

NEWPORT CIVIC CENTRE: REPAIRS TO GLASS-BLOCK ATRIUM ROOF

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

Incorporating Design & Access Statement

Newport City Council

14/01/25

Issue 01

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Site Address:

Newport Civic Centre
Godfrey Road
Newport
Gwent
NP20 4UR

1.2. Newport Civic Centre is a grade II* Listed Building. A copy of Cadw's Listing description is attached to this Statement at Appendix 'A'.

1.3. Previous Newport Norse records of the building comprise:

- Contemporary building journals.
- Photographs
- the architects' original floor and service plans
- Detailed drawings for completion of the new central hall (dated 1962).
- 1937 Council minutes.
- 1939 contract documents for the new assembly hall (never completed).
- Letters pertaining to the later construction of the clocktower.

There has been no dedicated archaeological assessment to date of the building.

1.4. This Heritage Impact Statement has been compiled by Newport Norse (NN) on the instructions of Cadw and the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in support of an application for listed building consent. It proposes a scheme to repair the glass-block atrium roof above a section of Newport Civic Centre's west wing.

Please refer to the attached site plan [Appendix 'B'], which shows the location of the atrium roof in relation to the rest of the building.

1.5. The applicant wishes to commence a programme of much needed roof repairs and maintenance, commencing with the flat roof area above level 4 west. A subsequent application will be submitted for these works. The repair of the atrium roof, located within this area, forms a necessary first stage in this process. It is the applicant's intention to help establish the long-term care and protection of the building. This will ensure that the building continues to operate as the civic and administrative focus for Newport City Council.

1.6. Structural and concrete assessments [Cambria Consulting Ltd and Beton Bauen reports attached] have been undertaken to identify the type and extent of defects, as well as appropriate repair methods and materials. During the concrete assessment, hammer tap-testing was carried out to ascertain the scale of deterioration and safely remove any spalling masonry. These were undertaken with a 'light touch' to minimise the loss of historic fabric.

1.7. A building-wide structural assessment has also been undertaken by *Mann Williams* who have also produced a 'Prioritised Schedule of Defects', which has flagged-up the poor condition of this atrium roof and the associated risk to the internal structure of the building.

1.8. This Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared in accordance with the general principles set out within Cadw's 'Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales 2017' and Cadw's 'Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment in Wales'.

2.0. THE SITE: BRIEF DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

- 2.1. The site is bounded by a predominantly residential area to the immediate south, west, north and north-east, with the south-east aspect facing the city centre and Newport (South Wales) railway station further east. The site is at a higher level than the city centre, which falls away to the east and towards the river Usk.
- 2.2. Newport Civic Centre is of high significance. Construction began in 1937 and at the outbreak of war in 1939, only the section containing the west wing – including the atrium roof – was completed. The other two sections under construction were temporarily rooved and commandeered by the Admiralty as stores throughout the war. It was not until 1964 that the building was finally completed in its present form, with the erection of the clock tower and the finishing of the central hall. Phase 4, a proposed assembly hall attached to the west side of the central core, was unfortunately never realised.

Interestingly, the architect's model (currently displayed in the central hall) shows that the atrium roof was originally designed to be much larger than the as-built.



According to Cadw, the Civic Centre's heritage significance relates to it being "...a well-designed and well-preserved major civic building, designed by a prominent early C20 architect, with a scheme of C20 municipal decoration comparable in Wales only to the murals of Frank Brangwyn at Swansea Guildhall." As such, it was designated Grade II* listed in 1999. Cadw consider Grade II* listed buildings to be "particularly important buildings of more than special interest. These make up about seven per cent of the total number of listed buildings in Wales."

2.3. Contextual note on the other building on the site:

Newport Crown Court (no work currently proposed): As described in 'Pevsner Architectural Guides, The Buildings of Wales – Gwent/Monmouthshire, 2000, J. Newman':

CROWN COURT, Faulkner Road. 1989-91, by PSA Projects Cardiff, design director John Roberts. Set at the foot of the slope between the arms of the Civic Centre, and effectively harmonising with it without compromising its own modern style. Portland Stone facing, of course. Seven-by-five-bay pavilion, of two storeys, the upper recessed above a loggia formed by a deep, rectangular lintel carried on slender rectangular piers, placed to set up a rhythm of alternating wide and narrow bays. Note how the piers are set back, not at the angles of the building. In the centre the lintel is brought forward polygonally over the projecting porch.

