



PALACE THEATRE MANCHESTER

NEW SERVICES INSTALLATION – HERITAGE STATEMENT

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

This statement has been written by Osbornes Architects on behalf of the applicants, Ambassador Theatre Group in order to support the application for the proposed works to install new mechanical plant to the Manchester Palace Theatre building.



Manchester Palace Theatre

SITE

The site of the proposed works is within the Palace Theatre building, Manchester. The building is a Grade II listed and is situated within the Whitworth Street Conservation area in Greater Manchester, located at the intersection between Oxford Street and Whitworth Street.

The Whitworth Street conservation area was designated by the City Council in September 1974. The extent of the conservation area is bordered by Oxford Street, Portland Street, Cobourg Street and the Piccadilly to Oxford Road railway viaduct.

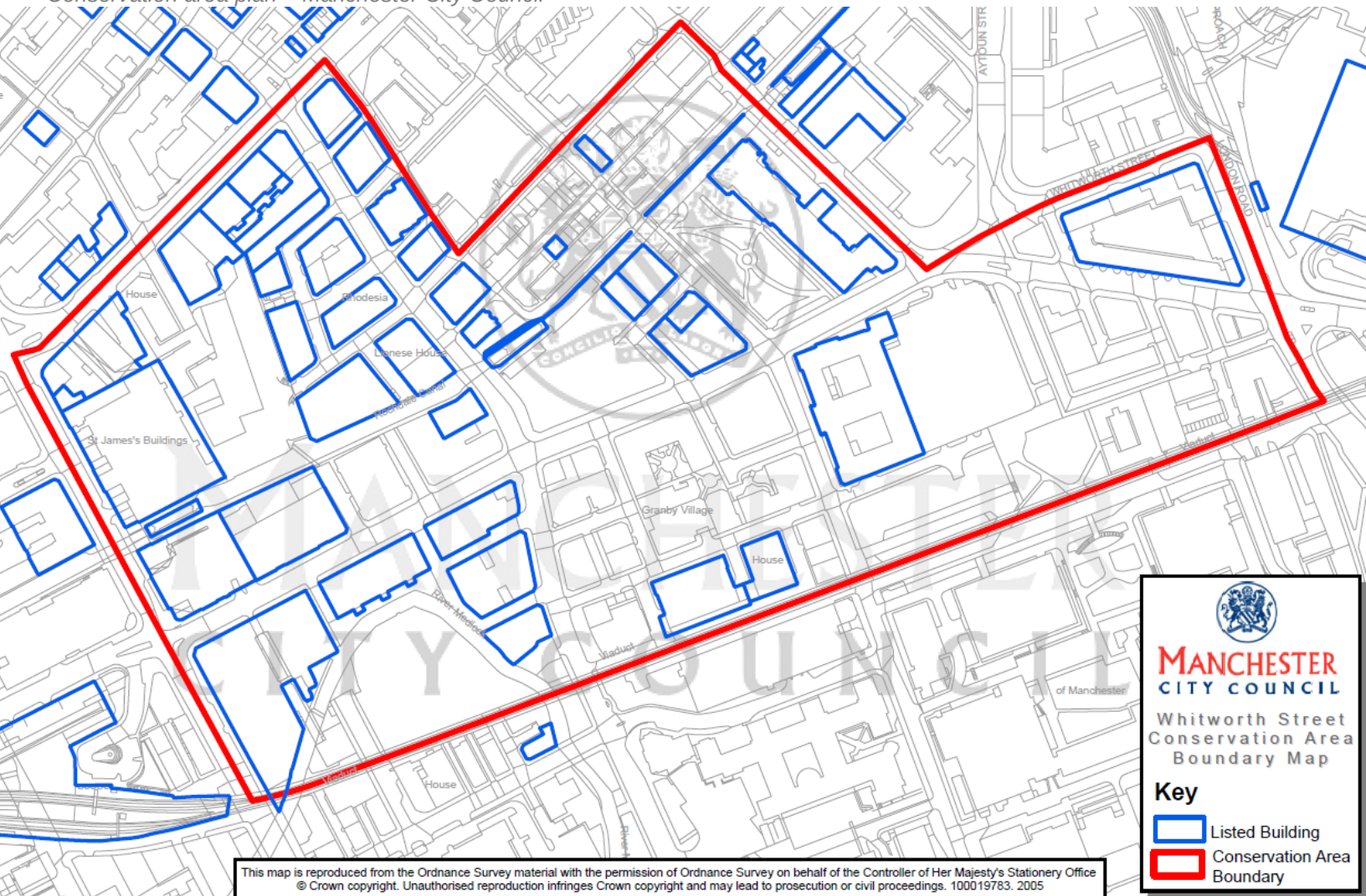
The conservation area contains a large number of buildings that are examples of Victorian and Edwardian architecture constructed between 1850 and 1920. These buildings are related to and reflect the historical importance of the textile industry in the city.

The area's history is connected with the working of cotton within Manchester. Manchester's first cotton mills were water powered and first built in the Ancoats area. As the city's textile industry grew so did its need for warehouse space. This led to the construction of many of the buildings found within the conservation area. The style and scale of the buildings in the area allowed their owners to express their wealth whilst also providing practical building for use for cotton storage and inspection of products.

Historic buildings in the area are six to seven stories in height with extravagant modelled facades in brick and terracotta, The rear of these building were typically constructed with large areas of glazing. Other buildings built later in the early 20th Century were of a grand Edwardian commercial architectural style, where examples of these can be found along Whitworth Street.

