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Heritage Statement
for
26 King Street, Gravesend DA12 2DU

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1.00 Introduction:

1.01 26 King Street is the former County Court building located at the heart of the King Street Conservation Area.

1.02 Listed Building Consent (Reference: 20170642) was Granted on the 11th of June 2018 for the following works:

Retention of completed temporary mechanical and electrical refurbishment works including: Disconnection of redundant radiators and pipework in the meeting room and court room; Installation of temporary power supply and temporary heating to the meeting room and court room; Disconnection and removal of all redundant small power supply feeds, controls and main wiring; and Extension of the existing fire alarm system into the court room and meeting room, to include additional smoke detectors. Retention of completed refurbishment work including: Installation of power-assisted opening gear and swipe card to existing timber double doors; Installation of swipe card to fire escape door from meeting room to corridor Temporary support to damaged plaster ceilings; Removal of redundant mechanical ventilation ducts and plant and covering the resulting hole in the wall; Stripping back of water-damaged wall plaster in the meeting room and corridors; Removal of fixed seating, defendant stand and jury box; and Installation of hot water heater over the sink to the office. The proposed removal of the unauthorised door to the office in the western corridor and the removal of the unauthorised doors to the meeting room and the boiler room in the eastern corridor and installation of replacement doors; and the removal of the two unauthorised loft hatch doors in the eastern corridor and installation of replacement loft hatch doors.

1.03 Conditions 1, 2, 3 & 4 were discharged on the 4th of October 2024 under application 20240632.

1.04 This application is for the removal of the raised platform in the former court room together with the remaining court furniture/proposed removal of the canopy and support brackets to the judges bench, detachment of the cornice moulding to be re-used to the

head of the retained joinery and removal of the platform in front of the judges bench and installation of bead and butt panelling.

- 1.05 This document should be read in conjunction with the following drawings:

KSG/0424/01 Court room part plan and section DD as existing
KSG/0424/02 Court room South elevation and sections AA, BB & CC as existing
KSG/0424/03 Court room West & East elevations as existing
KSG/0424/04 Court room part plan and section DD as proposed
KSG/0424/05 Court room West & East elevations as proposed
Floor plan (prepared by others and for reference only)

- 1.06 The court room is to be used as a Performing Arts Theatre for fringe theatre/dance studio/rehearsal room and the raised platform inhibits and restricts this use thus my Client wishes to remove it together with the Judge's bench and the remaining items of court furniture which do not already have Listed Building Consent for their removal.

The projecting canopy is also to be removed as this will allow a lighting rig to be fitted for use with performances in the room.

2.00 Listed Building Assessment:

- 2.01 26 King Street was Listed Grade II on the 3rd of July 1975. The List reference number is: 1089061.

- 2.02 The Listing description reads:

2. Dated 1870. 1 storey ashlar with stone dressings. Slate roof. Balustrade with quatrefoil motif. Triglyph frieze. 4 coupled pilasters. 2 round-headed doorcases with decorated spandrels. Double doors. Fanlights having swag moulding incorporating the date. Plinth. 3 pointed mullioned windows, 2 with 2 lights and the centre one with 3.

- 2.03 The following history of the building has been taken from the Design & Access Statement accompanying application 20170642 and has been reproduced with the permission of its author Christoph Bull:

- 1 Gravesend County Court is located in the centre of Gravesend town – in the parish of Milton and on the south side of King Street at number 26 King Street.
- 2 It stands on the site of 3 buildings that were demolished to make way for it – and the site almost adjoined the area occupied by the St Thomas Almshouses prior to their demolition in 1898 and consequent removal to Wrotham Road in Gravesend.
- 3 The building was purpose built as a County Court and replaced the Old Town hall in the High Street as a location for this level legal cases.

