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**SLOUGH TOWN HALL
BATH ROAD, SLOUGH, SL1 3UQ**



**BUILDING APPRAISAL AND ASSESSMENT OF
LISTING POTENTIAL**

*for the
Campaign to Save Slough's Heritage*

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INDEX

1. PREAMBLE 2-3
2. BACKGROUND HISTORY, CONTEXT
AND COMPARISONS 4-13
3. BUILDING INSPECTION 14-19
4. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST 20-24
5. COMMENTARY ON CONSULTANT’S REPORT 25-28
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 29

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

SLOUGH TOWN HALL: BUILDING APPRAISAL

1.0 PREAMBLE

- 1.1 This Report was commissioned by the *Campaign to Save Slough's Heritage*, who are focussing on the decision of Slough Borough Council, taken on 11 February 2008, to demolish the 1937 Slough Town Hall together with its modern extension and dispose of the site for housing development.
- 1.2 I have received comprehensive briefing documents from the group, and have made a full external and internal inspection of the building. I have researched the background to the original permission, resulting from the winning entry of an architectural competition held in 1933, which produced 205 entries. I am long familiar with the work of James and Bywaters, with Rowland Pierce, both in terms of their three fine local authority competition-winning designs of the 1930s, and more generally for other key projects, and the contribution of Charles James to the architecture of Hampstead Garden Suburb.
- 1.3 I hold the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Architecture (Class 1 Honours) from the University of Durham; the Degrees of Master of Architecture and Master of Urban Planning from the University of Illinois; and the Degree of Doctor of Urban and Regional Studies from the University of Birmingham. I am a Chartered Architect, having been a corporate member of the Royal Institute of British Architects since February 1968, and a Registered Architect from that year. I am also a Chartered Town Planner, having been elected a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1973, and made Fellow in 1980. I am a Member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, since 1985; a long-standing Member of the Victorian Society; and Architectural Adviser to The Lutyens Trust since 1985, and was elected a Trustee in 2008.
- 1.4 My specialist field in architecture and town planning is of the first half of the 20th century. I researched the history of both Letchworth Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb and have written definitive books on these pioneer community projects of the early 20th century. I was Principal Planning Officer for Conservation and Design at North Hertfordshire District Council from 1974-87, following two years in the Conservation and Design Group of the Hertfordshire County Planning Department at County Hall, Hertford. My local authority work covered all aspects of the conservation of the historic built environment, including conservation area designation, building appraisals for listing, building assessments, appeals and public inquiries. In 1979 I was appointed a Director on the Board of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust by the Royal Town Planning Institute, a position which I held until 2000, following I was made the first Honorary Life President of the Trust.
- 1.5 I became a sole practitioner in private practice, specialising in conservation and listed buildings, in 1988. I also served for four years as Executive Secretary of the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust, and was architect for the first phase of restoration of the village forge at Much Hadham. In the mid 1990s I undertook comprehensive list reviews for East Hertfordshire District Council, in liaison with English Heritage. These were for the historic towns of Ware and Hertford. In the course of the fieldwork for the Hertford List I revisited Hertford County Hall and

assessed its listing potential in detail, with a recommendation of a Grade II* listing, which was confirmed in 1995. During the 1990s, I also undertook specialist thematic listing studies for English Heritage on Housing in the New Towns, Rural Housing and New Town Centres, followed by a thematic study of private sector flats 1880-1940. I am thus familiar with the practical aspects of assessing and listing a wide range of 20th century architecture, including civic buildings.

- 1.6 In 2005, I was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council to undertake a detailed Historic Building Appraisal and Management Study for County Hall, Hertford. This was a competition-winning design by James and Bywaters with Rowland Pierce, premiated in 1935, and built in 1937-40. In undertaking the assessment, I reviewed over 600 surviving original drawings of all aspects of the building, including all detailed designs for external and internal features, and furniture, which was designed throughout by the architects.

- 1.7 As a basis for comparison, I visited Norwich City Hall, which the same practice won in open competition in 1931, and which was completed in 1938. Having become familiar with two of the key local authority competition-winning designs by the practice, I was pleased to be commissioned by the *Campaign to Save Slough's Heritage* to undertake an assessment of Slough Town Hall and provide my conclusions as to its listability. The Norwich and Hertford buildings are now both listed Grade II*. While Slough Town Hall was a smaller project, it is evident that the same care and attention to detail was provided as for the two better-known projects. As my inspection of the building confirms, there was an approach to design, planning and detailing that, although varied between all three projects, followed a consistent thread of rigorous high-quality design and detailing, which has been reflected in the way in which these flagship projects have endured for over seventy years.

2.0 BACKGROUND HISTORY, CONTEXT AND COMPARISONS

The Competition

- 2.1 Architectural competitions have a long history as a recognised procedure for obtaining premium design values for prestige buildings. Despite the large number of entries, this was often viewed as a means for architects to obtain a public profile, at a time when advertising was debarred by professional codes. Nor were first premiated schemes necessarily regarded as fixed, following the award. Two of the most comprehensive architectural competitions of the early 20th century were won by comparative outsiders: Ralph Knott for the LCC County Hall Building in 1907-8; and Giles Gilbert Scott for Liverpool Anglican Cathedral in 1902. Both, particularly the latter, were modified significantly as they were built, and Liverpool Anglican Cathedral had a time span to construction over seven decades. However, comprehensive the brief, the clients were apt to modify their requirements, particularly if costs began to rise beyond initial expectation.
- 2.2 The interwar period was a fruitful one for competitions of all kinds. They were numerous in the sphere of local government as many smaller settlements, many in a satellite relationship to large centres of population, became increasingly urbanised. There were increasing numbers of urban districts and municipal boroughs created within the local government hierarchy, which itself had been a product of late 19th century local government reform. In addition, the 1930s were a period of economic depression, and the architectural competitions that were held during this decade, particularly up to 1935/6 were oversubscribed many times as architects sought, however long the odds against, to win a commission. This even applied to established practitioners.
- 2.3 Slough had been created an Urban District Council (UDC) in 1894, and the next forty years saw a steady increase in area, population and rateable value. Local government responsibility included highways, public health, water, parks and, increasingly, housing. These responsibilities were all represented by Executive Committees on the Slough UDC. The number of professional and technical officers and employees grew, creating the need for more efficient office headquarters, with a requirement for larger Council Chambers, to which the public were admitted in increasing numbers. As they grew, many authorities aspired to the status of municipal boroughs, and it appears to have been at least on the agenda while Slough was in the process of obtaining a design for its new Town Hall. By 1937, when the building was completed and ceremonially opened, the Mayor of neighbouring Windsor was reported as remarking that he was looking forward to the time when Slough's status changed. At that date, preparations must have been in hand for the necessary application and protocol, and Slough was created a Municipal Borough by Royal Decree on 14 September 1938, by Colonel the Lord Cottesloe, Lord Lieutenant of Bucks, on behalf of King George VI.
- 2.4 This was the culmination of a process that had begun five years previously. The initial catalyst appears to have been the extension of the UDC boundary in 1930. There was, apparently, considerable discussion and controversy about the selection of a site for the future Council Offices during the early 1930s, but eventually the Council resolved by a large majority to purchase the site at Salt Hill, on the historic Bath Road

(now the A4) facing the Salt Hill Playing Fields, later landscaped as a public park. A local Inquiry was held on behalf of the Minister of Health, who issued a loan sanction for the purchase of the site, which was completed in August 1933. This clarified and crystallised the project, which assumed a more definite form when, under the RIBA Regulations, an open architectural competition was organised and H. S. Goodhart-Rendel FRIBA, was appointed as Assessor to adjudicate on the submitted designs. 205 entries were received from architects from all over the British Isles and even from the Dominions overseas. The brief for the competition would have been provided by the Council, but firmed up in discussion with the RIBA before the particulars were circulated to competitors.

