



THETFORD, GUILDHALL

ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Design and Access Statement REV A



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Copies to: Thetford Town Council (Post+PDF), Breckland Council Planning Department (PDF), File



I. DESIGN STATEMENT

I.1. Use of the Building

The Grade II listed Guildhall sits alongside the British Legion building at the south west corner of the Market Square. It is well used by the community with the Large Court, the Council Chamber and Small Court (now the Guildhall Tea Room) all available to hire for small scale private functions or performances (40-120 persons).

The historic market place has been converted into a carpark with tarmac finish, still used for markets twice a week. Pedestrian areas are designated with modern paving slabs with engineering bricks.

I. Previous Reports/Proposals

An access audit was undertaken by NPS in October 2003 which notes that all areas of the building require negotiation of stepped access routes. Temporary timber ramps provide ramped access to the main entrance although at a gradient of 1:5, these are far too steep to be practicable; a further unfixed ramp is then required to reach the threshold of the Entrance Hall. The Carnegie room is accessible via a permanent ramp although does not provide level or ramped entry to other parts of the building. It is not impacted by the current proposals and therefore does not form part of this study.

A series of concept designs to address access issues have previously been produced by Feilden Clegg Bradley. Recommended options included permanent ramps to the front of the building and construction of a new lift shaft and extension to the rear to provide disabled access to other building levels, however these were never realised.

2. Consultation

Local Planning Authority

A site meeting was held at the Guildhall on 25 August 2017 with Mr Andrew Gayton, Conservation Officer for Breckland Council, Mrs Rosalind Barnett and representatives of the Town Council.



The group was keen to enhance the entrance to the hall and to improve the ambience of the Market Square. It was noted that Market Square and the parking space outside were also owned by Thetford Town Council and there was consensus for the steps to come forward to address this space. Ramped access to the service door on the British Legion Building side was also discussed. Subsequently the proposal for an extended semi-circular landing with ramped access along the Guildhall or British Legion building, was agreed in principle.

Preliminary design drawings of the external access ramp, and proposals for the modification of the internal toilet/servery arrangements have also been agreed in principal following further correspondence with Mr Gayton.

Building Control

A further site meeting was held with Mr Kevin Beckwith, Senior Building Control Surveyor for Breckland Council. The available space restricts external access ramps to the main entrance from being fully compliant without obstructing the car park and market space. Mr Beckwith confirmed that the proposals for improved access to the main entrance are not controlled, and do improve the existing scenario.

It was noted that if use of the Large Court is limited to 120 people, two escape routes of compliance will be required. It was requested that the route through the store room, to the front of the building, be improved as a means of escape by installing emergency lighting and removing potential trip hazards.

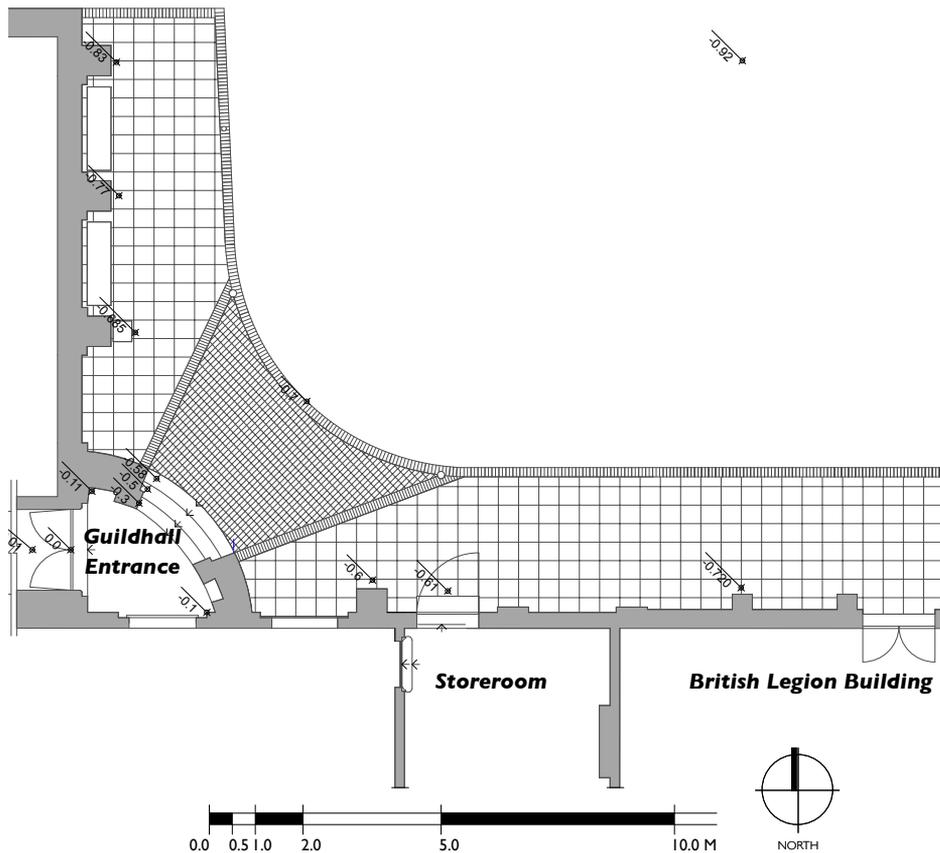
3. Constraints on Development

The existing Guildhall building dates from 1901-2 and is located on the same site as earlier constructions. It is designated as a Grade II listed building (List Entry Number: 1207867) and sits within the Thetford Conservation Area.

