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BANKSY'S BREXIT MURAL, DOVER



PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE OPTIONS FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF THE MURAL

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Banksy's Brexit Mural, Dover

Preliminary Assessment of the Options for the Preservation of the Mural

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Description & Condition
 - 2.1 The Building
 - 2.2 The Mural
- 3.0 Conservation Options & Budgets
 - 3.1 Option 1 - Preservation in situ
 - 3.2 Option 2 – Detachment & Restoration
 - 3.3 Additional Options

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Banksy's Brexit Mural, Dover

Preliminary Assessment of the Options for the Preservation of the Mural

1.0 Introduction

The following preliminary assessment report on the options for the preservation of Banksy's Brexit mural in Dover has been prepared for Jon Iveson (Museums and Tourism Manager at Dover Museum). An initial assessment of the mural, which has been overpainted, was carried out on 21 February 2023 and options for further action were discussed on site. The building has been deemed to be structurally unsound and is currently due for demolition. The report looks at a range of options for the restoration of the painting both in situ and as a detached piece, together with ball-park figures for each.

The popular mural depicting a workman chipping away at one of the stars of the European Union's flag appeared in May 2017 close to Dover's ferry terminal on the side of the former Castle Amusements building at 11 Bench Street, but was painted over 2 years later with white paint. After Banksy confirmed he was the artist on his Instagram account the artwork had been valued at about £1 million.

The mural which had greeted traffic travelling towards the Port of Dover had become a popular tourist attraction and there was an outcry when it disappeared over the weekend of the 24th and 25th of August 2019. The Godden Gaming Organisation, which owned the building, had previously said it was exploring options to remove, maintain or sell the artwork leading to speculation that it had been removed for preservation or sale. It is evident, however, that the painting was simply whitewashed over although who did it remains unclear.



Photo: Banksy

2.0 Description

Painted a year after Britain narrowly voted in a referendum to leave the European Union the mural high on the flank wall of the former Castle Amusements building showed the European Union's blue flag, designed to be a symbol both of the European Union and, more broadly, the identity and unity of Europe. The circle of 12 gold stars on a sky-blue background were intended to stand for the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe. A comment on the result of the result of the controversial Brexit vote Banksy depicted a workman on a long ladder chipping away at one of the golden stars of the flag, symbolising the UK's impending exit from the bloc. As the workman chips away at the star cracks radiate out from the piece across the flag. After the piece was whitewashed over Banksy commented on Instagram: *"Oh. I had planned that on the day of Brexit I was going to change the piece in Dover to this [image lower right]. But seems they've painted over it. Never mind. I guess a big white flag says it just as well."*



Photos as originally painted and as the artist envisaged it post-Brexit (right): Banksy

2.1 The Building

The building arranged over four floors is of substantially brick construction, the courses being a mix of headers and stretchers the wall is likely to be 9 inches thick. Despite the very poor condition of the building as a whole the brick wall support behind the mural appears relatively sound with structural cracks apparently being limited to cracking of the render, some following the courses of brickwork. Structural issues are understood to be primarily associated with the general levels of neglect resulting in instability of the roof and internal structures. The interior of the building is currently inaccessible due to safety concerns and the wall has not been assessed internally.

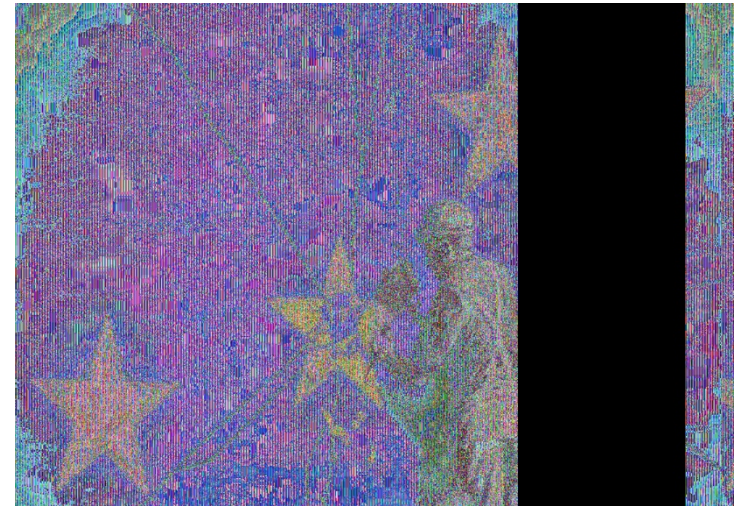
Overall the cementitious sandy render which forms the support for the mural appears generally well adhered to the brick substrate but some areas of substantial loss are visible towards the rear of the building (*photo centre below*). Viewed from a distance the sandy yellow-tinted render appears to be compact and cohesive in most places at high level but localised areas of disaggregation are evident where the protective paint layer has been lost, particularly at lower levels (*photo lower right*)



