

HERITAGE STATEMENT TO SUPPORT PLANNING APPLICATION

FOR PROPOSED REAR EXTENSION AND CONVERSION OF UPPER FLOORS TO APARTMENTS

AT 1 GEORGE STREET, WHALLEY, BB7 9TH

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This heritage statement has been produced to support a planning application to Ribble Valley Borough Council, for the proposed rear extension and conversion of the existing upper floors of 1 George Street, to apartments. It has been written by Stephen Haigh MA, on the instruction of the owner Sean Ronnan, through his agent Peter Hitchen Architects, and follows a site visit on 8 December 2020.
- 1.2 The building lies within the Whalley Conservation Area, and is identified within the council's Conservation Area Appraisal map as a "Building of Townscape Merit" and "focal building".
- 1.3 An appraisal of the building was produced by this writer in December 2020, and has been used in drawing up the present proposals, which also take into account pre-application advice on an earlier scheme, provided by RVBC in June 2021 (ref: RV/2021/ENQ/00004).

2 The existing site

- 2.1 The site lies on the south side of George Street where it forms part of a mostly two-storey brick building, originally constructed as a single property, to serve as multi-purpose premises for the Billington and Whalley Cooperative Society, which at that time included a first floor cinema. The ground floor has been extended at the west end, and now comprises a number of retail units, one of which also occupies some first floor space at the west end of the block. Latterly the building was occupied by the Maureen Cookson department store, and the remainder of the upper floors are now vacant and disused.

3 Summary of proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed to extend the building at the rear, within the existing service yard area, and convert the majority of the upper floors to seven apartments, five of them duplex and two located on the top floor only. Access to the apartments would be via a new external staircase and first floor terrace at the rear. An existing roof dormer on the front elevation would be replaced by a larger one and

the eaves parapet removed, while to the rear, an existing rear wing near the east end would be enlarged, and a second, new one constructed near the west end. There would also be new rooflights to the rear elevation, and the existing cupola to the ridge removed.

4 Historical background

- 4.1 The precise circumstances and date of the building's construction are not known¹, but Ordnance Survey maps indicate that the block was erected between 1910 and 1929, and was associated with the establishment of George Street as a cul-de-sac off King Street, prior to which the site otherwise appears to have been largely undeveloped.
- 4.2 Other documentary references imply the cinema within the building began to operate in or shortly before 1915, and initially showed silent films, with capacity for an audience of 500. *"As well as exhibiting CWS films, slides were screened announcing changes in prices at the store, meetings of the society and other local matters. During winter months, free afternoons for adults were arranged, whereby a film programme lasting an hour was supplemented by a 15 minutes talk on the society by the Secretary/Manager."*²
- 4.3 The cinema closed in 1958, and the building as a whole is believed to have become vacant and fallen into disrepair by the 1960s. The first floor was converted to a nightclub and casino in 1964, but later became part of a department store, which closed in 2018. Planning permission for change of use to a restaurant was granted in 2019, but the upper floors remain disused at the time of writing.

5 Setting

- 5.1 The site is located within the west side of Whalley village centre. It forms part of an enclave of twentieth century development, with traditional semi-detached houses on the north of George Street, but close to the south is much older terraced housing and the medieval St Mary's and All Saints' Church, along either side of Church Lane; the church is grade I listed, and nos 10 to 16 Church Lane are listed at grade II. The commercial properties along the west side of King Street also include some historic buildings.

¹The original plans might be held by Lancashire Archives, in their Clitheroe Rural District Council collection, ref: RDC Acc 3794 or RDC Acc 7593. If so, this would give a close date for construction.

²Burton, A 1994 "The people's cinemas: the picture houses of the Co-operative movement" in *North West Labour History Society Journal* vol 19

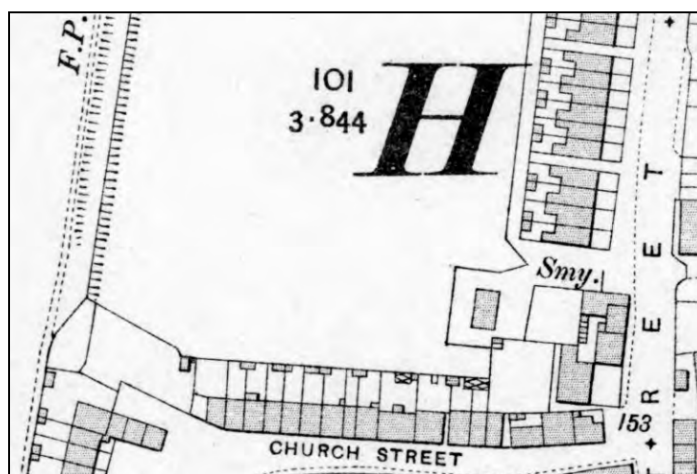


Figure 1: OS 1:2500 map, 1912 (pre-dates the building)



