

Conservation Team Advice

Date: 3rd June 2025
Application Ref: SMD/2025/0225
Site Address: Nicholson Institute, Stockwell Street, Leek
Proposal: Listed building consent for various refurbishment works, including internal refurbishment throughout and limited external repairs.

Heritage assets affected:		
Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☒	- Nicholson Institute and Leek College of Further Education – Grade II* (listing ref: 1268544) - Greystones – Grade II* (listing ref: 1268542) - Gate piers, railings and gates of Nicolson Institute – Grade II (listing ref: 1268545) - Leek Conservation Area
Non-Designated Heritage Asset(s):	☐	

Conservation Advice

Summary of Significance

The proposal would involve alterations to the Nicholson Institute, which is a Grade II* Listed Building situated within Leek Conservation Area and in the setting of other Listed Buildings.

The Nicholson Institute (Grade II*) was constructed 1882-4 as a school of art, museum, art gallery and public library. The building was building was given to the town by Joshua Nicholson and designed by local architectural firm W.Sugden & Son. The building is constructed in red brick and designed in mid-17th century revival style. The significance derives from its historic association with the development of public buildings in the late-Victorian period, association with local notable architects, architectural grandeur, internal decor and distinctive domed tower which dominates the skyline of Leek. The piers and railings are also Grade II listed and are significant due to their association with the principal building.

Greystones (Grade II*) is a late-17th to early-18th century house constructed in coursed stone and plain tile roof. It is an excellent example of a house from this period with its symmetrical frontage and mullioned and transomed windows, with limited later alterations.

Leek Conservation Area was designed for its medieval origins which have been laid over with Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Typically buildings are constructed in red brick with Staffordshire blue tiles. The town expanded as a result of industrial growth in the late-18th and 19th century, specifically associated with textile manufacture and brewing industries. The Nicholson Institute, although set back from the main road, is a landmark building with the town centre and makes a positive contribution to the area's character and appearance.

Assessment and Impact

The proposal would involve internal and external alterations, including: window repair and refurbishment, improved WC provision on the lower ground floor, repairs and redecoration to walls, ceilings, flooring and internal décor to the lower ground floor, internal redecoration of the library and repairs to the staircase.

This proposed scope of works is reduced in scale to the previously approved works (application ref: SMD/2024/0103) and the current submission follows pre-application site meeting with the Conservation Officer in April 2025.

Works to lower ground floor (Studios)

Currently the lower ground floor is vacant and in a deteriorating condition due to water ingress damaging the brickwork and windows to the studio. This is potentially as a result of higher land levels around the western side of the building and failing rainwater goods.

The remedial works would involve the removal of an inappropriate non-breathable acrylic paint to the internal walls, which is accelerating damage to the brickwork. A sample panel of the proposed cleaning method was viewed on site 02/04/25, which is proposed to be walnut shell blast cleaning. Whilst this is an abrasive method of removal which often is discouraged on historic fabric in a Listed Building, the sample panel viewed showed this was the least abrasive option and did not damage the face of the brickwork. A more detailed method statement for the cleaning and brick repair works is included in the Design & Access Statement. Overall, the removal of the non-breathable paint would help alleviate the ongoing damp issues which is deteriorating the condition of the brickwork.

The Design & Access Statement sets out that the windows are to be refurbished and repaired where necessary, however the technical details provided with the application are limited. These works have the potential to harm the special interest of the Listed Building as it may involve the loss of historic fabric and original craftsmanship. On site 02/04/25, it was clear that the studio windows were in a deteriorating condition due to

water ingress. However, it would be useful if a more detailed survey of the existing condition and a more specific scope of works to windows affected could be provided to fully determine the level of impact to the significance of the building (which could be agreed via condition).

In addition to the above, there would be general refurbishment of the internal parquet flooring and redecoration of walls and ceilings (as indicated on dwg no. 32120 Rev P01 and set out in the Design & Access Statement). It is unlikely that these works would affect the significance of the building as it is proposed to utilise sympathetic palette of materials to infill missing parquet flooring and sympathetic breathable paint.

