



Reference No	24/0362/LB
Application Type	Listed Building Consent
Proposal	Demolition of the Brown Institute (retrospective).
Location	Former Renfrew Museum, The Brown Institute, 41 Canal Street
Ward	1 - Renfrew North and Braehead
Community Council	Renfrew Community Council
Applicant	Renfrewshire Council
Recommendation	Grant subject to conditions
All plans, reports, documents and representations relating to this application can be viewed in full online at https://pl-bs.renfrewshire.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=SDZQU1MWHQB00	

The report is presented to the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board in line with the Council's Scheme of Delegation as the application seeks listed building consent (in retrospect) for the demolition of a listed building.

Proposal

Listed building consent is sought in retrospect for the demolition of the Brown Institute, a category B listed building, in Renfrew. The building was located to the west of Canal Street close to its junction with Ferry Road to the north and Station Road to the north-east.

The building was constructed in the early twentieth century and was originally gifted to the town by the provost, Andrew Brown. The building was initially used as a library with associated reading room and a billiard room and subsequently for various other, mostly civic, uses prior to its final use as a museum from 1997 to 2011. After the museum was relocated to Renfrew Town Hall in 2011, the building lay vacant until its recent demolition.

The demolition followed the serving of a Dangerous Building Notice by Renfrewshire Council's Building Standards service in February 2024. The Notice required that steps be taken to make the building safe within a three-month period, either by undertaking necessary works to secure and shore up the building, or by demolishing it. The applicant and owner, in this case Renfrewshire Council, determined that the works to secure and shore up the building were prohibitively expensive such that the retention of the listed building was not considered economically viable. As such, the decision was taken to proceed with demolition.

Documentation submitted with the application includes a Statement of Justification and associated appendices, including the results of a structural survey in 2022 and an economic appraisal in 2023, both undertaken by external consultants. The findings within these documents inform the Statement of Justification in concluding that demolition was appropriate in satisfying two of the four tests for demolition of listed buildings set out in Historic Environment Scotland and Development Plan policy. These two tests refer respectively to the retention of the listed building not being economically viable; and the demolition being essential for delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community.

Also included among the appendices submitted with the Statement of Justification is a Conservation Statement prepared following the issuing of the Dangerous Building Notice. This contains a statement of significance which in turn informs a demolition plan identifying specific features for retention and potential reuse and/or safe keeping. These include the

main door, as well as carved panel stonework and an oriel window corbel situated above the door, leaded windows and a cupola situated on the roof ridge. Two plaques situated either side of the front door and a further plaque on the side of the building commemorating the site of Renfrew Castle have also been retained.

Site Description

The Brown Institute was located at the north end of Renfrew Town Centre and stood prominently on the west side of Canal Street close to its junction with Ferry Road to the north and Station Road to the north-east.

The building was of a broad square footprint and consisted of two storeys at the front and three storeys at the rear. The building featured a symmetrical red sandstone ashlar frontage facing south-east, with various architectural features of note. These included two large round-headed iron-framed windows at ground level either side of a round-headed front entrance door set within a square-headed architrave containing a fanlight. A decorative inscription was also situated above the front door whilst two decorative pilasters were situated on either side which merged with corbels above to support a large projecting iron-framed oriel window at first floor level. The roof featured Scottish slates and a central art nouveau cupola on its ridge.

The building adjoined a three storey red sandstone building on its south-west side featuring commercial ground floor uses, with tenement flats at first and second floor level. On its opposite north-east side, the building featured a predominantly grey rendered wall which overlooked a small landscaped public space. The rear elevation faced towards a pair of semi-detached houses at an angle, beyond which it also faced the former Renfrew Parish Council Chambers, also a category B listed building. The rear elevation was of a less formal asymmetrical design, featuring additional iron-framed windows including a further oriel window at first floor level.

Pre-Application Consultation with Officers

The Scottish Government strongly encourages constructive pre-application discussions between prospective applicants and the planning authority. Pre-application discussions seek to identify key planning considerations at an early stage and help inform what supporting information is required to support a subsequent application.