Palace Theatre, Manchester is located at the South West of the conservation area and is surrounded by several other listed buildings

Conservation area plan – Manchester City Council



BUILDING HISTORY

As a Grade II listed building the Palace theatre is of historical importance. The listing details of the building are as follows:

OFFICIAL LIST ENTRY

Heritage Category:	Listed Building
Grade:	II
List Entry Number:	1271227
Date first listed:	08-Jun-1977
Statutory Address:	THE PALACE THEATRE, OXFORD STREET

LOCATION

Statutory Address:	THE PALACE THEATRE, OXFORD STREET
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The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District:	Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National GridReference:	SJ 84106 97617

DETAILS

SJ 8497 NW 698-1/32/269

MANCHESTER OXFORD STREET (East side) The Palace Theatre

08/06/77

GV

II

Theatre. 1891, by Alfred Darbyshire and F.Bennett Smith; altered 1913 by Bertie Crewe of London; re-fronted 1956. Probably iron-framed, clad with brick and now faced with buff glazed terracotta; slate roof. Rectangular plan. Three storeys and basement. The facade, in debased modern classical style, is of less interest than the INTERIOR: auditorium with two tiers of segmentally curved balconies (the Circle and the Grand Tier) with bowed ends, the fronts decorated with continuous series of cartouches, anthemions, etc, and two tiers of boxes carried by standing Atlantes, with tetrastyle architraves of giant fluted Ionic columns; and a circular dome in the ceiling with a hinged lighting panel. Circle promenade with Ionic columns and semi-columns, and elaborate pedimented architraves to the staircase doors.

Listing NGR: SJ8410697617

The Palace theatre was designed by Architect, Alfred Derbyshire and constructed by William Brown and Son of Salford. It was first opened on the 18th of May 1891 as the Manchester Palace of Varieties. The cost of construction £40,500. Not long after opening the building was further altered with redesigns carried out to the interior, by renowned theatre Architect Frank Matcham in 1899.

According to the listing information the building was likely constructed with an iron frame and the design of the building was of a modern classical style. Originally the theatre was clad with brick, as is evident in older photographs of the building. This means that the building would have resembled the style of neighbouring buildings, more so than it does today, following changes to the building's external appearance.

In 1913, the auditorium was reconstructed by Bertie Crewe. Of the 1891 building, he retained the stage and basic out-side stage.

The theatre was damaged during the Manchester Blitz in September 1940 although damage is believed to have been confined predominantly to the corner of the front facade.



Further alterations were carried out to the Theatre in 1953 when the exterior was refaced and modernized. The change to the façade was lamented by some and as described by the Theatres Trust, 'Darbyshire's splendidly opulent façade was obliterated by unprepossessing faience tiles.'

These changes are what give the building its appearance today.

In 1979 the theatre was threatened with closure due to audience number declines through the 1970s, however the theatre was eventually chosen as Manchester's touring house of the future and the theatre was supported in the 1980s by the Arts Council.

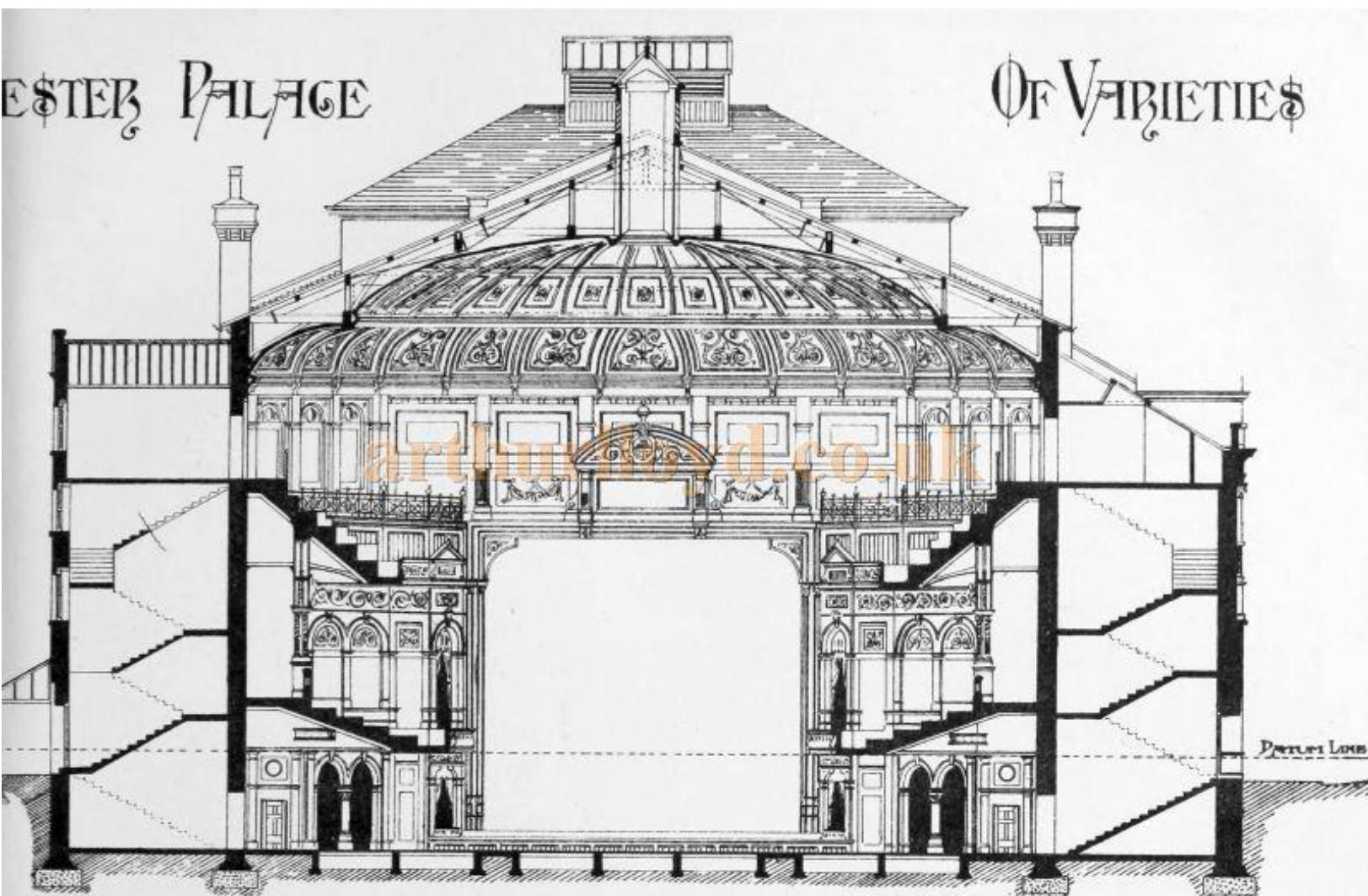
Extensive refurbishment works were complete in 1981, this saw enlargement of the stage, raising of the fly tower, enlargement of the orchestra pit and modernization of dressing rooms. The theatre was re-opened in March 1981 under the ownership of Raymond Slater, who bought the Theatre from Moss Empires. The theatre was subsequently sold to the Ambassador theatre group in 2009.

