



Comment on Planning Application 22/03350/FUL 1 Broom Close, 136-138 & site of former 126 London Road (Revised drawings uploaded 31 July 2025)

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Summary

Hallamshire Historic Buildings objects to this latest proposal. We consider that it offers only minimal and token recognition of the historic significance of the former Highfield Cocoa and Coffee House while destroying much of its historic character. The proposed building for the site of 126 London Road is inappropriate in form, scale, style and materials and will do serious harm to the 19th century streetscape and the setting of the Cocoa House.

In summary, our objections are as follows:

- The information provided by the applicant incorrectly limits the significance of the heritage asset to the decorative elements of the façade and ignores the impact to the streetscape both as setting to the Cocoa House and as a heritage asset, so fails to comply with their obligation under National Planning Policy Framework¹ paragraph 207;
- The advice that the applicant implies they have received from the Council fails to identify correctly the conflict between the proposal and the heritage asset's significance and so does not comply with the Council's obligation under NPPF 208 to minimise that conflict;
- The proposal is destructive of much of the evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value² of the Cocoa House, a Non-Designated Heritage Asset of special importance;
- The proposal is very damaging to the unique and historic 19th century streetscape of London Road, which is also a Non-Designated Heritage Asset and forms the setting of the Cocoa House and nearby contemporaneous Listed Buildings;
- The design of new elements including both the changes to the Cocoa House and the scale, form, style and materials of the six-storey tower is contrary to the definition of well-designed development in the National Design Guide paragraphs 41, 43, 48 and 53, requiring its refusal under NPPF 139;
- The design of new elements is also contrary to local policies BE5(a), BE5(c), H14(a) and CS74(c);

¹ All references to the National Planning Policy Framework refer to the version of December 2024, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>.

² As defined in Historic England's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/constructive-conservation/conservation-principles/>.

- The design of new elements is not supported by any documented local or national policy and does not in any sense meet the exceptions defined in policies including NPPF 139(b) and BE5(a);
- The proposal fails to comply with the requirement in NPPF 135(c) to be sympathetic to local character and history;
- The proposal is contrary to the letter and spirit of BE20 which encourages the retention of buildings of local historic interest;
- The incremental public benefit arising from the harmful elements does not outweigh the high degree of harm caused to one of the city's most important Non-Designated Heritage Assets, and so fails to satisfy the balanced judgement prescribed by NPPF 216;
- The requirement of NPPF 139 that development that is not well-designed be refused significantly and demonstrably outweighs the incremental public benefit arising from the harmful elements, and so there is no presumption in favour of sustainable development in the absence of up-to-date housing policy as described in NPPF 11(d)(ii).

Historic importance of the Cocoa House

The Highfield Cocoa and Coffee House, built for Frederick Thorpe Mappin in 1877 by prominent local architect Matthew Ellison Hadfield, is a Non-Designated Heritage Asset of special importance. In response to the applicant's previous attempts to demolish the building 127 objections were received, and the Council considered it of sufficient merit to seek a rare Article 4 direction removing the permitted development right to demolish, a step almost unprecedented in Sheffield. The building was subsequently added to the Local Heritage List,³ which contains only the most significant of the city's NDHAs.

It is clearly regarded by both the Local Planning Authority and the public as having special significance even compared with other NDHAs. Its preservation should therefore be a central priority of any proposal for its redevelopment, and its significance merits a weight that is second only to the statutory requirement that applies to Listed Buildings.

This should be taken into account when applying policy BE20 supporting the retention of unlisted historic buildings of local interest. It should be noted that this policy refers to the retention of buildings, rather than merely to elements thereof. This special significance should also carry great weight in applying NPPF 216.

The applicant's Heritage Statement is wrong and misleading in its isolation of the historic significance of the Cocoa House to the decorative elements of its façade, and also fails to recognise the importance of the mid-20th century changes. This reductive approach to significance that identifies it merely with the old and pretty parts of a building has long been discredited and it is surprising to find an applicant attempting to rely on such arguments.