Pre-application discussions have taken place, focusing on the following matters:

- The applicant has submitted that various discussions and meetings were held with Renfrewshire Council's Building Standards Officers who arranged a detailed structural inspection of the building prior to determining that a Dangerous Building Notice required to be served. As part of this process, Historic Environment Scotland were also consulted as a statutory requirement under Section 35(3) of the Buildings (Scotland) Act 2003. During this process, Historic Environment Scotland requested that a formal application for listed building consent be submitted.

Negotiated Improvements

- None.

Site History

Application No: 19/0029/LB
Description: Stabilisation works to structure
Decision: Grant

Consultations

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) - No objection. While the demolition is regrettable, it is in line with the HES guidance on demolitions as it has been demonstrated that reuse is not economically viable and demolition is now required for safety reasons. HES advise that they are satisfied that reasonable effort has been taken to save the building and welcome the intention to salvage masonry and other features from the building.

West Of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS) - Note that the site is of archaeological interest and therefore advise that WoSAS is likely to seek a condition requiring archaeological fieldwork in the event that any subsequent planning application to redevelop the site is lodged.

Representations

The application has been publicised in line with the requirements of the relevant legislation.

No representations were received.

Policy Context

In making any determination under the Planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan consists of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and the Renfrewshire Local Development Plan (2021) (LDP).

The following provisions of the Development Plan are considered relevant to the determination of this application:

National Planning Framework 4

NPF4: Policy 7 - Historic assets and places

Full details relating to the policies of the NPF4 can be found [online](#).

Renfrewshire Local Development Plan

LDP 2021: Policy ENV3 - Built and Cultural Heritage

Full details relating to the policies of the LDP can be found [online](#).

Other relevant policies and guidance

Renfrewshire New Development Supplementary Guidance 2022

- Delivering the Environment Strategy: Built Heritage.

Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) and associated "Managing Change in the Historic Environment" guidance note on Demolition of Listed Buildings.

Submitted Reports and Assessments

The following reports and assessments were submitted in support of the application:

Statement of Justification - Provides a history of the listed building and background to its subsequent deterioration, noting that since the building was vacated in 2011 efforts to secure its reuse have been unsuccessful and the condition of the building has in the meantime declined to a point that required the serving of a Dangerous Building Notice in February 2024.

The statement summarises the findings of various reports undertaken to assess the prospects for the building being retained and contains a policy analysis which considers

demolition against the four tests identified by Historic Environment Scotland and Development Plan policy. This analysis concludes that demolition is justified against two of the four tests, namely that retention is not economically viable; and that retention is essential for delivering significant benefits for economic growth or the wider community. In reaching these conclusions, the statement is informed by the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Structural Inspection Report by Balfour Engineering Consultancy (Rev A - 12/08/2022) - Outlines the results of a structural inspection which found the building to be in poor condition. Provides a list of remedial measures that would require to be undertaken for the building to be retained.
- Appendix B: - Dangerous Building Notice (Issued February 2024) - Notice issued by Renfrewshire Council's Building Standards service setting out a requirement to make the building safe either by way of a range of remedial measures or by way of demolition.
- Appendix C: - Dangerous Building Notice Report (30.01.2024) - Report outlining the findings of an inspection by Renfrewshire Council's inhouse structural engineer which informed the issuing of the Dangerous Building Notice. The report concludes that due to deterioration/dilapidation, a Dangerous Building Notice requires to be served.
- Appendix D: - Economic Appraisal by Brown & Wallace Construction Consultants (14 April 2023) - Provides an economic analysis of 4 different options for the building, consisting of: (Option 1) Making the building wind, watertight and structurally stable per the report by Balfour Engineering Consultancy; (Option 2) Option 1 plus conversion to 5 residential units; (Option 3) Option 1 plus conversion to 3 residential units; and (Option 4) Full demolition. The analysis concludes that without significant funding or grants from other sources, the first three options would each result in a substantial financial loss.
- Appendix E: Conservation Statement by O'DonnellBrown (February 2024) - Provides an appraisal of the history and architectural significance of the building, concluding that it was of both special historic and architectural interest. Includes a statement of significance which identifies features of "considerable significance", "moderate significance" or "negative significance".
- Appendix F: Drawing entitled "Demolition Plan. Features to be Retained" (drawing number: 23079 (DEM) 02, dated 16/02/2024) - Informed by the findings of the Conservation Statement by O'DonnellBrown, the demolition plan identifies various architectural features of significance which should be retained for safe keeping for potential reuse.

