



Planning Statement

274 Deansgate, Manchester

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of

WHISPERINGSMITH

November 2021

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ON BEHALF OF
WHISPERING SMITH

Planning Statement
274 DEANS_GATE, MANCHESTER

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of Whispering Smith ('the Applicant'), in relation to the site known as 274 Deansgate, in support of a full planning application for:

"Proposed two storey roof extension to provide additional office floorspace (Use Class E (g)), along with ancillary works to the ground floor and basement levels, and removal and replacement of plant."

Background to the proposal

Whispering Smith

- 1.2 Whispering Smith is the UK's largest creator, importer, wholesaler, and distributor of innovative fashion clothing for all major high street stores and e-tailers across the globe.
- 1.3 Founded in 1967 and already headquartered in Manchester, Whispering Smith supply to the top retail and ecommerce brands such as; ASOS.com, Boohoo, Zalando, La Moda and Namshi under their core brand 'Brave Soul'. From famous style staples to basic jersey essentials, Whispering Smith's essence is to translate key seasonal trends into wearable, commercial, quality garments. The company have been located in Manchester since their inception, and have grown to add showrooms in London, New York, Dusseldorf, Madrid, and South Africa to their portfolio.
- 1.4 Whispering Smith are very much an integral part of Manchester's fashion and clothing industry, driving the success of customer facing clothing businesses headquartered in the locality, including well-known brands such as Boohoo and Pretty Little Thing.
- 1.5 Having outgrown their original headquarters located at 61 Great Ducie Street, Whispering Smith have purchased 274 Deansgate in order to invest in Manchester; acquire a site with the potential to expand; create a bespoke office environment specially adapted and suited to their needs, and also position themselves within central Manchester, as part of their strategy to raise their profile within the city and develop a flagship, centrally located headquarters.
- 1.6 Whispering Smith have instructed Icen Projects (Planning & Heritage Consultants), Calderpeel (Architects) and Sheila Bird Studio (Interior Designers) to advise on the development of the scheme.

The purpose of this statement

- 1.7 The purpose of this statement is to identify and address the main planning issues associated with the proposed development, demonstrating how the proposal is acceptable in the context of

Manchester City Council's ("the Council") Development Plan and other material planning considerations.

1.8 The statement is structured as follows:

- Section 2 describes the application site and its surroundings and sets out the planning history of the site;
- Section 3 outlines the policy and legislative framework governing development in this location;
- Section 4 explains the context behind the proposals, including the applicant's particular requirements for their headquarters and their search for an office building in Manchester;
- Section 5 describes the pre-application process conducted to date;
- Section 6 describes the proposed development;
- Section 7 assesses the proposal against the key planning considerations; and
- Section 8 concludes that planning permission should be granted.

1.9 This application has been submitted with the following plans and supporting documents:

- 21057 (PL) 001 Location Plan
- 21057 (PL) 002 Existing Block Plan
- 21057 (PL) 003 Existing Floor Plans - Sheet 1
- 21057 (PL) 004 Existing Floor Plans - Sheet 2
- 21057 (PL) 005 A Existing Elevations
- 21057 (PL) 015 Existing Street Scene
- 21057 (PL) 020 Proposed Site Plan
- 21057 (PL) 100 A Proposed Basement Floor Plan
- 21057 (PL) 101 A Proposed Ground Floor Plan
- 21057 (PL) 102 A Proposed Fourth Floor Plan
- 21057 (PL) 103 B Proposed Roof Plan - Level 1

- 21057 (PL) 104 B Proposed Roof Plan - Level 2
- 21057 (PL) 200 B Proposed Elevations
- 21057 (PL) 300 A Existing & Proposed Section
- 21057 (PL) 400 A Proposed Street Scene
- 21057 (PL) 550 A Proposed Facing Materials - Sheet 1
- 21057 (PL) 560 A Proposed Facing Materials - Sheet 2
- Design & Access Statement, prepared by Calderpeel
- Heritage Impact Assessment, prepared by Icen Projects