2.2 The Mural

The wall (*photo lower left*) as it appears now following the application of white paint to the mural over the weekend of the 24th and 25th of August 2019. Originally a bright white overpaint the colour of the white has dulled considerably and in parts looks to have thinned sufficiently, due to weathering, that elements of the mural are visible through the layer. The level of thinning is uncertain and this may be misleading, however, as the wall has also become dirtier as algae and other materials have either been deposited or grown on the surface. Compare the workman and stars in the image top right to the same area today (*photo lower right*) where some of the star design is evident under the white.

The image produced by Banksy is a composite of different paint types and application techniques all of which will have an influence on the techniques required to remove the overpaint. The blue background would probably have been applied by roller and is likely to have been an exterior masonry paint chosen for its longevity outdoors. The stars are executed using a stencil as can be seen in their slightly uneven application. The figure of the workman and the ladder are likely to be spray painted using stencils for the main elements combined with free hand spray painting for areas such as the shadows. The cracks radiating from the broken star are likely to be freehand brush work. Prior to the application of the overpaint it is though the mural had survived in good condition.



3.0 Conservation Options

It is understood that structural engineers have assessed the building and deemed it to be structurally unsound. Plans for redevelopment of the site will need to take account of the presence of the mural and a range of options are considered below.

Options for the conservation of a wall painting are generally divided between preservation in situ and detachment and preservation at another location. It is generally accepted that removal of a wall painting is a last resort, to be carried out only where other options for conservation are unviable, although with works by Banksy commanding large sums his street pieces are more likely than most to be detached and sold. Banksy's street works are site specific and here the large edifice of the former amusement arcade provided the perfect location with Dover harbour in the background. Often executed in quiet, neglected areas, run-down buildings offer a suitable opportunity for the artist to appear with a scaffold, execute a piece quickly using stencils, and depart unnoticed and unchallenged.



Photo: Banksy

Measurements – The wall itself is approximately 12m high x 9m wide at the upper levels. The blue EU flag measures approx. 7m x 7m with the stars occupying a circle approx. 5m across. The life-size figure of the workman stands on a ladder roughly 4.5m from the ground. The area painted by the artist covers an area measuring approx. 55m².

3.1 Option 1 – Preservation in situ

Carry out a facadectomy retaining the building's mural facade for use in the new construction after the rest of the original building has been demolished. This would require the temporary stabilisation of the building structure with steel supports, for example, and the careful removal and/or strengthening of the structures behind. After structural stabilisation has been carried out it would be possible to uncover, conserve and restore the Banksy mural in situ.

3.1.1 Budget for in situ Conservation Treatment (excluding the structural works and provision of access) to include removal of the overpaint, stabilisation and restoration as necessary £ 290,000.00 (excl VAT)

3.2 Option 2 – Detachment and Restoration

The detachment of a wall painting is normally carried out only as a last resort and the process can present significant risks to the painting. The methods used to detach a mural can result in significant localised damage and require extensive restoration. However, with careful planning and the completion of a detailed assessment and feasibility trials it is possible to minimise the risk of damage and loss to the original.

The removal of a mural can broadly be divided into three main categories:

- 1 Detachment of the entire wall, including support structure (e.g. brick, etc.) – in sections if necessary
- 2 Detachment of the render and paint layers (i.e. removing the render from the wall support) – to be mounted onto a new support.
- 3 Detachment of the paint layer only (i.e. lifting or peeling the paint from the plaster) – this can be the riskiest and potentially damaging method.

Of these the one that retains the most integrity as a mural is the first option – detachment of the entire wall – preserving all evidence of the mural’s construction, context, history, etc. Typically this method requires a considerable degree of structural work to be carried out – supporting the building structure prior to removal, consolidating and supporting the wall within a lifting cradle and detachment, in sections if necessary. Once detached the mural can be cleaned and conserved, framed and supported as necessary at a new location.

