



Heritage Impact Statement

Salisbury Guildhall Works

24 March 2026



The Value of Certainty.

Contents

Version Control	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Site Description and Historical Context	4
3. Statement of Significance	5
3.1 Historic Significance	5
3.2 Architectural or Aesthetic Significance	5
3.3 Archaeological Significance	6
3.4 Communal or Social Significance	6
4. Condition and Need for Works	6
4.1 Overview of Building Condition	6
4.2 Banqueting Hall Ceiling Condition	6
4.3 Structural Cracking to Masonry Walls	7
4.4 Environmental and Material Factors	7
4.5 Risk of Inaction	7
4.6 Justification for Intervention	8
5. Proposed Works	8
5.1 Ceiling Stabilisation	8
5.2 Structural Crack Repairs	9
5.3 Plaster Repairs	9
5.4 Decorative Finishes and Materials	9
6. Impact Assessment	10
6.1 Overview of Impact	10
6.2 Impact on the Banqueting Hall	10
6.3 Heritage Benefits and Justification	10
7. Planning Policy Context	10
8. Conclusion	11

Version Control

Version	Date	Description of revision	Prepared by	Checked by	Authorised by
1.0	27/05/2026		Lucas Main	Paul O'Brien	

Distribution list

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1. Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) has been prepared on behalf of Salisbury City Council in support of an application for Listed Building Consent (LBC) for conservation works to Salisbury Guildhall.

The assessment considers the potential impact of proposed works on the significance of the Grade II* listed building and demonstrates how the proposals align with conservation best practice and statutory requirements.

The proposed works comprise:

- Stabilisation of the Banqueting Hall lath and plaster ceiling.
- Structural crack repairs to masonry walls.
- Associated localised plaster repairs and redecoration.

The purpose of the works is to ensure the long term preservation, safety, and continued functional use of the Banqueting hall at the Guildhall.

Address: **Salisbury Guildhall, Market Place, Salisbury, SP1 1JH**

2. Site Description and Historical Context

Salisbury Guildhall is a Grade II* listed civic building constructed circa 1795, representing a significant example of late Georgian municipal architecture. The building occupies a prominent position within Salisbury Market Place and forms an important part of the city's historic core.

The structure is of traditional solid masonry construction, comprising:

- Loadbearing brick and limestone walls.
- Lime plaster internal finishes.
- Timber floor and roof structures.

The Banqueting Hall is one of the principal spaces within the building and is of high heritage significance. It contains:

- Ornate plaster cornices.
- Decorative ceiling roses.
- Traditional lath and plaster ceiling construction.

The ceiling is understood to have been reconstructed in the late 20th century using traditional materials and techniques, maintaining the historic character of the space.

3. Statement of Significance

3.1 Historic Significance

Salisbury Guildhall in Market Place, Salisbury is a Grade II* listed civic building constructed in 1795 and has served as the principal centre of civic administration, governance and ceremonial activity within the city for over two centuries. The building occupies a prominent position within Market Place and forms an important component of Salisbury's historic urban environment.

The Guildhall has long been associated with public life in Salisbury, it is understood that the origins of the Guildhall date back early 14th century built under governance of the Bishop of Ghent and knowns as the Bishops Guildhall, serving as court for civil and criminal justice.

The Guildhall was subject to expansion and change within 16-18th centuries culminating in the demolition of the former dilapidated civic building with the reconstruction of the current building in its Georgian architectural form, in late 1700s, designed by Sir Robert Taylor and William Pilkington. It is anticipated that the current site has been built utilising aspects of in part, the foundations of the formative late medieval building. The grand jury room was understood to be added in 1829 with further iterations of change occurring over the last century.

The building, which had been the meeting place of the municipal borough of Salisbury throughout much of the 20th century, became the headquarters of Salisbury District in 1974. All magistrates' court hearings in Salisbury were held in the courtroom in the west wing of the guildhall.