Scottish Ministers Direction

In determining a planning application, the Council is required to provide details of any Direction made by Scottish Ministers under Regulation 30 (Directions requiring consultation), Regulation 31 (Directions requiring information), Regulation 32 (Directions restricting the grant of planning permission) and Regulation 33 (Directions requiring consideration of condition) of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, or under Regulation 50 (that development is EIA development) of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.

None.

Planning Assessment

The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) 1997 Act states that in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works, special regard must be had to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic merit.

The fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) provides the long-term national spatial strategy for planning in Scotland. It sets out the Scottish Government's current view on delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places through the application of spatial principles. Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places) states that demolition of listed buildings will not be supported unless it has been demonstrated that there are exceptional circumstances and that all reasonable efforts have been made to retain, reuse and/or adapt the listed building. Policy ENV 3 (Built and Cultural Heritage) of the Renfrewshire Local Development Plan is also applicable and presumes against the demolition of listed buildings unless fully justified.

Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) and associated "Managing Change in the Historic Environment" guidance note on demolitions also support these principles, with the latter document advising that demolition should only be approved as a last resort and typically at the end of a process which has considered and discounted all other feasible options.

To assess whether the proposed demolition is justified in terms of the above, Historic Environment Scotland's "Managing Change in the Historic Environment" guidance note on Demolition of Listed Buildings outlines four tests under which demolition may be established as acceptable. These four tests are also reflected in Policy 7 of NPF4 and the Renfrewshire New Development Supplementary Guidance highlighted above. In this regard, demolition may only be considered acceptable if it is demonstrated that the proposal accords with one of the following:

- a) The building is not of special interest;
- b) The building is incapable of repair;
- c) The repair of the building is not economically viable, having been marketed at a price reflecting its location and condition to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period.
- d) The demolition of the building is essential to delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community;

Proposals typically only require to satisfy one of the four tests, although Historic Environment Scotland guidance outlines that exceptions to this may apply. The applicant in their supporting information has outlined that they consider the proposal to comply with the latter two of the above four tests. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this report, the four tests are considered in order, as follows:

(a) The building is not of special interest

The building was a key landmark on the streetscene and contributed notably to Renfrew's built heritage. The building was of special historic interest, having been presented circa 1903 to the town by the then provost, William Brown, who was associated with the management of William Simons' shipyard in Renfrew.

The building was also of a noted architectural interest in view of its style and features, having been designed by the Glasgow architect, Alexander McGibbon. The Conservation Statement submitted with the application highlights a number of features deemed of "considerable significance", including original stonework; the composition of the front and rear elevations with original window openings; stonework detailing on the principal elevation including the round-headed doorway and associated square-headed architrave and fanlight; decorative

pilasters and arched window openings; the cupola at roof ridge level; the sculptural panel above the front door; and the leaded windows.

In view of the above, demolition of the building would not have passed the first of the four tests.

(b) The building is incapable of repair

The structural inspection report advised that the building was in poor condition, noting that the poor condition of the roof allowed water penetration, whilst the building has also experienced foundation movement and significant cracking in its side wall, which could be due to a number of possible factors. The report sets out a list of remedial works that would be required to allow the building to be retained. Among other measures, these would include:

- refurbishment of the roof and potentially the roof structure;
- underpinning to the side elevation followed by "crack stitching" or a partial take down and rebuild around the large crack on this elevation;
- potential underpinning to some of the internal walls;
- repair or potentially rebuilding of the upper portion of the front elevation around the oriel window to ensure the whole frontage is stable;
- removal and replacement of all damaged lintols;
- replacement of all windows;
- replacement of all floorboards and potentially floor joists;
- removal of all internal wall and ceiling finishes to expose the underlying structure to establish if further remedial works would then be required.