Externally the theatre building has a number of pitched roofs of traditional construction covered in green and blue slate. There are also a number of asphalt roofs, some with their original finish some which have been recovered in the past with bituminous felt. External walls are masonry construction with the main elevations finished with terracotta, the remaining original elevations are finished in red brick.

Internally the auditorium of today's Palace Theatre is on three levels: Stalls, Circle and Grand Tier, with a capacity of 2,000 people.

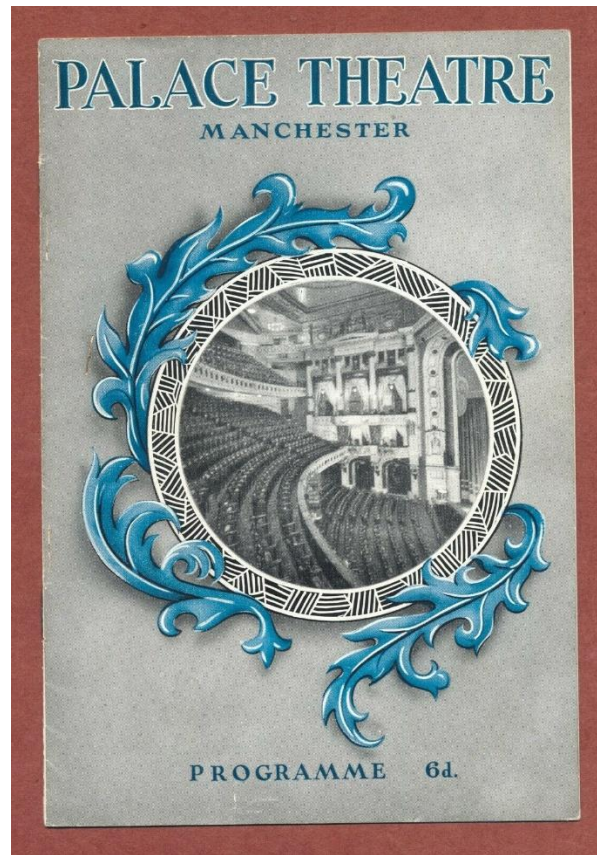
Auditorium

The following drawings were initially published within the Building News and Engineering Journal of 24th January 1890 and were drawn by Alfred Darbyshire & F B Smith's. These drawings were accessed from www.arthurlloyd.co.uk.



The drawing shows a section through the auditorium and shows the intended design for this area before the building was constructed. The above drawing shows that the appearance of the auditorium ceiling has greatly changed since the building was first completed in 1891. The ceiling depicted shows a larger dome than, what is currently existing. Additionally, there is an outer curved area of ceiling between the main central dome and above the frieze around the perimeter of the room.

As it currently existing the auditorium ceiling consists of a single smaller domed area with areas of flat ceiling surrounding. It is likely that this ceiling has existed in this form since 1913 with the changes to the auditorium ceiling likely taking during the 1913, reconstruction works by Bertie Crewe. The following images seen on the front cover of a 1950s programme for the theatre.



Although cropped, the flat ceiling areas surrounding the central dome is visible. This shows that these alterations to the ceiling had already taken place by the 1950s.

PROPOSALS

The proposed works include the installation of new plant to an existing area of roof externally. This new plant will help to improve the airflow to the existing auditorium areas of the building and will allow the circulation of fresh air into this area.

There would also be some works required internally to install new ducting and vents within the Auditorium ceiling. Where possible this would be to areas where existing vents are located, to allow the appropriate sizing for the new vents the existing penetrations within the ceiling will need to be enlarged.

Several new penetrations in the ceiling will also be required. These are to be positioned in flat areas of ceiling within the Auditorium and will avoid areas of decorative mouldings or plasterwork and the central dome.

These proposed works within the building will allow improvements to the wellbeing of building visitors and staff, as well as the condition of the building itself. Due to the age of the building, the existing ventilation system within the building do not provide an adequate amount of fresh air entering the building. Following recent events involving COVID-19 it has become apparent that public health should be a priority. Improving the quality of air is especially important to building such as theatres where large numbers of people are likely to gather.

The request for improvements to the ventilation system were made by Manchester Environmental Health during the height of the Covid 19 pandemic. The proposals look to address the concerns put forward at this time.