The building, which had been the meeting place of the municipal borough of Salisbury throughout much of the 20th century, became the headquarters of Salisbury District in 1974. The Guildhall has therefore been synonymous in accommodating council functions, civic ceremonies, public gatherings and community events including former magistrates court since its medieval . Its continued use for these purposes contributes significantly to its historic interest and evidential value. The building illustrates the development of local government and civic administration during the late Georgian period and remains an important symbol of the city's civic identity.

3.2 Architectural or Aesthetic Significance

The Guildhall is a significant example of mid- Georgian civic architecture and derives considerable significance from both its external appearance and historic internal spaces. Constructed using traditional masonry materials with timber floors and roof structures, the building retains a high proportion of historic fabric and architectural character.

Particular significance is attached to the Banqueting Hall, which is one of the principal ceremonial spaces within the building. The hall contains decorative dentiled plaster cornices, ceiling roses and traditional lath and plaster ceiling construction which contribute substantially to the building's special architectural interest. The historic oil paintings and decorative interior features further enhance the aesthetic quality and significance of the space.

The former magistrates courtroom has is typically arranged in a formalised layout reflecting judicial hierarchy and process. Key spatial characteristics include:

- A raised magistrates' bench, emphasising authority and visibility.
- A defined area for defendants and legal representatives.
- Public seating or gallery, reinforcing the principle of open justice.
- Controlled circulation routes separating magistrates, court staff, and public.
- The legibility of this arrangement is central to its heritage significance, as it expresses the functional and symbolic requirements of the judicial system. The interior layout of the court comprise predominantly oak raised and fielded timber panelling and traditional joinery with simple but formal detailing appropriate to a civic courtroom comprising dock, witness stand, bench seating and judges bench to preside over judicial proceedings.

The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury – Conservation works

While some alterations may have occurred over time to accommodate changing operational standards, surviving historic fabric and layout are likely to retain evidential value.

3.3 Archaeological Significance

The proposed works are limited to internal conservation repairs, localised structural stabilisation and redecoration within the existing building fabric. No below ground works are proposed as part of this application and therefore the archaeological significance of the site is not considered to be affected by the proposals.

The Guildhall occupies a historically important location within the centre of Salisbury and the wider site may possess archaeological interest associated with the historic development of the city, particularly related to the former Bishops Guildhall late medieval building situated on the site. However, the proposed works do not involve any excavation or disturbance of archaeological deposits and therefore no impact upon archaeological significance is anticipated.

3.4 Communal or Social Significance

The Guildhall has considerable communal significance as a long established civic and public building serving the residents of Salisbury. The building continues to accommodate civic functions, council activities, weddings, receptions, community events and public gatherings, maintaining its historic role at the centre of civic life.

The Banqueting Hall in particular remains an important venue for ceremonial and social functions and is widely recognised as one of Salisbury's principal public spaces. The continued use of the building supports its communal value and ensures that its historic significance remains accessible to both residents and visitors. The proposed conservation works will help safeguard the building's continued use and enjoyment for future generations.

4. Condition and Need for Works

4.1 Overview of Building Condition

Salisbury Guildhall is a historic structure of traditional masonry construction, and as with many buildings of this age, it exhibits signs of long-term material ageing, environmental exposure, and structural movement. Previous investigations have identified a range of defects affecting both the internal finishes and structural elements of the building.

While the building remains generally stable and continues to function in its current use, a number of defects have been identified which, if left unaddressed, have the potential to result in progressive deterioration of historic fabric and increased risk to occupants. The proposed works are therefore preventative and conservation focused, aimed at stabilising existing elements rather than replacing them.

4.2 Banqueting Hall Ceiling Condition

The Banqueting Hall ceiling is of traditional lath and plaster construction, understood to have been reconstructed in the late 20th century using materials and techniques consistent with historic practice. Despite this relatively recent reconstruction, the ceiling now exhibits signs of deterioration associated with some vulnerabilities of lath and plaster systems.