2. SITE & SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 274 Deansgate is a five-storey building (ground +4) located within Manchester city centre, constructed in the 1950s, measuring 23,688 sq. ft. It was then refurbished in the mid-1990s and more recently, the second, third and fourth floors have been refurbished again.
- 2.2 The ground floor frontage & part basement currently hosts a high-end bike retailer known as Pinarello, with full wrap around window displays. To the side of the property there is a self-contained entrance leading to the office accommodation on the rear ground floor and four upper floors. In addition, there is storage space at rear basement level, and the fourth floor also has an outdoor/balcony area.
- 2.3 The site is currently vacant, with the previous occupier vacating in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Figure 1 Aerial view of the site (highlighted in red).

Planning History

- 2.4 There have been several planning applications associated with the site's redevelopment, the most notable of which are:

- Ref. 123011/FO/2019 | Installation of a new entrance and the enlargement of two windows to the Camp Street elevation. Approved May 2019.
- Ref. 116649/FO/2017 | Installation of glazed balustrading to form roof terrace to existing roof, with canopy over. Approved March 2018.
- Ref. 038602 | Erection of a 5-storey office block with basement car parking after demolition of existing building. Approved October 1991.
- Ref. 039111 | Erection of a 5-storey office block with supporting basement car parking accommodation and rooftop plant rooms, after demolition of existing building. Approved October 1991.

3. POLICY & LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Planning Policy

- 3.1 The Manchester Local Plan comprises of the Core Strategy (2012), the interactive proposals map and the saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan.
- 3.2 Within the Core strategy and interactive proposals map, the site is not allocated or designated for any particular use. However, the following policies will be of relevance when considering the proposals:
- Core Strategy Policy EC 2 – Existing Employment Space
 - Core Strategy Policy DM1 – Development Management
 - Core Strategy Policy CC 1 – Primary Economic Development Focus : City Centre and Fringe
 - Core Strategy Policy CC 9 – Design and Heritage
 - Core Strategy Policy CC 6 – City Centre High Density Development
 - Core Strategy Policy EN 1 – Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas
 - Core Strategy Policy EN 2 – Tall Buildings
 - Saved UDP Policy DC18.1 – Conservation Areas
 - Saved UDP Policy DC19.1 – Listed Buildings

Heritage Designations

- 3.3 We would note that the building sits on the fringe of two conservation areas (CA's) (but is not located within them); Castlefield CA and St John Street CA. The building is shown on the map below, highlighted by a black 'dot'.

Castlefield Conservation Area

- 3.4 Designated on 13 October 1979, this CA is one of the largest in the city, and it is noted that although the variety of building materials used in Castlefield is very wide, it tends to be more rugged and industrial in character than in other parts of the city centre. Information on MCC's website regarding the CA states that 'stone, brick and slate are used extensively, but the most impressive building components are the massive cast-iron columns supporting the railway viaducts and, of course, the viaducts themselves, which are constructed of iron lattice beams'.

- 3.5 It is also suggested by MCC that when considering new development, the height and scale, the colour, form, massing, and materials of new buildings should relate to the existing high-quality structures and complement them however there is still scope for innovation, provided that new proposals enhance the area. Further, the extreme diversity of form and style in Castlefield's existing structures makes it permissible for designers to use their imaginations freely.

St John Street Conservation Area

- 3.6 St John Street is the only surviving Georgian terraced street in central Manchester and forms the heart of the conservation area which was designated on 4th November 1970. The boundary of the conservation area follows Artillery Street, Longworth Street, Camp Street, Culvercliffe Walk, Lower Byrom Street, Quay Street and Byrom Street. In view of the existing high quality of the area, MCC advocate that any new building, extension, or alteration must attain a similar standard of design compared to the existing buildings.

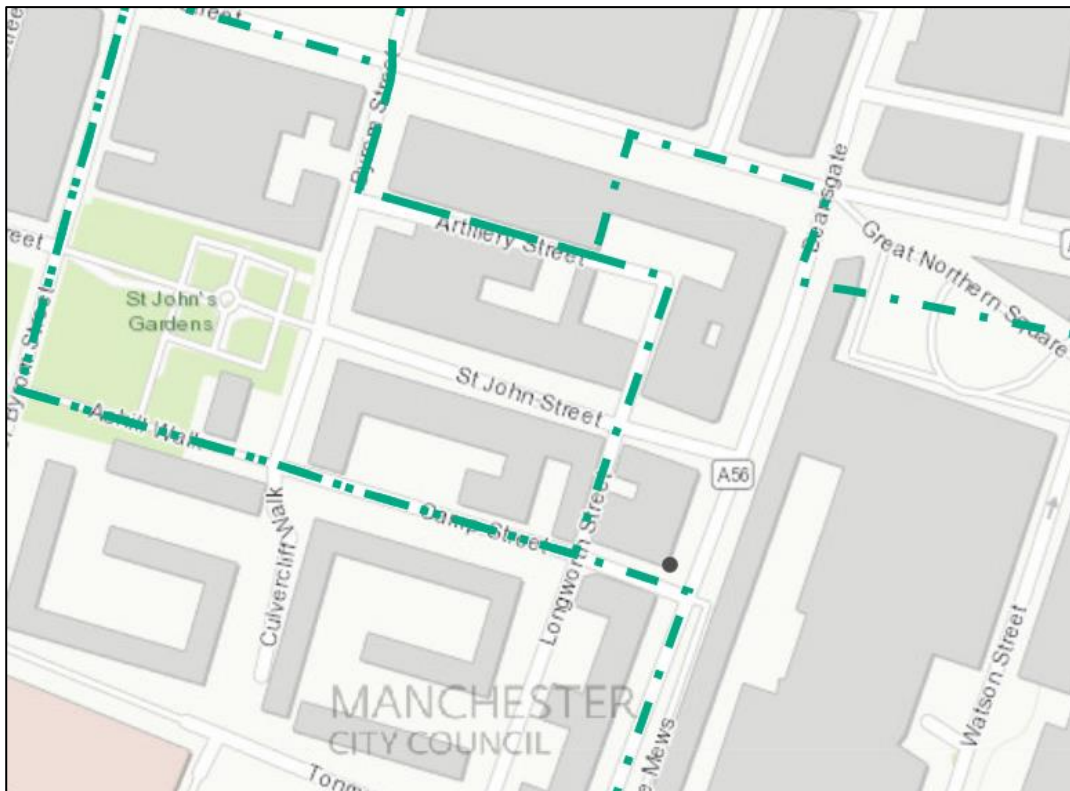


Figure 2 Conservation Areas map. Site shown by a black 'dot'.

Listed Buildings

- 3.7 There are several listed buildings located near to the site, which have been labelled and plotted on the map below and will be taken into consideration during the detailed design development.

1. Grade II Listed. K6 telephone kiosk in front of St John Street Chambers.
2. Grade II Listed. 8 and 8A St John Street.
3. Grade II Listed. 10 St John Street.
4. Grade II Listed. 12 -1 6 St John Street.
5. Grade II Listed. 18 & 20 St John Street.
6. Grade II Listed. 22 St John Street.

7. Grade II Listed. 24 St John Street.
8. Grade II Listed. 24a and 26 St John Street.
9. Grade II Listed. 28 St John Street.
10. Grade II Listed. 15A Byrom Street.
11. Grade II Listed. 11-17 St John Street.
12. Grade II Listed. 19 St John Street
13. Grade II Listed. 21-25 St John Street.
14. Grade II Listed. 25 to 31 and attached former chapel.
15. Grade II Listed. Manchester & Salford Junction Canal Tunnel.



Figure 3 Listed Buildings in the vicinity of the site.

