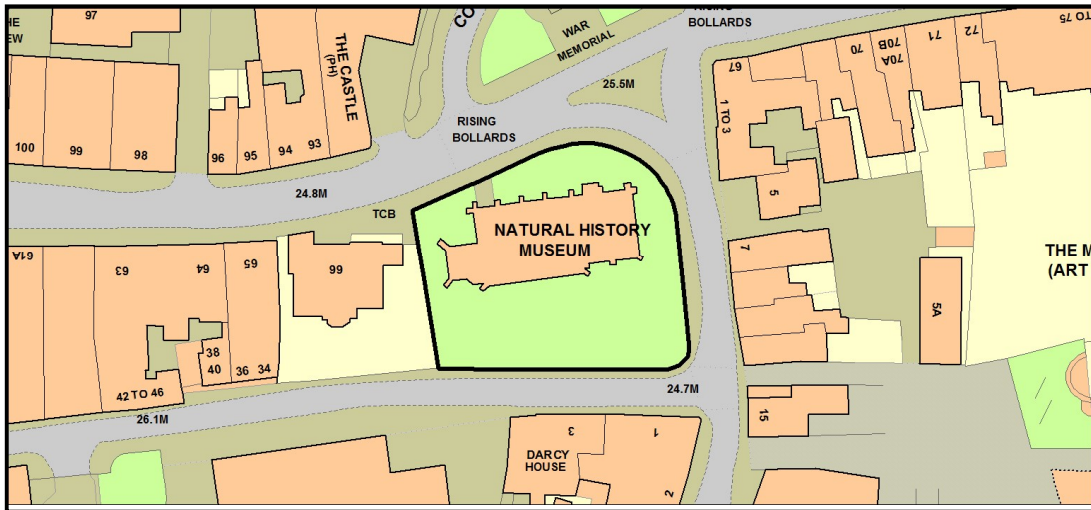




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Item No: 7.2

Application: 261422 (Planning Permission) and 261423 (Listed Building Consent)

Applicant: Mrs Pippa Pickles

Agent: Mr Stephen Nevard

Proposal: Repair and conservation of the West Tower, including works to the facade, structural repairs, a replacement roof and new external rainwater pipes.

Location: Natural History Museum, High Street, Colchester, CO1 1DN

Ward: Castle

Officer: Simon Grady

Recommendation: Approval

1.0 Reason for Referral to the Planning Committee

- 1.1 This application is referred to the Planning Committee because the applicant is the Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service at Colchester City Council.

2.0 Synopsis

- 2.1 The key issue for consideration is the impact of the proposed works on the heritage significance of the Natural History Museum, a Grade II listed building. As the proposal includes external alterations to the building which is located within the designated Colchester Conservation Area 1, consideration is given to their impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 2.2 The application is subsequently recommended for approval, subject to conditions. All relevant material planning and heritage considerations are assessed in the report below.
- 2.3 The planning application and listed building consent application relate to the same programme of works and are therefore considered together within this report. Whilst some matters discussed are principally relevant to the planning application and others principally relevant to the listed building consent application, the report should be read as a whole. Separate statutory and policy considerations apply to each application type and these are identified where relevant within the assessment.

3.0 Site Description and Context

- 3.1 The application relates to the Natural History Museum in Colchester High Street. The former church is listed at Grade II (NHLE List Entry Number 1123603 and its list description is as follows: *“Formerly church of All Saints, now the Natural History Museum. Late C12 nave, C14 chancel, good C16 west tower with knapped flint work. Restored mid C19. All Saints Museum forms a group with Nos 69 & 71 Culver street and Nos 1, 3 & 7 to 13 (odd) Queen Street”*.
- 3.2 Formerly The Church of All Saints, the Natural History Museum is situated in a prominent position on Colchester High Street opposite the Castle Bailey. The church incorporates fabric dating from the late Twelfth century, with evidence of Roman brick reuse. The building evolved through successive phases of development, including the rebuilding of the Chancel and addition of the West Tower in the Fourteenth century, the construction of the North Aisle and Chapel in the Fifteenth century and the rebuilding of the West Tower in the early Sixteenth century. Further alterations followed Civil War damage in the Seventeenth century, while a major programme of restoration was undertaken by H. Hayward in the mid-Nineteenth century, with additional repairs and enhancements into the early-Twentieth century. Following its redundancy as a parish church, the building was acquired by Colchester Borough Council and adapted to accommodate the Natural History Museum which opened in 1958.
- 3.3 The applications relate to the West Tower. In September 2024, an area approximately 2 metres by 2 metres detached from the upper eastern flint façade. The failed section was up to approximately 200mm thick. The collapse