A new accessible WC is proposed to Studio B0018. This would involve the subdivision of the historic plan form, but it would be a relatively minor alteration and the WC has been discreetly positioned so as to not interfere with the openness of the studio. There is clear and convincing justification for these works in terms of improved accessibility. In addition, a window to the office will be retained and just blocked up from the WC elevation so as to maintain the historic detailing and minimise the impact on the Listed Building.

Works to ground floor (Library)

Currently within the library, there is freestanding shelves and storage units. It is proposed to remove this and alter the soft furnishing, such as carpets. This would not affect the building's special interest.

As above, the Design & Access Statement mentions potential repair and refurbishment of windows but there is limited technical details of what this entails. In addition, the Design & Access Statement mentions the possible cleaning of stone and tile flooring to the staircase and library flooring. The cleaning to the tile flooring is proposed to be treated with sympathetic specification, as set out in the Design & Access Statement. However, there have been no technical details provided for the works to the stone staircase which is of high significance.

Works to first floor (Gallery and Museum) and roof works

It is proposed to remove a modern partition and storage area to the gallery, which would likely better reveal the proportions and appreciation of the gallery space.

Around the staircase to the first floor level, it is proposed to restore the wall mural. Whilst in principle there are no concerns with this from a conservation perspective as, if sympathetically done, would better reveal this feature. However, there are limited technical details provided in the application.

The internal panelling and joinery would be refurbished and redecorated to the first floor level and a sympathetic method statement is provided in the Design & Access Statement.

It is also mentioned that localised roof repairs will be carried out as there is currently water ingress in parts of the upper floors, which will help conserve the historic fabric of the Listed Building.

Overall, the proposed works seek to repair and restore the historic fabric of the Listed Building and revitalise under-utilised spaces to better reveal the significance of the building and secure its optimum viable use, the principle of which is supported from a conservation perspective. However, as mentioned above, there are limited technical details provided for some aspects of the proposed works and further information would be required to ensure that the architectural grandeur and detailing of this Grade II* Listed Building is best conserved.

Legislation and Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The local planning authority should have a desirability of preserving the special interest of the Listed Building (s.16 and 66) and preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (s.72).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

In determining applications, local authorities should take account of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (par.210).

Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within the setting), should require clear and convincing justification (par.213).

Where a proposed development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (par.215).

Local Development Framework

Consideration should also be given to the following documents and local development framework policies:

- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) – DC2 The Historic Environment
- Leek Conservation Area Appraisal (2017)

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal has the potential to have a minor harmful impact on the special interest of the Listed Building, due to possible replacement of historic windows and minor subdivision of the lower ground floor studio. This would be contrary to s.16 of the Act. The proposal would not affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (s.72 of the Act).

With reference to the planning policies, the impact to the Listed Building would result in 'less than substantial harm' (par.215 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). Some aspects of the proposal would better reveal the architectural significance of the building, which has minimised some of the overall heritage harm. There is clear and convincing justification for the elements of the scheme which are harmful and, overall, the proposal seeks to best conserve the building's special interest and secure the continued optimum viable use for the building (par.213 and 215 of the NPPF).

There are no objections to the principle of the proposal from a conservation perspective.

For any consent granted, we would suggest the following conditions:

- Before any cleaning of the masonry to the staircase is carried out, details of the method of cleaning shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and a test panel of cleaning then undertaken in a position to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority. Following the approval of the test panel in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the cleaning works shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building.

- Before any works or cleaning to the mural along the staircase are carried out, a detailed specification of the proposed works shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall thereafter be carried out only in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building.

- Before any works to the windows are commenced, a detailed condition survey and specification of refurbishment works to the windows affected shall be

submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall thereafter be carried out only in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building.

- Any replacement flashing hereby granted consent shall be lead code 4 or 5 and installed in accordance with British Standard BS EN 12588.

Reason: To preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the Listed Building.

Conservation Officer: