

THEME 05 A NEW LIFE FOR
HALIFAX HERITAGE



There are three key historic buildings that need to be rediscovered as part of the renaissance of the town centre:

1. THE PIECE HALL

PROPOSITION

While it is well documented how beautiful the inside of the Piece Hall is, in places the external walls are also superb and should be retained. But the Piece Hall must become the focus for a wide range of new uses that reinforce those already there, new uses which cannot be accommodated within the confines of the building itself. Rather, new buildings should be constructed around the periphery, each a new local landmark in its own right, but each accessed from within the Piece Hall itself, the central space of which becomes the vestibule for the wealth of new activities around it.

2. SOMERSET HOUSE

PROPOSITION

Halifax is full of very good, high quality buildings, most of which are on full display. However it also has a jewel that has become hidden and lost. Somerset House is a fine stately home that has become overwhelmed by the town, and is now known only by a minority.

3. ELSIE WHITELEY MILL & ADJOINING PROPERTIES

PROPOSITION

Reuse of land and buildings to close the gap between West Central Halifax and the town centre around the A55.

1: THE PIECE HALL

Right from the start of the Town Team's work, the Piece Hall was seen as central to the renaissance process. In many ways it is symbolic of the town as a whole - a construction of substantial and unique quality that is an icon for the town, but which lost its original function many years ago and has struggled to find a new role relevant to Halifax today. In the recent past it has come very close to oblivion, demolition being averted only on the Chairman's casting vote at a hung Council meeting, but even with the benefit of Council ownership, on behalf of and for the community, its poor economic performance has meant that on-going maintenance and restoration is always in doubt. The existing tenants are an important part of the future of the Piece Hall. But they need to be reinforced by a range of new activities.

At the first Town Team meeting, Yorkshire Forward announced that an examination of the future use of the Piece Hall would be funded as part of the Renaissance Programme, and that international architect Will Alsop would be commissioned to help explore the potential. He led a workshop with members of the Town Team at the planning and design weekend at the end of January 2003 (see Section 6) that formulated a brief for the regeneration of the Piece Hall, and he then went on to develop some of the ideas agreed at that

stage to illustrate what that brief might mean in practice. The main text here is the brief for the Piece Hall. Illustrations and annotations describe Will Alsop's responses to the brief.

The concept for the future of the Piece Hall is that the space immediately adjacent to the Piece Hall's exterior walls should be cleared, re-establishing the original green setting for the building and revealing a view of where the building meets the ground. This would become a continuous strip of new, usable public space for the town - a form of promenade.

The former Industrial Museum adjoining the Piece Hall on its east side is one option for the concentration of Calderdale's Museum Service, or it could be located in the Great Northern Shed. In the context of the Piece Hall, it is important mainly as an example of an activity that is housed outside the Piece Hall but accessed from within it. This is an important model for future use and development. It has a collection of artefacts that are important to the community and its history, but the building has little architectural merit and could be demolished, as should the adjoining Burger King. A new building would be a landmark in Winding Road and should respond positively to the street frontage.





Any new buildings around the Piece Hall would straddle this new promenade and connect to the Piece Hall in as minimal a way as possible. These new buildings would be entered from the central space of the Piece Hall via one of its gates, reaching the new facilities by passing through the existing structure. In this way the Piece Hall will become a foyer to a wide range of new uses active over much of the day and unconstrained by the spaces available within the existing building. The central space becomes a route to many other places as well as being a destination in itself.

The Town Team have considered the range of possible activities that would make this concept for the Piece Hall work and the following uses are proposed:

- a residential tower;
- a multi-screen cinema;
- an educational building;
- a conference facility that could include a recording studio and a 'youth club', and;
- live-work units.

In addition the existing market should be relocated out of the main space, possibly to lower Westgate, because it detracts from the relationship of the space with the building.

Flexibility is important in the central public space to cater for different uses during the year. A central water feature could animate the space and create an

event when the space was not being used for specific activities. The site could be gently terraced, making use of the natural fall. The water on each level of the feature could be controlled in such a way as to provide either an animated performance, completely disappear or perhaps simply a surface to reflect the sky.