The second option – detachment of the render and paint layer – preserves much of the character of the mural including its surface textures and to some degree its context but can sometimes be difficult to manage in the practical sense as it can sometimes prove hard to separate the render from the substructure.

The third option – detachment of the paint layer – leaves the painting devoid of its original support structure which can fundamentally affect and adversely alter the surface of the mural. The success of this process depends on both the methodology of removal (adhesive choice, etc.), the nature of the paint layer(s) and requires the application of a temporary, reversible facing material which holds the paint layer intact as it is removed from the render. The reverse of the paint layer is typically cleaned of all plaster residues and transferred to a new lightweight, dimensionally stable support.

In this case the first option might be deemed problematic due to the structural instability and access issues, the size of the mural and the costs involved in undertaking such a procedure. However, it would be feasible to detach the mural in sections with each one stabilised prior to removal and cradled for lifting to a new location for conservation and reconstruction.

Option 2.1 - Detachment of the entire wall, including support structure (e.g. brick, etc.) – in sections as required

Budget for cradling and removal of the mural in 8 sections approx. 3.5m w x 2m high plus the ladder section 4m x 2m £ 650,000.00 (excl. VAT)

Budget for initial in situ stabilisation and subsequent conservation treatment to include removal of the overpaints, stabilisation and restoration as necessary £ 450,000.00 (excl VAT)

Budgets quoted assume the façade has been stabilised by others and the building behind made safe or removed prior to works being carried out. Costs for craning and transportation of the sections are excluded. Costs for conservation work include reconstruction of the detached 3.5m x 2m sections at a new location, if necessary, but not the construction of the new wall support.

Option 2.2 Detachment of the render and paint layers (i.e. removing the render from the wall support) – to be mounted onto a new support.

Budget for the removal of the mural in 18 sections approx. 2.4m w x 1.2m high plus the ladder section 4m x 2m £ 300,000.00 (excl. VAT)

Budget for initial in situ stabilisation and subsequent conservation treatment to include removal of the overpaints, stabilisation and restoration as necessary £ 450,000.00 (excl VAT)

Budgets quoted assume the façade has been stabilised by others and the building behind made safe or removed prior to works being carried out. Costs for craning and transportation of the sections are excluded. Costs for conservation work include reconstruction of the detached 3.5m x 2m sections at a new location, if necessary, but not the construction of the new wall support.

Option 2.3 Detachment of the paint layer only (i.e. lifting or peeling the paint from the plaster) – the paint to be removed in sections and subsequently reconstructed as an image on a new lightweight support.

Budget for initial in situ stabilisation, detachment of the paint layers and subsequent conservation treatment (excluding the structural works and provision of access) to include removal of the overpaint, stabilisation and restoration as necessary £ 650,000.00 (excl VAT)

Budget quoted assumes the site has been made safe and all access is provided by others. Costs for conservation work include reconstruction of the sections as a complete image at a new location, if necessary, but not the construction of the new wall support.

3.3 Additional Options

Some additional options are available which would help to reduce costs overall. These would entail partial restoration in situ if the side elevation of the building were to be preserved or partial removal of the spray painted elements and reconstruction of the remainder.

3.3.1 Partial Restoration in situ

The elements of the mural which are actually spray painted (the stars, figure and ladder) and the painted crack lines could be uncovered, conserved and restored and the majority of the expanse of blue background could be repainted to match the original blue colour. As a cost option this would reduce the overall time required significantly.

Budget for partial restoration in situ £100,000.00 (excl VAT)

3.3.2 Partial Detachment and Restoration

The overall scope of any removal might also be considered. Looking at the artwork the lower quarter which contains the figure, the upper part of the ladder, the broken star and the two adjacent stars might be a more manageable piece to detach and display (*see image Page 3*).

In this scenario one could preserve just that area or incorporate it into a reconstruction of the remaining EU flag, either by removing the other 9 stars individually and repainting the background or reconstructing both.

Budget for partial detachment of key elements and restoration £ 400,000.00 (excl. VAT)

Budget quoted assumes the façade has been stabilised by others and the building behind made safe or removed prior to works being carried out. Costs for craning and transportation of the sections are excluded. Costs for conservation work include reconstruction of the detached 2.4m x 1.2m sections at a new location but do not include the construction of the new wall support.