2.4. Significance: As described in 'Pevsner Architectural Guides, The Buildings of Wales – Gwent/Monmouthshire, 2000, J. Newman':

CIVIC CENTRE, Godfrey Road. A white presence which dominates distant views of the town from its hillside site. The impulse to build, when the town already contained a town hall and a shire hall, came from the decision in 1936 to move the County Assizes from Monmouth to Newport. The competition to design the new building held that year was won by T. Cecil Howitt of Nottingham. The sw wing, containing the courts, was built 1937-39, but Howitt's design was fully executed only in 1964, with the completion of the central entrance hall, stair and tower.

The style is ghostly classicism thought appropriate for public architecture of the period, influenced no doubt by Percy Thomas's Swansea Guildhall, but entirely lacking in the panache which infuses that building. The plan consists of a central ceremonial block of two storeys, with a recessed third storey, and a tall, tapering, axial clock tower. To l. and r., stepping down hillside, administration blocks, also two-storeyed. The principal entrance is through a high, plain, round-headed arch on the sw, uphill, side. Similar arches penetrate the downhill ends of the side blocks. All walls are faced with Portland stone. Channelling is introduced on the lower storey of the downhill side of the central block, above which rise the five tall, rectangular windows of the council chamber, their imposts are formed of curious convex fluted panels, the nearest approach to columns anywhere in the building. Elsewhere, the walls are given an equally curious quilted texture. But what goes furthest to undermine the monumentality of the building is the use of shallow pitched roofs everywhere, covered in brown pantiles. Even the pyramidal cap of the clock tower is given this treatment.

The main entrance leads into a square STAIR HALL, lit artificially from a central, square ceiling panel painted pale blue, which is raised above three stepped tiers of coffering. * The stair rises in two easy, straight flights to a broad, glazed balcony on all four sides of the hall. The walls here were painted 1961-4 with a series of eleven rectangular murals by Hans Feibusch, illustrating the history of the county from the first Celtic settlement to the building of the George Street Bridge, opened in 1964. A broadly treated figure style and semi-naturalistic colouring unite the disparate subjects. As a scheme of municipal decoration, it is perhaps unsurpassed in C20 Britain – the murals of Frank Brangwyn in the Guildhall, Swansea, being a special case. (Feibusch's preliminary studies are displayed downstairs, some of them different in composition from the paintings.) – SCULPTURE. Labour, 1929 by David Evans. Small bronze group of two straining miners.

The COUNCIL CHAMBER, at the head of the stair and looking over the town, is flooded by light from its five tall windows. Flat ceiling decorated with large, shallow coffers painted red.

The hillside below the centre block is terraced and planted in a large semicircle.

* It had been intended to use natural lighting.

Significance Values

Building as a whole:

- Evidential value: **HIGH**
There are numerous sources of information detailing the development of the building and site. Drawings and written records inform the alterations made over time and how the building was used. The earlier elements of the building, including the court rooms and core, are of a higher quality of design and detailing. However, the later post-war work, whilst part of the original design, have been executed to a lesser quality. The different uses of the building can still be read, for example the courtrooms, prison cells, police functions, council chambers and committee rooms.
- Historical value: **MEDIUM/HIGH**
Some evidence exists of the history of the site from the demolition of the houses that once existed there to the construction of the new Civic Centre and its later extensions. However, this information itself does not result in historical value of great significance. The way in which the site does increase in historical value is by association with the royal visits (including the sod cutting of the original build) and through civic events throughout the years.
- Aesthetic value: **MEDIUM/HIGH**
The Art Deco design and its overall size, positioning and orientation add to the aesthetic value of the building. The later 1950s and 1960s fitouts are unfortunate in their detailing which is seen to be of lesser quality and detailing than the original 1930s elements.
- Communal value: **MEDIUM**
Given the purpose of the building in performing civic functions and becoming the focus of major civic events it is expected that the local community will draw great communal value from the building. This can be seen in the photographs taken during such events where the people of the town (later, city) are seen around the building. These events are specific to Newport rather than of national note. There is an argument that because public access has gradually reduced over the period the communal value of 'special place' will have been reduced.