- 2.5 Goodhart-Rendel (1887-1959) was an architect of wide experience and a scholar who had a profound interest in 19th century architecture, at a time when its reputation, particularly that of Victorian churches, was at its nadir. He was Vice President of RIBA during the Slough competition phase (1933-4) and President immediately after the building was completed (1937-9). It was evident that when employing an Assessor to judge the entries, Slough UDC employed one of the most respected architects in the land. He had served in the Guards during the First World War. He was President of the Architectural Association 1924-5. Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University 1933-6, and President of the RIBA 1937-9. His architecture ranged from the massive brickwork of St. Wilfrid's Church, Brighton (1932-4) to the sparkling moderne of Hay's Wharf in the Pool of London (1930-32). This indicated that he had no hard line principles on either a traditional or a modern approach, although he apparently rejected an entry in the Slough Competition, which he considered had the most sophisticated plan, because he felt that the Modernist exterior was not appropriate. (This, the second premiated design, submitted by Edward Armstrong and Oscar Bayne, certainly lacked *gravitas*, and there were not the compensating virtues found in, say, the local government work of the Culpins, particularly at Greenwich Town Hall). In his Slough assessment, Goodhart-Rendel awarded first premium (of £250) to entry No. 142, submitted by C. H. James and S. Rowland Pierce, whose practice was in London. The competition results were made public during 1934.

- 2.6 In his letter to the Council, Goodhart-Rendel stated:

...I have minutely weighed the merits and defects of the considerable number of excellent designs that remained after those with grave faults had been eliminated. It is therefore with complete confidence that I put forward my selection of No. 142 (the design placed first), having repeatedly compared it with those most nearly approaching it in all-round merit. Its general arrangement is convenient and economical, the detail of its planning is very well studied, its fenestration is particularly admirable, and its architectural treatment appropriate and dignified.

In a further letter he adds:

I am looking forward eagerly to seeing the building when it will be in course of erection. I feel convinced that, when complete, it will be generally admired.

He further adds:

...the winning design appears to me to strike an admirable just mean between enterprise and tradition. Its architecture is flexible and functional, attaining dignity without pomposity, and its arrangement is thoroughly sensible and convenient. I venture to congratulate the District Council of Slough upon the excellent building this competition will have secured for them.

- 2.7 The Council forthwith applied for loan sanction to construct the winning design and a further Inquiry was held by an Inspector from the Ministry of Health at the end of January 1935. Following the receipt of tenders, the loan sanction was received in October 1935, and H. Tyson Chambers of Slough were appointed contractors to construct the building for £25,297. It must have been substantially completed during 1936, as the dates indicate on the rainwater heads and from the front of the doorway into the east cross wing. The completed and fitted out Town Hall was ceremonially opened by Mrs. A. G. Trevener, wife of the Chairman of the Council on Wednesday 31 March 1937. Mrs Trevener opened the front door with a golden key, presented to her by the architects, and which is now in the collection of Slough Museum.

The Design

- 2.8 The competition design differed in detail from the building as completed, but the general scheme was the same overall. At the west end was a large rectangular block, containing the main entrance to the building on the ground floor, a cruciform foyer, with a projection into the rear to give public access to the Rates Office, and a Council Suite, consisting of two storey Council Chamber, Ante-Room and Foyer, with two interconnecting Committee Rooms on the north elevation, above the main entrance. At right angles was a long axis, running from the main staircase in a projection to the west, through the foyers on ground and first floors, as a central corridor, to meet a cross wing, which in the competition submission had a greater length and projection, particularly on the north. The main corridor was partly single bank, allowing room for future extension on the south – indeed it was made double banked in the design, which was built. The east wing was, however, single banked, and had a small attic storey, which was suppressed in the built version. This left the Council block dominant, and it had a return clerestory above the public gallery above the Public Gallery. The roof over this block, which was square in plan, had a low-pitched pyramid, with a central fleche. The east wing, and its attic, had low gabled ends, which suggested pediments.
- 2.9 As a future requirement, room for an Assembly Hall, in a separate block was stipulated. The architects duly indicated this to the west of the main building, with a length that corresponded to the cross wing, giving a forecourt enclosed by the buildings, in which the main entrance was asymmetrically set. This arrangement was shown on a perspective by Pierce, who was the architect principally involved with the project design, but there was no suggestion that the premiated scheme would be in any way incomplete were this feature to be omitted, which it was, possibly due to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. Further suggestions for extension took the form of an outline of a courtyard at the rear, which would have resulted in a block plan, which attained the characteristics of a smaller version of

County Hall, Hertford, the third major local government office competition, which the practice won, in 1935. As with the Assembly Hall, this suggestion remained unbuilt.

It is worth noting that in the report that accompanied their design, the architects stated the following:

The Hall occupies a conspicuous position on the Bath Road frontage, and it would be very accessible to the public: but while the Hall is necessary to complete the composition as a forecourt, its omission would leave a pleasant building mass in the proposed municipal offices.

Again indicating that the Assembly Hall was merely a possible aspiration, *The Builder* journal of 27th July 1934 stated as follows:

Provision was to be made for an assembly hall to be built, perhaps, at some later date.

- 2.10 The modifications did not, however, modify the overall concept of the building. Nor did it alter the varied fenestration, which Goodhart-Rendel identified as a significant strength of the design. The ground floor offices were treated as a more modern continuous stripped window, divided by substantial structural mullions, whereas above, a more traditional and slightly vertical proportion was adopted for windows which were more decidedly holes in walls. In addition, the three full-length windows over the main entrance were the pattern adopted and the setback clerestory of the Council Chamber had five small square windows, creating a distinctive pattern, which would have been visible from the frontage of the Bath Road, and particularly in more distant views from the public park opposite. This delight in almost abstract window patterns was a feature from the free disposition of windows on the landmark Stockholm Town Hall by Ragnar Ostberg, built 1911-23. This seminal building influenced all three of James and Pierce's competition-winning local government buildings, but in a varied degree.
- 2.11 The revisions to the premiated design and the building constructed in 1936-7 strengthened the design values in my opinion. The original Council block did not break forward of the front elevation, and may have seemed a little indeterminate with the setback attic clerestory to the upper part of the Council Chamber and low pyramidal roof. In the final design, it attained a firmer status, breaking forward of the front elevation and also gaining a full attic storey with the addition of the Caretaker's Flat on the second floor, above the Committee Rooms. The pyramidal roof was superseded by a full pedimented roof and the fleche was suppressed, in favour of a lower cupola, with a sturdy rectilinear base, and a graceful louvred setback upper part and slender finial, all designed by Reg Butler, then an assistant in the office, who later made his name as a sculptor after the Second World War.

Indeed, with regard to these changes, it is worth noting that the minutes of the Council's General Purposes Committee of 29th May 1935 state as follows:

Your Sub Committee [New Offices Sub Committee] begged to report that at the suggestion of the Architects they have agreed a few minor amendments in the planning of the various offices which they are of the opinion will tend to

facilitate the working arrangements of the staff. Your Sub Committee also agreed a slight alteration in the elevation which they are satisfied will improve the appearance of the building.

- 2.12 On the ground floor of the building, the entrance was emphasised by a projecting stone doorcase, while bands of stone ran across the ground floor of the projecting Council Chamber block, and were also used quoins around the corners of the building, giving a suggestion of sturdy pilasters. The east wing retained its stone framed strip windows on the ground floor, but a more traditional pattern was found on the east cross wing, emphasised by a central projecting doorcase and with the quoin motif repeated on the corners. This block also had a low pedimented roof, while that over the double bank east office wing had a low-pitched roof rising to a flat in the centre. All the roofs, and the cupola were covered in copper, which had been specially treated to acquire a green patina as soon as possible.

The walling materials, of buff Newbury bricks and Cotswold stone gave a warm appearance, in counterpoint with the cool pale green of the roofs and cupola. Precise detailing of the brickwork introduced a special bond, based on the Garden Wall Bond, with courses of header bricks at intervals, and between, the stretcher courses were so faced that they formed chevron patterns, this being particularly visible on the rear south elevation of the Council Chamber beneath its tall windows. The windows themselves have the characteristic horizontally aligned subdivision of the 1930s and tall west window on the main stair, together with some of the ground floor windows, included narrower margin panes, reinforcing the juxtaposition of horizontals and verticals in the design. While this has been modified by the replacement of windows around the building, I do not believe that this has significantly impaired the quality of the overall design values. The windows were originally similarly subdivided to those at Norwich City Hall, where they are still extant. More will be stated about this in the notes of my inspection of the building in Section. 3. Perhaps more than any other building in Slough, the quiet dignity and good taste of Slough Town Hall provides the *riposte* to John Betjeman's strictures on the town. Indeed, in 1948, Betjeman and John Piper wrote in Murray's Buckinghamshire Architectural Guide that '*The unfinished Civic Centre, with Swedish affectations, represents a striving for unity out of chaos*'.