Investigations have identified the following key defects:

Loss of plaster key:

The primary mechanism of deterioration is the failure of the plaster key that secures the plaster to the timber laths above. This has resulted in areas of delamination between the plaster and its supporting substrate.

The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury – Conservation works

Localised sagging and deflection:

In areas where the key has weakened or failed, sections of the ceiling exhibit slight sagging, indicating a loss of structural integrity within the plaster layer.

Previous localised failure:

A partial ceiling failure occurred circa 2018–2019, demonstrating that the system is capable of localised collapse where deterioration is more advanced.

Temporary restraint measures:

Following the previous failure, temporary interventions were installed, including plywood boarding and fibreglass netting fixed to the underside of the ceiling. While these measures have reduced immediate risk, they are not considered a suitable long term solution and detract from the architectural integrity of the space.

Distributed deterioration:

The deterioration is not isolated to a single area but occurs across multiple zones of the ceiling. This indicates that the ceiling is no longer functioning as a unified structural system and requires a coordinated stabilisation approach.

Although current inspections indicate that the ceiling is broadly stable, it is considered to be approaching the end of its serviceable life. Without intervention, there is a foreseeable risk of further localised failures, which could result in loss of historic fabric and potential safety hazards within a publicly accessible space.

4.3 Structural Cracking to Masonry Walls

A programme of structural investigation has identified cracking within masonry walls across several areas of the building, including the Crown Court, Oak Court, basement, and roof void.

The principal characteristics of the various cracking found within the Guildhall are as follows:

- A primary crack line extends vertically through multiple storeys of the building, indicating structural masonry cracking rather than superficial plaster defects.
- Crack widths vary across the building, with some areas exhibiting moderate to severe cracking (up to approximately 35mm in isolated locations), suggesting historic and progressive movement.
- The alignment and continuity of cracking indicate long term differential movement within the building, likely influenced by a combination of ground conditions, historic settlement, and thermal affects.
- In certain areas, such as Oak Court, movement to structural openings (including door frames) has been observed, further evidencing movement within the masonry.

Despite the presence of these defects, there is no evidence of imminent structural failure. The cracking is considered to be historic or slow progressive in nature. However, without intervention, there is potential for continued movement, further opening of cracks, and associated deterioration of masonry and finishes.

4.4 Environmental and Material Factors

The condition of the building is influenced by a number of environmental and material factors typical of historic structures. It is found on chalk geology with localised sand and gravel deposits. While generally stable, such conditions can be susceptible to long term differential settlement, particularly where groundwater levels fluctuate. With elevated moisture levels, particularly at lower levels of the building, contribute to material degradation, including plaster deterioration and salt migration within masonry.

In addition, traditional materials such as lime plaster and timber laths are inherently susceptible to gradual deterioration over time, particularly to environmental fluctuations. Previous repairs and alterations, including temporary ceiling supports, have altered the way loads are distributed within certain elements, contributing to localised stress and behaviour changes.

4.5 Risk of Inaction

If the identified defects are not addressed, the following risks are likely:

The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury – Conservation works

- Continued loss of plaster key and potential for further localised ceiling collapse.
- Progressive widening of structural cracks and deterioration of masonry.
- Increased risk to occupants in publicly accessible areas.
- Loss of historic fabric through uncontrolled failure rather than managed repair.
- Greater scope and cost of future intervention.

Given the Guildhall's active use as a public venue, these risks need to be reduced and required appropriate intervention.

4.6 Justification for Intervention

The proposed works are necessary to ensure the long-term preservation and safe use of the building. The interventions are justified on the basis that they:

- Address identified structural and material defects in a controlled manner.
- Prevent further deterioration and loss of historic fabric.
- Replace temporary previous interventions using conservation led solutions.
- Maintain the building's functionality as a civic and public space.
- Represent the minimum level of intervention required to achieve stability.

The works have been developed in accordance with conservation best practice, prioritising repair over replacement and ensuring compatibility with the existing historic fabric.