Figure 2: OS 1:2500 map, 1932

6 The present building

- 6.1 The following account concerns the block as a whole, and it should be noted that the proposed development is confined to the upper floors only.
- 6.2 The original part of the premises is brick-built with sandstone ashlar dressings, ten bays long and two storeys high, with bays 2 and 9 rising as flat turrets to the front elevation. The turrets are linked by a parapet, and surmounted by stone balustrades, below the level of the ridge of the hipped, slated roof. The stone dressings enliven an otherwise plain brick façade, and give the building a distinctly Edwardian character with a neo-baroque theme.
- 6.3 The roof turrets also mark the positions of street entrances to the upper floors, a matching pair of arches. Otherwise, the ground floor of the façade is given over to shop-fronts, and an historic photograph shows a stone band bearing the

names of the various Cooperative departments, eg offices, and groceries and provisions. This is now hidden or replaced by modern shop signs. The first floor has a fairly simple arrangement of large window openings, with modern frames. Above the parapet over the centre of the façade is a wide but low dormer, and an octagonal ventilator with cupola.

- 6.4 The building's east end is much plainer, and almost all brick, and the west end appears similarly mundane, but was extended in the late twentieth century. A single-storey projection at the south-west corner is however believed to be original.
- 6.5 The rear of the building backs onto a narrow access road and is very much concerned with servicing: it includes a covered loading bay, a modern, flat-roofed, pebble-dashed extension, and a lift shaft.
- 6.6 The internal areas proposed for development include the stairwell from the street entrance (between Tastebuds and The Mens Room), and the upper floors of the building, with the exception of the two easternmost bays, which remain in use as part of a clothes shop.
- 6.7 The stairwell contains the original stairs (stone or concrete), which are of some quality, having ornamented steel balusters and moulded hardwood handrail, as well as a tiled dado which incorporates the Lancashire rose. The stairs emerge onto the first floor in an area which has been partitioned up historically. This is generally unremarkable, although the south-east room is notable for its ornate plaster ceiling, and the remains of a fireplace and wall panelling, which suggest it was a boardroom or similarly prestigious space.
- 6.8 The main first floor space is the former cinema, which is five bays long, and has a vaulted, ribbed ceiling. It lacks any seating or other furniture, or stage, which would have been at the west end. The ceiling is suspended from steel trusses, and incorporates ventilation grilles as well as large, circular, borrowed lights, which seem to rely on the north dormer for their light-source. The projection room is situated on a small second floor room to the east of the auditorium, and now contains modern heating plant, but it does retain some historic fixtures and fireproofing (as legally required in the early 20th century, due to the flammability of early films).

7 Statement of significance

- 7.1 The building as a whole is a substantial, early 20th century, commercial premises of a former local cooperative society within the village centre,

distinguished by its front, north elevation in neo-baroque architectural style, and in which the pair of roof turrets form a particularly important component.

- 7.2 It is a relatively tall commercial building, set mostly amongst lower, residential properties, so obviously forms a distinctive element of the village and conservation area, as highlighted in the council's appraisal document. Although its location in a side street (without through-access, except by pedestrians), means that the prominence of its façade within the village centre is restricted, it is nonetheless visible from King Street, and the more open character of development along the north side of George Street does allow it to form a dominant element locally.
- 7.3 The rear of the building is much less conspicuous within the conservation area, and was originally constructed, and subsequently altered, with considerably less regard for appearance and display than the front. This part of the building therefore provides much greater scope for change.
- 7.4 The building also has historical significance as the former premises of the Billington and Whalley Cooperative Society, which incorporated a cinema within it, perhaps the only cinema to have operated in the village's history. The auditorium and projection room are still largely intact spaces, but only the latter contains any fixtures or fittings. On the whole, the cinema is not well preserved, and is a plain, functional space, dating from the heyday of cinema (established in about 1915), when hundreds of its type were built, so is not a good example. Significance is however raised slightly by the building's origins in the cooperative movement, and in addition to the cinema, the south-east room with ornate plaster ceiling remains as evidence for the movement's optimism and confidence in the early 20th century.

8 Impact on significance

- 8.1 The majority of the external works within the proposed conversion would take place at the rear of the building, where there would be relatively little impact on heritage significance. Changes to the front of the building would be confined to roof level, where the existing low parapet and dormer would be replaced by a larger dormer, set back slightly from the eaves. Given that the building is mostly viewed from street level nearby, this change would have a very minor effect on the conservation area, so would preserve its character and appearance, and is not considered to amount to harm.
- 8.2 Although works to the rear would be more extensive, they would affect that part of the building which has very low significance, because of its existing plain,

functional form, which lacks aesthetic value. This means that the new and extended gables, external stairs and roof terrace, would not be unharmonious with the existing building. The rear is also largely concealed from view, and would not impinge on views of those parts of the conservation area which confer its special architectural and historic interest, nor on the setting of nearby listed buildings on Church Lane. These aspects of the proposal would preserve the conservation area's character and appearance.