The glass-block atrium roof:

- Evidential value: **HIGH**
This area of roof is of high evidential value (of past human activity) since its detailing (internally and externally) is original to the first stage of construction (circa 1937-39). It features on the architect's model, although on a grander scale, and on the original floor plans for the building (as-built). Evidential value has been adversely affected by its poor condition.
- Historical value: **NONE**
There is no historical significance to the atrium roof itself. However, the space beneath it was originally designed, and used, as a gymnasium for the police officers who were housed in this wing of the building.
- Aesthetic value: **LOW**
The atrium roof is of low aesthetic significance. Somewhat utilitarian and at odds with the monumentality of the building, it is a design normally associated with pavements and Victorian public toilets than a building of this calibre. Aesthetic value has been adversely affected its poor condition.

- Communal value: **NONE**

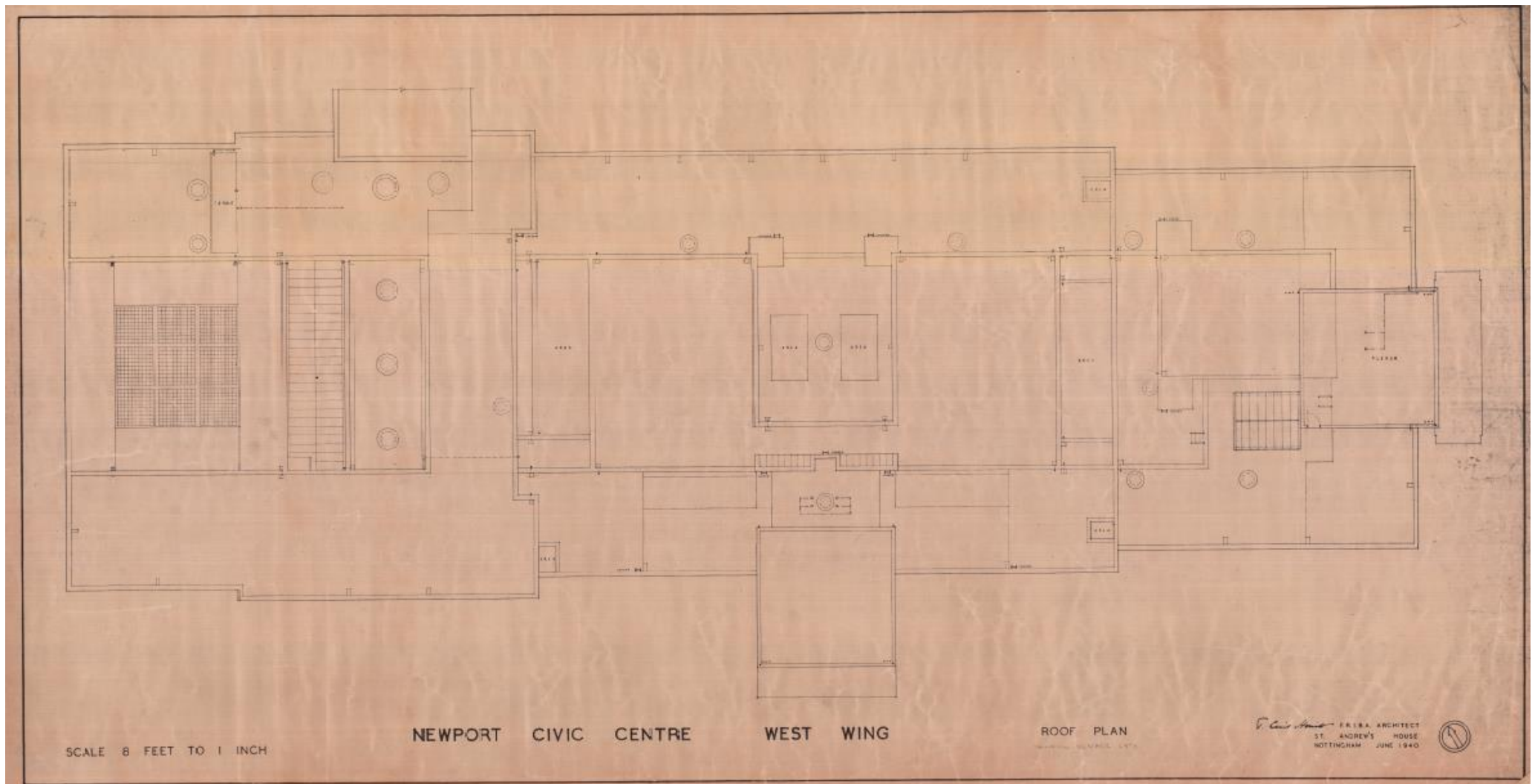
There is no communal significance to the atrium roof itself. However, the space beneath it was originally designed, and used, as a gymnasium for the police officers who were housed in this wing of the building and will have recollections of it. NCC staff (past and present) will also have memories of this room being used as a canteen and, more recently, an office space.

- Historical value: **NONE**

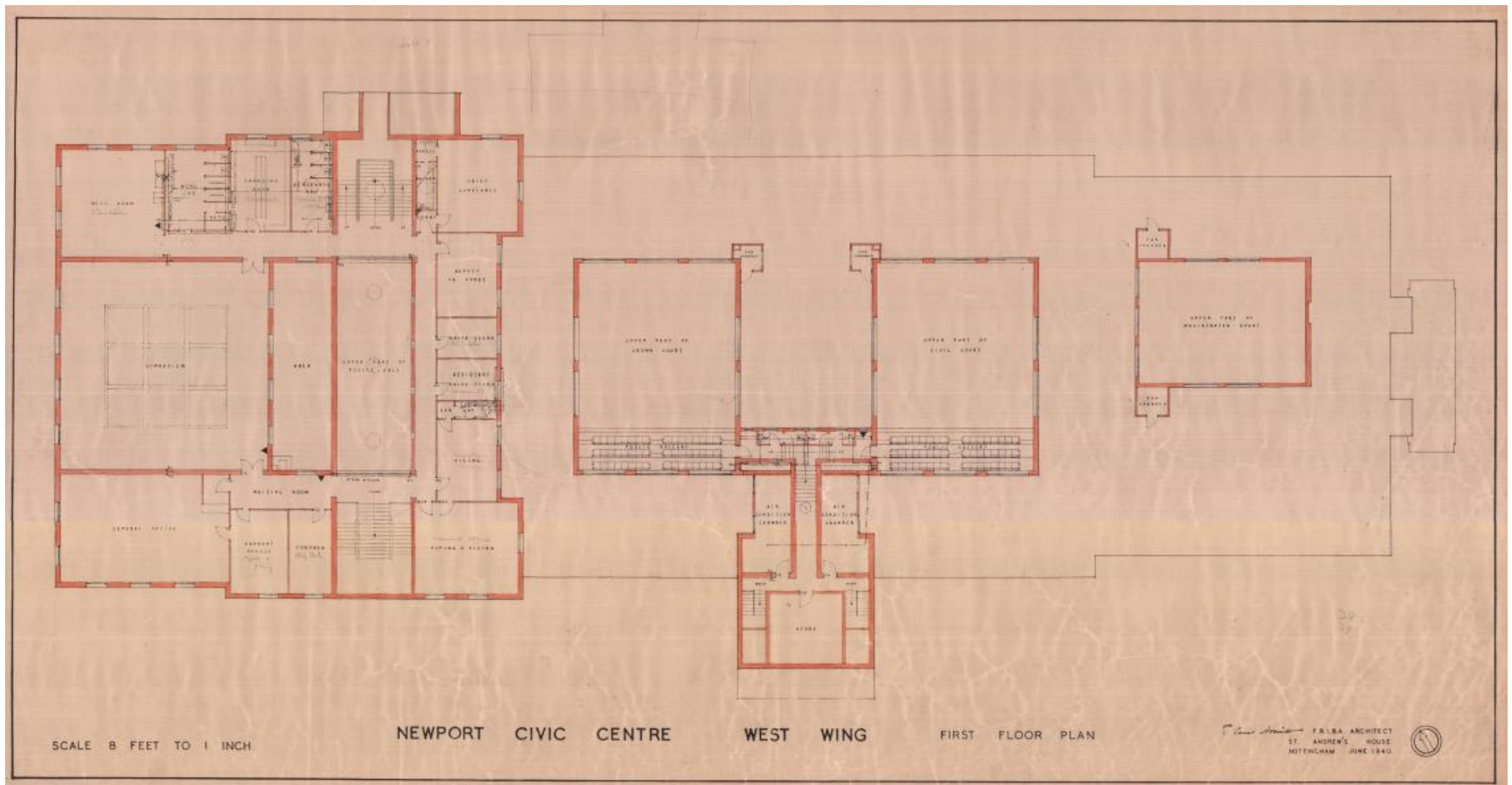
There is no historical significance to the atrium roof itself. However, the space beneath it was originally designed, and used, as a gymnasium for the police officers who were housed in this wing of the building.