Prior to commencement, vulnerable historic features within the working areas will be protected. This will include decorative plasterwork, joinery, fixed paintings, chandeliers and other significant interior features where applicable. Where paintings or removable decorative items are present, these will either be temporarily removed by Salisbury City Council or protected in situ, subject to their condition and method of fixing. Works will be undertaken by specialist contractors with experience in historic building conservation.

5. Proposed Works

5.1 Ceiling Stabilisation

The proposed stabilisation of the Banqueting Hall ceiling will be undertaken using a low impactive screw and washer pinning system, selected as the most appropriate and sensitive method for addressing widespread delamination while retaining the maximum amount of existing fabric, whilst minimising the implications on disruption to existing finishes.

The technique involves the careful re-securing of loose or delaminated plaster back to the supporting timber laths and joists above through the use of stainless steel screws and low profile plaster repair washers. Fixings will be installed in a controlled and evenly distributed pattern across affected areas to gently draw the plaster back into plane without introducing excessive localised stress.

All fixings will be set slightly below the finished surface and subsequently concealed using compatible lime-based plaster repairs, ensuring that the visual integrity of the ceiling is preserved.

This approach has been selected in preference to more invasive alternatives as it:

- Retains the majority of the existing plasterwork.
- Provides a reliable and immediate mechanical means of stabilisation.
- Is reversible and does not rely on the condition of existing plaster keys.
- Minimises disturbance to significant historic features.

The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury – Conservation works

The works will be undertaken by specialist conservation contractors experienced in historic plaster repair to ensure appropriate handling of fragile materials.

5.2 Structural Crack Repairs

Structural cracks within the masonry walls will be repaired using a conservation appropriate crack stitching system designed to restore structural continuity while maintaining compatibility with the existing fabric.

The proposed method involves the installation of stainless steel helical reinforcement bars within the horizontal bed joints of the masonry, spanning across identified cracks. The bars will be set within a lime based grout, allowing for flexibility and breathability in line with traditional construction.

The works will be undertaken in a controlled and localised manner, including:

- Careful raking out of mortar joints to receive reinforcement.
- Installation of reinforcement at regular vertical intervals across the crack line.
- Reinstatement of joints using lime mortar to match existing finishes.

Where necessary, localised areas of plaster may be removed to facilitate access to the masonry. These areas will be reinstated following completion of the repairs using compatible lime-based plaster systems.

This method has been selected due to it provides effective structural reinforcement without the need for extensive rebuilding and minimises loss of historic masonry fabric.

All works will be carried out by appropriately qualified contractors with experience in historic masonry repair, ensuring that interventions are both technically appropriate and sensitive to the building's heritage significance.

5.3 Plaster Repairs

Localised plaster repairs will be undertaken where required to facilitate the ceiling stabilisation and crack repair works, as well as in areas of existing deterioration. Damaged plaster will be carefully removed back to sound material, with particular care taken to protect adjacent historic features such as cornices and ceiling roses. All repairs will be carried out using compatible lime based plaster to match the existing composition and finish, ensuring breathability and consistency with the historic fabric.

Redecoration will follow using conservation appropriate, vapour permeable paint systems suitable for lime plaster surfaces. Works will generally be limited to affected areas, although broader redecoration may be undertaken to achieve a consistent finish.

5.4 Decorative Finishes and Materials

The proposed redecoration works will be undertaken following completion of the ceiling stabilisation, structural crack repairs and localised plaster repairs. Existing decorative plaster features, including cornices, ceiling roses and mouldings, will be retained and protected during the works.

Where existing plaster is disturbed, repairs will be undertaken using compatible lime-based plaster to match the existing substrate and finish. Redecoration to lime plaster surfaces will use breathable, vapour-permeable conservation paint systems suitable for historic fabric. Impermeable modern paint systems will not be used on lime plastered surfaces.

