



# FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL

## PLANNING APPLICATION NOW LIVE



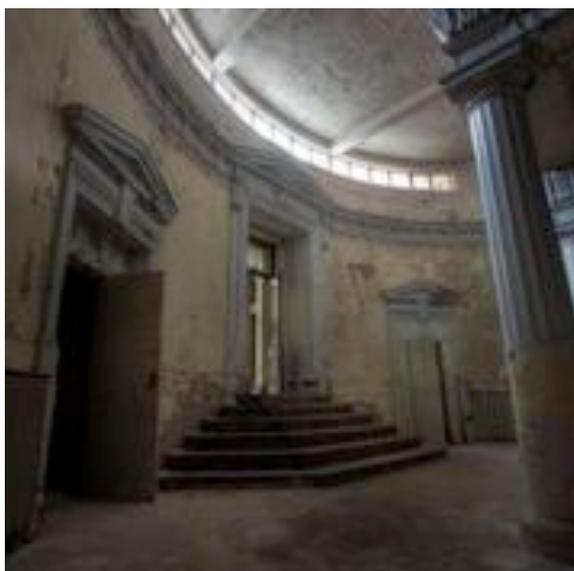
Yes it's been a long time since Newsletter 16, when we reported what we then knew about the bombshell announcement of the sale of the Old Town Hall to someone said to be a Sheffield person and sympathetic to the building. We had hoped he'd join us at the Friends' AGM in March, and sent an invitation; but he didn't appear. Then last week that he submitted a planning application to the Council, giving us and everyone else an opportunity to see what he intends to do with the building. The owner is called Efe Omu and he's someone with a number of property and other interests in Sheffield. He is

currently restoring the former Cannon pub in Castle Street – opposite the Old Town Hall – as shops and apartments. The scaffolding's still up but the plastic sheeting is starting to be removed and we can see that the stonework, at least, looks good. But the Cannon and the Old Town Hall are different propositions, in scale and terms of the amount of work to be done.

Anyone can read the Old Town Hall application – we have, and some initial reactions are set out below. You can find the application online via the Council website. Go to the planning applications page, enter 'Castle Street' in the search box and up it will come – or rather, both of them as there has to be an application for planning consent and one for Listed Building Consent. The documents for each are almost identical. Please take a look and if you can, send the Council your comments. The link is: <https://planningapps.sheffield.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=PWC4JINYK4Soo>

We'd be very pleased if you'd let FOTH know what you think. Email us at [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:fothsheffield@gmail.com), or post on Facebook page – Save Sheffield Old Town Hall. We are really keen to have your reactions, so please take a bit of time to consider the plans. But TIME IS SHORT. The deadline for comments is 12 September!

## WHAT'S IN THE PLANNING APPLICATION?



In summary, the new owner wants to use the building for a mix of serviced apartments, for 'hotel pods' – en-suite rooms, using the former cells – and for a 'souk', a publicly accessible court of small specialist shops and other outlets, with a small element of offices. Under the plans, none of the 5 courtrooms would survive intact. You have to look at the floor plans to work it all out, as the Design and Access Statement with the application is remarkably unspecific about it all. It puts a lot of emphasis on what it says are limited changes to the interior, with just a few walls removed and a few new partitions inserted. You might feel this understates what's

proposed. The Heritage Statement, especially section 5, pages 32-38, and even more section 6, pages 38-42, is where you really find out what will happen. Read section 6 if you can do nothing else!

## AND WHAT DO WE THINK ABOUT IT?

It is welcome that a new owner has come on the scene and is prepared to invest in the building and bring it back into use. We know – because we had a lot of serious work done on what might or might not work in the OTH, and because you have to accept that any project like this has to be financially justifiable – that you can't preserve every tiny detail of a historic building. The art is always in working out where you strike the balance between conservation and alteration. These plans involve the complete loss of two of the three main courtrooms, which would become apartments. Even more seriously, a hugely significant change is proposed to the third, Court 1, the most splendid. It would become an apartment, with bathrooms dropped into two corners, all the original fittings removed....and as the Heritage Statement itself says, this is one of the most important rooms in the building; but it accepts that the plans will remove all of its evidential value – that is you won't know it had been a courtroom. The same applies to what's proposed for the former waiting hall, where new partitions will alter understanding of the space and do away with the wonderful sense of theatre provided by the steps and Doric columns leading up to Court 1. Yet planning guidance says changes have to respect the significance of the asset and be balanced against the public – not private – benefit of any change. You may think there's little sign of this. Has the balance been struck in the right place? We know also that a mixed use approach makes most sense for this complicated building; but is this the right mix?

In terms of the planning guidance, this all poses serious questions for the Council about how far the plans observe planning law and guidance as they affect listed buildings. So there's a lot to consider.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The application went to the Council on 16 August, was validated by the Planning Department on 20 August – and went public on the Council website on 21 August. This looks like a record given there was a weekend in between. However comments have to reach the Council by 12 SEPTEMBER.

We understand the application will go to the Planning Committee meeting in December, with whatever recommendation the planners think fit. In between they'll collate submissions from the public, which have to be reported to the Committee, and decide what to recommend – acceptance, acceptance with alterations, or rejection. They'll write up a report which will be publicly available before the December meeting. And at that meeting members of the public can attend, and speak if they wish. See you there, maybe?



### HOW TO CONTACT US AT FOTH

We are on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/OTHSheffield>

We have a blog at <https://friendsofthsheffield.wordpress.com/>

We have our own website: <https://sheffieldoldtownhall.co.uk>

You can always email us at: [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:fothsheffield@gmail.com)