every 5 years or so, or as major new work is carried out.
Repair

4.15 Repairs should be the minimum necessary to allow the Old Town Hall to continue to function. Repair should not be a substitute for maintenance – the latter should always be the first priority.

4.16 Repairs should use proven traditional techniques and matching natural materials, unless modern techniques or materials can provide a suitable solution without harming significance, including aesthetic significance. This will be particularly important to the principal façades and the principal decorative room volumes.

4.17 Minor removal of fabric to reveal something concealed could be pursued where there is a need for understanding which cannot be achieved another way. But such destructive intervention is unlikely to be an issue here:

- There are few parts of the Old Town Hall which are so poorly understood and so potentially significant that fabric must be destroyed to get to them.
- Most concealing changes have generated fabric of low significance so intervention anyway would cause little harm.
- On the strength of current understanding, there is no case for destruction of above-ground fabric solely to understand better the potential archaeological resource below-ground.

Restoration

4.18 Restoration is a controversial practice in the historic environment as it risks creating a fake replica rather than sustaining authenticity. It is usually better for a building to honestly evolve but, on occasion, restoration is desirable, such as where it enhances understanding or significance.

4.19 Restoration should still be guided by a minimum intervention approach. Restoration should not be pursued where it would decrease authenticity (eg. wholly replicating court joinery and fittings) or where the later change is, in itself, causing little harm (eg. the 1950s extension).

4.20 As the original designs of the Old Town Hall are generally more significant than the later work, there will be an argument for restoring some later work which has concealed, harmed or destroyed original designs. Obvious examples are:

- removing inserted partitions in principal rooms,
- reinstating lost layout, circulation and volumes, particularly where they help interpret significant historic uses; this should include removing suspended ceilings to restore room volumes
- putting back missing or damaged decoration where it completes a room design (eg. ceiling plasterwork, window surround joinery, staircase metalwork, metal cresting on the central front roof, etc.),
- restoring replica doors to original doorways.

4.21 However, this should be balanced against future viability to ensure restoration does not hinder continued economic use. For example, restoring full fitted joinery in the former council chamber and court, or the dock stair’s entry into the latter, would most likely be counterproductive.

4.22 Works carried out during the building’s later uses are still part of its story and, if restored, should be suitably recorded first.

New work and alteration

4.23 Conservation of the Old Town Hall is very likely to involve alteration and new work. Innovation and preservation are two sides of the same coin. A presumption in favour of preservation does not preclude new work, it only requires its justification. Innovation is not in conflict with protecting significance – the Old Town Hall proves this because changes made already have left it in good shape as a heritage asset. Further change will be necessary, for example to allow sustainable new uses.

4.24 It will be important to provide sufficient information on the impacts of proposals, including visual (eg. does it protect aesthetic significance?) and technical (eg. will it cause harm in the long term?).

4.25 It will be important to justify the proposals in the context of the significance of the fabric or space concerned – the higher the significance, the stronger the justification needed. The highest priorities for upholding significance in new work and alteration will be to protect:

- the historic building form,
- the West Street and Swinburne Street elevations,
- original internal layouts, circulation and accessess,
- the most decorative principal room volumes,
- other decorative fabric and features where they contribute to evidential or aesthetic significance,
- fireplaces, safes and cells,
- group value with neighbouring buildings and their setting.

4.26 New work which reinforces or better reveals heritage significance will be easier to justify.

4.27 The Old Town Hall’s original architecture is high quality. So it will be important to achieve high quality in the design, materials, detailing and execution of new work and alteration. All work must achieve the quality expected of a more sensitive place.

4.28 Fashions can change but quality is enduring. New work should be honest in its style and execution unless there is a compelling case for adopting a traditional style. If so, the execution of that style must be wholly authentic.

4.29 Most new work should follow the principle of reversible change, whereby the earlier work will be left unharmed if the new work is later removed or undone.

4.30 The sort of new work for which a sound justification could be made includes:

- development in the building group’s setting to link it back into a coherent, planned townscape,
- development on West Street to make more suitably-scaled enclosure of the front square,
- minor alterations to layout to allow continued productive re-use,
- making changes to room volumes and layout in the less significant interiors, eg. former police house and 1950s extension.

4.31 Other new work is likely to include:

- alterations to improve disabled access,
- alterations to improve energy conservation,
- alterations to improve emergency escape capacity.

4.32 In considering new development in the building’s setting, key factors will be:

- street alignment along West and Swinburne Streets,
- scale, height, massing and materials to respect the building’s intended predominance in the local scene.