In summary, the report considered that the building could be capable of repair and the demolition would not therefore have passed the second test, albeit the measures required would be extensive and were recommended by the consultant inspectors without prejudice to the expense that would potentially be incurred.

(c) The repair of the building is not economically viable, having been marketed at a price reflecting its location and condition to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period

In this case, demolition has been undertaken after a period of 13 years during which the building has been vacant and subject to minimal interest or any offers despite being marketed for sale or lease. The condition of the building has during this time deteriorated to a point that resulted in the issuing of a Dangerous Building Notice in February 2024.

The Notice set out steps to be taken to make the building safe within a three-month period, either by undertaking necessary works to secure and shore up the building or by demolishing it. The alternative option of securing and shoring up the building, as set out in the Dangerous Building Notice, would entail removal of all decayed roof and first floor timbers, the installation and maintenance of a façade retention system to the front and gable walls and the installation and maintenance of any propping or shoring of the remaining structure that may be required. The applicant determined that these works would be prohibitively expensive such that the retention of the listed building was not economically viable and the decision was therefore taken to proceed with demolition.

In considering the economic viability of retaining the building, the applicant's Statement of Justification draws on the accompanying Economic Appraisal by consultants which provides a financial comparison of different options for the building. The appraisal outlines an estimated cost of some £868,700 for making the building wind, watertight and structurally stable in terms of the works recommended in the structural survey highlighted under (b) above. The estimated cost of these works compares with the lower cost of £261,900 to undertake full demolition.

The economic appraisal also provides costings for two possible development options after the necessary repairs have been undertaken, these being the conversion of the building to 5 flats or 3 flats respectively. The option of redevelopment into 5 flats would cost an estimated £1,731,600, whilst the option of redevelopment into 3 flats would cost an estimated £1,613,100. When taking into consideration the estimated return that would be made, the option of conversion to 5 flats would result in an estimated loss of £927,800, while the conversion to 3 flats would result in an estimated loss of £920,100. In percentage terms, these two options would result in losses of -98% and -112% respectively. The statement of justification therefore considers that without substantial funding from other sources, the retention of the building would be unaffordable.

The possibility of retaining the front façade of the building to support future potential redevelopment was also ruled out for several reasons. The Statement of Justification considers that retention of the façade would have made future development proposals "impractical, more expensive and less appealing", while it also comments that structural support would have been required behind the façade which would have required expensive maintenance. The statement also comments that there were no plans or funding in place for any such redevelopment, whilst the interim period between initial retention and any future redevelopment would pose risks in terms of offering an attraction to vandalism or other types of anti-social behaviour. As such, the statement advises that a strategy of architectural salvage of important features would be more appropriate than façade retention.

Given the substantial loss that would be made from making the necessary repairs to safely retain the building, with or without subsequent redevelopment, it is accepted that retention of the building was not economically viable. It is also accepted that the retention of the façade was also not viable given the inevitable financial outlay this would have entailed, together with the likely measures that would have also been required to ensure its ongoing stability. As such, the demolition is considered to satisfy the third test regarding economic viability.

(d) The demolition of the building is essential to delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community

The statement of justification considers that the demolition of the building is required to deliver benefits to the community and economic growth, noting in particular that the Community Council "has consistently expressed support" for demolition for various reasons. It is stated that these include concerns regarding the condition of the building, soil subsidence, the substantial cost of redevelopment and lack of economic viability to enable the restoration of the building.

The statement of justification also advises that a design team has been commissioned to prepare development options following demolition which may include new build options for different potential uses, or landscaped options. It is commented that these options will be shared with the local community for consultation. Additionally, it is commented that redevelopment options would seek to commemorate the historical significance of the site through reuse of architectural salvaged materials, potentially including the sandstone, carved panels, oriel window sections and the cupola.

