

Salisbury City Council

RIBA Stage 1 Feasibility Study for
Conservation Works to The Guildhall, Guildhall
Square, Salisbury.

03rd March 2026



The Value of Certainty.



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Version Control

Version	Date	Description of revision	Prepared by	Checked by	Authorised by
1.0	06/02/2026		Lucas Main	Paul O'Brien	Paul.O'Brien
2.0	03/03/2026	Additional aspects of conservation works included	Paul O'Brien	Nick Spurgeon	Chris Webb

Distribution list

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Executive Summary

As part of our commission under RIBA Stage 1-6 services, Salisbury City Council commissioned Currie & Brown to undertake an options appraisal to evaluate appropriate conservation led interventions for the historic lath and plaster ceiling within the Banqueting Hall at the Guildhall along with structural crack repairs within masonry walls externally and internally and internal redecoration.

The ceiling to the banqueting room was reconstructed in the late 1980s to early 1990s, now demonstrates signs of deterioration, weakened plaster keying, isolated sagging, and partial reliance on temporary netting and sheeting introduced following a partial failure in 2018–19. These issues indicate that the ceiling no longer functions reliably as a unified structural system.

The appraisal assessed three recognised remedial techniques: adhesive/grout injection, screw and washer pinning, and traditional patch repairs. Each method was evaluated for its compatibility with historic fabric, long-term performance, practicality, and the scale of intervention required. While adhesive injection and patch repairs are suitable for tightly defined, localised failures, they are less effective when deterioration is distributed across large areas.

Following analysis, screw and washer pinning has been identified as the preferred remedial techniques for widespread stabilisation of the Banqueting Hall ceiling. This method provides mechanical consolidation of delaminated plaster, allows for even restraint over large areas, and remains minimally intrusive and reversible, a key requirement for conservation led repair. The technique offers a meaningful means to resecure large sections of loose plasterwork while retaining as much historic fabric as possible.

Structural cracking to walls both externally and internally will be remediated via the provision of conventional crack repair techniques comprising embedding reinforcement steel and crack stitching across vertical cracks, with areas made good post installation.

Paint systems will be complimentary to lime plastered wall surfaces and most likely conservation paints and use of vinyl papering for feature walls, niches etc of high quality production and align with requirements for vapour permeability and passive fire protection.

Introduction

Salisbury City Council has appointed Currie & Brown to undertake a structured options appraisal to evaluate the long term viability of remedial or replacement interventions to the historic lath and plaster ceiling in the Banquet Hall.

The purpose of this appraisal is to develop and compare a series of technically sound, conservation appropriate options that address the ceiling's current condition, and determining whether the introduction of a cooling system can be achieved without undue harm to the building's heritage significance or operational function and if it is feasible for SCC to do so.

Each option will be assessed in terms of structural suitability, heritage impact, statutory consent requirements, cost implications, programme considerations and the extent of disruption to ongoing Guildhall operations.

Currie & Brown, acting as Lead Designer and Principal Designer, will coordinate structural and mechanical input to ensure all options presented are technically robust, aligned with conservation best practice, and informed by available survey evidence. The resulting appraisal will enable Salisbury City Council to select a preferred approach that balances heritage preservation, operational practicality, and financial viability ahead of progressing to detailed design under RIBA Stages 1–4. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the local Conservation Officers consultation and Local Planning Laws.

Building Location

Guildhall Square, The Guildhall, Salisbury SP1 1JH.

Objectives

- Secure the ceiling against failure while conserving as much historic fabric as is practicable, with conservation led methodology.
- Present various remedial options with implications such as statutory approvals, risk and qualitative cost bands to support the Council's choice of a preferred approach.

Caveats to the Appraisal

Whilst reference has been made to the condition of the building, it is not a condition survey and any reference to its condition and services therein, are for reference purposes only.

The conclusions and recommendations within this options appraisal are based on the information that was available at the time of preparation, including previous survey findings, visual inspections and any documentation that has been provided to us by Salisbury City Council.

Intrusive investigations have not been undertaken, and the presence or extent or condition of concealed building elements, such as structural components, services routes, or deleterious materials, cannot be fully verified without further opening up works.

No Refurbishment & Demolition Asbestos Survey is known to exist, and additional intrusive surveys may be required to confirm material composition and associated risks given that any material used prior to 2000 may contain ACM material.

All proposals remain subject to statutory approvals, including Listed Building Consent, and may require amendment following consultation with the local conservation officer or heritage specialists.

The attached appraisal has been produced for Salisbury City Council and should not be relied upon by any third parties.

Background Information

Project Overview

The project seeks to determine what conservation techniques should be undertaken onto the existing lath and plaster ceiling within the Banqueting Hall. All proposed works will remain subject to review and approval by the local conservation officer to ensure full compliance with any heritage requirement.

Current Ceiling Description

The ceiling is a traditional lath and plaster construction set above enriched, detailed continuous cornices with 3 central ceiling roses that support three principal chandeliers, consistent with the room's Georgian character. Building records indicate the original ceiling was replaced like for like in the late 1980s/early 1990s, with the current plasterwork understood to be a reconstruction in traditional materials.

Within the roof void the ceiling is restrained by timber battens and following a partial ceiling failure c. 2018–19 selected zones received temporary ply sheathing and fibreglass netting fixed from below to provide additional restraint.

A cold roof build up is present with rock mineral wool insulation laid at ceiling level. Above are timber joists and diagonal bracing form a lattice over the plaster, with the system relying on the integrity of the plaster keys to maintain the long-term stability.

Walls structure comprise predominantly load bearing masonry walls which are lime plastered. Some lightweight timber frame partitions occur within the building. Wall finishes are lime based plastered finish. Externally, the structure comprise a mix of limestone and Gault clay brickwork

Deleterious Materials

Given the age and Grade II* listed status of Salisbury Guildhall, it is highly probable that deleterious materials are present within the building fabric. Historic

buildings of this period frequently incorporated materials that are now known to present durability issues or health and safety risks.

Common examples that could reasonably be expected in a building of this age include:

- **Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs)** – frequently used from the late 19th century through the 20th century in insulation, floor finishes, adhesives, textured coatings, and plantrooms.
- **Lead based paints** – almost universally used before the 1980s.
- **Horsehair constituent** – widely used in traditional fibrous plaster and relevant to the Banqueting Hall ceiling with early animal hair a possible source of anthrax spores. Unlikely occurrence if replaced in 1980s.
- **Calcium chloride admixtures** – historically used in concrete repairs or later additions.
- **RAAC** –unlikely given the Guildhall’s heritage age but cannot be definitively ruled out in later additions without intrusive investigation.

We are not aware of any refurbishment & Demolition (R&D) Survey that exists, meaning the presence, extent and condition of asbestos remains undetermined.

Fire Safety

Given the Guildhall’s age and historic construction, any works to the Banqueting Hall ceiling or installation of cooling systems must be planned to avoid compromising existing fire resisting elements or concealed voids. Fire related design risks will be managed through the Principal Designer role, ensuring they are recorded and communicated within the Pre Construction Information pack.

The use of class O paint systems designed to prevent the spread of fire across surfaces will be applied as part of any redecorate processes.

Remedial Techniques

Adhesive/Grout Injection (with Mechanical Re-fixing)

Targeted technique to re bond delaminated plaster to laths/backing using low viscosity, lime based grout, supplemented by mechanical re fixing (plaster repair washers or micro pins) where the original key is inadequate. It is minimally intrusive and heritage retentive, using breathable materials.

This method is appropriate where delamination is localised or moderate and the surrounding plaster and laths are fundamentally sound, in high significance areas where preserving original surfaces is a priority (near cornices or ceiling roses). It is not suitable where failures are widespread, laths are broken/decayed, a more extensive repair or an independent new ceiling is more suitable.

To begin with a careful survey (tap tests, borescope) to map voids and establish protection to finishes and cornices. Drill small injection ports and vents at the mapped extents, lightly pre dampen to control suction, and inject lime based grout at low pressure, applying light, even clamping to consolidate the bond without over tightening. Where the original key is inadequate, introduce mechanical re fixes preferably washers into joists, or discreet micro pins near sensitive edges. Finally, make good the port holes with lime filler, touch up finishes with vapour open paints, and verify the repair by tap test and visual inspection.