- 2.13 The interiors of the building ranged from the refined design and detailing of the Council Chamber, Committee Rooms, ground and first floor foyers, main staircase and the Chairman's and Town Clerk's offices, to the functional yet good quality approach to the detailing of the circulation spaces and offices. The practice was gaining comprehensive experience in designing and detailing three important local government schemes virtually simultaneously, of which Slough was the first actually to be completed. There is a distinct family resemblance between the interiors, be they as high status, or more functional, between all three projects. The principle of design being fit for purpose was derived from the old triumvirate of 'commodity, firmness and delight' proposed by the Roman architect Vitruvius. This was updated as 'fitness for purpose' by the Design in Industry Association during the interwar period. Moreover, James and Pierce were adept at a comprehensive view of the role of the architect, responsible for the building, its full detailing, its fittings and even loose furniture, which was another characteristic of their major work. The care with which this was undertaken still manifests itself at Slough Town Hall.

- 2.14 Thus, the Council Chamber received the most thorough design, including visually effective panelling of English Oak, in horizontal layers, almost giving the appearance of channelled masonry. On closer inspection, it can be seen that the mouldings are derived from classical profiles, but the overall effect is sweeping and modern, and the panelling skilfully incorporates heating panels, with horizontal openings and purpose-designed metal filigree grilles, which emphasise the functional nature of the design, as well as its aesthetic value. While the dais and Chairman's seat have been removed, with inadequately designed substitutes, this does not detract from the overall quality of the space. The panelling stops below the window cills, and above, acoustic plaster was used, with the result that the clarity of the acoustics was commended, shortly after the building opened. The ceiling is designed in a succession of shallow coffers, with a hint of classical ornament based on Pierce's favourite Greek Key motif, and this theme is picked up in the central square ventilation grille, with its filigree geometric tracery. The lighting was originally designed by the architect, in the form of suspended chandeliers with globe lights. These have been removed, but the setting of the Chamber as a whole retains its design value and quiet dignity.
- 2.15 The entrance doors between the Council Chamber and ante-room were purpose-designed, covered in grey-blue Morocco leather, with purpose-designed chromium plated columnar pulls, and porthole windows at eye level. The ante-room is treated in an updated classical style with the principal features being the reeded pilasters which continue through the barrel vaults. Between the ante-room and the corridor beyond is an original pair of glazed doors, with a fanlight above, of engraved glass, again exploiting a variant on the Greek Key.
- 2.16 The two Committee Rooms are en-suite, a major and a minor room, divided by full-height panelled doors in solid English Oak. The wall panelling is specially selected English Oak veneer, subdivided by fillets of brown oak. This panelling extends to the base of the bold ceiling coves, which are a feature not only of these Committee Rooms, but also of the larger equivalents at Norwich City Hall and Hertford County Hall. At the outer end of each Committee Room is an elegant fireplace, originally containing an electric fire. The surrounds are of Portuguese veined marble, with inlays of Devonshire and Derbyshire marbles, and engraved gilded eight pointed stars, an elegant detail that is also found on the external lintels of the Committee Room windows and above the front door. Originally there were suspended clear globe lights, set within horizontal glass rings, suspended by chromium-plated rods. This was a typical modern functional detail of the 1930s, which has now been removed, but the remainder of the ambiance of the Committee Rooms remains, albeit that the original furniture is no longer extant.
- 2.17 Along the east corridor at either side are the former Chairman's Office, facing north into the forecourt and the former Town Clerk's Office facing south. The Chairman's Office was panelled, with a marble fire surround, and a ceiling with a circular recess, while The Clerk's Office had a panelled dado and a recessed fire surround between two recessed stores. Throughout the building there were clock faces, designed by the architects, coupled to an electric impulse master clock.

The Architects

- 2.18 The partnership of C. H. James and S. Rowland Pierce was renowned during the 1930s for their success in three of the major competitions for local authority offices, as already noted. The practice, under various names, was at its peak during the 1930s and work fell off sharply after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. During the 1920s, both had pursued separate courses and only came together for the entry in the Norwich City Hall Competition in 1931. Several aspects of their design philosophy had already been established prior to the partnership.
- 2.19 Charles Holloway James (1893-1953) was born in Gloucester and was articled to the local architect Walter Brian Wood. He was an assistant in Lutyens's office from 1911-14, following which he enlisted in the forces, and was invalided home in 1916 after the loss of leg. For a short time he worked for Barry Parker in Letchworth, and was involved in working-up Parker's plan for a new civic centre for Oporto, Portugal, of which little, regrettably was built in the stripped classical form which Parker adopted. In 1919, in partnership with C. Murray Hennell (1883-1929), James designed the layout and housing for Swanpool Garden Suburb, south of Lincoln (1919-21) and also contributed early work at Welwyn Garden City in the mid 1920s. James lived in Hampstead Garden Suburb, where he built three houses for himself, beginning with No. 1 Hampstead Way in 1920. He worked with a number of architects including Louis de Soissons at Welwyn and Charles Holden for the design of Underground Stations at Bounds Green and Enfield West. In his designs, James tended to favour variants on a refined, Minimalist Georgian. The more aesthetic tendencies in the three local authority schemes of the 1930s were probably the work of Pierce. However, James appeared to have administered the buildings contract for Slough Town Hall and at the opening was thanked for his regular attendance at Council Committee Meetings, presumably to update Members on progress. James' postwar work was cut short by his early death, in 1953, before more normal building conditions had fully resumed.
- 2.20 Stephen Rowland Pierce (1896-1966) was educated initially at Hastings School of Art. From 1919-21, he studied at the Architectural Association in London and was articled to Arthur Wells in Hastings. He was awarded a Rome Scholarship and spent several years at the British School at Rome, returning to England in 1924, and joining the teaching staff of the Architectural Association, where he remained until 1932. He also began to practice on his own account and designed Lloyds Bank, Staines in 1929. He worked with James on the Norwich City Hall Competition, to which he contributed the innovative influences of Swedish Neo-Classicism. However, he did not enter a formal partnership with James until 1934, and the latter had appointed a surveyor, F. S. Bywaters, as a working partner after Hennell's death in 1925. Thus, there is a degree of confusion in the titles under which the practices worked, with James and Pierce being credited with Norwich City Hall and Slough Town Hall, but Hertford County Hall, slightly later, appears under the practice name of James and Bywaters, with Rowland Pierce.
- 2.21 Like James, Pierce appears to have been interested in housing, and together with James Burford, won an international competition for the planning and design of the Garden Suburb of Floriana, Malta, and later worked in partnership with James on

masterplans for Norwich and Leamington Spa. In the late 1930s, James and Pierce were assessors for the competitions for Town Halls at Wood Green and Harrow.

- 2.22 The quality of the three local government schemes was recognised immediately on the results of the three competitions being announced. They were extensively written up in the architectural journals and in 1936, a manual on the design of Town Halls, written by A. Calveley Cotton, was published by the *Architectural Press*. This included Slough Town Hall, which was the first of the practice's three major schemes to be completed, and it appeared alongside work by other architects, including the more traditional Grade II listed Worthing Town Hall (Cowles Voysey, 1930) and the large classical Grade II* listed Civic Centre at Southampton (E. Berryweather, 1929-39) and the progressive modernism, with some Swedish influence, of Grade II* listed Hornsey Town Hall (R. H. Uren, Slater and Moberley, 1932-5). These exemplars show the trend of styles current, not only in local authority buildings, in the mid 1930s. Slough was probably the smallest of the authorities in terms of population and resources, to be illustrated. Aesthetically it certainly punched above its weight in design values.