Where decorative wallpaper, feature panels or enhanced decorative finishes are proposed, these will be limited to designated wall areas and selected to complement the civic and historic character of the Banqueting Hall. Final colours, wallpapers and decorative finishes will be agreed at a later date.

The decorative works are intended to improve the presentation of the principal interior while preserving the architectural and historic significance of the space.

6. Impact Assessment

6.1 Overview of Impact

The proposed works have been carefully developed to address identified defects while minimising impact on the heritage significance of Salisbury Guildhall. The approach is conservation led, prioritising repair over replacement and retaining the maximum amount of existing historic fabric.

The interventions are localised and targeted, focusing only on areas where deterioration has been identified. As such, the overall impact on the building is limited and controlled, with the primary goal being the preservation rather than alteration.

6.2 Impact on the Banqueting Hall

The Banqueting Hall is a space of high significance, and particular care has been taken to ensure that the proposed works preserve its character and appearance.

The ceiling stabilisation works will retain the majority of the existing plasterwork, including decorative elements such as cornices and ceiling roses. The screw and washer pinning system will be largely concealed within the finished surface, ensuring that the visual appearance of the ceiling remains unchanged following completion.

Temporary measures currently in place, including netting and boarding, will be removed as part of the works. This will enhance the visual quality of the space and restore its intended architectural character.

The presence of historic oil paintings within the hall has also been considered. These will be protected or temporarily removed during the works to prevent damage, ensuring that their contribution to the significance of the space is preserved.

6.3 Heritage Benefits and Justification

The proposed works deliver clear and substantial heritage benefits, including:

- Securing the long term stability of the Banqueting Hall ceiling.
- Preventing further deterioration of structural masonry.
- Retaining and conserving historic fabric.
- Removing unsympathetic temporary interventions.
- Supporting the continued viable use of the building as a civic space.

These benefits outweigh the limited and justified level of harm associated with the works.

The proposals represent the minimum level of intervention necessary to address the identified issues and are consistent with conservation best practice.

7. Planning Policy Context

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, special regard must be given to the desirability of preserving the listed building, its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

The National Planning Policy Framework requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by proposed works, including any contribution made by their setting. It also requires any harm to significance to be clearly justified and weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The Guildhall, Market Square, Salisbury – Conservation works

The proposed works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of Salisbury Guildhall by securing deteriorating fabric, repairing structural defects, retaining significant internal features and supporting the continued use of the building as a civic and public venue. Any harm arising from localised disturbance of finishes is considered less than substantial and is outweighed by the heritage and public benefits of the works.

8. Conclusion

This Heritage Impact Assessment has considered the significance of Salisbury Guildhall, a Grade II* listed building of considerable architectural, historic, and communal value, and has assessed the potential impact of the proposed conservation works on that significance.

The assessment demonstrates that the identified defects, including deterioration of the Banqueting Hall ceiling and structural cracking within the masonry, present a clear and justified need for intervention. Without appropriate remedial works, there is a foreseeable risk of further deterioration, loss of historic fabric, and potential harm to occupants, particularly given the building's continued use as a public and civic venue.

The proposed works have been developed in accordance with established conservation principles, prioritising minimum intervention, retention of existing fabric, and the use of compatible, traditional materials. Techniques such as screw and washer ceiling stabilisation and masonry crack stitching have been selected as they provide effective and proportionate solutions while avoiding unnecessary removal or replacement of historic elements.

Importantly, the proposals will deliver clear and substantial heritage benefits, including securing the long-term stability of the Banqueting Hall ceiling, addressing structural defects within the building fabric, and enabling the continued safe and viable use of the Guildhall. The removal of temporary and unsympathetic interventions will further enhance the character and appearance of the principal interior space, whilst of course addressing the significant health and safety risks associated with sudden failure of the lime plaster ceiling.

It is considered that the public and heritage benefits of the proposals decisively outweigh the limited level of harm identified and therefore, concluded that the proposed works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of Salisbury Guildhall, and supports our Listed Building Consent application.

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