Overall, this methodology is suitable as a targeted, heritage retentive fix where delamination is local and the laths are sound, useful for stabilising edges and cornice returns with minimal disruption. It's not appropriate for widespread failure or compromised laths, so for the Banqueting Hall not suitable.

Pros	Cons
Maximises retention of original fabric and finishes.	Skill dependent; risk of over pressurising or staining if poorly executed.
Breathable, compatible (lime based) materials.	Not effective where laths are broken/rotten or delamination is extensive.
Targeted scope, reduced disruption and waste. Targeted scope, reduced disruption and waste.	Potential telegraphing from repair washers if overused or poorly set out. Potential telegraphing from repair washers if overused or poorly set out.
With pins/washers, can extend service life without wholesale replacement.	Moisture problems must be resolved or adhesion may fail. Moisture problems must be resolved or adhesion may fail.

Screw and Washer Pinning

Targeted technique to re secure loose plaster by drawing it back to the substrate using low profile plaster repair washers and stainless steel screws into the existing joists or pattresses and using micro pins used where joists are inaccessible or near sensitive edges. It is a minimally intrusive, reversible method that can stabilise localised defects quickly.

This method is most appropriate where delamination is localised, the plaster remains largely sound, and laths are intact, but the original key is unreliable. It works well for small panels, edges, and selected high significance areas where retention is preferred (e.g. from cornices or around ceiling roses), provided fixings can be aligned to joists or discreet pattresses. It is not suitable for widespread failures, broken or decayed laths, any significant sagging, or where moisture problems remain unresolved.

To begin with, a careful survey is needed to map out the drumming areas, locate joists, and protect adjacent finishes and cornices. Pre mark fixing positions to align with joists; confirm there are no concealed services (use a detector/borescope). Drill pilot holes, then fix low profile plaster repair washers with stainless screws, tightening incrementally in a staggered pattern to draw the plaster back without crushing or dimpling the surface. Near sensitive edges or where joists are not accessible, install discreet stainless micro pins at shallow angles to anchor the plaster back to sound backing. Make good over the washers/pins using a lime filler and a fine lime skim as needed, allowing vapour to pass through.

Overall, this methodology is suitable as a quick, heritage retentive stabilisation for small areas, especially where you need to make safe or retain original finishes with minimal disruption. It is not appropriate as a whole ceiling solution or where lot of laths are compromised. For the Banqueting Hall, it can be used selectively to stabilise local edges or features prior to the planned full plasterboard replacement (with cornices retained), but not as the primary repair strategy.

Pros	Cons
Maximises retention of original plaster with quick, targeted stabilisation.	Skill and layout dependent.
Minimal disruption with reversible and compatible with lime make good.	Ineffective where laths are broken/rotten, delamination is widespread, or sag is significant.
Stainless fixings and lime make good can maintain breathability and durability.	Requires accurate joist location.
Can be combined with micro pins for discreet anchoring near sensitive edges.	Creates point fixings that can introduce local stiffness, with poor detailing may lead to hairline cracking around washers.

Traditional Patch Repairs

Traditional patch repair involves cutting back to sound edges, retaining and repairing laths where possible, and reinstating the build up with like for like haired lime plaster. Where laths are missing or decayed, replace with riven timber laths fixed in stainless steel. Any hair contents and finishes should be matched to the existing to maintain breathability, appearance, and performance. This is a minimally intrusive, heritage retentive approach suited to localised defects.

Typically, traditional patch repairs are undertaken where damage is localised (e.g., impact holes, small, failed panels or isolated areas of key loss) and the surrounding plaster/laths are fundamentally sound. It is particularly appropriate near cornices and ceiling roses where retention of original surfaces is a priority. It is not suitable where delamination is widespread, there is significant sagging, or laths are generally broken, rotten or there is a widespread loss of key. In those cases, broader remedial measures or an independent new ceiling will provide greater reliability and efficiency.