required immediate safety measures, scaffold access and detailed investigation which informed the scheme of repairs that is proposed by the applications being considered here.

4.0 Description of the Proposal

4.1 The West Tower is a square structure approximately 20 metres high, comprising two internal timber floor levels and a concealed shallow-pitched roof behind the parapets. It is constructed with a composite masonry system consisting of inner and outer wall faces separated by a rubble core. The outer face is formed of knapped flint panels and the inner face of random rubble masonry, with deeper tying flints connecting the two layers at intervals. The architectural details of the Tower include ashlar quoins, horizontal stone courses, buttresses and a projecting stair turret on the South Elevation.

4.2 Unlike parts of the main body of the church, where brick courses interrupt the flint facing at regular intervals, the tower contains extensive uninterrupted panels of flintwork. These larger panels rely particularly upon the quality of the mortar, the tying flints and their bond with the rubble core. Following the partial collapse of a section of the East Elevation in September 2024, detailed investigations were carried out to determine the cause of the failure and inform an appropriate repair strategy. These investigations established that the Tower is constructed with a knapped flint outer facing bonded to a rubble core and revealed that historic cement-based repairs had impeded the wall's ability to breathe, contributing to the deterioration of the original lime mortar and weakening the bond between the facing and the core. Further inspections in 2025 and crack monitoring in 2026 found no evidence of significant ongoing structural movement. Therefore, the investigation concluded that the identified defects relate mainly to the deterioration of the flint facing layer, mortar joints and local masonry connections rather than any wider structural issues.

4.3 The Tower generally suffers from widespread failure of cementitious mortar repairs and associated decay of the original lime mortar. The investigation identified poor bonding between the flint facing and the rubble core, resulting in cracking, bulging, delamination and the localised collapse of masonry. Condition issues vary across the elevations and include further areas of potential detachment, movement at the junction of the stair turret and tower, damp-related deterioration, vegetation growth, defective rainwater disposal and extensive decay to stone dressings caused by inappropriate cement repairs. The parapets also exhibit displacement and open joints associated with corrosion of historic iron restraints. Internally, the timber floors show signs of deflection and localised historic cracking, although no evidence was found that the 2024 façade collapse had affected the inner face of the tower.

4.4 To address these issues, the application proposes a scheme of repairs as follows:

- Removal of cementitious repairs: Removal of defective cement pointing, render and stone repairs using carefully controlled hand methods to avoid damage to historic fabric.

- Flintwork repairs and rebuilding: Local dismantling and rebuilding of unstable flintwork using retained and matching replacement flints, repointed in a compatible lime mortar based on the findings of mortar analysis.
- Reconstruction of collapsed masonry: Rebuilding of the collapsed area to the east elevation using recovered materials where possible and reconnecting the flint facing to the tower structure.
- Structural stabilisation: Installation of concealed stainless-steel anchors, dowels and helical reinforcement to improve the connection between the flint facing, rubble core and stone dressings, and to stabilise areas affected by cracking and delamination.
- Corner strengthening: Localised concealed reinforcement to improve the structural integrity of the tower corners whilst minimising intervention to historic fabric.
- Stone repairs: Removal of inappropriate cement repairs and repair of deteriorated stonework through lime-based repairs, indents and limited replacement where necessary, including reinstatement of effective weathering details.
- Parapet repairs: Dismantling and rebuilding of unstable sections of parapet and replacement of corroded iron restraints with concealed stainless-steel alternatives where required.
- Rainwater disposal improvements: Installation of new rainwater outlets and downpipes to improve drainage and reduce water penetration into the masonry.
- Vegetation removal: Careful removal of vegetation in accordance with Historic England guidance to prevent further deterioration of the masonry.
- Re-roofing works: Installation of a new lead roof, upgraded drainage arrangements, safe access measures and improved provision for future maintenance.
- Weathervane repairs: Like-for-like repair, refurbishment and redecoration of the existing metal weathervane prior to its reinstatement.