4. CONTEXT TO THE PROPOSALS

Whispering Smith's Requirements

- 4.1 Whispering Smith have had a presence in Manchester for over 50 years and are often described as 'Manchester's best kept secret'. They currently employ around 70 members of staff, and as a third-generation family run business, the well-being of their staff is at the heart of what they do. Whispering Smith were previously based at 61 Great Ducie Street, operating both a distribution centre and office from this premises. However, having taken the decision to relocate the storage and distribution centre outside of the city, to a more sustainable, strategic location, the company did not want to retain their premises at 61 Great Ducie Street knowing that it would not be able to meet the requirements of the company as it expanded. In deciding how to proceed with their expansion, Whispering Smith have considered the following factors:

Capacity

- 4.2 Whispering Smith have an aspiration to grow their staff to circa 140 employees in the next 2-5 years (doubling the current number of employees) and have been faced with a choice whether to split existing and new staff across two sites (retaining 61 Great Ducie Street and finding a secondary office), or whether to relocate to a larger office which can accommodate the entire business operation. It is anticipated that new staff will be recruited across all areas of the business, at a variety of levels (from graduate to senior roles) and will be recruited locally from Greater Manchester.

Location

- 4.3 Whispering Smith wish to stay within Manchester, respecting their historic roots and retaining existing locally based staff, some of which have been with the business for over 40 years. However, the company do wish to increase their presence within the city, and a centrally based office on one of the busiest and most popular thoroughfares such as Deansgate will assist with this.

Attracting & retaining talent

- 4.4 Whispering Smith are aware that a centrally located office will give them greater appeal to potential applicants for new roles. Further, many of Whispering Smith's existing staff live in Manchester City Centre, so a central office will allow them to commute sustainably to work.
- 4.5 In addition, whilst the balance between home and office working has dramatically shifted in the past two years, Whispering Smith wish to advocate a predominantly office-based approach to their business, when it is safe to do so. Not only does the business rely on creativity which they believe is generated from a strong team ethic and day to day in-person interaction, but they also believe in supporting the recovery of Manchester City Centre following the pandemic, which starts with being present in Manchester and thereby supporting other local businesses every day.

Staff wellbeing

- 4.6 The potential at 274 Deansgate to create a bespoke office environment which can be adapted to suit Whispering Smith's needs is an unparalleled benefit. The culture of the company is very much family orientated, and as such, the company would like to dedicate a large proportion of space to the well-being of staff and celebrating who they are as a business. This means finding a space which can accommodate a large kitchen and dining area allowing staff to eat meals together, rather than a simple tokenistic kitchen providing a microwave and tea point for example. Whispering Smith also want to include break out spaces, a lounge, meeting rooms and outdoor terraced areas to allow staff to enjoy the city centre skyline and have access to the outdoors.

The search for a premises

- 4.7 Earlier in the year, Whispering Smith instructed Dominic Pozzoni, Head of Colliers' Manchester Office, to act as an advisor to find office premises suitable for their growing operations. Short term lets on leases of circa 5-10 years were options presented to the company by Colliers, however Whispering Smith's choice was ultimately led by their desire to own the freehold to a site, in order to invest in Manchester and own a premises which they can control and retain in the long term.
- 4.8 Whispering Smith viewed a handful of other offices whose freeholds were for sale, but the search was constrained by the limited options for city centre premises on the market at the time. 274 Deansgate presented itself as an opportunity at the right time, and Whispering Smith were decisive in making an offer for this prime office in a city centre location, recognising that it would meet their key occupational requirements but also has the potential to expand through an innovative roof top extension subject to planning.