Left: zoomed-in image of the atrium roof (circa 1950s)



Above: architect's plan of the west wing roof (1940). Note, atrium roof (left-hand side)



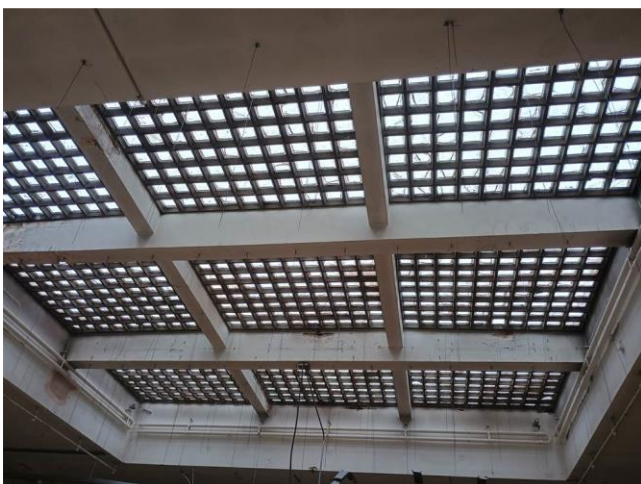
Above: architect's plan of the west wing – first floor (1940). Note, police gymnasium (left-hand side) beneath atrium roof

3.0. PROPOSED WORKS AND JUSTIFICATION

3.1. Refurbishing the glass-block atrium roof:

- 3.1.1. It is proposed to refurbish the glass-block atrium roof (above room 425W). The concrete waffle structure and adjoining beams will be repaired. Corroding rebar will be cleaned and treated prior to the application of compatible mortar repairs. Rather than cause further disturbance to the historic fabric, the external side of the glass-blocks will be cleaned and coated with a clear polyurethane coating.

This work is necessary since the concrete elements of this roof are exhibiting significant spalling due to prolonged water-ingress. The existing seals at the interface between the glass blocks and the concrete have significantly deteriorated resulting in widespread leaking. A clear polyurethane coating has been identified as being the most cost-effective and least disruptive remedial method for reinstating weather-tightness to this area of roof.



Above: external and internal views of glass block atrium roof above 425W. Note, significant spalling to concrete ribs.

3.1.2. The applicant originally considered five different options:

- a. Completely restore glass-block atrium roof. Carry out necessary concrete repairs and temporarily remove all glass-blocks. Replace any cracked blocks like-for-like and then reinstate by resealing with mastic or bitumen.
Whilst this was originally the applicant's preferred option, it has been discounted as being too costly and disruptive.
- b. Overcover existing roof with an over rooflight solution.
This option would likely be successful at keeping the rain out and improving energy efficiency in line with Part L requirements. However, the applicant has dismissed it as being too visually obtrusive - this atrium roof is visible from nearby Fields Road – and to the detriment of the architect's original design scheme.
- c. Completely remove glass-block atrium roof, infill the opening and felt over.
Although this would have the benefit of designing-out an inherently vulnerable feature, the applicant has rejected this option because of the negative impact upon the significance of the asset. It would also significantly reduce light levels in the space below.
- d. Remove concrete waffles and replace with new bespoke structural glass infills.
Although this would have the benefit of designing-out an inherently vulnerable feature, the applicant has rejected this option because of the negative impact upon the significance of the asset.
- e. Remove concrete waffles and countersink nine number bespoke PV panels.
This option would be too costly and be too visible an alteration, which would unduly harm the significance of the building.