EXTERNAL PLANT

The proposed new external plant will be installed on an existing area of flat roof located at the Northwest side of the building. This elevation of the building faces the canal and are overlooked by offices commercial buildings. There are already services in this area including condensing units and heat pumps.

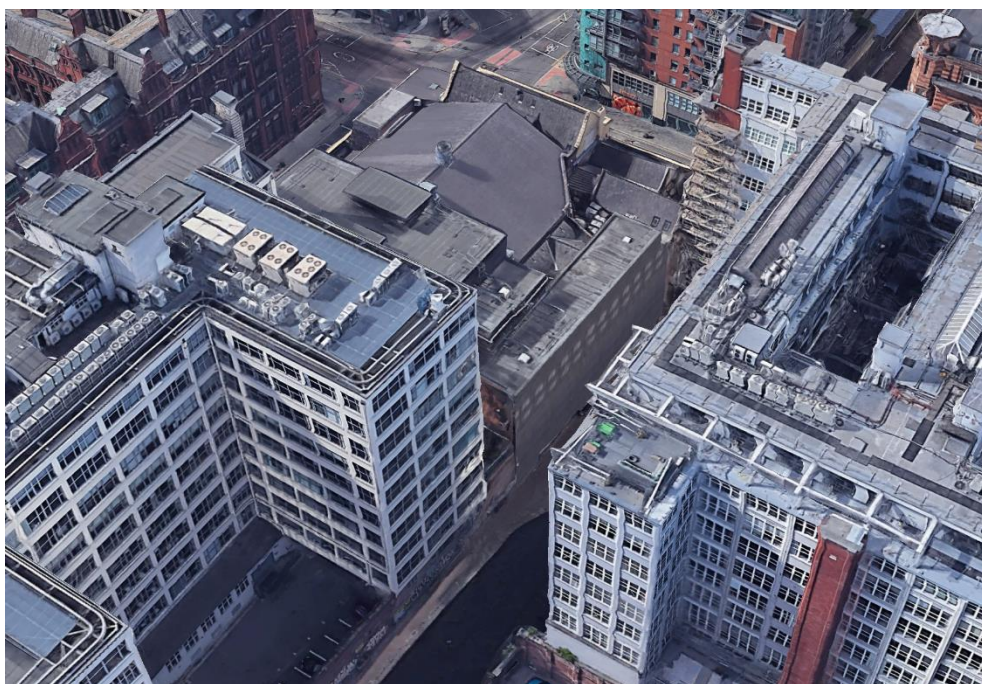
The area of roof that will be affected by the works is a relative modern flat roof area with parapet walls to perimeter. It is proposed that the new plant to be installed will be supported by the existing parapet walls to reduce intervention to the existing roofs and structure beneath. The proposed plant will consist of 2 no. Air handling units and 1 cooling unit. These units will be a maximum of 2.7 m high and will also require associated new ducting connected to the units. These will require new penetrations into the existing roof. A new louvred enclosure will be installed this will conceal the individual units and will provide an acoustic enclosure, reducing the noise impact of the proposed units. The total height of this unit will be approximately 3.2 m above the existing parapet. The louvred enclosure will have a dark grey external appearance, which will allow it to fit in with the existing areas of flat roofs already at the Northeast and Northwest areas of the building. The existing roof finish on the flat roof will be replaced as part of the works. The new finishes will consist of a liquid applied waterproofing with a grey colour to be similar to the colour of existing roof finishes.

Due to the location of the proposed plant, it is believed that there would be minimal visual impact to the surrounding areas and to the wider conservation area. The plant is concealed by the much higher surrounding building from the Northwest, and Northeast directions. The new plant will sit on top of the existing roof, and it is visible on the flat elevation drawings of the front of the building. However, it should be noted that it will not be visible from street level. The higher, pitched roofs along Whitworth Street prevent visibility from the view. The new enclosure is set far back from the Southwest elevation which means the theatre building itself conceals the plant at street level on Oxford Street.

It is likely the plant will be visible at canal level at the Northwest of the building. However, this is an area of relatively low visual amenity. This elevation of the theatre contains a number of existing louvred openings on the external wall to the theatre building. This elevation and area can therefore be read visually as more of a service area of the building. With this being the case, the new louvred enclosure would not have a negative impact especially as plant on neighbouring buildings is also visible.



Aerial view from South
(Google Earth Model)