Significance of the Cocoa House and impact of the proposal

Historic England's Conservation Principles identify four dimensions to the significance of a heritage asset: evidential, historical (which may be illustrative or associative), aesthetic and communal.

Evidential value

This derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. The Cocoa House does not provide any special or unique evidence, but in its form, scale and layout it does show how it and similar institutions supported the activities that took place there. More importantly, it demonstrates how such buildings were capable of being re-used for new purposes when their original purpose became redundant.

³ See entry at <https://local-heritage-list.org.uk/south-yorkshire/asset/12893>.

Historical value

These are the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

The Cocoa House has illustrative value as a separate, institutional building that intentionally creates a landmark in its environment through its overall form and design, while respecting the scale and vernacular forms and materials of its surroundings. It is designed to resemble a public house and the decorative elements (now lost on the ground floor) echoed the embellishments of contemporary establishments, but the building as a whole has some architectural distinction to create the sense of being a better and more edifying environment. This similar-but-different character is important in illustrating the contrasting approaches to the same purpose, of providing recreation for working people.

The illustrative value of places tends to be greater if they incorporate the first, or only surviving, example of an innovation of consequence, whether related to design, technology or social organisation. The Cocoa House, designed as a non-philanthropic, commercially sustainable enterprise, was the first of its kind in Sheffield, and an early purpose-built example in the national context, all or nearly all of its precursors being adaptations of existing buildings.

There is also very strong associative value relating to the temperance movement, the provision of facilities for a rapidly-expanding working population, and the involvement of both a major social benefactor in Frederick Thorpe Mappin and a prominent architect in Matthew Ellison Hadfield. How these figures chose to serve or take advantage of the movement and population change is expressed by the whole building in its scale, form, style and materials, of which the first floor decoration is only one element. In isolation, that limited decoration could have been applied by anyone to any purpose, but in the context of a whole building it shows how that building and its use were perceived and reflects the choices made by its founder and designer.

Aesthetic value

The Conservation Principles state that design value relates primarily to the aesthetic qualities generated by the conscious design of a building, structure or landscape *as a whole*.⁴ It embraces composition (form, proportions, massing, silhouette, views and vistas, circulation) and usually materials or planting, decoration or detailing, and craftsmanship. It may extend to an intellectual programme governing the design and the choice or influence of sources from which it was derived. It may be attributed to a known patron, architect, designer, gardener or craftsman.

The Cocoa House touches several of these points. The building was conceived by its patron and architect as having a particular scale and function, and a visual identity similar to that of a better class of public house. These are vital to an understanding of the building's original purpose, but are obscured or lost by eliminating all but a few decorative elements attached to what would be essentially a different building with a different scale, style and purpose. The changes already made to the ground floor have eroded the decorative appearance, but left the overall identity and form of the building largely untouched.

The Italianate design of the building is an important creative choice by the architect (who also created other buildings in the style such as the Royal Victoria Station Hotel), which distinguishes it as a higher-status institutional building in comparison with the simpler vernacular of surrounding residential and retail buildings of the same era. It is implemented in a stripped-down form that they would have been considered appropriate to an institution for working people and a commercially-viable budget set by the patron. The scale, extent of decorative and non-decorative elevations, proportion and roofscape are all essential to the style. The proposed changes would entirely destroy the architect's intention, retaining in isolation only the parts that modern taste considers pretty.

It is well established that roofscapes, especially roof covering materials and chimneys, are essential characteristics of Victorian architecture, spanning all types of building from the humblest domestic vernacular to spectacular civic institutions. Recent decisions such as those on 22/01020/FUL to require retention of chimneys and slate roof covering on the former cotton mill and workhouse building on Alma Street and 24/00410/FUL refusing the

⁴ Historic England, Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, paragraph 48.

demolition of chimneys at Albyn Works acknowledge this importance. The hipped, slate-covered roof, deep eaves and surviving chimneys all contribute significantly to the building's identity.