4.0. IMPACT

- 4.1. The proposed works will make a positive contribution in sustaining the heritage values and significance of the main building. The proposed works have been considered carefully in accordance with relevant heritage guidance and the established legislative framework.
- 4.2. Whilst there will be a noticeable visual impact from the repairs to the concrete ribs – it will not be possible to get a colour-match with the adjacent masonry – this is offset by the positive contribution that fixing this area of roof will make. Historic fabric will be preserved and the room below will be able to be brought back into beneficial use.
- 4.3. This work package of essential repairs will have a positive impact in addressing years of benign neglect, helping to safeguard the future of the building.
- 4.4. The physical impact of the proposals on the building's fabric is minimised by the careful selection of compatible repair materials with a proven track record.
- 4.5. The impact on significance values (Section 2.0) is as follows:
 - Evidential value: There will be a negligible effect on evidential value since failing concrete will be removed prior to repair. However, this will be mitigated by the benefits in repairing this roof, addressing noticeable health and safety risks and bringing the space beneath back into beneficial use.
 - Historical value: The building's historic context and associations will be strengthened by addressing noticeable neglect and safeguarding the future of the building.
 - Aesthetic value: Aesthetic value will be retained and strengthened.

- Communal value: Communal value will be retained and enhanced in enabling the continual occupation of the building as the civic and administrative focus for Newport City Council.

5.0. CONSULTATION

- 5.1. This application has been prepared with great care and has been submitted following pre-application consultations with Laura Smith, Principal Heritage Officer to Newport City Council (NCC) and Jonathan Green (Cadw).
- 5.3. Newport Norse discussed the works with Jonathan Green during a site visit on 5th June 2024 where he gave specific advice on the level of information that would be required in support of an application for such works.

6.0. SUMMARY

- 6.1. We believe that the proposed works are proportional to address the significant repair requirements for the glass-block atrium roof. These have been carefully thought through with due regard for national, and local, planning and heritage policy and guidance.
- 6.2. The overall aim of the proposals is to assist with returning the building to a semblance of its former glory and to ensure that it can continue to safely operate as the civic and administrative focus for Newport City Council.

7.0. DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

7.1. Layout

The overall layout of the property is not affected by the proposals. The extent and impact of the proposed works has been addressed in the preceding parts of the Heritage Impact Statement.

7.2. Character & Appearance

The proposed works have a limited impact upon the character and appearance of Newport Civic Centre. It is envisaged that they will significantly enhance the present building.

7.3. Scale

No alterations to the scale of Newport Civic Centre are proposed.

7.4. Environmental Sustainability

Since the proposals are predominantly repair works, there are limited opportunities to incorporate environmentally sustainable design solutions.

7.5. Community Safety

The proposed works have no impact on community safety.

7.6. Community Involvement

The proposed works will have no impact on community involvement.

7.7. Access

The proposed works will have no impact on access.

Appendix A – Cadw's Listing Description

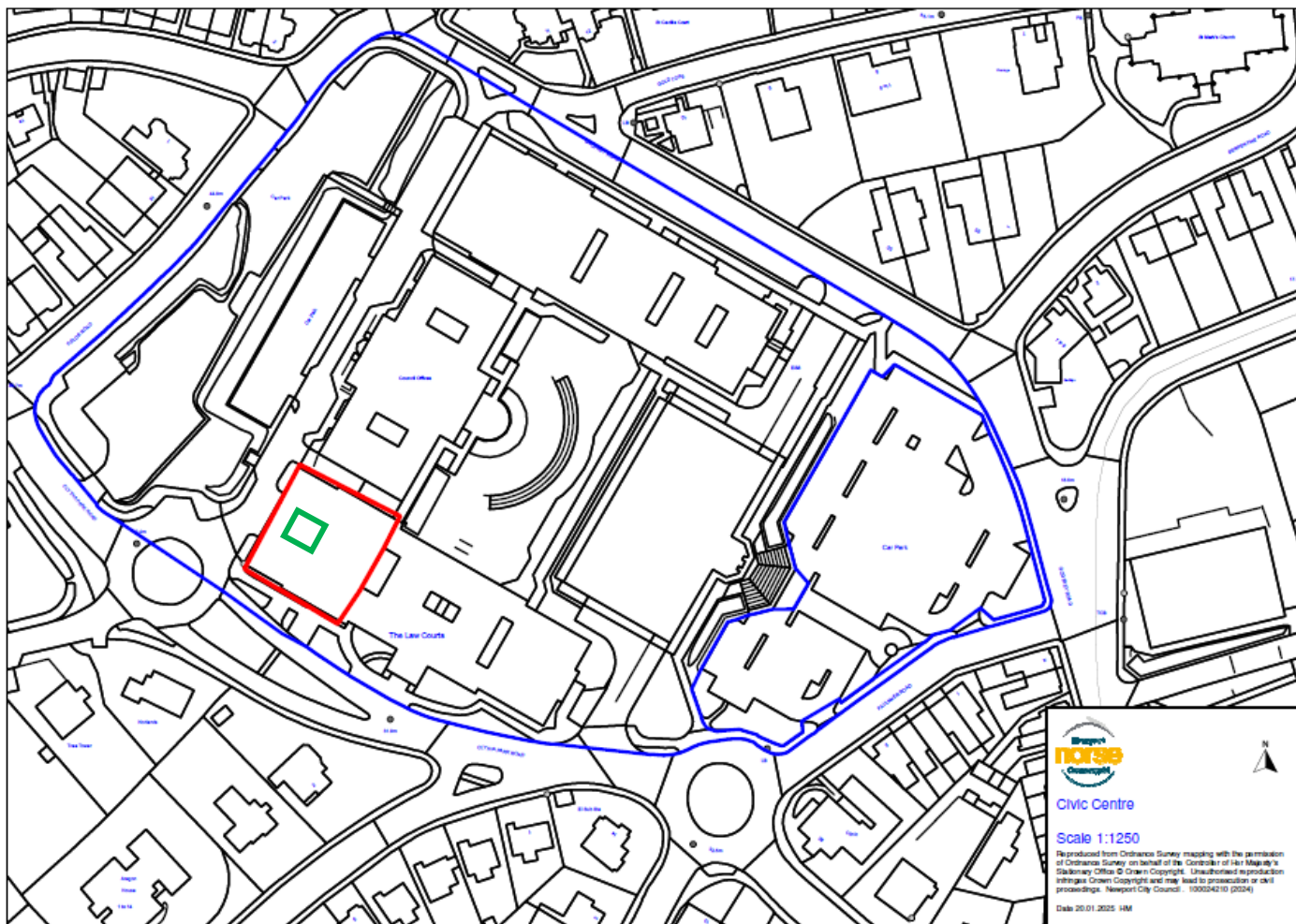
Description

Commissioned by Newport Corporation in 1936. A u-plan complex, facing SE, set on a sloping site. Elevations of unbonded Portland stone in panels. Basement level of brown rock-faced Derbyshire sandstone. Roofs of brown pantiles, with deep coffered eaves. Steel casement windows. SE front of three storeys, with taller advanced two-storey centre block containing council chamber: five bays. Centre block has tall upper windows with balcony to centre three bays; rusticated ground floor. Tall tapering clock tower set above central block on low square base; pyramidal roof. Tower has panel-like raised sides, simple clock. Three small square openings below eaves to each side. Flanks of centre block of seven bays, the outer bays slightly advanced, with hipped roofs. Lower two floors have parapet roofs and project in front of end bays. Long wings, stepped down the slope in three stages, 1+11+6 bays. Flat roofs behind parapets; rock-faced plinths. Lowest blocks have SE entrance facades each of two storeys and five bays, the centre entrance bay higher and advanced, with pyramidal roof. Entrances set within giant round-arched openings with glazing above, similar to those at Cambridge University Library (by Giles Gilbert Scott). Openings have cable-mouldings. Projecting door surrounds of polished black granite within Portland stone frames. Carved and painted shields above. NE elevation stepped up slope in three two storey blocks, each slightly advanced of one another. Six bay lower block. Middle block of eleven bays with entrance within giant central opening; door surround as above. Upper block of five bays, with similar door; three bays slightly recessed to the right. SW elevation has similar upper block, its entrance with shield and date of 1939 above. Nine bay middle section, the taller pyramid-roofed centre bay containing entrance within giant cable-moulded arch, as SE elevation. Six bay lower block. NW elevation contains current entrance. Central entrance range of fifteen bays, two storeys. Upper storey set behind parapet roof as to SE. Wide centre bay with tower above, containing entrance, set within giant arch: later glazing and balcony. Five bay returns to centre block to single bays which have round-arched service entries to SE court. Range to left of nine bays; right range of eight bays with delivery doors to centre.

(Source: Cadw Listings database) S Garfi 3/10/06

Designed by Thomas Cecil Howitt in Art Deco style, the Newport Civic Centre was finally opened to the public in 1940. This centre of local government houses the city council, courts (NPRN: 304460) and mayor's office.

APPENDIX B – SITE PLAN



Green box indicates location of glass-block atrium roof; red, the location of roof above level 4 west