It is located at the south west corner of the historic Market Square which is lined with a multitude of listed buildings as defined in the Heritage Impact Assessment. Any modification of the main entrance will impact on the square and therefore the setting of the surrounding heritage assets.



4. Access

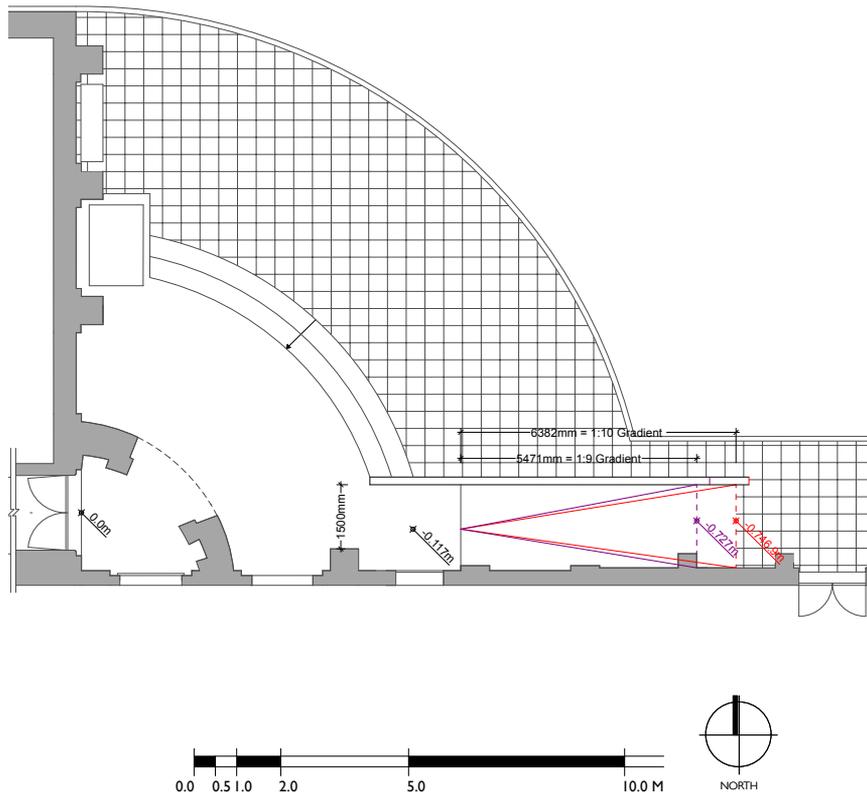


Existing access arrangement to the Main Entrance.

At present, entry to the Guildhall through the main entrance is only by negotiation of stepped access. Removable timber ramps are used temporarily when ramped access is known to be required. These are constructed at a gradient of 1:5 which is far too steep to be practicable; a further unfixed ramp is then required to reach the threshold of the Entrance Hall.

A number of studies have been made for permanent ramped access to the main entrance of the Guildhall. Due to the gradient of the ramp required to accommodate the restrictions imposed by the existing listed building, neither of those discussed below are fully compliant with modern building regulations. They do however, provide a vast improvement to the current scenario without compromising the character of the heritage asset. Further investigations into extending ramp lengths by use of a dog-leg were considered although deemed inappropriate due to obstruction of the carpark.