Conserving our artistic heritage

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Assessment of Options in respect of the Banksy artwork at the Bench St site

Issues

The Banksy mural was painted in May 2017 and was painted over in in September 2019, well before DDC acquired the site on 16th September 2022. It is not known who undertook the covering up work or what specific materials were used either for the artwork itself or the covering over of the artwork.

It is known that Banksy himself did not consider the mural to be permanent because he himself had intended to repaint the wall himself following the Brexit decision. He posted the intended replacement design below on his web site and commenting that the 'white flag' (the overpainting) conveyed the same message:



The artwork was located on the west facing flank wall of a building which has been identified as a dangerous building, due the neglect over decades of the previous owners.

The lack of care and maintenance extends to the external walls/facades, and the render on which the artwork was painted is delaminating from the masonry wall and fragmenting.

Options

Description	Pros	Cons	Indicative costs (£k)	Costing explanations	Comments
OPTION 1: Record and demolish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low cost option • no impact on LUF delivery programme. • discreet piece of work easily delivered. • subject to obtaining relevant permissions gives ability to reproduce the artwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original artwork is lost • Potential for bad publicity 	<p>£6-£8k</p> <p>TOTAL £6-8k</p>	For advanced photometry that records the original artwork through the painted over layer plus the assembly of the photographic records into a catalogued information system.	Negligible impact on LUF project.
OPTION 2: Conserve in situ and retain flank wall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserves artwork in original setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high cost, to stabilise building and render. • Additional very high cost to conserve. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low land values mean there is a significant risk that the cost of retaining the art work in situ will make the whole site undevelopable for the foreseeable future. 	<p>@ £0.5m - £1.5m</p> <p>@£0.5m-£0.75m</p>	<p>Need to construct structural frame strong enough to support stand alone flank wall and clamp the mortar to wall and frame so that it does not move /disintegrate.</p> <p>Conservator costs-based estimate of labour for the painted over layer being removed manually. There may be a chemical process that reduces costs</p>	It is impossible to estimate the impact on the value without a full commercial appraisal and the costings are therefore indicative.

Description	Pros	Cons	Indicative costs (£k)	Costing explanations	Comments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of time. It may take many months to complete the painstaking process see appendix 1 below . • Success not guaranteed due to very fragile nature of both the wall and the render. The render could simply disintegrate. • On site welfare provision and facilities needed for conservators • Adverse impact on demo costs due to delay and complications costs of demolishing around a retained wall. • Adverse effect on ability to redevelop site. 	<p>@£0.05m -£0.1m</p> <p>@£0.02m-£0.03m</p> <p>£0.1m - £0.15m</p> <p>£0-£2m</p>	<p>depending on the paints used.</p> <p>Cost to stabilise mortar which is the base for the art work. Either a chemical treatment or some sort of film applied to surface.</p> <p>Cost of welfare facilities</p> <p>Costs of redevelopment rise because of need to incorporate new structural frame to support the wall with the Banksy. Location of the wall prejudices</p>	

Description	Pros	Cons	Indicative costs (£k)	Costing explanations	Comments
				obtaining the most value from the redevelopment Will involve re-tendering the demolition contract to take account of the wall remaining. Demo cannot start until flank wall stabilised. Estimated delay 6-12months.	
			TOTAL £1.17m- £4.44m		
OPTION 3: Conserve in situ and then remove for storage and re-use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retains artwork. Potential to sell to partially recover costs, sums of £1m have been talked about when valuing the artwork assuming it is possible to stabilise the mortar so that it does not disintegrate but see comments. Could be relocated to somewhere in close proximity to original location. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High cost, to stabilise building and render short term Additional very high cost to conserve. Success far from guaranteed due to very fragile nature of both the wall and the render. The render could simply disintegrate. On site welfare provision and facilities needed. Removing from site transportation and 	<p>@ £0.4m - £0.7m</p> <p>@£0.5m-£0.75m</p> <p>£0.02m-£0.03m</p> <p>£0.3m- £0.6m</p>	<p>Stabilisation costs</p> <p>Conservation costs</p> <p>Welfare facilities costs</p> <p>Includes sums for significant cranes depending on section sizes</p>	<p>The eye catching piece has been given the seven figure sum evaluation by expert Banksy collector, John Brandler.</p> <p>Mr Brandler said: "What is reported to be the asking price of £1million is reasonable but I think it could cost you three or four times</p>