Begin with a careful survey and record of the affected area, including protection to adjacent finishes and cornices. Cut back failed plaster to firm, clean arises and gently rake and undercut edges for key. Assess laths, re-fix/sister loose laths or replace decayed sections with riven timber laths at appropriate centres, fixed with stainless nails/screws. Lightly pre-dampen to control suction. Apply a haired lime scratch coat (typically 8–10 mm), well keyed and allow an initial set and cure. Follow with a float coat (6–8 mm), straightened and scoured, then a fine lime finish feathered into the existing. Cure slowly (avoid forced drying) and redecorate with vapour open paints. Near cornices, maintain clear junctions and consider discreet micro pinning only if stability is questionable.

This is an excellent heritage retentive technique for small to moderate patches, preserving original fabric and visual continuity. It is not a whole ceiling solution and should not be used where failures are extensive.

Pros	Cons
Maximises retention of original fabric, seamless visual integration when well matched.	Not suitable for widespread delamination or significant sagging.
Breathable, compatible (haired lime) build-up; supports moisture performance.	Skilled craft required; longer curing times and environmental control needed.
Localised, minimally intrusive; reduced waste and easier consent pathway.	Programme can be variable due to curing and site conditions.
Like for like materials facilitate future conservation and reversibility.	Poor aggregate/hair matching or rushed curing risks micro-cracking and colour mismatch.

Adhesive Injection (Plaster Consolidation)

A further conservation led technique (but undertaking the repairs from above in the ceiling void), that strengthens failing lath and plaster ceilings by injecting a low viscosity acrylic stabilising resin into the voids between plaster and laths. The stabilising resin penetrates porous, deteriorated base coats and re-bonds the plaster to the wood lath substrate, recreating failed keys. This method is widely recognised in heritage practice as a minimally destructive, highly retentive approach for stabilising historic ceilings where the plaster surface is to be preserved.

This approach is most appropriate where the plaster remains intact at the surface, but hollow or “drummy” areas indicate detachment from laths. It works well where original keys have failed through age, vibration, or moisture cycles, but the laths themselves remain largely sound. Because consolidation strengthens the entire system from within, it is suitable for moderate areas of delamination or early stage sagging so long as the plaster matrix has not lost structural integrity. It is commonly applied in high significance interiors where retention of original plasterwork is required and where widespread screwing would be visually or materially inappropriate.

The process begins with a condition survey from above, identifying loose zones and cleaning out accumulated plaster crumbs and dust where keys have broken. Small access holes are drilled between the laths. The stabilising resin is then injected so that it migrates through the voids and saturates the friable base coats. This allows the resin to reform a bond with the timber substrate. Temporary clamping is undertaken and is used to hold the plaster tight while the adhesive cures, after the clamps are removed and holes are made good with lime-based filler. This preserves breathability and avoids incompatibility with original materials.

Overall, adhesive injection provides a long term, reversible, and fabric retentive means of stabilising lath and plaster ceilings. It is not suitable where laths are broken or decayed, where plaster has lost cohesion (soft, powdery base coats), where significant sag has already occurred, or where water ingress continues to compromise the substrate. For the Banqueting Hall, this method will likely not be acceptable to due requiring a redecoration of the ceiling included in the works, however this method is typically quite low costing, fairly simple and minimally invasive.

Pros	Cons
Re-bonds plaster to laths, restoring structural integrity and re-forming failed keys.	Not suitable where the plaster base coats are friable, powdery, or heavily decayed.
Minimally invasive with very limited surface disruption.	Ineffective where laths are broken, rotten, or missing.
Strengthens the entire plaster matrix internally rather than creating local point fixings.	Requires specialist materials, controlled injection, and experienced conservation operatives.
Reversible and compatible with lime-based make-good materials, maintaining breathability and fabric integrity.	May require temporary clamping; access from above must be feasible and safe.

Structural Crack Repairs & Redecoration

Crack repairs to points of structural failure will be remediated through traditional crack stitching methodologies. This entails the cutting back of plaster and bed joints to brickwork and in some cases, include removal of brickwork in isolated locations and the inclusion of stainless steel reinforcement across vertical cracks and within bed joints in accordance with good conservation practice.

