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Exclusive: first Stirling Prize winner set to be demolished

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Source: Morley von Sternberg

The first building to win the RIBA Stirling Prize – Hodder Associates' Centenary Building for the University of Salford – is to be demolished

The 29-year-old building, which has sat empty for nearly a decade, is due to be flattened as part of the major redevelopment of the Adelphi Village area backed by the university, Salford City Council and the English City Fund, the AJ can exclusively reveal.

Its only possible chance of survival is a listing bid, which has been made by the Twentieth Century Society.

The Hodder block was completed in 1995 and was described as a 'dynamic, modern and sophisticated exercise in steel, glass and concrete' when it won the first RIBA Stirling Prize the following year. It was originally designed to be the School of Electrical Engineering before a change of use, during construction, to the Faculty of Art and Design Technology.

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In 2018, plans were unveiled to convert the building into a primary school under wider proposals by 5plus Architects for the university's existing campus and surrounding area, which included the delivery of a significant amount of new housing.

But the school scheme has now been ditched and the development team, having 'explored multiple options' for the long-vacant four-storey block, said it intended to press ahead with demolition.

A spokesperson for the project backers said: 'While the Centenary Building has been part of our university estate for a number of decades, unfortunately, its ageing infrastructure means it no longer meets modern standards and requirements. It has now been vacant for a third of its built life.

'Careful consideration has been given to the history of the building, and the partnership, which includes Salford City Council, ECF and the University of Salford, intends to demolish the building as part of the comprehensive development of Adelphi Village.'

Reacting to the news, Hodder Associates founder Stephen Hodder said he had received the news of the demolition with 'great dismay'.

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He told the AJ: 'This is not borne out of nostalgia, it being the inaugural RIBA Stirling Prize winner, or indeed the importance of the building to the development of our practice, but as an original signatory to Architects Declare and past chair of the Construction Industry Council's Climate Change Committee, I simply cannot support the demolition of a building that is only 30 years old.'

The former RIBA president said he had previously been 'encouraged' by the earlier 2012 Crescent Development Framework, which proposed retrofitting the building as either a community or social facility.

Hodder said that the university's previous director of estates had invited his practice to submit a fee proposal

...never said that the university's previous decision to demolish the building was a mistake, but it had 'never received a reply'.

He added: '[We're] not aware that there has been an exhaustive effort to repurpose the building.'

'For a university that promotes its sustainability credentials, the intention to demolish surely undermines the credibility of its policy. We urge it to reconsider, and hope the architectural community and wider industry collectively exclaim its concerns.'

Meanwhile, Historic England has confirmed it received an application for listing the building last month and was considering the application.

The **Twentieth Century Society**, which made the bid before the university's official confirmation of its plans to flatten the academic building, said: 'The "disciplined romanticism" of the Centenary Building at the University of Salford saw it recognised with numerous awards at the time of its completion, most notably the inaugural RIBA Stirling Prize in 1996.'

'It's hugely disappointing that the commendable previous proposals for conversion to a school or for community use have floundered, and to now see the vacant building proposed for demolition. That would be wholly irresponsible and unnecessary outcome, and we urge the University to reconsider.'

It added: 'This is a sophisticated piece of modern architecture, with clear opportunities for adaptive reuse. It acted as a catalyst for regeneration before and could do so again.'

'The [listing] application provides an intriguing test-case for the heritage status of previous Stirling Prize winners, as the award approaches the 30-year anniversary of its founding.'

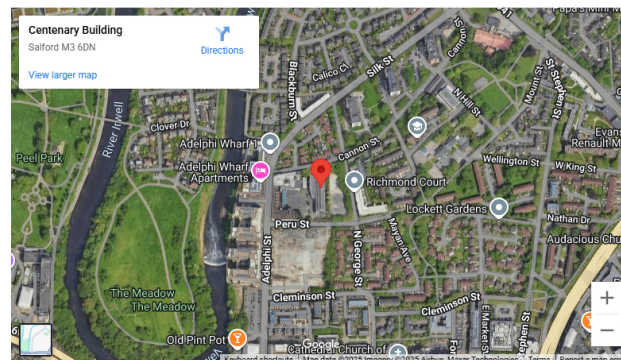
'If the buildings 'which have made the greatest contribution to the evolution of architecture' [as per RIBA's Stirling Prize definition] only have a shelf-life of 30 years, what does that say about the current state of British architecture?'

There must be a case for all Stirling Prize-winning buildings to be considered for listing

Responding to the news RIBA board chair, Jack Pringle, said that while the institute did not have the detail to 'comment definitively on this specific case' the 'inventive re-use of buildings [was] critical to our net zero future, and would always advocate for a whole life carbon assessment to understand whether re-use is truly feasible.'

He told the AJ: '[There] must be a case for all Stirling Prize winning buildings to be considered for listing. By definition they are the best buildings of the year, and to list at least one modern building a year, after due consideration and maybe a little time, would not seem unreasonable.'

See the Centenary Building in the AJ Buildings Library



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