WILL ALSOP'S PROMENADE AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE PIECE HALL BELONGS TO NEW ACCOMMODATION RAISED UP AROUND THE OUTSIDE OF THE PIECE HALL AND ACCESSED FROM WITHIN IT



WILL ALSOP'S PLAN OF THE PIECE HALL SHOWING THE CONNECTING ROUTES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT AROUND IT

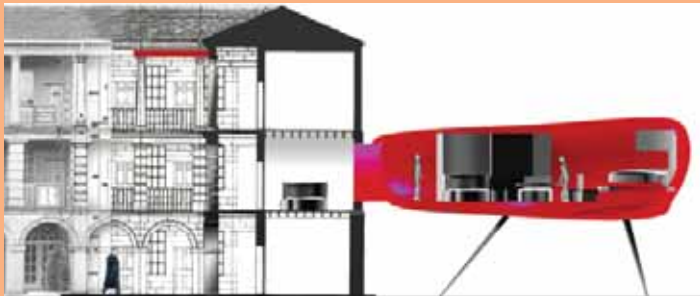
Whether the central space should be covered or not is by no means clear cut, and the Town Team has advocates on both sides. Weather protection is the strongest argument in favour, guaranteeing the use of the space for events year round. However against this is the view that the integrity of the building design would be compromised by any roof structure and that the strongest relationship is between the space and the sky with Beacon Hill and the church spire as key features. Any permanent roof structure would weaken this relationship. As a compromise approach to this dichotomy a sliding roof is proposed which could retain views of the sky and provide cover in adverse weather. The roof could be of a very light material (such as ETFE) supported on a very light frame on a structure totally independent of the building. The space would be open most of the time but could be partially or fully covered when necessary.

Within the structure of the Piece Hall the rooms are small and very shallow, making re-use on their own a difficult task. To a certain extent this explains the high level of vacancy in the building at present, particularly on the upper floors. One approach to their reuse would be to attach live-work units outside the structure, with working in the front - the Piece Hall rooms - and living at the back.

In addition to the 'live-work' units, it is proposed that a major new residential component is developed on the site of the Burger King fast food outlet and the Industrial Museum. This should be of the highest design quality and would provide a counterpoint to the existing but derelict church spire.

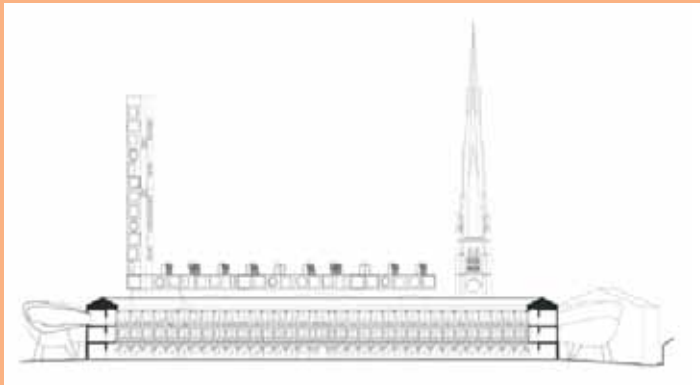


WILL ALSOP'S CONCEPT OF A RETRACTABLE ROOF FOR THE PIECE HALL CONSISTS OF AN ETFE MEMBRANE SUPPORTED ON A TITANIUM STRUCTURE THAT WOULD PROVIDE WEATHER PROTECTION FOR THE PIECE HALL YET PERMIT OPEN VIEWS OF THE SKY. THE ROOF WOULD SLIDE NORTHWARDS ON ITS FRAME TO OPEN THE SPACE TO THE SKY AND WOULD REST ABOVE THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE WOOLSHOPS SHOPPING CENTRE PROVIDING WEATHER PROTECTION FOR THAT AREA.



WILL ALSO PROPOSES RESIDENTIAL PODS ATTACHED TO THE PIECE HALL ON ITS NORTH AND SOUTH SIDES THAT ARE STRUCTURALLY INDEPENDENT AND CONTRAST WITH THE HISTORIC BUILDING. USING THE PIECE HALL ROOMS AS WORKING AND SELLING SPACE

WILL ALSO PROPOSES A RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FORM OF A SLENDER TOWER RISING ABOVE THE PIECE HALL AND PROVIDING EXCELLENT VIEWS OF THE TOWN AND BEACON HILL