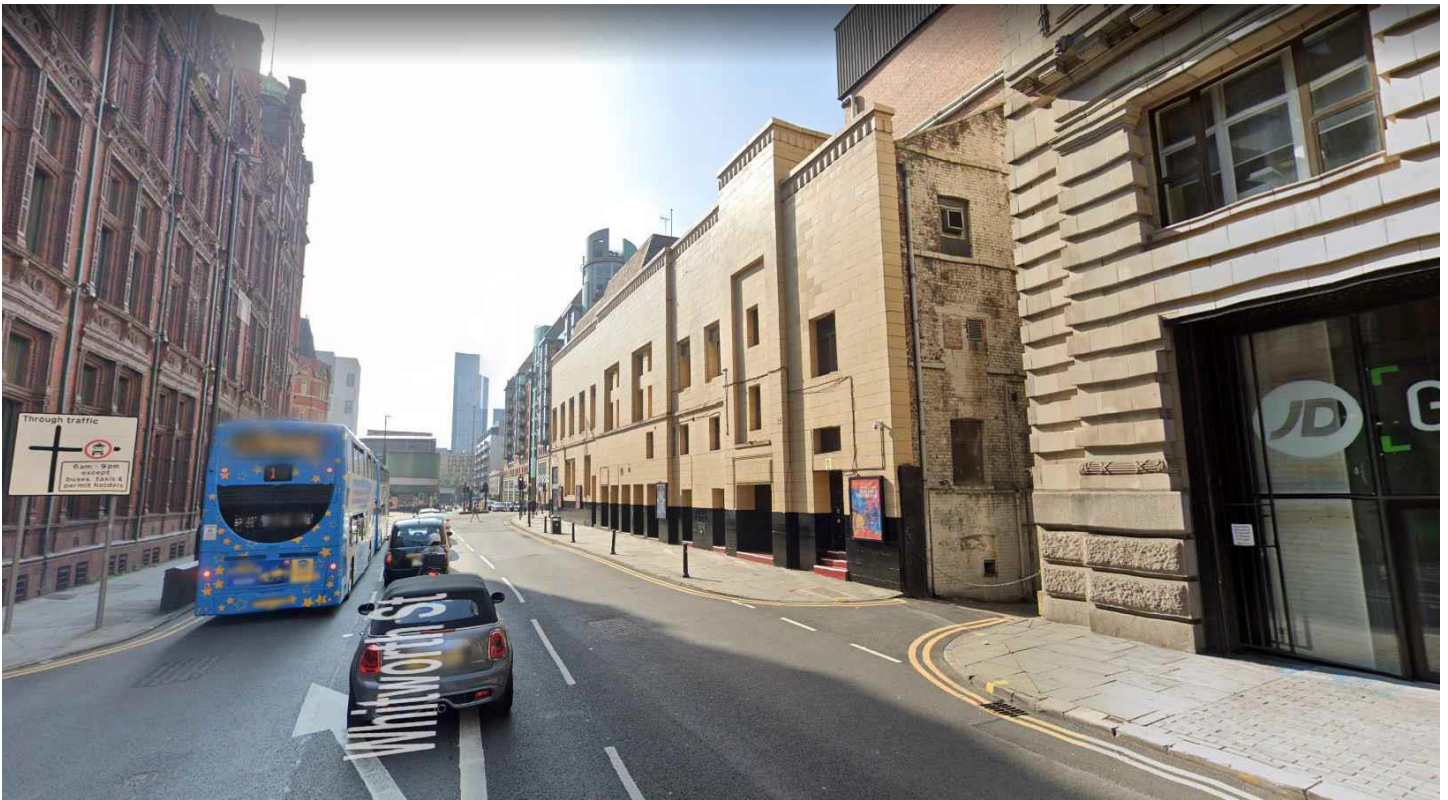
Aerial view from North
(Google Earth Model)



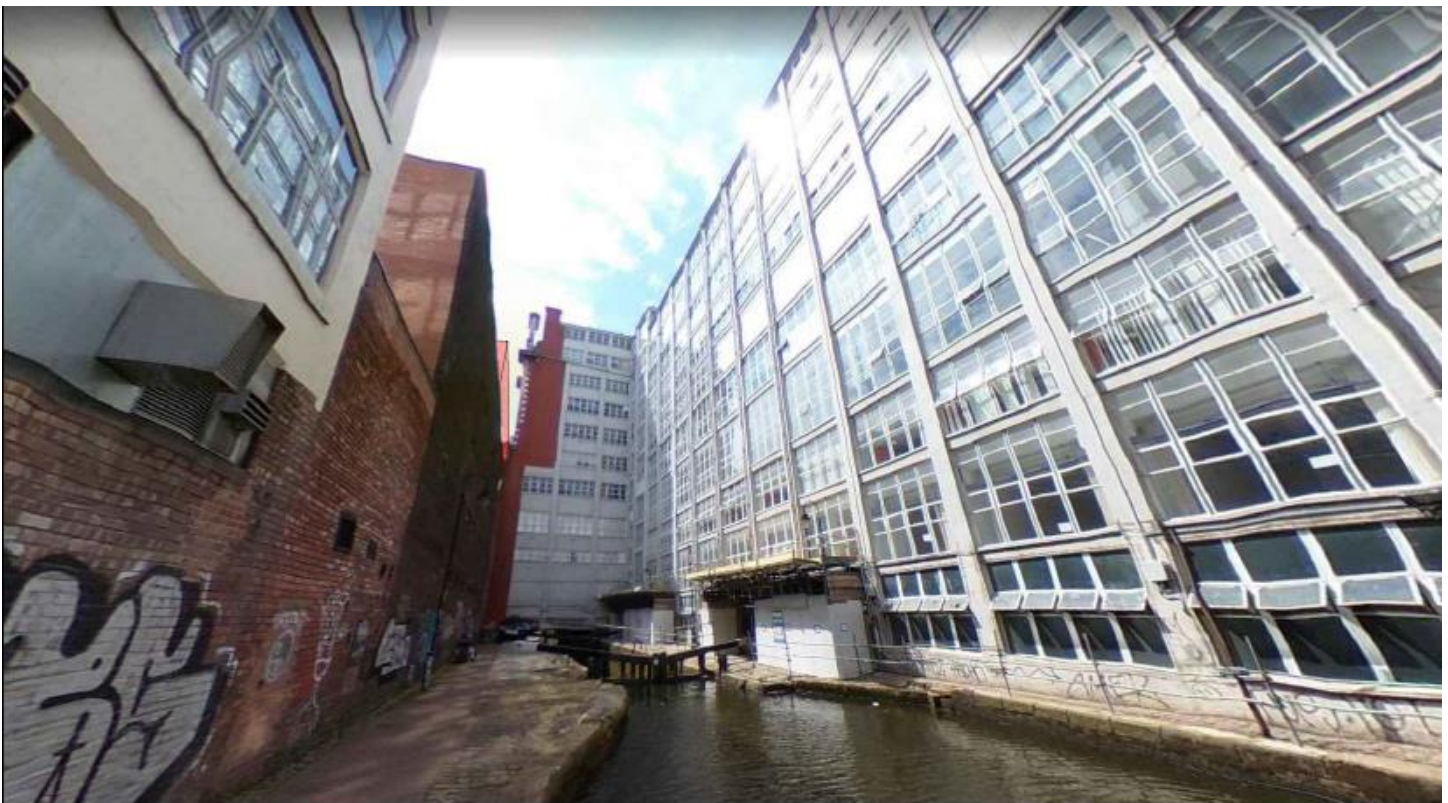
View from Oxford Street (Google Street View) – Areas of proposed works obscured by front of theatre building and would not be visible at street level.



