

**Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
Buckinghamshire**

Initial assessment of conservation interest

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- 2.5 By the nineteen fifties the need to expand the accommodation was recognised and Sir Basil Spence was commissioned to prepare designs. From newspaper articles it is apparent that both costs and location – with many preferring a more central position – were sources of dispute. A decade later the issue had not been resolved and Spence was instructed to prepare revised proposals which were to be no more successful than the previous ones.
- 2.6 Other civic buildings were developed under the direction of F Pooley, the County Architect, but it appears that there was no attempt to site these to achieve the civic focus for the Borough which was anticipated in the nineteen thirties.
- 2.7 The building is not listed nationally but it is included in a local list of buildings. The description is brief and notes that the building is in a neoclassical style with a shallow copper roof. It is referred to as being in brick with slender stone dressings and a pattern of fenestration which plays a strong role in providing a distinctive character. It refers to Pevsner's description and comments that the principle rooms are much as originally designed.
- 3.0 **Context – the building today and its surroundings**
- 3.1 A report in the *Slough Observer* on 2nd April 1937 stated that the new Town Hall was at the centre of the District Council's area and would be a new focus for the town but sadly this has not been achieved.
- 3.2 The original plan showed a wing on the western side of the main block with a new hall and the plans published at the time of the opening showed proposals for further a extension in the form of a square courtyard at the back. Neither of these has been built and the surrounding area has changed from domestic properties to a series of substantial commercial buildings. The adjoining buildings make no reference to the Town Hall in their siting, general form or arrangement.
- 3.3 The opportunity to create a civic focus for the Borough has not been realised and the displacement of the main entrance from the existing pedimented front to a side door by the new building at the back, has denied the building its original role.
- 3.4 Internally the circulation layout of a central hall in the main block at ground level, with an axial corridor leading along the main range of buildings has been retained.
- 3.5 Due to pressure on space, the building has now been linked to a major new building at the back which provides the bulk of the office accommodation. This has significantly changed the relationship of the internal use of the building to the forecourt in front. The original entrance doors and public areas are no longer in use apart from on formal occasions. There have been significant alterations to the public space at ground level and the enquires area has been taken over for the Chairman's office, truncating the original cruciform layout.
- 3.6 The main block to the east of the council chamber is two stories high and contains a range of offices including some of those originally noted as being of special interest in the *Slough Observer*. Some alterations have taken place there.

historical associations of the town; these can often be major claims to special interest.

- 5.3.1 The building has not been used to display any special decoration or adornment, probably reflecting budgetary constraints at the time. While some good quality finishes were used they are in no way exceptional and the tradesmen and suppliers used are equally unremarkable.
- 5.4 **Setting and Civic groups** *Town halls are often the most prominent civic buildings in town centres and have an important symbolic role. Group value can thus be a relevant consideration.*
- 5.4.1 Although there were aspirations that the Town Hall would become the focus of a new civic area for the town, this was not realised and the building has not provided a format for the development of the area. There is no group value.
- 5.5 **Planning** *The planning of town halls was a challenge, given the increasingly complex functions that had to be accommodated.*
- 5.5.1 While this is true of some of the larger town halls and in particularly the major Victorian examples this is a relatively simple plan and, according to the assessor, not necessarily the best of those submitted.
- 5.6 **Post-war** *In the post-war period the focus of planning shifted from the ceremonial aspect to public accessibility and the provision of office accommodation. Architectural quality is paramount.*
- 5.6.1 In this building the office accommodation is of no special value with standard cellular space arranged on either side of a central corridor.
- 6.0 **Other local criteria.**
- 6.1 The Borough Local Plan in 5.62 refers to the lack of significant buildings and the process for selecting locally listed buildings. It is noted that the use of locally listed buildings will help to preserve areas such as Slough Old Town.
- 6.2 It is noted that locally listed buildings do not have the same status as nationally listed buildings and seeks to encourage developers to apply the criteria in EN 14 and 15. These require that:
- there be no adverse effect on internal or external items which are of architectural or historic interest;
 - they respect character, appearance and detailed design features;
 - records be kept of any features lost as a result of demolition;
 - change of use be granted if it would preserve the building's character;
 - any proposals for change incorporate all the intended alterations.
- 6.3 It is also noted that the setting of a locally listed building often relies on its relationship with neighbouring buildings.
- 7.0 **Assessment of the building**
- 7.1 The building currently retains its main functions to provide a Council Chamber and associated offices. The original layout has generally remained although with a number of alterations. It no longer provides

- 8.3 Using the criteria for assessing Town Halls it would appear that it does not have special merits and it is clear that it is a partly-completed design which has not fulfilled the original aspirations for the site.
- 8.4 The setting of the building demonstrates no special relationship with the more recent adjoining buildings and the relationship with the front open space and original arrival point has been destroyed.
- 8.5 The proposal to keep part of the building appears to have little value. The elements which give the building its character would be lost and the remaining central building would lose its balance. Internally the alterations necessary to provide proper access, means of escape and the provision of public amenities would have a substantial impact on an interior which has already lost many of its original features.
- 8.6 The building is of course of some local interest, having been the Town Hall for some seventy years, but it has neither the special features and finishes nor the relationship with its surroundings which are suggested as considerations in EN14 and 15.
- 8.7 In conclusion, I consider that there are no sound conservation grounds for resisting the demolition of the building and its replacement with a suitable development. I recommend that a full record is made of the building and placed with the other documents in the local studies archive.