WILL ALSO PROPOSES A MULTI-SCREEN CINEMA AS A SERIES OF FREE-FORM PODS ATTACHED TO THE PIECE HALL BUT RAISED UP ABOVE GROUND LEVEL TO RELEASE THE LAND BELOW AS PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND TO ALLOW THE NEW EAST GATEWAY TO BE CREATED

On the east side of the Piece Hall, on the site of the former industrial museum and the now derelict church, a cinema complex would be developed following the 'plug-in' model. The auditoria would be in buildings attached to the Piece Hall with the foyer spaces and ticketing provided within the original building. The auditoria could be elevated above ground level around a new gateway to the Piece Hall on the east side - the "missing" east entrance - as part of a new public space facing Square Road. This new entrance would be part of a route between the new community in the valley bottom through the Piece Hall and into the town centre via Westgate.

There is opinion both for and against linking the Square Chapel visibly to the Piece Hall. A connection between the Chapel and the Piece Hall would enable the Piece Hall to reinforce its role as 'vestibule' to surrounding activities. One view is that the perfectly square geometry of the former chapel should be respected so that the two retain their individual integrity, and any connection should be underground. Others felt that this would require considerable compromises on accessibility.

The final two propositions concern the west side of the Piece Hall. Here the existing buildings would be redeveloped creating sites for two facilities which would follow the same principle of standing close to the Piece Hall and using it as their 'front door'.

These two buildings would be a Conference Facility and an Educational Building. The Conference Facility would serve the youth community of Halifax in the evenings and at weekends, whilst offering more conference type usage during the working day.



WILL ALSO'S CONCEPT FOR A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF A CONFERENCE AND YOUTH FACILITY AT THE JUNCTION OF THOMAS STREET AND BLACKLEDGE



The Educational Building would be a new art or craft school, perhaps involving fine arts, or fashion and fabrics or media or crafts. This should be a faculty of a Higher Education Institution in the Region and would offer a strong and characterful setting for students to learn their craft. There would be a natural flow of occupation from the college to the live-work units within the Piece Hall, where newly-qualified craftsmen could develop their businesses and artistic careers, to the benefit of the Piece Hall and the town as a whole.



WILL ALSO'S DRAMATIC STRUCTURE TO HOUSE A SCHOOL OF FASHION, FABRICS AND ASSOCIATED TECHNOLOGIES ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE PIECE HALL, WITH ITS HIGHER PARTS LOOKING DOWN INTO THE CENTRAL SPACE

2: SOMERSET HOUSE

Somerset House is a very different proposition. Whereas the Piece Hall is a very public symbol of Halifax's heritage, Somerset House is a hidden jewel, a fine stately home buried in the heart of the town as it expanded. The house, reputedly designed by architect John Carr of York in 1766 and Listed Grade II*, lies between two important streets on the western edge of the town centre: Rawson Street (home of Harvey's Department Store) and George Square (the town centre's largest public space). Following early life as a residence and banking hall, the house has had other buildings attached to it and it has been subdivided and altered over the years to house a wide variety of new uses. Its ownership has become fragmented and many of its unique features lost, but it still retains a fine plaster decorated drawing room, and the external grandeur is still recognisable. Now much of the building has become vacant and Calderdale Council, with help from Yorkshire Forward, has acquired the freehold and leasehold interests to bring the bulk of the building back into a single ownership for the first time in many years.



THE GRAND SOUTHERN FAÇADE

There is now a double challenge:

- How can the glory of the building and its setting be restored so that it makes a strong contribution to the quality of the town centre once more?
- What is the most appropriate range of new uses for the building that will have the most beneficial effect on the surrounding streets?

The proposition is to incorporate a range of new activities into the building that will encourage public use and substantially improve the relationship between the building and its immediate setting.

The single storey shops that face Rawson Street will be cleared away to create a new public forecourt overlooked by the restored main face of the building itself. The lower floors of the building will be used for a range of high quality, retail and restaurant uses that will exploit the new, south facing