5.0 Land Use Allocation

5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 Relevant Planning History

6.1 There is no site history that is particularly relevant to the decision regarding this proposed development.

7.0 Principal Policies

7.1 Planning law requires that applications for Listed Building Consent must be determined in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which sets out that “In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”

7.2 Applications for planning permission for development that affects listed buildings and their setting must be determined in accordance with Section

66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which requires that same regard to be given to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

- 7.3 Section 72(1) of the Act requires that, in the exercise of planning functions, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas.
- 7.4 Additionally, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that planning applications are determined in accordance with the local development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 7.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2026) must be taken into account in planning decisions and is a material consideration, setting out national planning policy. The NPPF's Section 20 "Conserving and enhancing the historic environment" provides the guidelines for the protection and conservation of heritage assets, including listed buildings. Policy HE6 determines that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be) (HE6.1). The policy also stresses that development proposals which would have a positive effect on a designated heritage asset should be supported (HE6.2)
- 7.6 Colchester's Development Plan is in accordance with the national policies and is made up of several documents as follows below.
- 7.7 Local Plan 2017-2033 Section 1
The shared Section 1 of the Colchester Local Plan covers strategic matters with cross-boundary impacts in North Essex. This includes a strategic vision and policy for Colchester. The Section 1 Local Plan was adopted on 1 February 2021. The following policies are considered to be relevant in this case:
- SP1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
 - SP7 Place Shaping Principles
- 7.8 Local Plan 2017-2033 Section 2
Section 2 of the Colchester Local Plan was adopted in July 2022. The following policies are of relevance to the determination of the current application:
- ENV1 Environment
 - DM15 Design and Amenity
 - DM16 Historic Environment
- 7.9 The application site is not located within an adopted Neighbourhood Plan area.

8.0 Consultations

- 8.1 The stakeholders who have been consulted and who have given consultation responses are as set out below. More information may be set out on our website.

Historic England

- 8.2 HE are supportive of these works subject to clarification on the choice of mortar mix to use, which has now been subsequently submitted by the agent.

Historic Buildings and Areas Officer

- 8.3 No objections. Comments incorporated in Section 17.0 of this report.

Archaeology Advisor

- 8.4 Having examined the submitted plans and documents, I can confirm that the proposed development will not result in material harm to the significance of below-ground archaeological remains. Therefore, there will be no requirement for any archaeological investigation in this case.

Essex Highway Authority

- 8.5 From a highway and transportation perspective the Highway Authority had no comments to make on the proposal but recommended the use of some Informatives, should planning permission be approved.

9.0 Parish Council Response

- 9.1 The site is not in a parished area.

10.0 Representations from Notified Parties

- 10.1 None Received

11.0 Accessibility

- 11.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. In consideration of the application, due regard has been given to the Local Planning Authority's duties under the Equality Act 2010. Taken as a whole, the proposed development does not raise any concerns from an accessibility or equality perspective.

12.0 Open Space Provisions

- 12.1 Not applicable

13.0 Planning Obligations

- 13.1 This application is not classed as a "Major" application and therefore there was no requirement for it to be considered by the Development Team and it is considered that no Planning Obligations should be sought via Section 106 (s.106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

14.0 Report

- 14.1 The main issues in this case are the Heritage considerations, in particular, the impact on the significance of the Grade II listed Natural History Museum and the impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (in respect of the planning application).