It is entirely false to consider that aesthetic value exists merely in the most decorative parts of a building, let alone that historical significance is represented by these alone. The Conservation Principles state clearly that these interact with other elements of the composition to create design value.

The Cocoa House roof is aesthetically and architecturally significant and its loss would seriously harm the significance of the heritage asset without justification.

Communal value

This arises from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. The Cocoa House closed in 1908, so its customers and their memories are long gone. However, the threat to the building and the rediscovery of its largely forgotten history resonated very strongly with the public, reviving that sense of communal value and stewardship, resulting in the very large number of objections to demolition and the reaction of the Council in seeking to protect the whole building from demolition.

It would be unreasonable to suggest that this reaction was based solely on the appreciation of the decorative qualities of a part of the façade. It is more plausible that the building as a whole, and the ideas, people and institution which it represents, caught the public imagination and that it is in the asset, not the terracotta moulding, that the communal value lies.

Historic importance of the streetscape

London Road is the ancient southern route out of the town of Sheffield. In 1756 it became part of the Sheffield and Chesterfield turnpike road, then in 1758 the Buxton and Sparrowpit Gate roads (the latter connecting onward to Manchester) and in 1812 the road to Baslow. Building progressed during the 19th century from the northern end at the foot of Sheffield Moor, spreading southwards with the increasing population. The oldest buildings include inns such as the 18th century Albion, but by the time of the 1851 Ordnance Survey plan there was more or less continuous building on both sides of the road from Sheffield to where the Cocoa House now stands, with a small number of larger properties set back from the road south of this point. The latter were replaced by more continuous building until the route was fully urbanised in the 1890s.

From the late 18th century Albion public house in the north to St. Barnabas church in the south, a distance of about 600 metres, the streetscape remains substantially as it was at the end of the 19th century. The increasing status of the town during this time can be traced in the increasing ambition of the architecture from north to south: the northern part consists mainly of simple early 19th century shops consistent with the development of the town at that time; while the southern part illustrates the increase during the latter part of the 19th century in both general prosperity, shown by grander scale and detailing, and population, shown by large public buildings.

The Cocoa House is positioned at a highly visible location on a bend, with an obvious intention to be a landmark and to be of the same standard as the other new public buildings along the road. These were all created within a few years, by architects of similar standing to M. E. Hadfield & Son, including Highfield Library (Edward Mitchell Gibbs 1876), St. Barnabas' church (Flockton & Abbott 1874-76) and Trinity Methodist church (John Dodsley Webster 1877-79). All are now listed at Grade II.

Remarkably, most of the buildings we see today are from the 19th century. Only at the very northern end, north of Boston Street to the west and Hill Street to the east has there been any erosion of this character with the appearance of a cluster of early 21st century buildings of up to six storeys. This degree of survival is unusual, and there is no other comparable example in Sheffield. The other turnpike routes in all directions have either seen significant replacement of earlier 19th century domestic buildings around the turn of the 20th century or more recent clearances and redevelopment. In its architectural form, styles, scale and materials London Road still appears very much as it did 125 years ago, and a significant proportion is older.

This streetscape is the context in which the Cocoa House and the Listed Buildings mentioned above are experienced and understood, and so forms their setting.

Impact to the streetscape and setting of heritage assets

The proposal will introduce assertively modern architectural forms in non-traditional materials into a highly visible primary landmark location, disrupting and irreparably damaging a rare 19th-century streetscape. The scale of the proposed tower is especially objectionable, given the almost entirely consistent scale of the street. It would stand isolated from and entirely unrelated to the recent larger buildings near the inner ring road.

The streetscape also forms the setting of the Cocoa House, which is one of a number of contemporaneous public buildings showing the expansion and increasing status of the town in the late 19th century. By damaging the streetscape the significance of the Cocoa House is harmed further. The loss of identity of the Cocoa House and the supplanting of its landmark role in turn harms the streetscape and the settings of nearby Listed Buildings.