Description	Pros	Cons	Indicative costs (£k)	Costing explanations	Comments
		<p>delivery costs to new site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .storage costs • Costs of delaying demo redevelopment • problem of finding a venue to display such a large work of art should it be conserved and not left in situ. 	<p>£0.04m</p> <p>£0.03m- £0.08m</p> <p>TOTAL £1.29m - £2.2m</p>	<p>£10k per year</p> <p>Includes retendering costs</p>	<p>that to transport it, look after it, preserve it and insure it so its actually in a way a negative value." Source Kent On line article of 4th July 2019</p>
OPTION 4: Remove and conserve off site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retains artwork. • Potential to sell to partially recover costs. Sums of £1m have been talked about when valuing the artwork. • Could be relocated to somewhere in close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high cost, to stabilise building and render. • Additional very high cost to conserve. • Success far from guaranteed due to very fragile nature of both the wall and the render. The render could simply disintegrate. 	<p>@ £0.4m - £0.7m</p> <p>@£0.5m-£0.75m</p>	<p>Stabilising building</p> <p>Conserving paint</p>	<p>Potential to create community conservation project to reduce costs subject to right premises being sourced</p>

Description	Pros	Cons	Indicative costs (£k)	Costing explanations	Comments
	<p>proximity to original location.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation rental and storage costs • Cost of delaying demo • Removing from site transportation costs and delivery cost (two moves: one to conservation workshop one to storage) • problem of finding a venue to display such a large work of art should it be conserved and not left in situ. 	<p>£0.03-£0.05m</p> <p>£0.03-£0.08m</p> <p>£0.6m- £1.2m</p> <p>TOTAL £1.56m - £2.78m</p>	<p>Rental and storage costs</p> <p>Will involve retendering the demolition contract to take account of the wall remaining. Demo cannot start until flank wall stabilised. Estimated delay 3-6 months.</p> <p>Remove to off site conservation workshop and then to final location (two moves).</p>	



Banksy mural before and after covering up.

Actions so far

- Comprehensive photographic records taken.
- Factum Arte commissioned for advanced photometric survey that will allow reproduction of the artwork, subject to Banksy giving permission.
- Factum Arte have existing connections with Banksy and will try to gauge his feelings for suitable next steps.
- [REDACTED] has taken a conservator, [REDACTED], to view the site (21 February 2023) and give his opinion about feasibility and viability of conserving the artwork itself. Initial comments during the site visit confirmed that the paint layer overlying the artwork is of a different composition and chemical cleaning is an option. There are three ways of approaching the removal of the artwork. The first - to support the layer of render from the west and to take down the brick wall on which it sits from within the building has been ruled out on safety grounds. The second is to support the paint layer and separate it from the underlying render so that the work can be reapplied and patched on a new substrate. The third, and probably best option in terms of the preservation of the object, is to support the render and paint from the west and to remove it in sections. This latter approach retains the texture of the work as well as the image.

Recommendations

That option 1 is adopted, primarily because options 2,3 and 4 add time and costs to the redevelopment projects, which are already on extremely ambitious timetables. The demolition contract tender documents were predicated on the previously accepted argument that the buildings needed to be demolished as quickly as possible on health and safety grounds. A strategic decision now to reverse that argument will require a further tender exercise and a fundamental re-write of parts of the tender documents.

The project sum in the LUF bid relating to demolition was worked up early last summer and the delay, (from August to January), in the award by DLUHC was not matched by an inflationary uplift hence the finances are challenging too. Those inflationary pressures will only be exacerbated by a further delay.

Option 2 is almost certainly fatal to redevelopment of the Bench Street West site because of the location on the site and the need for the wall to be visible.

Next steps

Cabinet/Leader reviews this document and decides whether they wish to commission further viability from suitably qualified practitioners or whether the arguments put forward, albeit internally, are sufficiently compelling to show the Council has acted reasonably.


Regeneration Delivery Manager

1st March 2023

Appendices

A selection of comments taken from local Facebook groups which demonstrates the difference of opinions held about the mural:

- Appendix 1 - Facebook Conversation 1
- Appendix 2 - Facebook Conversation 2
- Appendix 3 - Facebook Conversation 3
- Appendix 4- 1: relevant news articles
 - Kent On Line article published 4th July 2019 <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/1m-price-tag-for-banksy-207884/>
 - The BBC article published a13th September 2019 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-49693503>