Acquiring 274 Deansgate

- 4.9 In May 2021, after concluding their property search, Whispering Smith completed on the purchase of 274 Deansgate, representing a strong investment for the business but also demonstrating their continued commitment to Manchester and its thriving e-commerce community.
- 4.10 In selecting this premises, Whispering Smith are aware that they will need to make changes to the building, including a roof extension to provide the high-quality dedicated amenity space that they desire for their staff. Whilst it would have been preferable to have found a building large enough to accommodate all of their requirements from the outset, finding a freehold site in central Manchester capable of meeting all of this criterion was not possible.
- 4.11 Whispering Smith are therefore seizing the opportunity to create a bespoke office environment that will act as their flagship headquarters in the city.

5. PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

- 5.1 Pre-application conversations with Manchester City Council commenced in the summer of 2021. A meeting was held on site with James Hughes (Planning Officer at MCC) on the 22nd September 2021, and was attended by Calderpeel, Sheila Bird Studio and Iceni Projects.
- 5.2 The site visit was a useful exercise as it allowed the project team to walk the planning officer through the building and highlight key opportunities and constraints that had informed the development of the design. A scheme was presented at the meeting, and this comprised a two storey roof extension which was set back from the existing building and completely contrasted with it, by being made from red pigmented concrete and GRC perforated panels. This scheme is detailed in the Design & Access Statement on page 10.
- 5.3 Following the site visit, feedback was received from MCC (from both James Hughes and the Conservation & Design Officer) which advised that whilst they were supportive of a two-storey roof extension in principle, they expressed concerns about the overall design, noting that:

‘The design in its current form is deemed ‘top heavy’ when considering the scale and layering of the existing building. This is compounded by the way the top of the rooftop extension appears almost to ‘flare out’ due to the design[...]It is the recommendation that the first floor of the rooftop extension is designed to be built directly on top of the existing top floor of the building, with matching brickwork/windows/proportions etc. Then, the second floor of the rooftop extension can be as currently designed. This should hopefully work to decrease the overall prominence of the rooftop extension and decrease the appearance of it being top heavy[...] As the rooftop extension element of the proposal would be reducing, we would also expect a corresponding reduction in the width of the proposed pillars, so that the rooftop extension does not appear squat and makes it appear more lightweight.’

- 5.4 In response to this feedback, the project team considered the comments and revised the scheme to what is largely the same scheme submitted now in this application. The first floor of the roof extension now largely matches the existing top floor of the building, and is positioned directly on top of it. The second level of the roof extension then contrasts with the rest of the building, and sits back from the established building edge. The scheme was appraised by Iceni’s Heritage Team who expressed support for the revised proposals; noting that the revised design positively responds to the character of the existing building. The approach to reflect the existing elevational treatment of the building within the first floor of the new addition sensitively balances an increase in vertical massing with the maintenance of the building’s established character. The incorporation of projecting window architraves both emphasises the continuation of the building’s fenestration pattern at this level and

provides an appropriate transition between the change in the elevation treatment of existing levels below and the uppermost level above.

- 5.5 The uppermost level of the proposed addition is considered to present an opportunity to present a 'top' to the building with a contrasting design which effectively gives the building a clearer proportion, one that is more akin to the existing street frontage, including 262 Deansgate. This also allows the extension to read as one, without adding too much mass on the host building.
- 5.6 Upon sending the revised scheme back to MCC for comment, they advised that they are comfortable with the amendments and would look forward to receiving a planning submission, where finer details could be discussed and agreed during the determination period.

6. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Proposals

6.1 The planning application seeks consent for a:

“Proposed two storey roof extension to provide additional office floorspace (Use Class E (g)), along with ancillary works to the ground floor and basement levels, and removal and replacement of plant.”

6.2 Specifically, the proposals will include the following:

- Three private offices.
- Four meeting rooms.
- A boardroom.
- A staff lounge and kitchen area.
- Toilets/super-loos (including a disabled toilet)
- Outdoor terraced seating areas at both levels.

6.3 There will also be a series of refurbishment works taking place on the lower floors and the provision of a new main entrance area on the ground floor. The existing high-end bike retailer (Pinarello) will remain in situ to ensure an active ground floor frontage is retained.