In terms of the above, it is accepted that given the lack of economic viability of retaining the building and the visual importance of the site at a prominent and historic location, there is clear community benefit to be gained through demolition and potential redevelopment of the site. As such, the demolition is considered key to allow any significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community to be realised and on this basis is considered to pass the fourth test.

Summary

The listed building was a highly important landmark and of special interest both in terms of its history and its architectural quality. Its demolition therefore represents a highly regrettable loss to Renfrew's heritage. Notwithstanding this, the information accompanying the application sufficiently demonstrates that the demolition was only undertaken as a last resort following several years of marketing for reuse and following the deterioration of the building and eventual issuing of a Dangerous Building Notice requiring intervention within a stipulated three-month period.

In assessing whether demolition of a listed building is appropriate, policy refers to four tests, of which only one requires to be satisfied for the demolition to be considered acceptable. In this case, the submitted Statement of Justification and its accompanying appendices satisfactorily demonstrate that retention of the listed building was no longer economically viable and the demolition was therefore acceptable under the third of the four criteria highlighted.

Additionally, it is accepted that the demolition of the building, although extremely regrettable, offers opportunity for redevelopment of the site which may support the wider community and/or allow an economically sustainable reuse of the site for the wider benefit of the surrounding area. As such, the demolition is also acceptable under the fourth test.

The salvaging of important architectural features and materials which contributed to the special character of the building also offer opportunity for any future redevelopment of the site to retain a connection with its past, albeit in a more limited way. It should be noted that the Council, as landowner, retains control over these elements.

In view of the foregoing, it is considered that the application has satisfactorily demonstrated that the building was beyond economically viable conversion, refurbishment or reuse, in accordance with the relevant policies and guidance highlighted.

Section 75 Obligations

The Council is required to provide a summary of the terms of any planning obligation which is required to be entered into under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act in relation to the grant of permission for the proposed development:

None.

Conclusion

It is considered that the application has satisfactorily demonstrated that the building was unsafe and beyond economically viable conversion, refurbishment or reuse, in accordance with the relevant policies and guidance highlighted. As such, it is recommended that listed building consent for the demolition of the building is retrospectively granted.

Recommendation

Grant subject to conditions

Reason(s) for Recommendation

1. The proposal accords with the provisions of the Development Plan and there were no material considerations which outweighed the presumption in favour of development according with the Development Plan.

Condition(s)

1. That an inventory of all architectural materials which have been salvaged and retained as a result of the demolition shall be submitted to the Planning Authority within 3 months of the date of consent. The inventory shall record details of the location, storage and safe

keeping of all items. This record shall be maintained and updated in order that the relocation or reuse of any items continues to be recorded and the Planning Authority shall be notified in writing of any such updates to the inventory.

Reason: In the interests of maintaining a record of all salvaged materials that contributed to the special interest of the listed building and the potential future reuse and care of these materials.

Advisory Note(s)

None.

Approved Drawings and Supporting Documents

Drawing Number	Revision	Drawing/Document Title
Not numbered		Location Plan – Brown Institute, 41-43 Canal Street, Renfrew
		Statement of Justification for the Demolition of the Brown Institute, 41-43 Canal Street, Renfrew
		(Appendix A): Structural Inspection Report – Brown Institute, 41-43 Canal Street, Renfrew by Balfour Engineering Consultancy (Rev A 12/08/2022)
		(Appendix B): Copy of Dangerous Building Notice issued under Building (Scotland) Act 2003 issued 08/02/2024 (reference number: 24/0010/DB)
		(Appendix C): Dangerous/unsafe building – report by Renfrewshire Council (30/01/2024)
		(Appendix D): The Brown Institute, Renfrew – Economic Appraisal by Brown & Wallace Construction Consultants (14/04/2023)
		(Appendix E): The Brown Institute Conservation Statement February 2024 by O'DonnellBrown
23079 (DEM) 02		(Appendix F): Demolition Plan. Features to be Retained

For further information please contact Andrew Mackenzie, Development Standards Team,
Email: andrew.mackenzie@renfrewshire.gov.uk