It has been suggested that the tower blocks on Leverton Drive and Gardens provide a precedent for taller buildings. These do not form part of the London Road streetscape and do not disrupt the 19th century building pattern. They are merely visible from a street which maintains its 2-3 storey scale for nearly all its length, the nearest being some way north of the Cocoa House.

Proposed mansard roof

The proposal includes the creation of a two-storey mansard clad in seamed metal with projecting dormers on top of the Cocoa House, replacing the existing Victorian roof, claiming as a precedent Palatine Chambers in Pinstone Street, part of the Heart of the City development. This is based on a misunderstanding of how the Palatine Chambers roof came about.

The original elaborate Victorian roofscape of Palatine Chambers was removed during the 1970s and replaced with a poor-quality single-storey mansard of lesser height. By replacing this with the new roof that exists today the building's proportions were restored to be much closer to the architect's original intent. It would not have been financially feasible or realistically achievable to replicate the missing Victorian roofscape. Employing a contemporary material and design represented a substantial improvement to the building's appearance without risking any attempt at fakery.

The case of the Cocoa House is the exact opposite. The original Victorian roof survives intact, save for modifications to the chimneys. The proportions and appearance of the roofscape remain almost exactly as the architect intended, and are characteristic of a building of this age and type. Replacing the roof with a larger structure will destroy those proportions, demolish original fabric, and substantially alter the appearance without the justification of correcting previous unsympathetic changes.

Design of new build elements

National Design Guide

The National Design Guide⁵ provides strong guidance in respect of how new development should respond to Context and Identity. It defines criteria for a development to be well-designed, and paragraph 15 states that these are precisely those that if not met should lead to refusal according to NPPF 139.

Paragraph 41 states that well-designed new development responds positively to the features of the site itself and the surrounding context beyond the site boundary ... including the existing built development, ... layout, form, scale, appearance, details, and materials; local heritage ... and local character.

⁵ National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, January 2021, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>.

The proposal does not do this. The proposed mansard roof distorts the form and proportion of the historic building. The building and the surrounding streetscape are almost exclusively characterised by the use of traditional materials including red brick, dark grey slate roofs and buff sandstone dressing. The use of seamed metal cannot realistically be considered anything other than a direct contradiction of this prevailing style. The proposed tower is significantly out of scale with both the Cocoa House and the historic streetscape, has none of the detailing characteristic of surrounding buildings and adopts an entirely different form and appearance.

Paragraph 43 states that well-designed new development is integrated into its wider surroundings, physically, socially and visually. It is carefully sited and designed, and is demonstrably based on an understanding of the existing situation, including: the landscape character and how places or developments sit within the landscape ...; the architecture prevalent in the area, including the local vernacular and other precedents that contribute to local character, to inform the form, scale, appearance, details and materials of new development.

The proposal achieves none of this. The Cocoa House is positioned at a bend in London Road, an ancient road that was for centuries the main route between Sheffield and London, and is very obviously meant to be the principal landmark when approached from either direction. This vital role would be supplanted by the imposition of a much taller building, which in no way responds to the local vernacular or local character, including form, scale, appearance, details and materials.

Paragraph 48 states that well-designed places and buildings are influenced positively by ... the local vernacular, including historical building typologies ... the treatment of façades, characteristic materials and details.

As detailed above regarding the provisions of paragraphs 41 and 43, the proposal directly contradicts the important aspects of the local vernacular and historic buildings, including the Cocoa House, and reflects none of their façade treatments, characteristic materials or details.

Paragraph 53 states that well-designed new development is influenced by an appreciation and understanding of vernacular, local or regional character, including existing built form, landscape and local architectural precedents.

As detailed above, the proposal owes little or nothing to local architecture or landscape.

National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF 135(c) requires developments to be sympathetic to local character and history. This further reinforces the principles regarding form, scale, appearance, details and materials in the NDG, whose importance is indicated by their repeated restatement.

NPPF 139 states that development that is not well designed should be refused, and is one of the key policies which provides a reason for disregarding the presumption in favour of sustainable development, according to NPPF 11(d)(ii) (see below).