- 14.2 Historic England's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008) identify four main heritage values that attribute significance to heritage assets; these are evidential value, historical value, aesthetic value, and communal value. The Natural History Museum's special interest is the sum of these values and is reflected on the Grade II listed status.
- 14.3 The "Design, Access and Heritage Statement" by Purcell which accompanies the application summarises the significance of the building on page 10. The report notes that the former church is of high architectural significance as a medieval church retaining substantial Norman and later medieval fabric. Its historic plan form, flint construction, stone dressings and traditional craftsmanship contribute strongly to its special interest. The building derives historic and evidential value through its potential to illustrate the evolution of an urban parish church over several centuries and retains important evidence of historic construction techniques, materials and phases of repair. Following its redundancy as a parish church, the building has maintained its communal value through its continued use as Colchester Natural History Museum.
- 14.4 With regard to the West Tower, the report identifies its important contribution to the significance of the listed building. As a prominent Sixteenth century structure, it is a defining element of the church's architectural character and its presence within the townscape. The tower also holds evidential value through its surviving flint-and-rubble construction, stone dressings and historic structural features which illustrate traditional materials, craftsmanship and methods of construction. Its prominence in the street scene makes this a key component of the building's contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 14.5 The partial failure of the flint facing layer of the east elevation and the subsequent investigation and monitoring of the Tower's condition demonstrate the requirement for the proposed works that are necessary in order to address the ongoing deterioration of the Tower. The extensive investigations have identified a range of defects, including delaminated flintwork, deterioration of historic lime mortars, trapped moisture, corroding iron restraints and the failure of earlier cement-based repairs. In the absence of intervention, these defects are likely to lead to further loss of historic fabric, increased structural risks and continued deterioration of the listed building, as well as health and safety risks due to potential failures in other areas of the Tower.
- 14.6 The proposed works comprise the removal of inappropriate cement-based repairs, repair and rebuilding of unstable flintwork using compatible lime mortars, reconstruction of the collapsed section of the east elevation, localised stone repairs, parapet repairs, limited concealed structural reinforcement, improvements to rainwater disposal, vegetation removal, replacement of the lead roof and refurbishment of the existing weathervane. Collectively, these works seek to repair the damaged masonry but also to address the underlying causes of deterioration and secure the long-term conservation of the structure.
- 14.7 The repair strategy has been informed by established conservation principles and adopts a minimum intervention approach. The proposals seek to retain and

repair historic fabric wherever possible, with replacement limited to areas where this is demonstrably necessary. Original flints and stonework would be reused where practicable, while any replacement materials would be carefully matched to the existing fabric. The scheme has also been designed to ensure that interventions remain largely concealed, thus preserving the architectural character and appearance of the tower.

- 14.8 Where the works will involve localised loss of later repair materials and some intervention to historic fabric, these measures are considered necessary to safeguard the significance of the listed building. The removal of harmful cementitious repairs and their replacement with breathable lime-based materials will improve the performance of the historic masonry and ensure that similar defects will be avoided in the future. The repair of the failed flintwork section of the East elevation with the use of salvaged materials, together with the repair of stone dressings and parapets, will restore and enhance the Tower's appearance, also enhancing its contribution to the townscape.
- 14.9 The proposed masonry reinforcement, including anchors, dowels and other strengthening measures will be concealed within the fabric of the building and will not have any visual impact on its appearance. The only notable external change will result from the installation of new rainwater outlets on the North and South Elevation. The use of these features was considered essential for the project as the lack of any outlets was identified as one of the key factors contributing to the poor condition of the masonry, allowing water to penetrate and become trapped within the wall structure. Other works, such as the roof repairs and the repair and restoration of the weathervane will complement the masonry repairs, contribute to the long-term maintenance and restore its appearance.
- 14.10 In accordance with Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, considerable importance and weight has been given to the desirability of preserving the listed building, its setting and features of special architectural and historic interest. It is considered that the proposals would preserve, and in some respects enhance, the significance of the Grade II listed building through the repair and conservation of historic fabric.
- 14.11 In respect of impact on the Conservation Area, the West Tower forms a highly visible landmark within the High Street streetscape and makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of Conservation Area 1. The proposed works will repair areas of visible deterioration and reinstate failed historic fabric using appropriate traditional materials. As such, the proposals are considered to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