Design Option I



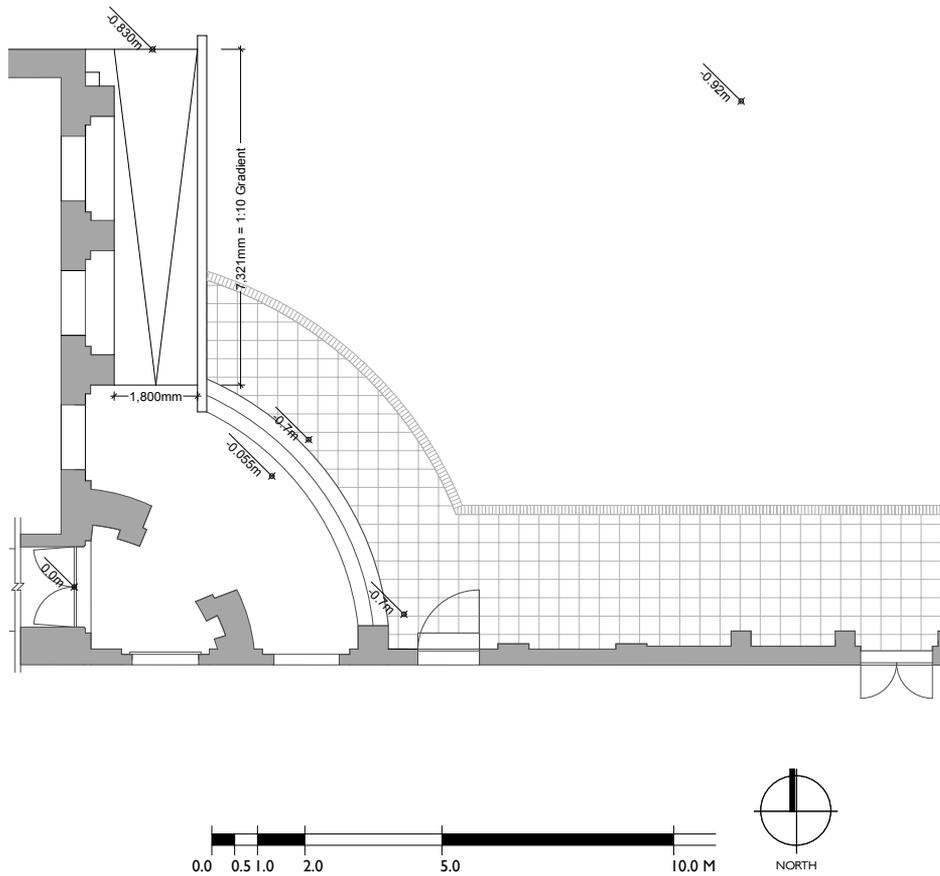
Preliminary Design Option I: Ramp along the British Legion Building elevation.

The proposal is to construct an extended landing providing level access into the Entrance Hall of the Guildhall. This will be served by permanent stepped and ramped access with the ramp located along the facade of the British Legion Building. In order to prevent interruption or obstruction of the entrance to the British Legion Building, the length of the ramp is restricted. Access to the existing store room from the market square must be maintained as a possible route of escape. The necessary landing reduces the space available for the ramp and requires the threshold to be raised significantly, thereby altering the proportions of the door. To achieve the required rise within the remaining space, a gradient of 1:9 or 1:10 is required for the ramp.

Note: Access to the existing gas supply pipe along this elevation would also need to be accommodated within the design of this layout.



Design Option 2



Preliminary Design Option 2: Ramp along the Small Court elevation of the Guildhall.

An alternate study was made locating the ramp along the facade of the Small Court. The length of the ramp is restricted by the footprint of the Guildhall and compliant gradient cannot be achieved within the available space. There is controlled vehicular access to the rear of the Guildhall. At times when the bollards have been removed, egress from the ramp would be dangerous around the blind corner.



5. Design

The palette of materials is an important consideration to avoid detrimental impact on the character of the building and the wider market square.

The Guildhall and British Legion Building are constructed of gault brick with stone dressings. Gault brick is seen consistently in buildings surrounding the Market Place with further uses of limestone in a number of the heritage assets. Also found in the immediate context is flint, chalk and colour-washed lime render with timber joinery.

External floor finishes are of modern construction. Paving slabs and engineering bricks have been used to define the pedestrian areas, with a tarmac finish to the carpark. Whilst the paving is of a similar colour to the stone detailing on the Guildhall and British Legion Buildings, the modern engineering bricks, particularly the tarmac, sit at odds with the historic fabric. For this reason it is believed that a vast improvement to the character of the market square could be achieved by replacing the tarmac surface to the carpark with something more in-keeping, however this is beyond the scope of the current project.

6. Precedent Studies

An appraisal was made to determine whether the proposal should be constructed of modern or traditional materials.

6.1. The Forum, Norwich

The Forum provides a successful example in the use of modern design for access. In this instance the landscaping and finishes continue to the curtilage of the amphitheatre and do not intrude on the historic character of the medieval church of St Peter Mancroft.

6.2. The Ancient House, Thetford

The Ancient House provides an alternative example where traditional detailing was used alongside the historic fabric, complementing, rather than detracting from its character.



*The Forum, Norwich:
Modern materials and detailing within a modern context.*



*The Ancient House, Thetford:
Use of traditional materials to provide access to the historic building.*



6.3. Conclusion

Given the relatively small scale of the proposed intervention, and the abundance of heritage assets surrounding the market, a traditional aesthetic is proposed to prevent an awkward juxtaposition being created between the new and old.

Use of natural stone finish is proposed to complement the traditional materials and colouring found in the surrounding buildings. Tactile markers will be incorporated into the flag stones to identify level changes with non-slip finishes to the ramp. The railings will be constructed in mild steel to a traditional aesthetic and decorated black.

The existing mosaic flooring of the entrance hall could be extended into the porch.

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