View from corner of Oxford Street and Whitworth Street (Google Street View) – Areas of proposed works obscured by front of theatre building and would not be visible at street level.



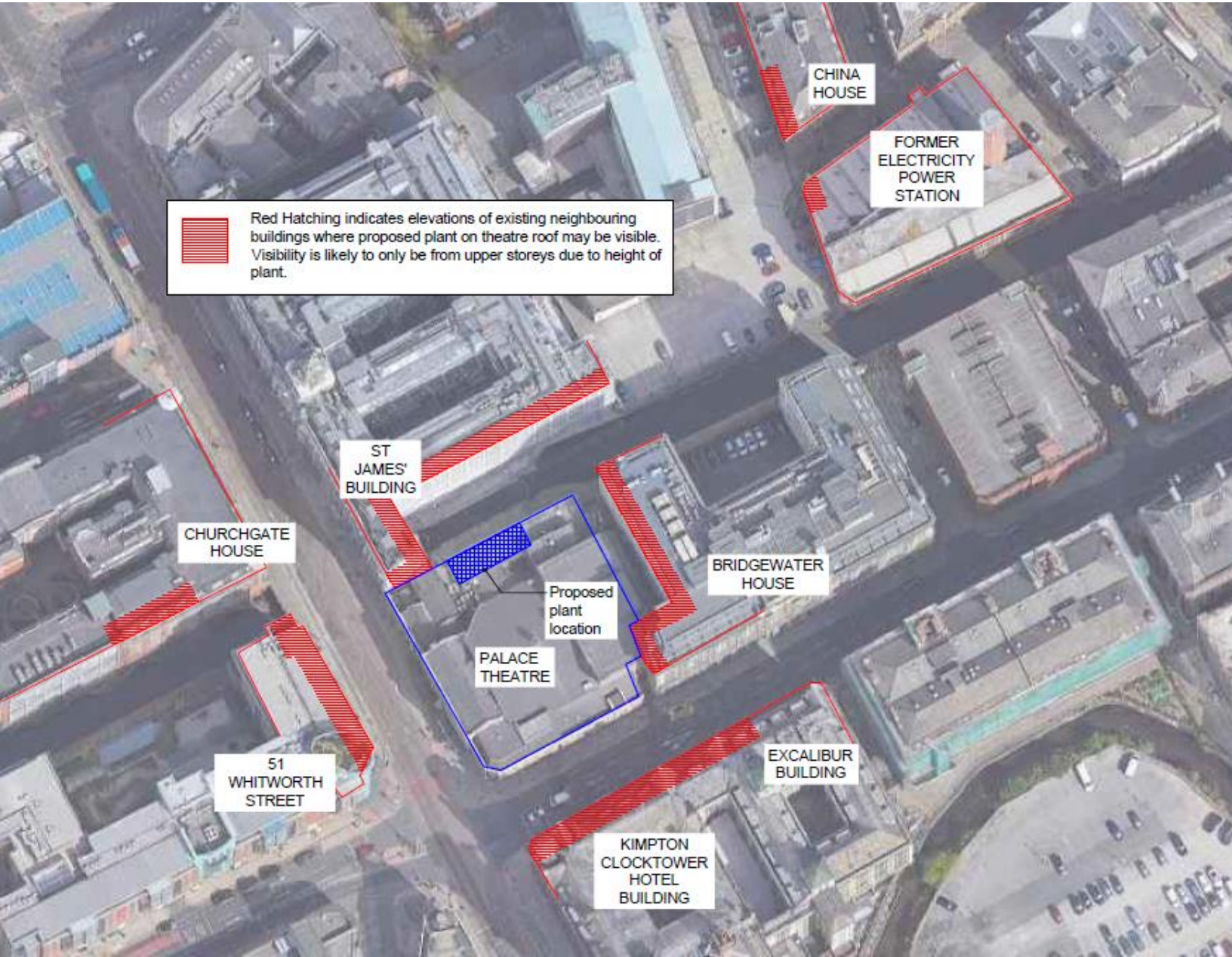
View from Whitworth street (Google Street View) – Areas of proposed works obscured by front of theatre building and would not be visible at street level.



The p View from Canal level (Google Street View) – Red box indicates likely visibility of plant.
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It is worth noting however that many buildings in the near vicinity of the theatre appears to locate plant on rooftops in a similar way to the proposed. This means that the placement of proposed equipment on the roof of the theatre would not be out of place in the areas and would not be an isolated instance. As would be the case with the proposed, much of the existing plant on nearby roof tops are also visible from higher vantage points in neighbouring buildings. Additionally, many of these buildings with rooftop plants are also listed buildings.

The plant will possibly, be visible from a carpark and its entrance gate accessed via Bloom Street these are to the Northeast of the Palace Theatre.



St James' Building & Bridgewater House

New plant will be visible from Southeast areas of the building. These are mainly offices and existing plant on the theatre building is already visible from the upper levels of this elevation of St James' Building.