The Benefits

There are several benefits to the proposed scheme, including:

- **Securing the long-term future of the building** -the purchase of the building will ensure the vacant office space becomes fully occupied, increasing business rate revenue for MCC.
- **Improving the quality of office space** – the refurbishment will add to the quantum of Grade A office space in the city centre.
- **Improving the energy efficiency of the building** – replacing the existing gas heating system with a VRV heat recovery system, improving the carbon performance of the building.

- **Improve the delivery and waste collection strategy** –via the provision of a new goods lift.
- **Provides a flagship building for a Manchester headquartered brand** – this will in turn bolster the reputation of the city as a world class location for business, particularly in fashion and e-commerce.
- **Improves the attractiveness of South Deansgate** – Whilst Deansgate has seen a tremendous amount of redevelopment and expansion, we would argue that most new office space has been provided to the north of Quay Street, whereas in comparison, the southern end of Deansgate has suffered from a lack of investment and regeneration.
- **Promotes the safe return to office working** – research by United City indicates that footfall dramatically decreased in the city centre over the last 18 months and is yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Businesses that rely on footfall have been hit hard, with lower output, profitability, and cash reserves since before the pandemic. Unemployment has also risen sharply across every borough. Whispering Smith want to support Manchester City Council in promoting a safe return to work by leading by example.

7. KEY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 This section sets out the key planning considerations that will form the basis of the assessment of the planning application. We consider that these are; the principle of a roof extension; the design, and the impact of the proposal on designated heritage assets.

Principle

- 7.2 The principle of a roof extension in this location has been accepted by MCC through a series of pre-application discussions. Roof extensions along Deansgate are common place, for example, at No. 268 Deansgate, which occupies the adjoining plot to the application site. In August 2018 approval was granted for a two-storey roof extension to create 11 residential apartments. In addition, in 2016 No. 2 St Johns Street also gained approval for a similar single storey glazed rooftop extension, which has since been built and can be seen on site. No. 2 St Johns Street now sits at 7 storeys high.
- 7.3 The creation of additional office floorspace and ancillary staff amenity space is supported in principle by Core Strategy Policy EC 2 (Existing Employment Space). This policy notes that the Council will seek to retain and enhance existing employment space and sites. In the supporting text to this policy, it is noted that 'Despite being home to 51% of the region's Top 500 businesses, there is a noticeable gap in company headquarters in Manchester despite the higher-than-average presence of large businesses'. To be able to provide a landmark headquarters in the city centre for Whispering Smith is not only an achievement and significant benefit to the company, but also to Manchester as a city, helping to promote the city as a key destination to do business, particularly in the fashion and e-commerce sectors.

Design

- 7.4 According to Core Strategy Policy EN 1 (Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas), the site is located in Character Area 1 - The City Centre. Here, developer's will be expected to consider the City's heritage and continue the rich pattern of activity in the core area, by following the seven principles of urban design (Character; Continuity and enclosure; Quality of the public realm; Ease of movement; Legibility; Adaptability and Diversity).
- 7.5 The design for the scheme has considered these design principles, and design choices have been led by a number of identified opportunities and constraints, namely:
- The site's prominent location on Deansgate, a key throughfare through the city;
 - Proximity to heritage assets and the fringes of multiple conservation areas;

- Existing tall buildings in the surroundings;
- Ability to take advantage of rooftop views of the Manchester skyline;
- The existing quantum of space available in the current building and the need to consider practicalities such as bin and bike storage; and
- Materiality in the surroundings.