The use of helifix, helicoil type crack stitching solutions have been commonly used for conservation works of this nature and are designed to be hidden behind or beyond finishes and to form a structural sheer prevention reinforcement to masonry walls under compression loads.

We anticipate these reinforcement bars being inserted at various centres vertically and over openings where structural cracking has manifested itself.

One inserted, these areas will be subsequently encapsulated in a remedial lime based plaster repair, using traditional conservation techniques and principles and most likely use of hydraulic lime for plastering repairs designed to match existing.

Redecoration to wall surfaces will be the use of conservation focussed water based paints such as KEIM or similar. These will be odour free and from sustainable production but also designed for use on lime based finishes for breathability and moisture evaporation. A key aspect will also be focussed on BS 476 Class 0 surface spread of flame, the highest level of fire spread mitigation that exist under British Standards.

Timber joinery will be redecorated in more conventional water based gloss paints where previously decorated whilst varnished hardwood timber joinery will be rub down and recoated as required using a water based finish for achieving similar BS 476 Class 0 Spread of flame standards.

Conclusions

Assessment of the Banqueting Hall ceiling has established that whilst there is some deterioration, the existing ceiling does not present a single point of failure, the extent of distributed delamination demonstrates the need for a coordinated, whole ceiling stabilisation strategy rather than fragmented or small scale repairs, in order to prevent any future repairs.

After evaluating the available remedial options, screw and washer pinning is concluded to be the most appropriate conservation technique for widespread stabilisation. Unlike adhesive or grout injection, which relies strongly on the presence of sound keys, screw and washer pinning provides a mechanical means of reattaching plaster to the substrate even where the key is largely lost. Similarly, traditional patch repairs are suitable only for discrete areas and would not effectively address deterioration occurring across the wider ceiling surface.

Screw and washer pinning offers a controlled, low intrusive, and reversible solution that aligns with heritage conservation best practice. It can be deployed across significant areas of delaminated plaster, using stainless-steel fixings and low-profile washers to draw the plaster back into plane without imposing excessive force. The technique allows the ceiling to be stabilised in situ, preserving original fabric wherever possible and minimising disruption to the ornate cornices and ceiling roses.

In addition, with the requirement of decorating the ceiling there is no need to undertake remedial works from the ceiling void above.

This appraisal concludes that screw and washer pinning represents the most balanced approach in terms of conservation integrity, practical deliverability, and long term stabilisation of the Banqueting Hall ceiling.

Structural cracking will be repaired using stainless crack stitching techniques and surface finishes made good to match existing, using traditional based plaster methodologies.

Redecoration works will utilise conservation paints which meet BS 476 Class 0 surface spread of flame criteria but also allow for vapour permeability and meet sustainable production and low VOC criteria.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Salisbury City Council proceed with screw and washing pinning as the preferred remedial technique for widespread stabilisation of the Banqueting Hall ceiling. This method is the most suitable among the assessed conservation techniques for addressing extensive delamination, as it provides mechanical restraint across large areas while retaining the majority of the historic fabric.

Large scale pinning works should be preceded by a detailed mapping of delamination, joist location, and areas requiring micro-pins where joists cannot be accessed. Protection should be provided to decorative plaster elements, including the enriched cornices and ceiling roses, during the works. Stainless steel fixings and low profile plaster repair washers should be specified to ensure long-term durability and compatibility with the historic setting. Works should be undertaken by specialist conservation contractors experienced in heritage plaster stabilisation.

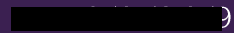
Localised patch repairs or adhesive injection may still be used selectively where appropriate, but their role should be secondary to the overarching screw and washer stabilisation strategy. A pre-construction intrusive investigation phase is recommended to confirm the full extent of delamination and ensure accurate design and pricing.

Crack stitching will be utilising cut and fix brick stitching techniques and remediation to wall and ceiling finishes, designed to be sympathetic with original finishes.

Redecoration works will focus on client design aspiration, utilising conservation paint system entirely in keeping with conservation practice and do not inhibit moisture migration and evaporation through the structure and do not undermine the robustness of passive fire protection.

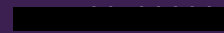
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