51 Whitworth Street

51 Whitworth Street contains residential apartments along the Northeast elevation. The windows on the upper levels of this building where these are on the same level or higher will be able to see the new theatre plant. Currently the windows overlook areas of existing plant on the roofs of the theatre. This area of the building is of a more modern construction than other areas of the theatre, it is also located at the rear of the building where there is less decorative detailing and materials. This area therefore already has very little visual amenity and it is believed that the impact of adding the additional plant will have very little further impact on this.

Churchgate House

Views from Churchgate House from which the new plant is visible is relatively limited. These will mainly be from a small area on the Southeast of the building, and only from higher levels of the building. This is due to the views from this building being obstructed by St James' Building and 51 Whitworth Street. Views from this elevation towards the theatre is also at a very oblique angle.

Kimpton Clocktower Hotel and Excalibur Buildings

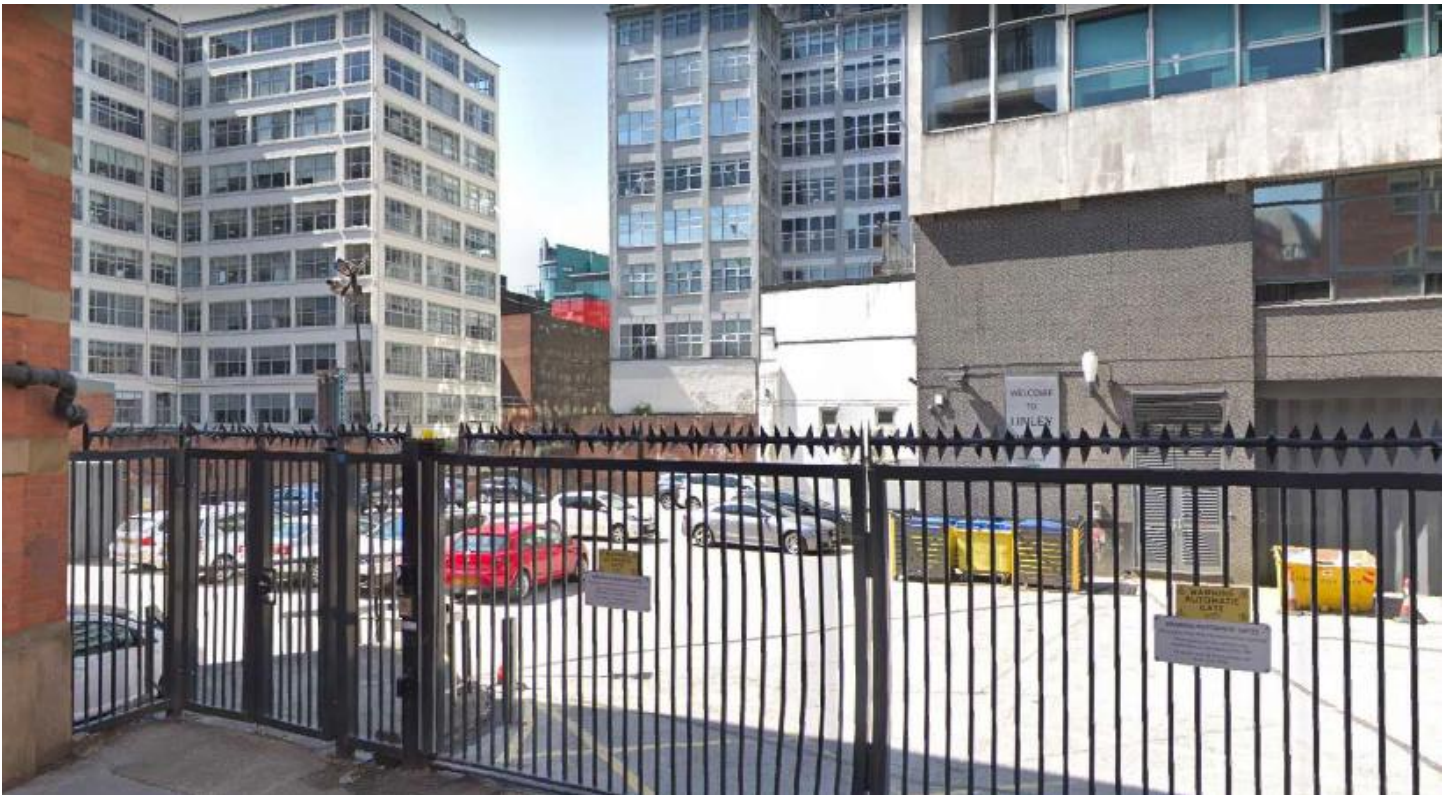
Both the Kimpton Clocktower and Excalibur buildings are located on the opposite side of Whitworth Street from the theatre building. The Hotel is directly opposite whereas Excalibur building is further along the street to the Northeast. Both these building are taller than the theatre. This means that the area containing the new plant may be visible from the upper storeys of these buildings. The visibility from the Excalibur building would be restricted by Bridgewater House and therefore most of this building will be unaffected by the proposed plant. It is believed that the only views affected on both buildings will be from windows on the top floors. This is due to the line of sight to the plan being partially blocked by the height of the theatres pitched roofs at its front elevations. Based on images taken from Google Earth models, it is likely that the only the top of any plant may be visible from windows and this would be near the heads of these windows.

China House, Former Electricity Power Station building and Carparks

Views from the Northwest towards the theatre where the new plant would be visible are from China House, The Former power station building and the carpark and its entrance at ground levels.

This carpark is situated at the rear areas of several surrounding buildings, and it should be noted that some of these building have their plant located around this area much of this is easily visible. Additionally, this area is acts as bins storage areas for neighbouring buildings as well as what appears to be service areas of buildings.