- 4 The architectural drawings were sent in as part of the tendering process in March 1870 and were sent onto the contractor Messers Thomas Rowland Hills and Joseph Hills, in April 1870.
- 5 The architect who won the tender for these buildings was Thomas Charles Sorby (1836-1924) – a Wakefield man with a practice in London – he emigrated to Canada in 1883. Among the many examples of Sorby’s works are Bromley Town Hall (1863), Harrogate new cemetery with lodge (1862), Leicester Wyggeston’s Hospital (1866) and Sheffield’s St Michaels and All Angels church (1866-7). Sorby also designed many county courts –some of which include Darlington, Bolton, Brighton, Cheltenham, Leeds, Halifax, Gainsborough and Barnsley 1866-1871 plus Birmingham Law Courts in 1876.
- 6 Work proceeded on Gravesend County Court in the later part of 1870 with an announcement in the Gravesend Reporter 17.6.1871 that the next county court was to be held in the new court house in King Street.
- 7 The first sitting in Sorby’s brand new County Court House was described in the Gravesend Reporter 24.6.1871 “The new court house is garnished in a very complete manner and filled with almost every convenience, although its acoustic properties are not superlative”.
- 8 The county court dealt with debts and minor cases of landlord/tenant disagreements but in later years the work covered by the court enlarged greatly. In 1869 bankruptcy cases were removed from Gravesend to Rochester. A visiting circuit judge would occasionally preside over a case but mostly it was a Registrar who was a local solicitor – some better known examples were George Sharland and Charles Wyatt – both of whom served as legal advisors to Gravesend Corporation - they were Town Clerks (predecessor of the Chief Executive). Mr Howard Winnett also fulfilled the role of Registrar as a local solicitor in the twentieth century. Another post of the court was that of High Bailiff – a post taken over by the Registrar after 1884.⁹ Gravesend County Court was closed in 2006 and inquests were moved to Dartford in 2008 after a long campaign to save the local facilities from 1996.
- 10 The building was then left empty until it opened as The Grand Healthy Living Centre in 2013.
- 11 The former County Court building has had major refurbishment work done on the front portion (once the Public office) in order to allow it be used by The Grand as a café, meeting place and to promote its business as a healthy living centre in Gravesham which is an area in need of these services.
- 12 The back portion of the court building consists of the unrestored area which includes a large meeting room (originally the jury and consultation room), 15. corridor and most importantly the actual court room.
- 13 The court room has been modified –almost certainly in the 1960s and again with new fold up seating in the 1980s. These latter destroyed all the original 16. benches.

- 14 The original features of the court room are those identified by the architects drawings of Thomas Charles Solby – and are:

The Judge’s sea (including canopy but minus the royal coat of arms) and table, the whole are of the upper dais (south end of court room),

The Reporter box on the west side (on lower dais),

The defendant’s stand (on lower dais),

Plaintiff’s stand (on lower dais),

Registrar’s table between these is original (on lower dais),

The panelling and dado around the court room’s outer wall.
- 15 Doors in the court room are original except the main public entrance on west side where the door fittings are all 1870 but the doors are 1970s replacements.
- 16 The ceiling and windows in the court room are original
- 17 Other than doors-internal and external and a single fireplace there are few other original features. The jury box and public gallery are all replacements for the originals which were works carried out in the 1960s.
- 18 The rear exterior yard has a toilet block on the west side which was there in 1908 but has been modified in the 1960s and a store room area made of brick on the south side of the court building which appears also to date from the 1960s.

3.00 Proposed works:

- 3.01 The raised timber platform and steps are to be removed so that the main court room floor will be uniform throughout the room.

The judge’s bench, canopy and the items of court room furniture which do not already have Consent for removal are to be removed.

The projecting canopy over the judge’s bench is also to be removed.
- 3.02 Panelling to the walls is to be retained with the resultant gaps, between the proposed floor level and the underside of the panelling, to be infilled with new panelling to match the existing and ‘bead and butt’ boarding where there is insufficient height to construct meaningful panels beneath the retained fabric. The detailing of the panelling is illustrated by Sections AA and CC on drawing KSG/0424/05.
- 3.03 With the removal of the platform, it will be necessary to construct steps leading from the court room to the adjoining studio. The steps will be detailed to match the original nosing detail of the West steps leading to the judge’s bench. The nosing detail is illustrated by Section BB on drawing KSG/0424/05.

- 3.04 It is assumed that the main [lower] court room floor will run beneath the raised platform; there will be a new floor finish, which will include the remainder of the court room, in timber suitable for use as a dance floor.
- 3.05 The removal of the court room furniture/fittings including the raised floor, are required to provide flexibility for the former Court Room which is to become the Performing Arts Theatre. The existing stage, and furniture supported by it, would restrict the use of the space and thus threaten the economic viability of the space.
- 3.06 It is recognised that the furniture and fittings are of interest and reflect the previous use of the building thus it is proposed that they be carefully dismantled and retained on site with a set of record drawings thus if reinstatement were ever considered the principal features (ie. the joinery items but not the raised platform) would be available on site.

4.00 Access Statement:

- 4.01 The proposals do not affect access arrangements to or from the building but they do change the position of the steps which address the change in level between the former court room (proposed multi function space) and the room (identified as the recording studio on the Acorn Commercial floor plan) to the South east of the former court room.

The proposed steps (there will be three each with equal risers of approximately 157mm) are within the wall thickness thus there is no projecting step beyond the wall.

5.00 Conclusion:

- 5.01 The proposed works are required to improve flexibility of the space and whilst it may be argued that the removal of the court room furniture is detrimental to the building their function is specific to its former use and it becomes difficult to justify retention when the building has a new purpose.
- 5.02 The platform and court room furniture has been recorded in drawing form thus there is a record of it.
- 5.03 The removed fittings/furniture (but not the platform) are to be retained on site with a set of drawings.