

Abingdon Guildhall Project

February 2016

Project Statement & Description:

Context / Existing Building / Client Brief

The existing Guildhall building designed in 1963 by Oxford Architects occupies an important site and is connected physically to the historic Guildhall buildings which together with St Nicolas' Church create a 'cloistered' feel slightly removed from the bustle of Bridge Street. The Client had originally identified various important user issues with the current building which required addressing, as there is no direct physical or visual connection to the 60's building making access to the existing public WC's and Abbey Hall indirect and difficult.

Several previous design proposals have been produced which addressed these problems but at a considerable cost. The emphasis following the latest Council instruction, moved away from trying to focus solely on resolving the level and access issues between the Historic Rooms and the Abbey Hall, to concentrating on how it would be possible to open up the Abbey Hall and the lower level directly to the street, creating a new public piazza and main entrance, providing Abingdon with a new, vibrant and accessible venue.

Design Commenced June 2015

Ground (lower) Level:

The proposal involved removing the front external escape stair, front and rear concrete ramps, taking out the infill walls between the structural columns to the front (and a smaller section to the rear elevation), constructing a glazed extension with folding doors, extending about 1.5m beyond the existing first floor facade line at the front, providing direct access from the proposed cafe / bar space out onto a new terrace area with seating.

Internally the existing male & female W.C.'s, would be completely upgraded whilst the various remaining room partitions would be removed to create a large open public area, serving as a new cafe bar and social space visually and physically linking onto the existing piazza area. The existing lift core and assisted W.C. to the back corner (behind the existing plant room) would be retained and upgraded and a new enclosed stair built to link directly to the Abbey Hall above. Located against the existing plant room wall, a new large reception information desk would combine with a sales area for food and drinks.

The existing storage rooms at the back of the plant room would be adapted into staff space, W.C.'s and storage. Both the existing internal concrete stairs either side of

the plant room would be retained, with one either rebuilt or remodelled to serve as a direct escape from the Abbey Hall (to replace the existing external stair) and the other left as existing linking up to the existing stage level.

At the opposite end of the newly opened up space between the existing W.C.'s, Lewandowski Architects have shown a new partitioned glazed space, which could be part meeting / seminar space and could also be developed to house various 'treasures' or historical objects in display cases built.

Abbey Hall Level:

As before the hall will be completely upgraded in terms of comfort, acoustics, lighting and sound and would be fit for hosting theatre groups, live bands, screening 'live' video broadcasts and films.

The proposal completely partitions off both the upper viewing gallery and stage area entirely, with the existing expansive stage used as a general storage area (easily large enough to accommodate stackable table, chairs and other equipment), a small platform lift / hoist would be added to assist in moving furniture safely between the main hall and store. The proposed new level stage (with dressing rooms on one side and the existing kitchen and dumb waiter on the other) is now positioned at the opposite end with the proposed retractable seating located where the removed 'orchestra pit' and stage overhang is located. It is proposed that the side aisles would be enclosed (to a height of about 2.5m), which provide direct dedicated storage to various 'user groups'. Some of these enclosed spaces could also be adapted to house a 'temporary bar' area for events, receptions etc.

Additional Floor Level:

It was also proposed to insert an additional floor plate above the stage area, accessed by extending the existing lift core and new stair one level. This could give the centre a new large community space linked directly to the new ground level entrance area (as mentioned below, this element is currently not included within the approved scheme but would be able to be incorporated at a later date if funding became available)

Ramped Link:

Following a client suggestion a new ramped link in tandem with a short stair and platform lift, has been created connecting the Bridge Street entrance and the new lower ground level.

Town Planning / Escape Issues:

Previously Lewandowski Architects had engaged with a local Planning Officer regarding pre-application advice and also met with local Conservation and Archaeology officers to seek their advice and approval on the proposed additions. A

'fire safety consultant' had also been asked to look at the previous proposals to ensure there are no major issues in terms of fire fighting and escape.

The major difference between the current proposal and the previous is that there is little in the way of new build additions, therefore based on the previous discussions with the Planning Officer the 'risk' to obtaining approval has been greatly reduced with the latest scheme. We intend making contact with them again shortly (once instructed) to gauge their reaction to these.

Design Update December 2015

Updated Statement:

Lewandowski Architects presented these proposals to a full Committee Meeting, where the design intentions were fully explained and discussed. The Steering Group subsequently instructed Lewandowski Architects to further develop the proposals and costs.

The design team then began an extensive in-house design review, supported by additional detailed reports from Mechanical & Electrical, Structural & Acoustic consultants and 'opening up' investigations of the structure.

Once these reports were received, Lewandowski Architects met with PT Projects (QS) who produced a summary of all costs based on the latest technical and design information made possible by the more detail information and investigations made available.

The stated objective was to be able to prepare for the client a basic 'Core Scheme' and an 'Options Scheme' with fully inclusive costs and which importantly made the interpretation of the proposals and costs clear and understandable to all members.

A: Core Scheme

This proposal incorporates the basic design elements that Lewandowski Architects considered would deliver an acceptable (r 'affordable' scheme) which would hopefully satisfy the client's brief and fall within a 'scale of costs' likely to find favour.

Ground (lower) Level:

The scheme delivers the new but smaller glazed area off the cafe / bar, direct access to the front terrace / piazza area new reception / sales / concessions and staff areas, revamped W.C.s and a new 'Family W.C.' At the rear of the building there would be some full height glazing to bring in additional natural light (but no access), a new small connecting lobby and an external metal escape stair. Internally the exposed

ceiling soffit will be acoustically lined to reduce airborne and transmitted sound between the Abbey Hall and the new cafe / bar area.

The Working Group considered the proposed ramped link connecting to the Bridge Street entrance. This is put forward by the Group as an option and has been separately costed by the QS.

Abbey Hall Level:

The hall as before will be comprehensively refurbished with a new acoustic ceiling, triple glazed full height replacement windows, acoustic panels will line some of the flank walls to control reverberation and the existing sprung timber floor will be sanded and resealed. Both the existing stage area and viewing gallery will be enclosed as previously proposed. The hall will be accessed and exited via one of the remodelled stairs and the existing stage area will be used for storage as originally envisaged. Comfortable fully retractable seating is included as well as a pull down screen, digital projector and sound system.

Second Level:

The only works included are the partitioning off of the upper viewing gallery

B: Options Scheme

An options scheme was also put forward at this stage which the Working Group considered but has not recommended to proceed, due to cost. This proposal incorporates all the basic design elements which make the Core Option workable as well as several enhancements omitted purely for cost reasons. This is detailed below and in italics.

Ground (lower) Level:

In addition to all the items described in the Core Option, it includes a much larger glazed extension to the front of the cafe / bar area and an internal glazed partitioned seminar meeting space.

Abbey Hall Level:

The two options are essentially, the same.

Second Level:

This option includes the proposed new community space achieved by inserting a new floor above the existing stage area.

Additional Notes:

In both schemes for cost reasons the small alcove storage bays to the Abbey Hall have been omitted as they became largely redundant due to the more recent

proposal to partition off the stage area. A decision was also made to omit the enclosed glazed rear stairs and lobbies as originally proposed and adapt or rebuild one of the existing stairs, which was deemed as a more economical way to provide for direct access between the lower ground reception / cafe bar areas and Abbey Hall. The proposed new internal rear escape stairs will provide direct escape as well as being extended to roof level for access and maintenance.

Design Update February 2016

Updated Statement:

Lewandowski Architects have subsequently met with the client Working Group where the question was posed regarding the future use of the central atrium / link area. A subsequent walk around the area with the group concluded that by simply removing the existing stairs, leading up from the Roysse Room and adding a small bar server counter within the existing undercroft store would significantly enhance the venue by providing a large social / exhibition space.

The main existing bar would be relocated from the second floor to the first floor level, adjacent to and within the existing reception / office space with a new balustrade closing off the void where the stair was.

The existing external entrance steps would be removed and the existing paved landing area converted into a terrace accessible from the newly created bar relaxation space within the current foyer entrance area.

The advantage of these additional works is that they will provide very attractive usable function spaces to the Abbey Hall and Roysse Room, catering for major functions but which can also be used independently by the public when not pre-booked .

Off the bar area space, a contemporary platform lift would take wheelchair users directly up to the Abbey Hall level replacing the existing 'stairlift' mechanisms.

Up on the second level a partition would be built creating a large storage area a few metres in front of the existing bar server partition (to be removed). The two spaces within the upper gallery space would be used as green rooms (changing space) for players and performers.

Conclusion:

The Core Scheme, along with the additional works to the central atrium described above provides a solid, workable model for the Guildhall, making the Guildhall a much more directly accessible venue and importantly giving it an immediate and

visible presence off the street. It provides good value for money and the new ground floor public entrance and cafe bar facility, if professionally operated could provide much needed income as well as becoming a welcome addition to Abingdon.

The Option Scheme would further enhance these by providing additional facilities which could be incorporated later as and when funds became available.

Lewandowski Architects, 23rd February 2016.