Context and Comparisons

- 2.23 In making an assessment of the listability of a 1930s local authority building, albeit of high quality such as Slough Town Hall, account needs to be taken of its place, not only in the work of a practice which designed it, but also in a broader swathe of buildings designed during the last pre-war decade, which showed a considerable range in style and scale. In Appendix C, I have compiled a checklist ranging across the design *piste*. These range from the fairly orthodox classicism of E. Berry Webber, who designed a number of fairly orthodox classical town halls and the large-scale Southampton Civic Centre, which was incomplete at the time that war broke out in 1939. Philip Hepworth could range from orthodox classicism, if not entirely without individual touches, to something including progressive influences of Swedish Modernism as at Grade II listed Walthamstow Civic Centre. The influence of Lutyens was seen at St. Pancras Town Hall (now Camden Town Hall), designed by A. J. G. Thomas who was actually dismissed by Lutyens for designing the competition entry during office time. In the event, the Thomas' touches seem rather laboured without the sense of fun that the master often introduced. C. Cowles Voysey, son of the master Arts and Crafts architect, C. F. A. Voysey, produced many local authority schemes during this period, and won the competition for Worthing Town Hall in the late 1920s. His major work during the 1930s included the rather heavy-handed Grade II listed Cambridge Guildhall (1936-7), Grade II listed Bromley Town Hall (1939) and the altogether more progressive Grade II listed Watford Town Hall (1940).
- 2.24 The two influences in the design of local authority buildings of high quality during the decade was, of course, Ragnar Ostberg's Stockholm Town Hall (1911-1923). It was the combination of informal massing, lively fenestration, a striking silhouette, and Arts and Crafts rigour in the detailing that appealed to architects throughout the interwar period. Some aspects appealed more than others. At Norwich, James and Pierce allied the soaring campanile, the key landmark feature at Stockholm, to a fairly restrained symmetrical block facing the Market Place below. Yet detailing such as the attenuated classical order for the portico and the varied fenestration also took their cue from the Swedish model. Hertford County Hall took the colonnade from

Stockholm Town Hall, and the concept of balanced asymmetry, yet was more Neo-classical in the entrance block, which appears to a tribute to Sir John Soane. Nevertheless, the low key classicism of the cupola over the entrance block and the swept, almost streamlined footprint of the Council Chamber also hinted at a moderne classical style, seemingly at odds with the use, throughout, of immaculately proportioned Georgian sash windows. Slough Town Hall came between the two. The informality of the fenestration, and particularly the design of the front of the Council block around the entrance profited from the window pattern of Stockholm, as did the restraint of the classical detailing of the pediments and minimalist carving around the doorcase. Internally, all three schemes combine the elegance of a late Classicism, with hints of Moderne. For example the main stair and the panelling around the lower walls of the Council Chamber at Slough Town Hall.

- 2.25 Stockholm also influenced more overtly modern designs, particularly the massing of Hornsey Town Hall, with the tower soaring above the entrance, and the variety of fenestration which can be traced back to the Swedish precedent. Even in a building which tries to eliminate historical influences, such as Grade II listed Greenwich Town Hall (Culpin and Son, 1939), the landmark campanile, although appearing functionally designed is a throwback to Swedish Romanticism of silhouette.
- 2.26 Smaller local authorities were certainly active during the 1930s, but tended to be more conservative in their approach. Neo-Georgian figured in many smaller councils' agendas, even when generated by a competition, such as Worthing, who commissioned the winning scheme by Cowles Voysey. Touches of Swedish modernism can be seen at Grade II listed Friern Barnet Town Hall, a little known but fine scheme by Sir John Brown and Henson, completed in 1939. The elegant stripped classical crescent is well sited across a prominent road junction, and the copper-clad lantern is related both to those on Slough Town Hall and Hertford County Hall. Unfortunately, this building is no longer in council use, having been converted to flats. Clearly, Slough Town Hall was one among many commissions for smaller local authority offices. However, it is one, possibly *the one*, which stands out in any survey. It was praised by Nikolaus Pevsner, and I have included Pevsner's comments on a wide range of 1930s local authority buildings in Appendix C. The extended entry by Bill Wilson for the revised edition *Norwich and Norfolk* in the Buildings of England series, contains a useful survey of the state of local authority architecture in England during the 1930s and this has also been reproduced.
- 2.27 After the War, local authority buildings were evicted until the 1950s, when the modernist design agenda was much more firmly established as the logical style for such buildings. Nevertheless, the Swedish influence, seen in various buildings during the 1930s, lived on in two contrasting schemes. Although a new City Hall and Civic Centre were proposed for Newcastle upon Tyne in 1939, more detailed planning and design did not occur until the 1950s. The main office block was high-rise, but terminated in a campanile, literally, with a carillon, soaring above a low-level quadrangle and the massing of the building distinctly harks back Stockholm Town Hall. So does the approach to the main interiors which feature, amongst other artefacts, enormous glass murals by Victor Pasmore, a sculpture of the *River God Tyne*, by David Wynne and a Banqueting Hall with a John Piper tapestry. Rather dismissed as old fashioned when under construction (1956-69), the Newcastle Civic Centre was listed Grade II* in 1995.

2.28 Devon County Hall, designed by Donald McMorran, built 1957-64) is much more overtly traditional, with brick walls and stone dressings around the main windows. A feature of the design is a low clock tower and campanile, terminating in a pyramidal roof and an ornamental weathervane set on a stone base. The groin vaulted *porte cochere*, which leads into an arcaded entrance hall, has tall windows above, which distinctly recall the long blocks with colonnades below the Committee Rooms at Hertford County Hall. The imaginative variation of the window type and spacing is a common feature with Slough Town Hall. Devon County Hall was listed Grade II* in April 1998.

3.0 **BUILDING INSPECTION**

- 3.1 I visited Slough and made a full external and internal inspection of the Old Town Hall, Bath Road, Slough on Tuesday 6 May 2008. The purpose was to draw comparisons between the building as it now exists and the state in which it was finished in March 1937. I was also looking for details of planning and design, which compare with the Grade II* listed Norwich and Hertford schemes.
- 3.2 Local Government services have expanded massively since the 1930s. Consequently, the Old Town Hall is now more of an adjunct to the complex of newer buildings, including purpose-designed offices from the 1980s at the south-east of the Old Town Hall, and a number of prefabricated buildings to the south. None of these are of any architectural or historic interest. Although the 1980s offices are attached to the rear of the office wing of the Old Town Hall, I would foresee no difficulty in excluding them from any listing.
- 3.3 The inspection began internally, walking through into the east ground floor corridor, leading into the Old Town Hall. The layout of the building was very simple, with a broad corridor, giving access to double banked offices and council committee rooms etc. on ground and first floors. On the cross wing which terminates the ground floor, the offices are single banked, on the east only. The Old Town Hall was planned so that a ground floor store and first floor stub corridor could provide direct access into further buildings on the site. I have commented on this in Section 2 above.
- 3.4 The main spine corridor runs east-west, from the foot of the secondary stair, along a straight axis, through the main entrance hall, to the main stair, planned principally to be used by elected members. This is a distance of about 160 ft., and despite the installation of glazed fire doors, this still gives an impressive spatial sweep to the building on both floors. Now carpeted, the floor finish was originally cork tile, as at both Norwich and Hertford, where some of the flooring has also been covered over. The cellular offices were plain and functional, and some features such as ceiling coves still survive, although in other places, particularly on the first floor, there has been opening out to create more open office and departmental spaces.
- 3.5 The entrance hall forms a cross space, reflecting the cross wing, externally, which contains the Council suite. The main front entrance opens into a broad vestibule, with a recessed original glazed screen dividing it from the entrance hall, whose access is at right angles. Originally, the cross axis ran through into the public area between the Rates Office and General Office. This area has been replanned to accommodate the Mayor's Parlour, ancillary facilities including a kitchen and a small Committee Room. However, the important entrance hall appears to survive largely intact.
- 3.6 The terrazzo flooring contains a geometrical pattern, reflecting the architect's fascination with classical motifs, particularly variant on the Greek Key. The central crossing of the axis is emphasised and framed by four green veined *scagliola* marbled columns, of slender proportions, with a role moulding in place of a capital. This was a 1930s detail of 'stripped classicism', used, for example, by Lutyens on the 1930s extension to his Art Gallery at Johannesburg. Similar columns, in a biscuit veined *scagliola*, are found in the Entrance Hall at Norwich City Hall. In the outer vestibule

there is a wall-mounted travertine panel, cut with elegant lettering and commemorating the completion of the commission, including the name of the architect and building contractors. The use of travertine, and elegant cut lettering of similar detail, is found on the 'wall of honour' a list of Lord Mayors of the City of Norwich since mediaeval times, which spans the rear wall of the entrance hall of City Hall. Overall, the ground floor entrance space at Slough is elegant, with minimalist, yet high quality detailing, and retaining much of its special interest. It is fully comparable with Norwich City Hall, with which it shares its functional character: by contrast the Entrance Hall at Hertford County Hall is more overtly historicist.

- 3.7 The entrance hall frames the main corridor on the east and the main stair on the west. The latter is beautifully detailed, with a two-tone terrazzo balustrades, having a chromium plated handrail above. Further interest is added to the balustrades with the insertion of most unusual small rectangular windows that lend a Modernist marine feel. At the foot of the stair, the handrail sweeps around to a central finial, mounted on the curved dark terrazzo capping of the balustrading. This is compact open well stair, with a half landing and a full-length window. The frame of the window has been changed, but the feeling of spatial design, with the curved swept corners on the landing, indicates a design approach, informed by, but not obsessed by the emergence of Modernism in the 1930s.
- 3.8 The ceiling, however, is more classical in character, with a frieze, which curves around the corners and incorporates a curtain pelmet to the full-length west window. The centre of the ceiling is slightly raised, and there is a pattern of slightly projecting and recessed rectangles forming a frame around the ceiling edge. This is an important surviving interior feature. A stair lift has been fitted, but this appears to be independent of the main details of the original stair, and could be reversed if accessibility for disabled were to be provided by different means in the future.
- 3.9 There is an interesting comparison with the more functional stair at the other end of the corridor. This has the same careful attention to detail, but finishes are more utilitarian. Nevertheless, this secondary stair is also of excellent design, narrower than the prestige main stairs, and with a painted steel balustrade, divided into rectangles and lozenges on the flights, with a robust oak handrail. The finish of both stairs is terrazzo, a popular material at the time, which has worn well, although there is cracking in places, and in the entrance hall.
- 3.10 The main stair opens into the Council Ante-Chamber. This is an open area between the two Committee Rooms on the north of the building, and the Council Chamber on the south. The main spine corridor of the building runs through this space and is treated with a barrel-vaulted ceiling. This gives a more imposing character to this part of the building, in keeping with the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms. Reeded pilasters at intervals run continuously across the barrel-vault, giving a modern classical feel, with some characteristics of the early 19th century architecture of Sir John Soane. The ante-room to the Council Chamber at Hertford County Hall has some of these characteristics, but in a more overtly classical design.
- 3.11 The Council Chamber is a large rectangular double-height space. The lower half is panelled in English Oak, with horizontal channelling, made up of classical mouldings, but giving the effect of rustication and also a distinctly 1930s moderne characteristic.

Heating appliances were concealed behind the panelling, with horizontal grilles, with their original gratings, giving openings to distribute the heat. The panelling also originally incorporated concealed opening mechanisms for the large windows above. The frames are not original, but they have been skilfully reset so as not to damage the architectural character of the space. A simple cornice incorporates curtain pelmets, but the perimeter of the ceiling above is more elaborately designed, with a bold lower frame opening to a raised centre, again featuring geometrical ornaments derived from the Greek Key motif. The original architect-designed lighting for the room has been removed, together with the original dais and purpose-designed furniture. Nevertheless, the main architectural characteristics of the room are in place and still contribute to the quality of the room. The Council Chamber at Norwich City Hall is likewise on the first floor, again a rectangular space but larger. Externally, the brickwork features some contrasting diaper work: at Slough this is provided by the working out of the bonding, as in the distinctive chevron work below the windows of the Council Chamber.

- 3.12 The doors into the Council Chamber are original, and of high quality detail. The doors are covered in blue-grey Morocco leather, back and front, with a porthole window at high level reflecting the Modernist marine feel of the main stair. The door pulls are skilfully designed with a chromium plated column set in chromium plated brackets, giving an elegant and practical fitting.
- 3.13 Two linked Committee Rooms lie to the north of the ante-chamber. Linked suites of Committee Rooms are a feature of both Norwich City Hall and Hertford County Hall. At Slough, the principle is the same, although there are only two smaller rooms involved. However, the design is basically similar, albeit simpler. The full-height panelling at Slough has a more modern character about it, but as in the other two, it contrasts with the coved ceiling above, adopted for acoustic reasons and to reflect light. Unfortunately, the original globe lights, designed by the architects are no longer extant and the fluorescent fittings are not sympathetic to the character of the room, but this is a comparatively superficial matter. Much of the rest of the fabric remains as it was when designed, including the large folding leaf panelled doors, and the simple, but visually effective white marble fireplace surrounds on the outer walls of each Committee Room. As with the Council Chamber, the original furniture and committee tables are no longer extant. In photographs it appears that they were a simpler version of those found at County Hall, Hertford, which are still in place in two of the three Committee Rooms.
- 3.14 The main first floor corridor leads out eastwards from the Council Ante-Room. This corridor gave access to some of the principal officers. The glazed doors are original, identical in detail to Norwich City Hall and Hertford County Hall, but with a fanlight of engraved glass, containing the characteristic Greek Key motif used so often by the architects. Within the corridor and many of the offices, a suspended ceiling has been fitted, but there is no reason to believe that the original does not survive above. In addition, there has been considerable opening out along here to create open work bays with the remaining enclosed offices between. Although this is a considerable departure from the original plan, the latter is still legible. And there are also some important surviving offices, with original detailing in place. Amongst these, at the front of the building, is the former Chairman's Room. This retains its full-height almost flush panelling and the curtain pelmets above the windows. The original door

to the corridor has been blocked as a display case but this is not a serious alteration. Access is now to a door, apparently inserted in the 1960s, alongside the marble surround for the fitted electric fire. The former office of the Clerk to the Council on the south side of the corridor is somewhat simpler, with a flush-panelled dado, and retains its twin stationery stores and cloak cupboards, with a recess where the surround for the electric fire is still in position. Other offices were apparently plain and functional, largely with plaster walls, but with cork tile for senior officers flooring, battleship grade linoleum, elsewhere.

- 3.15 The Public Gallery is approached by a well-detailed service stair with concealed access from both the ground floor and the Council Ante-Room. The gallery was simply finished, and was originally open to the Council Chamber. A glazed screen of no particular design merit was later fitted, but this is reversible. The seating in the Public Gallery has been renewed but was always in the form of linked theatre seats in tiers. The second floor largely consisted of the Caretaker's Flat, set around a central archive store. The flat has quite clearly not been inhabited for many years, but some of its features are still *in-situ*. Such features as the sanitary fittings, and original electric fire surrounds are of some historic, but limited architectural interest.
- 3.16 It is regrettable that so little of the original furniture appears to survive. However, there are two original desks, including one now in the Mayor's Parlour, and these designs are quite similar to that in the Chairman's Room in County Hall, Hertford. Likewise, there is one surviving original Neo-Classical wooden bench, with a long leather covered cushion, and this relates to a similar but slightly more elaborate design for seating in the Ballroom above the main entrance at County Hall, Hertford. Similar benches are also still in place in the entrance hall at Norwich City Hall. James and Pierce designed all of the original furniture and fittings at all three of their prestige local government competition-winning buildings. The items in the archive photographs of Slough Town Hall reveal that the fittings were generally similar, or variations upon common themes in all three major projects. Services, likewise were sophisticated for their day, particularly the slave and master pulse operated electric clocks in all major rooms. A good number of these survive at Slough Town Hall and are part of the fabric of the building. As I have noted above, it is regrettable that none of the original light fittings now appear to have survived.
- 3.17 The exterior of the building retains its original brick and stone-banded walling, which is distinctive, particularly the care with which the brick bonding has been made. For example, on the rear south wall of the cross wing containing the Council Chamber, there is a variant on the garden wall bond, with a course of header bricks, then three intervening courses of stretchers, set out so that there are continuous diagonals running up the walls, giving the effect of bold chevron patterns beneath the tall high-level windows of the Council Chamber.
- 3.18 The care with which the window openings were related to the walling is typical of the period, and of the architects. The relationship between the horizontal strip windows, set in narrow stone surrounds on the ground floor of the wing to the left of the formal entrance, juxtaposed with verticals on the first floor is striking and also indicative of the influence of Modernism. The formal blocks containing the Council Suite is the most overtly classical part of the building, with its central entrance, flanked by smaller windows set in bands of stone, counterpointing with the more vertical and

formally framed first floor windows of the Committee Rooms, and the run of five small windows lighting the Caretaker's Flat in the second floor. The pediment which crowns the building is not overdone.

- 3.19 The most noticeable feature of the roofscape is the copper-clad cupola over the ridge of the gabled, pedimented roof of the Council Suite. This is a very important feature, as it has been found that it was designed by Reg Butler, who qualified as an architect in the 1930s, but gained international fame as a sculptor after the Second World War. Butler uses a low-key classical design, with a rectangular lower part, surmounted by a slender octagonal louvred feature, and a spiky finial above. There is a larger version of this cupola on the main entrance block of County Hall, Hertford, but this was designed a little later, and there is no indication on the drawings that Butler was responsible for it. This feature on Slough Town Hall is of considerable architectural and historic interest in itself, particularly as this is Butler's only remaining piece of architectural work. Further information on Butler is provided in Appendix C.
- 3.20 Another distinctive feature is the way in which the ends of the lower blocks, both the projecting pedimented block on the east, and the single bay projection on the west have stone quoins at intervals suggesting pilasters, or rustication. Again this is indicative of the way in which the architects of the period were sufficiently knowledgeable of classical detailing to be able to make an original statement without literal reproduction of classical features.
- 3.21 Externally, and with impact internally, the most noticeable alteration of the building is the replacement of all the windows. It is not known when this was carried out, but considerable care was taken in most cases to provide reasonable proportions in the subdivisions, but with the omission of the horizontal intermediate transoms which were so characteristic of designs of this period and which in the case of the originals gave a distinctive 1930s feel to the building. This can be seen in comparison with Norwich City Hall, where windows with the original subdivision are still extant.
- 3.22 Taken in context with the surrounding walling, the alteration of the windows, while noticeable when compared with the originals, does not appear to unduly devalue the impact of the design of the exterior of the building. Indeed, when looking at the front elevation from the Bath Road, past the characteristic flagpole feature, on axis with the entrance (another detail shared with County Hall, Hertford), the overall impression is that the building has retained its important design values and architectural and historic interest. A more formal assessment of the building will be made in the next section.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

4.1 The principles of selection for listing buildings are set out in paras. 6.10-6.15 of PPG 15: *Planning and the Historic Environment*. The main criteria are:

- **Architectural interest:** *The lists are meant to include all buildings which are of importance to the nation for the interest of their architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship; also important examples of particular building types and techniques (eg. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;*
- **Historic interest:** *this includes buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history;*
- **Close historical association:** *with nationally important people or events;*
- **Group value:** *especially where buildings comprise an important architectural or historic unity or a fine example of planning (eg. square, terraces or model villages).*

Not all these criteria will be relevant to every case, but a particular building may qualify for listing under more than one of them.

4.2 As stated in para. 6.11, age and variety are important consideration. Due to the relatively higher rate of survival of 19th and 20th century buildings

greater selection is necessary to identify the best examples of particular building types, and only buildings of definite quality and character are listed. For the same reasons, only selected buildings from the period after 1914 are listed.

4.3 Para. 6.12 adds more detail about the procedure for listing twentieth century buildings, which is:

To identify key exemplars for each of a range of building types – industrial, educational, residential, etc. – and to treat these exemplars as broadly defining a standard against which to judge proposals for any further additions to the list. This approach has already been successfully applied to the inter-war period.

These general principles of selection and main criteria were reiterated by English Heritage in March 2007, when a more detailed document was published by the Heritage Production Department. Together with a series of guides: of these *Law and Government Buildings Selection Guide* is most germane.

4.4 My detailed assessment of Slough Town Hall and conclusion is set out below:

- 4.4.1 The **architectural interest** of Slough Town Hall has been described in detail in Sections 2 and 3 above. It is a fine example of the progressive tendencies of classically based design, with the influence of Swedish Romantic Classicism, that was characteristic of public buildings during the 1930s. Its intrinsic pedigree is affirmed by its having been first premiated in an open architectural competition, promoted by Slough UDC in 1934. Its architects, James and Pierce had already won the competition for Norwich City Hall in 1931, and were also to win the competition for Hertford County Hall in 1935. Both these are listed Grade II*.
- 4.4.2 Slough Town Hall qualifies on architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship. I have above in Sections 2 and 3 discussed the interrelationship of design and decoration of Slough Town Hall in context of a shared comprehensive approach, in which all features were designed by architects, including the original furniture and lighting fittings. That much of the latter has disappeared does not disqualify the building from listing, as the excellent design and craftsmanship of the panelling in the Council Chamber, and Committee Rooms provided testimony to its original quality, both aesthetically and functionally. The main stair, with its sweeping terrazzo balustrade and terrazzo treads on a concrete base is a detail of technological skill and virtuosity. The main entrance hall and Council Chamber ante-room are excellent examples of progressive classical design and detailing.
- 4.4.3 The structure of the building was progressive in using hollow pot and concrete techniques to achieve a clear span between external walls, which would allow for flexible use in the future. The integration of services, particularly the heating system was notable, as was the case into which the radiators were concealed by detailing of sophistication and elegance, particularly in the Council Chamber. The master and slave clock system was characteristic of its date, and the clock faces in the principal rooms were designed by the architects.
- 4.4.4 Externally, the well mannered ‘balanced asymmetry’ of the design is little altered. Although windows have been renewed this has been done in a discreet manner, with care taken in the proportions of the replacements. By comparison, Norwich City Hall still retains the original subdivisions. However, I do not consider that the impact of the replacements at Slough is sufficient to impair the building’s eligibility for listing. The varied fenestration enlivens the building, as I have described in detail in Sections 2 and 3 above. The contribution of warm toned Newbury bricks, Nailsworth (Cotswold) stone dressings, and the contrast of the green patinated copper roofs and cupola are unimpaired. The cupola has the additional distinction of having been designed by Reg Butler, who trained as an architect and taught at the Architectural Association, and worked for Pierce in the mid 1930s: he was better-known for his postwar career as a sculptor. The craftsmanship and ingenious bonding of the brickwork, on a variant of Flemish garden Wall Bond, produces a ‘chevron’ effect on the Council Chamber block, akin to a 20th century updating of Elizabethan diaper work.
- 4.4.5 The plan form of the building attained a practical and well considered arrangement of the staff/technical offices in relation to the Council Chamber suite and main entrance, which reflected a degree of the hierarchical structure of local government in the 1930s. The main entrance was designed for Councillors, chief officers and public, who also had use of the main stair. Staff would have entered by the east doorway,

and generally used the east stair. For access to the Public Gallery of the Council Chamber, there was a 'secret' service stair, running up from the entrance hall, which avoided the Council Chamber Ante-Room: this stair also served the Caretaker's Flat.

Indeed, *The Builder* Journal of 27th July 1934 talks favourably about the high quality plan of the building.

The plan takes advantage of the site and has no internal courts. The accommodation is well grouped. The public and main entrance gives direct access to the Rates Office on the ground floor. The Town Clerk's and Council suite are on the first floor. The secondary entrance is convenient for the Surveyor and the building inspectors.

Slough Town Hall is also espoused as a good plan by A. Calvely Cotton in *Town Halls* (1936) (London, Architectural Press). The Assessor, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel FRIBA also commented in his report:

Its general arrangement is convenient and economical, the detail of its planning is very well studied...

The Architects' plan also allowed for the future extension of the building. This was noted in their report.

Future accommodation up to any extent can be provided by extending the east wing in a southerly direction.

Although there has been some alteration, and opening out on the first floor main corridor, the key features of the plan form are still legible and functional. The fact that the main public entrance to the Town Hall is no longer in general use does not involve any physical alteration to the fabric, and is a management issue. The alteration of the rear rooms, beneath the Council Chamber has involved a degree of intervention, but the prolongation of the entrance hall into the public approach to the Rates Office was originally screened off by the glazed swing doors and screen that have been moved to close of the front vestibule. Additional glazed doors have been fitted at the foot of the stairs and elsewhere, for fire protection. I do not consider that the alterations or the moving and/or installation of additional fire check doors has impaired either the plan or the intrinsic quality of the areas involved to a point where listing might be dismissed: these are minor changes in the overall context.

