



Historic England

Mrs B Kirkbride
Liverpool City Council, Planning
Cunard Building
Water Street
Liverpool
L3 1AH

Direct Dial: 0161 242 1416

Our ref: P01157593

7 February 2020

Dear Mrs Kirkbride

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**ST JOHN'S BEACON & CENTRAL LIBRARY, HOUGHTON STREET/WILLIAM
BROWN STREET, AND LAND BETWEEN, LIVERPOOL, L3 8EW
Application No. 20F/0023**

Thank you for your letter of 15 January 2020 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Liverpool's William Brown Street Cultural Quarter developed hand in hand with the exceptional success of the cities docks and has been described as demonstrating 'Liverpool's greatness and civic pride', collectively forming one of the finest groups of cultural buildings in the country, positioned around the formally laid out St John's Gardens.

The current application seeks to create a two line zip wire course running between St John's Beacon and the roof of Central Library. Whilst the wires would be evident as part of this group and within the wider views, the fine nature of the wires means that the physical impact on the relationship between the buildings and St John's Gardens would be minimal and would not cause harm.

Where we do have more notable concerns however, is in terms of those aspects that make up the intangible characteristics which add to the overall significance of all the assets, including a greater sense of formality and peace. The repetitive noise and visual distraction of the zip wire would cause a disruption to this character and would cause harm which would be of a low level. The local authority must give this identified harm due weight in their consideration of the application, to which we raise some concerns.



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Historic England Advice

Significance

Liverpool's William Brown Street Cultural Quarter developed hand in hand with the exceptional success of the city's docks and has been described as demonstrating 'Liverpool's greatness and civic pride'. The group comprises of the elegant Picton Reading Rooms and Hornby Library, as well as the impressive Walker Art Gallery, County Sessions House, William Brown Library and Museum. Individually these buildings are of the highest architectural significance, designed with classical forms and ornate detail; their grandeur and elegance clearly states their importance as buildings for refined culture and learning; collectively they are one the finest assemblies of cultural buildings in the country.

These buildings flank arguably the finest of the group, St Georges Hall, the vast linear neo Greek building. The rear of the building overlooks St John's Garden, an area of designed landscape with a series of terraces and pathways, highlighted by listed statues of figures notable in Liverpool's history. The garden also forms the edge of William Brown Street, creating an attractive setting to the cultural group and one which has a more peaceful and calm atmosphere than the surrounding busy streets.

The William Brown Street area reflects the ideals of the Victorian period when the wealthy, who often derived their money from the docks, would act as benefactors to the city, funding buildings for the public's enjoyment and improvement.

The significance of these building is recognised in their individual listings, St George's Hall is Grade I listed, whilst the remainder are Grade II*; whilst the group and garden are the main focus of the William Brown Street Conservation Area. Their significance as a critical part of the city's cultural development in the 19th century and as an exceptional example of social benevolence has resulted in their inclusion of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile World Heritage Site as a key attribute of the designations Outstanding Universal Value.

Abutting the cultural quarter is more contemporary development, including the 1960's St John's Shopping Centre complete with St John's Beacon, an ingeniously disguised car park flue with a Crow's Nest at the top, which has become a distinctive feature of the Liverpool skyline.

Impact

The current application seeks to create a two zip line course running between St John's Beacon and the roof of Central Library; with associated external alterations to the second floor of St John's Beacon as well as installation of landing gantries and associated infrastructure at Central Library to use in connection with the attraction.



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We have had some discussions with the applicant prior to the formal planning application submission; however the application contains further information than previously reviewed and elements such as the roof top gantries proposed on the library have developed since those discussions.

St John's Beacon is instantly recognisable as a Liverpool landmark, but does not benefit from any formal heritage designation and as such we will not be considering the proposed alteration to this structure.

There is a considerable drop in height between the St John's Beacon and the library, which means that for a great length of the route, the zip wires would run at a notable height above the roof top of the buildings which lie along the route, including St Georges Hall.

The wires would also run just above top of the GII* library, in order to allow clearance over the contemporary dome which is a feature of the revitalised building. The wires would allow sufficient clear space above the rooflines of the important structures so that the roof forms would remain uninterrupted and the fine wires would not disrupt the architectural form of the buildings.

As set out earlier, the group of cultural buildings gains a great deal of additional significance from their grouping and setting contributes strongly to their overall significance. Whilst the wires would be evident as part of this group and within the wider views, the fine nature of the wires when not in use means that the visual impact on the relationship between the buildings and St John's Gardens would be minimal and therefore not harmful.

Consideration then needs to be given to the intangible elements of setting for the listed buildings, Outstanding Universal Value, as well as the character of the conservation area. Whilst we acknowledge that the group lies within a bustling city core, with shopping centres, theatres and busy ring roads, the closely knit group retains a sense of formality and peace distinct to the active and busy surroundings.

It is set out within the applicants own noise assessment that the zip wire would cause noise above the normal levels for St John's garden, which have been assessed to be lower than the surrounding areas, and would have an impact on the prevailing, quieter character of the garden. The speed of movement of the participants along the zip wire would also create a repetitive distraction to the appreciation of the group, both of which would have a detrimental impact on elements of character which positively underpin both the conservation area and World Heritage Site. This would cause harm which would be of a low level.

The end of the zip wire would be located on the modern extension to the Library building and would be formed from metal gantries. These gantries are much greater in



scale then were verbally suggested in pre application discussions, and whilst they are positioned on a modern extension, they would be visible in views of this exceptional group. The sensitivity of this roofline is demonstrated by the quality of the modern dome, designed to contribute positively to the architectural form in a way the gantries do not, being utilitarian in design. This causes us some concern.

Policy

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out in section 16 that the local planning authority in considering whether or not to grant listed building consent shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Section 66 of the Act repeats the requirement for having “special regard” when considering whether to grant planning permission. Section 72 of the Act sets out that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out in paragraph 192 in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

Paragraph 193 states that great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be; World Heritage Sites are, of course assets, of the highest significance. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 194 goes on to clarify that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 196 goes on to set out where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Perhaps mostly importantly paragraph 200 sets out that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Position



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In considering the William Brown Street assets, as well as the contribution their physical setting makes, we have concluded that the visual impact of the actual wires for the zip wire, when not in use, would be minimal and not cause harm.

However we do have some concerns with the visual impact of the landing gantries in certain views of the library and the associated group; we suggest were the council minded to progress this application steps should be taken to further minimise the impact of the gantries.

Where we do have more notable concerns however, is in terms of those aspects that make up the intangible characteristic's which add to the overall significance of all the assets, including a greater sense of formality and peace which prevails around key elements of the William Brown Street cultural quarter.

The repetitive noise and visual distraction of the zip wire would cause a disruption to this character and therefore cannot be found to fully preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area or sustain an element of a key attribute of the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site. This would cause harm which would be of a low level.

The local authority must give this identified harm due weight in their consideration of the application, to which we raise some concerns.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 194, 196 and 200 of the NPPF.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.





Historic England

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Marie Smallwood

Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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