

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	261134
Address:	Town Hall, The Courtyard, Market Place, Wokingham, Wokingham, RG40 1AS		
Proposal:	Application for Listed Building consent for the proposed installation of two roof-mounted air source heat pump condenser units and associated plant, together with the erection of a roof-level fall- prevention guardrail at The Courtyard, Town Hall, Market Place, Wokingham.		
Heritage Asset:	The Town Hall – Grade II* since 1969 Wokingham Town Conservation Area <i>Setting of:</i> 3 and 4, Market Place – Grade II 5 Market Place – Grade II 6 Market Place – Grade II* Roebuck Public House, Market Place – Grade II Fosters, Market Place – Grade II K6 Telephone Kiosk , Market Place – Grade II Drinking Fountain, Market Place – Grade II Ye Olde Rose Inne – Grade II Red Lion Public House – Grade II* 22 Market Place – Grade II 23 and 34 Market Place – Grade II <i>Listed buildings and conservation areas are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council's Local Plan policies</i>		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes a replacement heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system (as to include 2no. roof mounted air-source heat pumps (ASHPs),

internal cassettes with associated ducting, cabling and fixings) and a metal safety barrier to be installed atop of the flat roof, at the Town Hall, a Grade II* listed building, located within the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area.

The Town Hall is an exceptional building of 1860 by Poulton and Woodman, notable Victorian architects, based in Reading. Wokingham's Town Hall is arguably their finest civic work, reflected in the Grade II* listing. The building was designed as a literal centrepiece for the town, demonstrating power, prosperity and contemporary taste. The free high-Gothic style allowed the building to be both flexible in terms of requirement, but also grand enough to be a landmark structure. The building still functions as the town hall, some 166 years after construction, as well as being subdivided into commercial units – the unit known as 'The Courtyard' is the subject of this application. The Town Hall is located in the medieval market square, and set within a cluster of historic buildings. This area of the town is remarkably well preserved – reflected by – and perhaps partly of – the concentration of statutory listings. This is a highly sensitive area of townscape and thus any proposed change must be appropriately considered and managed.

The applicant erroneously refers to the building as being Grade II listed, whereas it is Grade II* - and thus Historic England must be statutorily consulted on the proposals.

The application proposes alteration to the commercial unit known as 'The Courtyard', currently tenanted by a café. It is proposed to install a HVAC system to replace the extant heating and cooling system which has been stated as ineffective. Very limited details have been supplied as part of this application as to understand the nature of the proposals and their impact upon the historic building, further to this, the following points are raised:

- Limited information has been given as to the nature of the flat and glazed roof. It is stated as being from the 1970s or 1980s, however appears to be much more recent in part. What is the roof made from? What is its structural capacity? This is important as the 2no. ASHPs will weigh in excess of 125kg (no specification has been provided, despite being stated to be - from the size dimension described, this has been extrapolated to a standard specification ASHP such as a Toshiba HWS-805-E, which weighs 63kg according to the manufacturer's specification). Can the roof take this load in this area? As it appears to be located next to 19th century walling, how has the inserted flat roof been attached to this fabric, and thus what is the bearing on the wall here? Further to this, the proposed plan shows the ASHPs to be located on top of part of the glazed roof – this would be physically impossible to achieve. Furthermore, is an ASHP system technically appropriate here? These systems require a building to have high levels of insulation to run efficiently – the flat roof would appear to have a low thermal value.
- Related to the above, is the proposed internal cassette system - in the first instance, no information, specification, plans etc. have been supplied in

relation to works, these are a necessity as to fully understand the impact upon the historic fabric. Again, no specification has been supplied, but taking a standard AC cassette weight of over 25kg – what is the structural implications upon the roof? How many cassettes will there be and where are they to be located? At present the roof has a much lighter weight ducting and venting system which the roof can evidently bear, but the introduction of additional load will undoubtedly have an impact.

- No information has been supplied as to the location, and thus impact of related new ducting, wiring, fixings etc. Whilst the flat roof is modern, the walling is historic and thus a physical impact may arise to the historic fabric – this is uncertain due to the lack of information.
- Returning the proposed ASHP location, this would likely be visible from the streetscape. As no details have been given as to the height of the parapet from the flat roof, this cannot be certain, but at 890mm tall (greater in covered) there may be some visible from walking up Denmark Street. Irrespective the ability to view from street level is not the entire consideration, the units would be visible from first and second floors of the opposite listed buildings, such as nos. 23, 24 and the Red Lion, thus disrupting their setting.
- It is further proposed to install a metal safety barrier atop of the southern section of the parapeted flat roof. The barrier would be 1.1m or 1.2 in height (two different dimensions are given) and approximately 10m in length. This is a highly inappropriate proposed alteration to this important and significant building. Not only would the barrier disruption the architectural composition, in this southern flank on the building, but seek to erode the interest of the entire structure. The barrier would be highly visible from not only the street scene but from the countless first and second floor windows of the numerous listed and non-listed buildings. No real reason, or the required 'clear and convincing justification' (NPPF para. 213) has been asserted for the barrier, it would be assumed it is in relation to the maintenance of the ASHPs, much this has not been made clear. The standard tubular steel 'key-clamp' barrier system – this would result in a highly divergent appearance to the host, being utilitarian and modern in nature (even if painted black), as compared to the finely crafted and detailed 19th century fabric. Further to the design, the installation of the barrier would impact upon the historic fabric, having to be heavily fastened to the structure, for the obviously purpose of the barrier. Whilst it is noted there are extant barriers on the building, this type of system is not appropriate on a highly prominent part of this important building.
- For clarity, there is not necessarily an objection in principle to an alternative heating and cooling system to serve this commercial unit, however the proposals, as presented, are ill-conceived and lack the required information for an application of this nature. It has not been satisfactorily demonstrated

that all other alternative systems (including upgrading the existing) have been explored, nor has it been satisfactorily demonstrated that the system as proposed is necessary for the continued viability of the commercial unit.

Given the above, it can be advised the proposals, as contained within this application, would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset of the Town Hall – a Grade II* listed building. Through the inappropriate design, form, appearance and impact upon historic fabric this less than substantial harm would be identified at a moderate level. The proposals would also result in less than substantial harm to the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area – a designated heritage asset. Through the modern appearance and resulted dilution of the Town Hall's architectural interest, and consequently erosion to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, this less than substantial harm would be identified at a low level with the adopted scale.

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the LPA has a statutory duty to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Through the unsympathetic appearance, form and detailing, as well as the impact upon the historic fabric, the proposed alterations would fail to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building (S66, P(LB&CA)A 90).

Section 72 of the aforementioned Act, requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Through the unsympathetic form and appearance, the proposals would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas (S72, P(LBCA)A 90).

Given the identified harm, the proposed development would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery local plan.

As such, an objection is raised to the application from a heritage perspective.

Conditions			
N/A			
Date:	03/07/2026	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer