Habitat and Heritage Statement

Buckden Towers (St Claret Centre), Buckden, Cambridgeshire

Grade I Listed Building

Client: Claretian Missionaries Trust
Applicant: BT Wholesale / Openreach
Proposed Works: Installation of new Ethernet fibre optic cable to second-floor server room

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1. Introduction

This Habitat and Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of an application for Listed Building Consent for the installation of a new fibre optic telecommunications connection at Buckden Towers (St Claret Centre), a Grade I Listed Building occupied by the Claretian Missionaries Trust.

The proposed works are required to provide a modern high-speed Ethernet fibre connection to support the operational requirements of the site. The installation has been designed to minimise any impact upon the historic fabric, character and appearance of the listed building.

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2. Site Description and Heritage Significance

Buckden Towers is a Grade I Listed Building of exceptional architectural and historic significance. The site contains buildings of medieval and later date and is recognised as one of the most important historic structures in the region. The significance of the asset is derived from its age, architectural interest, historic associations and surviving historic fabric.

Given its Grade I status, great weight must be afforded to the conservation of its significance. Any alterations should therefore be carefully designed to avoid unnecessary harm and preserve the building's special architectural and historic interest.

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3. Description of Proposed Works

Openreach proposes the installation of a new Ethernet fibre optic cable serving a second-floor server room.

The works comprise:

- Exposure of an existing BT duct located to the front of the building, currently covered by accumulated soil and debris.

General

- Installation of a new black fibre optic cable from the existing duct.
- Routing of the cable vertically up the external elevation to second-floor level, following the line of existing drainage pipework.
- Horizontal routing of the cable beneath an existing projecting white ridge/detail, thereby reducing its visual prominence.
- Formation of a single new entry point through an existing mortar joint/gap between bricks to provide access into the second-floor hall area.
- Use of a temporary hoist to facilitate safe installation.
- Internal routing of the cable beneath existing floorboards to the proposed communications cabinet.
- Termination of the connection within a white Fibre Distribution Point (FDP6) mounted at the base of the communications cabinet.

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4. Heritage Impact Assessment

External Works

The external fibre cable has been deliberately routed alongside existing drainage services to minimise visual impact and avoid introducing conspicuous new elements onto the historic façade.

The proposed black fibre cable is of a small diameter and will be visually subordinate to the existing rainwater goods. Running the cable beneath the projecting ridge further reduces visibility from public viewpoints.

Only a single, small penetration is required to facilitate entry into the building. This opening will be formed through a mortar joint or existing gap between bricks wherever practicable, thereby minimising intervention into historic masonry and allowing future removal with limited residual impact.

Internal Works

Internally, the cable will be concealed beneath existing floorboards and routed to the communications cabinet. The proposed Fibre Distribution Point is a small modern service component located within a functional server/comms environment and will not affect areas of special architectural interest.

No historic decorative features, fixtures, fittings or significant structural fabric will be removed or altered as part of the proposed works.

Level of Harm

The proposal constitutes a minor and reversible intervention required to facilitate modern telecommunications infrastructure. Due to:

- the limited scale of the works;
- the use of existing service routes;
- the minimal disturbance to historic fabric;
- the discreet positioning of the cable; and
- the reversibility of the installation,

the proposals are considered to result in **less than minor harm**, and effectively preserve the special architectural and historic significance of the Grade I listed building.

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5. Habitat and Ecology Considerations

The works are limited in extent and consist primarily of cable installation on existing building elevations and within previously disturbed areas of the building.

No trees, vegetation, watercourses, landscaping or natural habitats will be affected by the proposal. The works do not require excavation of undisturbed land, demolition of structures, or removal of features known to support protected species.

The fibre cable installation will utilise existing service routes and building fabric, significantly limiting the potential for ecological disturbance.

As a precaution:

- Contractors will remain vigilant for evidence of bats, nesting birds, or other protected species during the works.
- Should evidence of protected species be discovered, works in the affected area will cease immediately and advice will be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist.
- All works will be undertaken during normal daylight hours where practical.

Subject to these measures, the proposed works are considered to have **negligible ecological impact** and are unlikely to adversely affect habitats or protected species.

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6. Conclusion

The proposed installation of a new fibre optic Ethernet connection at Buckden Towers is a necessary infrastructure upgrade that has been carefully designed to minimise impacts on the Grade I listed building.

The routing follows existing building services, requires only a minimal and reversible intervention into historic fabric, and preserves the building's architectural and historic significance. The works are similarly considered to have no significant impact on habitats, ecology or protected species.

General

Accordingly, the proposal is considered to represent an appropriate and proportionate alteration that enables the continued effective use of the building while safeguarding its heritage significance.