- 8.3 There would be a small loss of significance to the building as an individual, non-designated heritage asset, primarily through the loss of the existing former cinema interior, albeit presently no longer wholly intact. However, the fact that this space is presently redundant, and eminently unsuitable for alternative uses, means that a balanced judgement regarding its future use clearly implies that conversion in some form is acceptable.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 In summary, it is considered that the proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the Whalley Conservation Area, without harm to its significance, nor to the setting of nearby listed buildings. They would however cause harm to the significance of the non-designated heritage asset of the application building itself, but given the public benefits which would accrue, and the lack of alternative uses for the building's upper floors, this would be an acceptable level of harm, within the meaning of the NPPF.

Stephen Haigh, MA
Buildings Archaeologist
31 August 2021



Photo 1: View along George Street, from King Street



Photo 2: North front, viewed across George Street



Photo 3: Service areas to rear of building, looking north-east

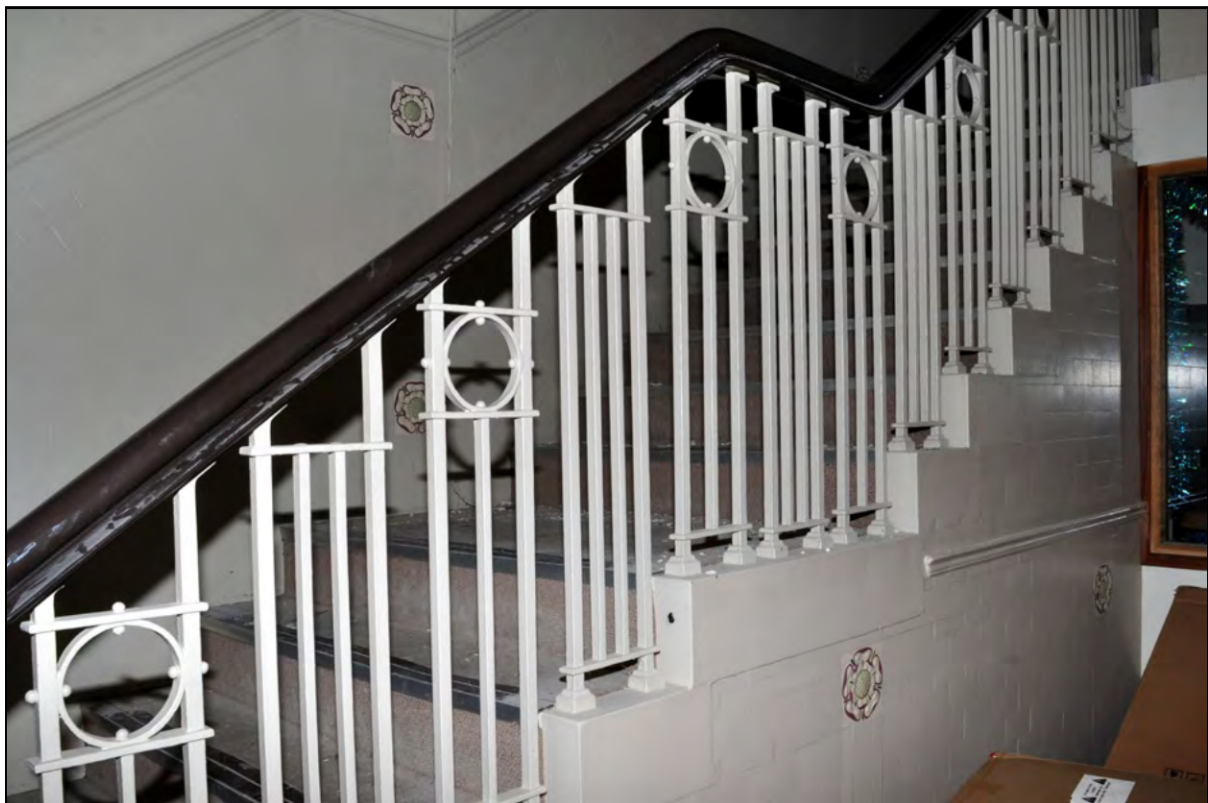


Photo 4: Staircase to first floor



Photo 5: Former cinema auditorium on first floor, looking east towards projection room (with bricked-up openings)



Photo 6: Former cinema projection room, second floor



Photo 7: Plaster ceiling over south-west room on first floor