7.6 The Design & Access Statement discusses the proposed design comprehensively, however we would reiterate the following key points:

- **Massing** - The design has responded to pre-application feedback received from MCC and has been developed in collaboration with planning officers, a heritage consultant and the interior designer, to ensure the scheme delivers the functionality required. The final scheme is far less 'top-heavy' in terms of the massing and proportions yet delivers more floorspace than the scheme first presented at the pre-application stage, benefiting the client from a practical perspective.
- **Height** - The height of the proposal sits comfortably within the surroundings and does not create an overbearing development.
- **Materials** - The material choices selected seek to complement the existing building and takes an alternative approach to typical roof extension designs which often seek to utilise large amounts of glazing to create a simple 'lightweight box'. It was considered that this was not the correct approach for this site. Instead the materials selected will create a bespoke design suited specifically to this building, and which create subtle nods to the industrial heritage of the site's location, and the applicant's business in clothes manufacturing. This is particularly captured through the use of a digitally manipulated fabric pattern which will feature on the perforated glass reinforced concrete panels.
- **Design practicalities** - The proposal includes space for 8 x1100l euro bins, positioned in the basement area with easy access to a goods lift creating a seamless waste handling process. The proposal also promotes active travel for staff, with the inclusion of wall mounted racks for 18 bicycles. This is over the requirement based on the Core Strategy Parking Standards Appendix (which would require 14 cycle spaces based on the entire floor area of the building).

7.7 Overall, the design seeks to improve on the existing building at 274 Deansgate, by taking an unlisted building with none of its own heritage significance and adding an extension which is a clear modern intervention but which signals to the wider area's historical significance. For example, the materials proposed are already referenced in the surroundings and associated with the area's rich industrial past, but the scheme is designed to be diverse in its form and style compared to its neighbouring buildings, as advocated by MCC's supporting text on the Castlefield Conservation Area which

neighbours the site (*'The extreme diversity of form and style in Castlefield's existing structures makes it permissible for designers to use their imaginations freely'*¹).

Heritage Impact

7.8 Policy EN 3 (Heritage) of the Core Strategy notes that 'Throughout the City, the Council will encourage development that complements and takes advantage of the distinct historic and heritage features of its districts and neighbourhoods, including those of the City Centre[...] New developments must be designed so as to support the Council in preserving or, where possible, enhancing the historic environment, the character, setting and accessibility of areas.'

7.9 [awaiting final input from heritage statement]

¹ https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conservation_areas/972/castlefield_conservation_area/5

8. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of Whispering Smith ('the Applicant'), in relation to the site known as 274 Deansgate, in support of a full planning application for:

"Proposed two storey roof extension to provide additional office floorspace (Use Class E (g)), along with ancillary works to the ground floor and basement levels, and removal and replacement of plant."

- 8.2 The planning objectives and benefits of the proposed scheme are:

- **Securing the long-term future of the building** -the purchase of the building will ensure the vacant office space becomes fully occupied, increasing business rate revenue for MCC.
- **Improving the quality of office space** – the refurbishment will add to the quantum of Grade A office space in the city centre.
- **Improving the energy efficiency of the building** – replacing the existing gas heating system with a VRV heat recovery system, improving the carbon performance of the building.
- **Improve the delivery and waste collection strategy** –via the provision of a new goods lift.
- **Provides a flagship building for a Manchester headquartered brand** – this will in turn bolster the reputation of the city as a world class location for business, particularly in fashion and e-commerce.
- **Improves the attractiveness of South Deansgate** – Whilst Deansgate has seen a tremendous amount of redevelopment and expansion, we would argue that most new office space has been provided to the north of Quay Street, whereas in comparison, the southern end of Deansgate has suffered from a lack of investment and regeneration.
- **Promotes the safe return to office working** – research by United City indicates that footfall dramatically decreased in the city centre over the last 18 months and is yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Businesses that rely on footfall have been hit hard, with lower output, profitability, and cash reserves since before the pandemic. Unemployment has also risen sharply across every borough. Whispering Smith want to support Manchester City Council in promoting a safe return to work by leading by example.

- 8.3 The proposed development is undoubtedly a positive intervention at the site which will increase the quantum of Grade A office floorspace within the city centre, and provide a landmark building fit for purpose as an international headquarters for a proud Manchester based business. The scheme has been designed to be in accordance with the core planning principles of the NPPF and Local Development Plan and should therefore be approved without delay.