NPPF 139(b) states that weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings. However, the proposal offers nothing that is in any way outstanding, being very ordinary in its design; is far from being innovative, as it is derivative and not noticeably different to many other recent developments; does not fit into its surroundings; and in any case offers no particular sustainability benefit. The design of the historic buildings and streetscape is either inherently good or of historic interest, and although more recent buildings further north have very limited design merit the proposal does not improve on this.

Local Policies

Local policies are consistent with the very clear provisions of the NDG and NPPF, and should be given the same weight to reach the same conclusion:

- BE5(a) states that original architecture will be encouraged but new buildings should complement the scale, form and architectural style of surrounding buildings;
- BE5(c) requires that all extensions should respect the scale, form, detail and materials of the original building;
- H14(a) requires that new buildings and extensions are well designed and in character with neighbouring buildings;
- CS74(c) requires development to respect townscape and landscape character and associated scale, layout and built form, building styles and materials.

As noted above, the architecture of the proposals is not original, and in any case does not comply with local design policy.

National Design Guide and NPPF 11

HHB understands that Council is currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of land for housing, so it is necessary to consider the impact of NPPF 11(d) which states that permission should be granted to sustainable development where the policies most important for determining the application (in this case those that govern the provision of housing) are out-of-date. Limb (ii) states that this presumption will not apply where any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

The relevant key policies are identified in footnote 9, and include NPPF 135 and 139. The former requires (sub-paragraph (c)) that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment. The latter goes further to say that development that is not well-designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, contained in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

The proposal involves the partial destruction of a heritage asset that is important to local character and history, and the creation of a new building that is substantially at odds with the surrounding built environment, and so is directly in breach of NPPF 135(c). In several regards it fails the definition in the National Design Guide of “well-designed” development, and according to NPPF 139 should be refused. These, the latter in particular, could scarcely provide a clearer instance of adverse impacts significantly and demonstrably outweighing the benefits, which in this case amount to the provision of a relatively modest number of additional homes compared with what could readily be achieved without these impacts.

Mosaic and frieze

The alterations made for Barlow’s in the 1950s and 1960s created an appearance that has lasted for a substantial proportion of the building’s life. The mosaic tile cladding and impressed concrete frieze are of particular importance, characteristic of their time and recording the presence of one of the city’s major shopfitting firms at a time of substantial retail development in the city. It is subtly variegated and the alternating pattern of joints is unusual, showing a care typical of the era in the design choice. The frieze has been designed to reflect the building’s history and the city’s industrial past. The style is close to that of William Mitchell, although it is not one of Mitchell’s known works and is more likely to be by another artist influenced by him.

We strongly support the retention of both mosaic and frieze. However, the proposed overpainting of the mosaic is entirely inappropriate as it would obscure the delicate patterning and contrast with the solid black of the frieze panels. Permission to overpaint should not be granted, and provision made to prevent it in the future.

We regret that an area of mosaic on Keetons Hill has been damaged in an unnecessary attempt to assess the feasibility of its removal. It may be difficult to repair this seamlessly, so consideration should be given to commissioning an artwork covering part of this elevation, installed without further compromising the integrity of the mosaic, which both celebrates the history of the building and neighbourhood and conceals the repaired area.

Conclusion

We strongly recommend that this proposal be refused, and that the applicant be requested to advance another scheme which preserves the Cocoa House in its present form as a distinct two-storey building with hipped roof, retaining as much historic fabric as possible, without overpainting. Any new building on the site of 126 London Road should be within the prevailing 2-3 storey scale of the streetscape and of considerably greater architectural distinction than the current proposal.

If officers are minded to approve the scheme, this should only be done with the following amendments:

- The deep eaves which are an important part of the building's Italianate architecture must be retained or reproduced;
- The decorative and subtly variegated mosaic must not be overpainted, and a condition applied removing the permitted development right to overpaint;
- The damaged area of mosaic to be repaired as seamlessly as possible and consideration given to non-destructive installation of new artwork on part of this elevation.