15.0 Planning Balance and Conclusion

- 15.1 The proposals would result in no harm to the significance of the Grade II listed building. Rather, they would secure its conservation through the repair of deteriorated historic fabric and the removal of inappropriate modern interventions.

15.2 Overall, the proposed works represent a conservation-led response to the defects and ongoing deterioration of the West Tower. The proposals will preserve and enhance the significance of the Grade II listed building through a schedule of appropriate repairs that will restore the fabric and appearance of the Tower. The works will also secure the long-term maintenance of the Tower, remove the health and safety hazard for the building which is in public use and restore its positive contribution to the townscape and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Therefore, the proposals comply with Sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the relevant heritage policies of NPPF (2026) and the Local Plan.

16.0 Recommendation to the Committee

16.1 The Officer recommendation to the Committee is for:

APPROVAL of planning permission and listed building consent, subject to the following conditions and Informatives:

Planning Permission Application

Conditions

1. Time Limit for Full Permissions

The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. Development to Accord With Approved Plans

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details in the submitted Structural Notes to Accompany Architect's Stage 3 Report (including all drawings), Tower Repairs Outline Specification dated 28/07/2026 and shown on drawing numbers 0060, 0200, 0230, 2100, 2101 and 2102.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the proposed development is carried out as approved.

3. Limits to Hours of Work

No demolition or construction work shall take place outside of the following times;

Weekdays: 08:00-18:00

Saturdays: 08:00-13:00

Sundays and Bank Holidays: No working.

Reason: To ensure that the construction phase of the development hereby permitted is not detrimental to the amenity of the area and/or nearby residents by reason of undue noise at unreasonable hours.

Informatives

Advisory Note on Construction & Demolition

The developer is referred to the attached advisory note *Advisory Notes for the Control of Pollution during Construction & Demolition Works* for the avoidance of pollution during the demolition and construction works. Should the applicant require any further guidance they should contact Environmental Control prior to the commencement of the works.

Informative on Any Application With a Site Notice

PLEASE NOTE that a site notice was erected in a publicly visible location at the site. Colchester City Council would appreciate your co-operation in taking the site notice down and disposing of it properly, in the interests of the environment.

Listed Building Consent Application

Conditions

1. Time Limit for LBCs

The works hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this consent.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 18(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. Development to Accord With Approved Plans

The works hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the details in the submitted Structural Notes to Accompany Architect's Stage 3 Report (including all drawings), Tower Repairs Outline Specification dated 28/07/2026 and shown on drawing numbers 0060, 0200, 0230, 2100, 2101 and 2102.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the proposed works are carried out as approved.

Informatives

Informative on All Listed Building Consents

PLEASE NOTE: This listed building consent relates solely to the plans, drawings, notes and written details submitted with the application or as subsequently amended in writing and referred to in this notice. Any variation of the works or additional works found necessary before work starts or while work is in progress may only be carried out after approval by the Local Planning Authority. Unauthorised modifications, alterations or works not covered by this consent may constitute an offence under Section 9 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and may render the applicant, owner(s), agent and /or contractors liable to enforcement action and/or prosecution.

Informative When Leadwork is to Occur

All leadwork should follow the codes and details recommended by the Lead Sheet Association.

Informative on Any Application With a Site Notice

PLEASE NOTE that a site notice was erected in a publicly visible location at the site. Colchester City Council would appreciate your co-operation in taking the site notice down and disposing of it properly, in the interests of the environment.