This area has very little visual amenity and has a utilitarian appearance due to its use as a carpark and with it serving as a location for service areas for the surrounding buildings. This means that the proposed plant, even if visible, would not negatively affect the area. The proposed louvred enclosure would also help to conceal the individual plant machinery and allow their to blend in visually with the existing areas of flat roof.



View from entrance to carpark (Google Street View) – Red box indicates likely visibility of proposed plant.

INTERNAL ALTERATIONS

Internally the Auditorium has services located within the large void areas above the existing ceiling. This area contains large amounts of ducting, cabling, pipework, and timber access walkways.

The ducting in this area provides ventilation to the auditorium below and is connected to existing plant located on the roof. The ducting also terminates on the ceiling of the auditorium. Many of the service penetrations in the Auditorium ceiling are located around the perimeter of the room whether these terminate in back circular or rectangular vents. These areas of ceiling have a black paint finish.

The areas of ceiling directly above the central stalls are considerably more decorative compared to the areas surrounding. These consist of decorative ceilings with painted mouldings as well as sculptural elements. There are areas of flat ceiling that have a purple paint finish. These areas of ceiling have several already existing vent terminations as well as light fittings. The vents consist of black circular covers.

The proposed alterations to the existing services will include installation of new ducting that will connect to the new external plant on the roof. It is believed that the existing vent sizing on the ceiling are inadequate. The existing vents will require enlarging in order to suit the upgraded system. In order to minimise the impact of these alterations the proposed ducting will make use of the existing positions of vents and ducting where possible. The existing penetrations through the ceiling will be enlarged where necessary in order to reduce the need to create new penetrations. New penetrations will be required in the central area of the room above the stalls areas. These new penetrations will be into the flat areas of ceiling where some existing vents are present. The new vent positions will avoid areas of decorative mouldings. These will be finished the same colour as the ceiling in order to reduce their visual impact.

Existing auditorium ceiling services



HERITAGE IMPACT

The proposed works will have a slight impact on the historical fabric of the building.

The location of the plant is also unlikely to have a large negative impact on the Whitworth Street conservation area. This is due to the relatively concealed position of the plant. Neighbouring buildings and the theatre itself will hide the plant from street level views towards the building. The only location where it would be visible is from a carpark to the rear of the building. However, this is a view onto the less decorative, rear elevations of the theatre. This carpark is surrounded by buildings with visible plant and service areas, consequently, this space is not one of high visual amenity. The proposed plant, therefore, is unlikely to have a considerable negative impact.

The plant will likely only be visible from upper floor windows from neighbouring buildings. Other buildings in the local area, including other listed buildings, also have similar plant on their rooftops. Therefore, it is believed that the installation of the proposed plant would not be out of place. Additionally, the theatre building already has areas of roof containing existing plant and equipment.

New ducting is to and from the new plant will be positioned to be inobtrusive and where these penetrate the existing roof these will be suitably weather sealed.

The proposed works internally also constitute relatively minor interventions to the most important historic fabric of the existing building. With reference to Icomos guidance on heritage impact the theatre building, being a Listed building can be described as having high historical importance. The alterations to the services internally, including the alterations to vent sizes and creation of new vents/penetrations would be classed as a minor intervention, based on Icomos descriptions, it is believed the works are 'slight changes to the historic building elements that hardly affect it'. When a comparison is made between the historical importance grading of the building, based on Icomos descriptions, the significance of impact of the proposed works can be classed as being slight.

The proposed works avoid areas of decorative plaster and mouldings. Where existing vent sizes are to be enlarged and where new penetrations are to be made, these will be to areas of flat plaster ceilings. Although these works will constitute some loss of historic fabric it is believed that these would be in areas of less historic importance when compared to more decorative areas of ceiling. These areas of ceiling were not part of the original ceiling as constructed in 1891 and instead were likely to have been installed sometime between 1913 and the 1950s.

It is also of note that these areas of ceiling already contain vent penetrations made in the past. The proposed vents will also be finished to match the colours of the existing ceiling this will help to reduce their visibility.

Where possible existing ductwork routes and ceiling penetrations are to be reused to reduce impact on the building fabric.

When considering the potential impact of the proposed works against the potential benefits, the interventions can be seen as providing a benefit to the building and its users.

Apart from the benefits to the health of visitors the improved airflow and within the building will allow more fresh air into the building. The existing mechanical ventilation systems are currently inadequate. A new properly sized system would help to better regulate moisture levels within the building and therefore help to reduce the impact on the building caused by excessive moisture this would therefore help to preserve the heritage asset.

ICOMOS ANALYSIS OF INTERVENTION

The building is a designated heritage asset and therefore has a grading value of High.

The proposed works would have negligible external impact on the heritage asset, however, internal works would require the loss of some historic fabric. The works internally would include alteration to 2 sections of flat ceiling either side of the main dome. Under the Icomos impact assessment the magnitude of the work would be assessed as 'Minor' Change to key historic building elements, such that the asset is slightly different. Overall the significance of the impact can therefore be judged as Slight/Moderate.

ACCESS

Main access to the building is via Oxford street with other entrances to the building along Whitworth Street. Local public transport is available in the local area, with bus stops for local bus routes nearby along Oxford Street and Whitworth street. The nearest train station is Oxford Road which is situated directly opposite the theatre. Piccadilly train station is approximately 0.3 miles from the theatre. These stations connect the site to the wider national transport systems.

It is proposed that the canal to the rear of the theatre may be used to bring equipment to the site. This access also relates to the proposed positioning of the plant allowing craned access from the canal reducing impact on road and pedestrian routes to the main street frontage.

Existing access will be unaffected by the proposed works with future access to plant being via internal staircases leading out onto the roof deck.