- 4.4.6 **Historic interest** includes the decision to site the new Town Hall on the Bath Road, which created the town's prosperity as a coaching stop; the origin of the building's commission, and its relation to the expansion of the area and population of Slough U.D.C. in the interwar period. The aspirational progress towards the application for the status of Municipal Borough, is another historic factor linked to the Town Hall, as the Royal Charter was granted in 1938, the year after implementation of the Town Hall. A later event of historic significance was the resiting of the Memorial and Book of Remembrance from the Great War (with an addition of names from the Second World War). The Memorial was installed in the entrance hall in 1953, and takes the form of an iron cabinet containing the Book of Remembrance. This discreet addition

has added to the special historic interest of the building, and association with the two World Wars.

4.4.7 **Group Value** is not a characteristic of Slough Town Hall. The Council's consultant, Anthony Walker, has attempted to argue that the Town Hall is incomplete, on the basis that the Assembly Hall, a competition requirement for siting only, was integral to James and Pierce's design of the Town Hall. I will rebut that proposition below. There is no group value of any material architectural and historic interest between the Town Hall and the 1980s extensions. The latter are of no special architectural or historic interest, and this should be made clear when listing the Town Hall. Nor does there appear to have been any attempt by Slough Borough Council to control subsequent development along the south side of the Bath Road to recognise or complement the intrinsic qualities of the Town Hall. It is possible to obtain a more appropriate view of the front elevation of the Town Hall in context, with the mature Cedar of Lebanon tree to its west, from Salt Hill Park to the north of the Bath Road. Above, in para. 2.12, I have quoted John Betjeman, not a notable enthusiast for Slough, who considered the Town Hall represented '*a striving for unity out of chaos.*' When a building possesses the requisite degree of special architectural or historic interest, as I have concluded Slough Town Hall does, group value is a bonus, not an imperative. Any lack of such does not detract from the special interest of the building concerned.

4.4.8 *The Law and Government Buildings Selection Guide* (English Heritage, March 2007) elaborates on some of the points raised in PPG 15. Para. 2 of the new guidance gives a context for assessing the impact of later alteration:

However, because of radical changes in the provision of these public services, original or early internal features are vulnerable and in some cases only hardly survive. Their significance should be carefully considered as part of the assessment. Adaptation is inevitable, given changing views on humanitarian issues and changing legislative backgrounds, so a degree of alteration is to be expected.

I have above concluded that the degree of physical alteration to the fabric of Slough Town Hall is not sufficiently negative in impact as to preclude listing. The recent advice, quoted above, puts the matter into perspective.

4.4.9 Some comments have been added to the date range:

With inter and post war towns, greater survival rates demand rigorous selection: architectural interest will be the principal determinant in assessing modern examples across the range.

I consider that my analysis of the competition procedure and the design of the premiated entry, in context of the architects other high profile local authority projects – Norwich City Hall 1931-8 (Grade II*) and Hertford County Hall (Grade II*), and my review of the context and stylistic range of 1930s local authority buildings, has affirmed the listability of Slough Town Hall.

- 4.4.10 **Civic identity** is a criterion added to the guidance. Above, I have analysed the process of the fast expanding UDC becoming more conscious of its identity and need for expanded premises; their foresight in promoting the competition, and the symbolic achievement of the completed building, in their bid for incorporation as a Municipal Borough, granted in 1938, the year following the ceremonial opening of the new Town Hall.
- 4.4.11 Having assessed the intrinsic and historic interest of Slough Town Hall against the relevant criteria, I have concluded that it warrants listing, Grade II, as of special architectural or historic interest, and urge that it be added to the list as soon as possible, in view of the Council's recent decision to sell the site for clearance and redevelopment.

5.0 COMMENTARY ON CONSULTANT'S REPORT

- 5.1 I have studied the Report submitted by Anthony Walker Consultant, and have noted his conservation related qualifications, and professional and academic experience. I have a number of comments to make on both the generality and detail of his Report.
- 5.2 In recounting the history of the competition in which entry No. 142 (submitted by C. H. James and S. Rowland Pierce) he insinuates, on the basis of a comment by the Assessor, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, that the first premiated design fell short of its planning – *'the one placed second probably had the best plan'*. As the Assessor concluded:

In arriving at these conclusions I have minutely weighed the merits and defects of the considerable number of excellent designs that remained after those with grave faults had been eliminated. It is therefore with complete confidence that I put forward my selection of No. 142 [the design placed first], having repeatedly compared it with those most nearly approaching it in all-round merit. Its general arrangement is convenient and economical, the detail of its planning is very well studied, its fenestration is particularly admirable, and its architectural treatment appropriate and dignified.

In a further letter the Assessor adds:

I am looking forward eagerly to seeing the building when it will be in course of erection. I feel convinced that, when complete, it will be generally admired.

This leaves no doubt that the first premiated scheme was overall the best of the 205 designs submitted. Goodhart-Rendel was an architect of considerable experience, undoubted professional probity, and (then) a future RIBA President, who appears to have handled the competition in an exemplary manner. The rather derogatory remarks made by Mr. Walker in his Report are purely speculative, and intended to cast doubt on the worth of Slough Town Hall *ab initio*. They don't succeed and are, moreover, irrelevant.

- 5.3 Mr. Walker also poses a hypothetical commentary (para. 2.4) which appears to affirm that (to him) the changes in planning and design of the building are reflections of defects in the original design. Very few architectural competition-winning designs have been built precisely following the premiated plans. For example, in the competition for Hertford County Hall, which the same practice won in 1935, a south projecting wing from the right hand of the principal south elevation was removed, and the accommodation (together with other functions not included in the competition brief) were housed in a separate building on the site. There was no suggestion that this compromised the overall building in any manner, let alone affected its eligibility for listing when this arose in 1995.

Indeed, it is worth noting again that the minutes of the Council's General Purposes Committee of 29th May 1935 state as follows:

Your Sub Committee [New Offices Sub Committee] begged to report that at the suggestion of the Architects they have agreed a few minor amendments in the planning of the various offices which they are of the opinion will tend to facilitate the working arrangements of the staff. Your Sub Committee also agreed a slight alteration in the elevation which they are satisfied will improve the appearance of the building.

It was not unusual for schemes to be improved after the competition had been won and the changes made were clearly done so at the suggestion of the architects.

- 5.4 Mr. Walker also attempts to make much ado over the omission of the ‘future assembly hall’, the siting of which was a competition requirement. Yes, it figures in the perspective, which accompanied the entry, and it is shown in heavy outline on the block plan, but that does not substantiate the claim that the design, and the building, was, and remains incomplete without the hall; in his conclusions, Mr. Walker goes out of his way to state that ‘*it is clear that it is a partly-completed design which has not fulfilled the original aspirations for the site*’ (para. 8.3). This is certainly not the case, and there is no evidence that its first premiation was in any way linked to its incorporation of the sketch perspective showing the hall.

It is also worth noting again that in the report that accompanied their design, the architects stated the following:

The Hall occupies a conspicuous position on the Bath Road frontage, and it would be very accessible to the public: but while the Hall is necessary to complete the composition as a forecourt, its omission would leave a pleasant building mass in the proposed municipal offices.

One should also recall that *The Builder* journal of 27th July 1934 was quite clear that the Assembly Hall was merely a possible aspiration, observing as follows:

Provision was to be made for an assembly hall to be built, perhaps, at some later date.

- 5.5 As regards the failure to complete the rear quadrangle, shown in dotted outline on the block plan, this is another irrelevant comment. In comparison, the rear of Norwich City Hall has never yet been completed. Nor was County Hall, Hertford extended beyond the original courtyard block plan in the traditional manner envisaged, but with a modernist high rise block, completed in the late 1970s, designed by the then Hertfordshire County Architect, John Onslow. Neither the incompleteness of Norwich City Hall inhibited listing at Grade II in 1981, or upgrading to II* very recently; nor did the scale, bulk and style of the 1970s additions at Hertford prevent County Hall being listed at Grade II* in 1995.
- 5.6 The comments about the various proposals for extension in paras. 2.4 and 2.5 of Mr. Walker’s Report are irrelevant, and do not indicate shortcomings, other than lack of space, in the 1936 building. The fact that the 1981 extension has the principal (and for a stranger to the town very difficult to find) reception area in the centre of its irregularly radiating wings does not affirm that the front entrance from the Bath Road is functionally redundant; still less that it indicates that the building was poorly

planned in the first instance. Throughout his Report, Mr Walker is ready to press any of his observations, however irrelevant or anachronistic, to attempt to downgrade the significance and intrinsic qualities of the Town Hall. The only relevant approach is an analysis of the design of the building, as actually completed in 1937, together with an inventory of the principal alterations that have occurred, and an assessment of the potential special architectural and historic interest, and this listability, against the criteria.

- 5.7 His comparability against other local authority commissions by the architects is superficial, and when discussing the setting of the building he tends to blame his perceived lack of distinction in the Town Hall for the poor setting in which it has become somewhat isolated (see paras. 3.2, 5.4.1, 8.4). As I have concluded, the setting of the building itself has changed very little. The fact that it represents an island of restraint and good taste in an otherwise poor street picture on the south side of Bath Road does not downgrade the building eligibility for listing. Seen in the broader context from Salt Hill Park on the north of the road, the front elevation of the Town Hall is viewed in a more appropriate context, and one which influenced its original siting.
- 5.8 In para. 3.4, Mr. Walker, acknowledges that the original plan layout of the building has been retained, although he then launches his tirade based on the fact that the original front entrance has been superseded by the modern reception area. His comment that *'this has significantly changed the relationship of the internal use of the building to the forecourt in front* is a management issue and unrelated to the assessment of its special architectural or historic interest. He also mentions *'significant alterations to the public space at ground level'*. While I acknowledge that the creation of the Mayor's parlour and its ancillary rooms at the rear of the building had some impact, it has not devalued the central lobby area, which retains its important green veined *scagliola* columns. In paras. 3.6 and 3.7 he merely states that alterations in the eastern office wings have taken place, without relating them to the original layout, or assessing the impact.
- 5.9 In discussing the building under the English Heritage criteria he makes numerous superficial comments, without providing justification for his views, for example, 5.1.1

While the building has some pleasant features it is not of special architectural interest on account of its planning, building style, special features or materials nor of its technical development.

Nowhere in the Report does he provide a cogent of justification for this sweeping statement. His assessment of the building in Section 7 of the Report, to which I will return later, is superficial, and appears to be based more on personal dislikes than the comprehensive examination of both original features and later interventions, that the *'rigorous selection'*, counselled by English Heritage calls for.

- 5.10 Moreover, there is an inaccuracy in his response to the criterion on civic identity being enhanced as a result of a change in status (paras. 5.2 and 5.2.1). In the latter he acknowledges the building's being constructed as a response to rapid growth in the authority's area. This was a general trend, particularly in the outer London area, and nearby urban centres. This prompted many authorities to work towards enhanced

status as Municipal Boroughs. Slough was created as a Municipal Borough by the Royal Decree of King George VI in September 1938. The Town Hall project should be viewed as aspirational, and in that respect it is linked both to a change in status and an enhanced civic identity. Mr. Walker omits to mention the creation of the Borough, the year after completion of the Town Hall.

- 5.11 In the more detailed assessment and commentary in Section 7, Mr. Walker's approach appears to be based on exaggerating the impact of later alterations or interventions, but where a room or feature remains relatively intact, to dismiss them as not of special interest anyway. He applies this tactic to all of the most distinctive rooms, spaces and surviving original details. For example, he concedes that original panelling has been retained in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms, but the removal of the dais in the former, and the original furniture throughout, has resulted in his comment that (para. 7.4)

Much of the original panelling has been retained but the matching furniture has been replaced and the original panelling is not of special interest.

This, without describing the panelling, or assessing its contribution to the quality of the rooms. Please refer to my assessment for comparison. He virtually ignores the simple, but refined fireplace surrounds in the Committee Rooms.

- 5.12 Likewise, he dismisses the main staircase as a *'pleasant design ... not of special interest'*. In fact it is a skilful design, and one of those of most modernist character in the building, with a technically adept use of terrazzo throughout the stair and balustrading, swept corners at the half-landing, and focus on the full-height window, which lights the space. The chromium plated handrail remains, as does most of the finial on the swept curving plinth at the foot of the stair. The intervention for the stair lift is clumsy, but would be reversible with little damage to the original and has not *'substantially compromised'* this space, as my building inspection and assessment have concluded.
- 5.13 Mr. Walker deems the finishes are not of special interest. I consider that they represent a balance of high quality traditional and modern materials used in detailing of enduring quality in most situations. The cracked terrazzo in the entrance hall is a product of hard wear over 70 years, and cracking of the terrazzo in similar situations in County Hall, Hertford did not impede its listing. He does not mention the special interest of the *scagliola* columns, the marble fireplaces, or the inscribed commemorative panel in the entrance vestibule.
- 5.14 In his conclusion, para. 7.2, Mr. Walker, spends little time on the exterior although he concedes that it remains *'substantially as built, although it is understood that the windows have been replaced'*. Yes, they have, and it is surprising that he does not use this as a further reason for dismissing the listability of the building. However, as I have shown, his line is that the building is fundamentally incomplete, and that without the projected Assembly Hall cannot seriously be considered to possess a sufficient degree of special architectural or historic interest to warrant statutory listing (see para. 8.3 and numerous other points in the Report). Mr. Walker completely neglects to mention that the clock tower was designed by the internationally acclaimed sculptor, Reg Butler.

- 5.15 One aspect that he introduces, and dismisses, is the possibility of retention of the Council block only. This is totally irrelevant to the issue of listing, and for once I agree with Mr. Walker's conclusion that this would have little value. However, he described the visual impact of the demolition of the wings in para. 7.8.1:

The current massing of the building depends on the larger wing and return balancing of the main block. This is part of the more informal semi-classical approach said by Pevsner to reflect a Swedish influence and which is evident in the architects' other and more significant work at Norwich City Hall.

And in para. 8.5

...The elements which have been described as giving the building its character would be lost and the remaining central building would lose the balancing massing of the wings.

- 5.16 In this assessment, with which I am in agreement, there is no reference to the chimera of the Assembly Hall as a necessary adjunct to the Town Hall's achievement of special architectural or historic interest. Mr. Walker actually appears to agree that the Town Hall, as built, attained the skilful 'balanced asymmetry' of Norwich City Hall (and though he does not mention it, Hertford County Hall).
- 5.17 In conclusion, I consider that Mr. Walker's Report quite fails to provide any justification for dismissing the listing of Slough Town Hall on the grounds of insufficient special architectural or historic interest.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 In the above Report, I have set out my academic and professional qualifications and experience, and my involvement with listing buildings, as a consultant to English Heritage. My familiarity with Norwich City Hall, and, in particular, Hertford County Hall, the other major local government competition-winning designs by the architects James and Pierce, which are both listed at Grade II*, will, I consider, add authority to my conclusion about the listability of Slough Town Hall.
- 6.2 In Section 2, I have compiled a detailed historical background about the commission, the competition, and the way in which, with minor amendments, was built in 1936 and ceremonially opened in March 1937. My account has also examined the background context of local authority buildings in the wide stylistic typology of the 1930s.
- 6.3 In Section 3, I have given a detailed account of my inspection of Slough Town Hall, which records the survival of original features, and the alterations which have occurred over the 70 year period since inauguration of the building. I concluded that the impact upon the special interest of the building has not been of sufficient magnitude as to preclude its listing as of special architectural or historic interest.
- 6.4 In Section 4, I have set out the published criteria against which buildings are assessed for listing, both the main criteria, from PPG 15: *Planning and the Historic Built Environment*, and also the more detailed advice published by the Heritage Protection Department's *Law and Local Government Selection Guide* of March 2007. My conclusion was that the building would well merit listing, at Grade II.
- 6.5 In Section 5, it has been necessary for me to rebut statements by the Council's Consultant, Anthony Walker, in his Report. I found that much of his Report was irrelevant or inaccurate, and that he failed to justify his conclusion that Slough Town Hall did not attain a sufficient high degree of special architectural or historic interest to warrant listing.
- 6.6 I have therefore concluded, that on the grounds of its intrinsic architectural quality, which has been retained in significant measure, and with the historic interest of its resulting from an architectural competition pioneered by a progressive expanding local authority, and won by architects who had also been first premiated in two other major competitions for local authority buildings, Slough Town Hall more than meets the requisite standard for listing Grade II as a Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.
- 6.7 I invite English Heritage to consider the detail of my assessment, and the supporting information contained in this Report, and the comprehensive material and photographs submitted by the *Campaign to Save Slough's Heritage*, and to list the building, as a matter of urgency.

Dr Mervyn Miller
13 May 2008

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