

# RIDGE

PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION CONSULTANTS



**THE GUILDHALL, ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**

**REPORT ON MAIN STAIRCASE**

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Prepared for

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We were instructed to inspect the existing main staircase within the older sections of the Guildhall complex, regarding its condition and comment on any health and safety related aspects of its use.
- 1.2 Our inspection was carried out on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018 by John Brown MSc MRICS
- 1.3 The inspections consisted of non-intrusive visual inspection where access was possible.

## 2.0 FINDINGS

- 2.1 We believe the central staircase within the older section is late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century and serves Council Chamber, Abbey Room and Bear Room: each room being at different floor levels. The oak staircase is of open string and bracketed construction with turned spindles and with ramped sections of handrailing.
- 2.2 A large number of the components have become loose, probably due to the degradation of the glue and displacement of wedges etc., resulting in the flexing of the staircase treads, instability of the balustrading in particular. Irregularity of the tread heights was noted, which again could be the result of displacement of the fixings to the risers.
- 2.3 Any repairs to the staircase should be undertaken by a competent person(s) who has adequate knowledge both of the construction of the staircase and the original materials used. Any replacement components should replicate the original and be fabricated using properly seasoned timber and the repair should follow a particular specification.
- 2.4 Dimensionally, the tread depths and riser heights are within acceptable limits taking account of the age of the staircase. However, we recommend that, where treads and risers have been displaced, these components are reinstatement to their original position where possible.
- 2.5 Health and safety risks associated with the use of the existing staircase could include the following:
  1. Unequal tread/riser heights  
In its present condition and with normal use, any height differences should not present a safety hazard. However, it is recommended that displaced components are reinstated as far as it is practicable.
  2. Detachment of components  
From inspection, there is no obvious risk of any staircase component becoming detached. Loose balustrading was noted and consolidation of the fixings should be carried out to address this.  
  
Access to effect repairs is limited to the existing access to the void below the lower flight.
  3. Insufficient height of balustrading  
The existing heights do not meet current regulations and we believe there is a risk of falling from height, particularly if children are using the building.  
  
Two options could be considered: i) restrict the use of the building by children either accompanied by adults or otherwise, or ii), increase the height of the guarding to the staircase and landings.
    - i) This option would be difficult to implement in practice. Should children be confined to the spaces at ground floor level there is still a risk of them accessing the staircase.
    - ii) There would be a requirement to secure consent for any modifications to the historic staircase from the relevant authorities/bodies. The introduction of an independent handrail of slender profile, set at the regulation height and outboard of the existing handrail would possibly have the least impact.

#### 4. Non visually contrasting nosings to treads/steps

Where the outer edges of the treads are not obvious, this could present a hazard, particularly to the visually impaired.

Two options could be considered: i) Affix a form of contrasting nosing or provide contrasting colour strip to the stair covering/carpet and/or ii), increase the lighting levels.

- i) This would involve fixing a form of nosing strip to the historic fabric, together with a form of coverings to the tread of the same thickness as the nosing. It is unlikely that this addition would be acceptable to a listed building and would compromise the appearance of the staircase. Contrasting colour to a fabric, such as carpet could be more acceptable option.
- ii) Increasing the lighting levels could improve identification of the individual treads/steps, however it is unlikely that this would be as effective as i) above and may not necessarily be effective for some visually impaired individuals.

### 3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 In summary, any of the above remedial works and possible health and safety matters need further consideration and investigation in order to arrive at an optimum solution which would avoid harm to the fabric and be reversible with regard to the historic staircase.
- 3.2 In terms of budget costs for 1 & 2 above, this could not be accurately costed without a specified schedule of repair works. Otherwise, a daywork rate would need to be agreed, possibly together with monitoring of the works. As an approximate guide, a daywork rate for an operative could be in the order of £250 per day plus any overhead costs and VAT and an allowance of 5 days to undertake the repairs may be required.
- 3.3 A suggested budget allowance for 3 ii) above would be a minimum of £5,000, although this is subject to a design and specification for the additional handrailing.
- 3.4 A budget figure for 4 above is difficult to properly assess without a proposed solution. However for all the remedial works, I would recommend that a budget of £10,000 be set aside.



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