THE FRONT FORECOURT

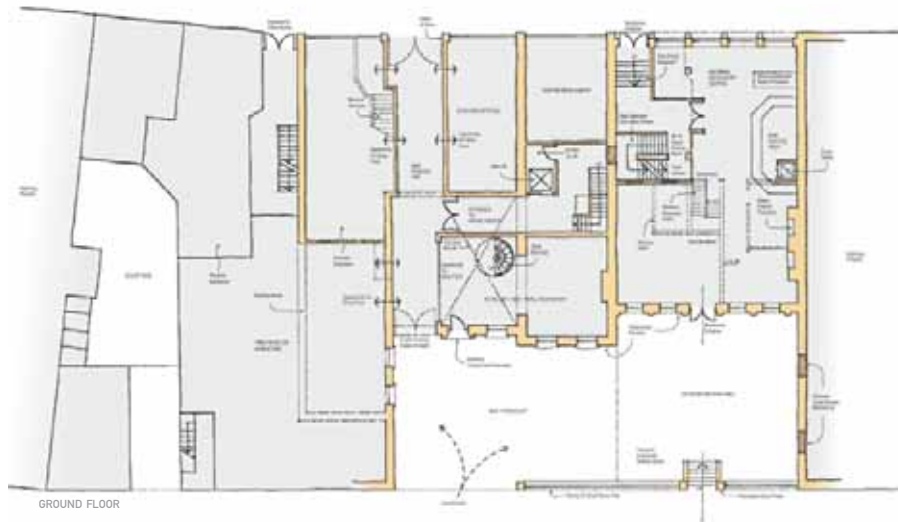
external space. The upper floors lend themselves to either residential use or small office suites or a combination of the two. The highly decorated drawing room on the first floor should form the centrepiece of a new restaurant use.

Structural changes to the building should be kept to an absolute minimum, but advantage should be taken of the arrangement of spaces at the west end of the building to create a new arcade connecting Rawson Street and George Square. This new connection will encourage pedestrian movement between the streets supporting a range of new activities. The proximity of Harvey's Department Store will reinforce up-market ambitions for the building.

Initial explorations of the potential of the building are explored in a series of illustrative plans of each of the main floors, in this instance showing retail and restaurant uses on the lower floors and small offices accommodation on the upper floors. These explorations reveal that the upper floors could be used equally well for residential use.



THE HOUSE FROM GEORGE SQUARE



3: ELSIE WHITELEY MILL & ADJOINING PROPERTIES

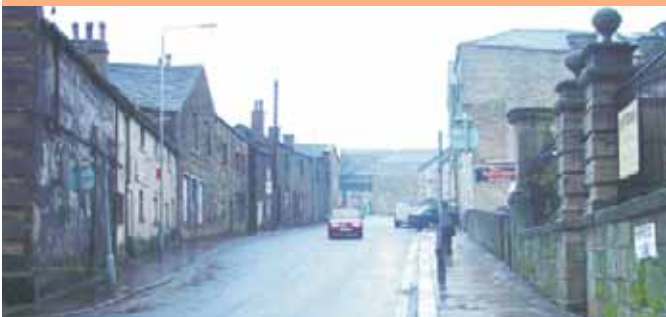
The communities west of the town centre are isolated from it by the main roads but more importantly by derelict land and buildings around the A55 by-pass. One of the most important gaps in the urban fabric is the former Elsie Whiteley Mill and adjoining properties in Hopwood Lane that create a poor approach to the town centre. These buildings should be refurbished and reused to close the gap in the urban fabric and to complete the connection between People's Park and the communities of West Central Halifax and the Town Centre.

The buildings and sites between Hopwood Lane and King Cross are in private ownership and have been derelict for many years. Regeneration is required for these characterful and valuable buildings before the fabric deteriorates further.

The Elsie Whiteley Mill has been acquired by the Council recently and draft refurbishment proposals have been drawn up for mixed use development incorporating managed workspace with shared business facilities. This will do much to revitalise Hopwood Lane and the links between West Central Halifax and People's Park and the town centre.



THE ELSIE WHITELEY MILL RE-USED



DERELICT HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN HOPWOOD LANE



ELSIE WHITELEY MILL TODAY



POSSIBLE SECTION
THROUGH THE
BUILDINGS



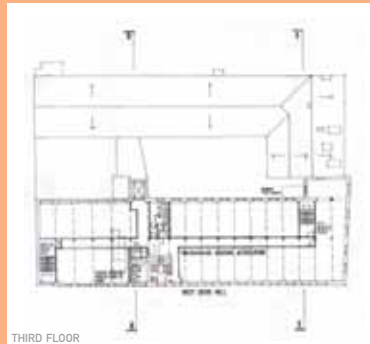
GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR