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Heritage

Queens Chambers Lightwell Heritage Statement

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Queens Chambers Lightwell Heritage Statement

1.00 Introduction

This Heritage Statement accompanies a planning and listed building consent application for Queens Chambers, Deansgate, Manchester. It was produced by Atelier Heritage in October 2021. Its author is Laura Jessup, MA History and Theory of Architecture, PGCert Conservation of the Historic Environment. The report describes and assesses significance of the specific elements involved in the application, as well as an overview of the listed asset.

2.00 Location, Description and History

Queens Chambers occupies a block within Manchester city centre, bounded by John Dalton Street, Deansgate, Back King Street and Ridgefield. The building is Grade II listed. An extract from the description is included below.

GV II SJ8398SE DEANSGATE 698-1/27/104 (East side)
03/10/74 Nos.105 TO 113 (Odd)

Includes:

Nos.5 TO 15 JOHN DALTON STREET. Commercial building with offices over shops and bank. 1876, by Pennington and Bridgen; altered. Sandstone ashlar, slate roof. Large trapeziform plan on island site, with canted corners. Gothic style. Four storeys over cellars, 5 bays to Deansgate (plus the corners), symmetrical; with polygonal piers, string courses and sill-bands (the topmost with grotesques projected from the piers), the corners and alternate bays with shallow canted oriels to the 1st and 2nd floors and gables above.

C20 shop-fronts at ground floor, and at the right-hand corner a canted 3-bay open arcade of moulded 2-centred arches (the centre larger) carried on 2 columns of polished granite with carved caps, various forms of enrichment including honeycombed spandrels and parapet with quatrefoils; mullioned and transomed windows on all floors (except the

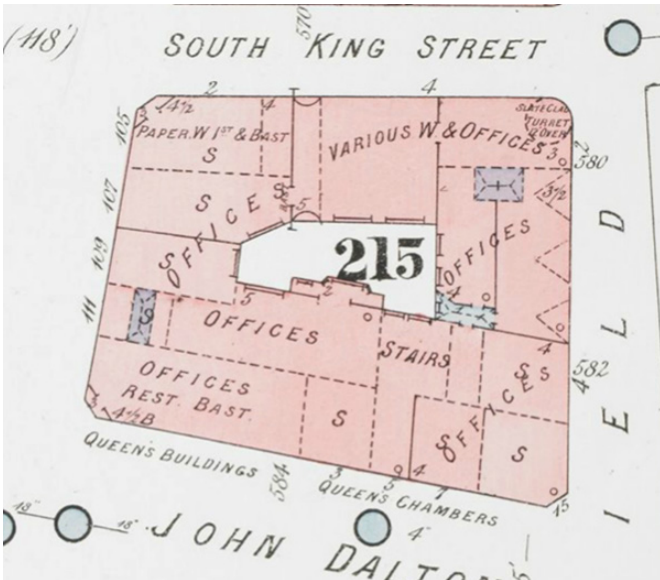


Image 01: 1886 Goad's Insurance Plan



Image 02: Queens Chambers Photographed from Deansgate

outer bays which have single-light windows), all with leaded glazing in arched upper lights; embattled parapet to corner oriel; steeply-pitched gables with quatrefoils and finials. Seven-bay return side to John Dalton Street in similar style but asymmetrical, lacking the gables, and with the former bank front of 3 large mullioned windows and an arched doorway at ground floor.

Listing NGR: SJ8368398258

The address of the listing is given as 105 to 113 Deansgate, rather than John Dalton Street, reflecting that the initial building was the 'L' shaped structure fronting Deansgate and John Dalton Street and that the primary entrance was at the corner of the building into the Queens Building Society, for whom the building was constructed.

The entrance to the upper floors of the building, now the primary entrance, was located on John Dalton Street and appears to have targeted professional services such as solicitors, accountants etc. This is evidenced by the rather fine panelled partitions above the ground floor and the absence of any obvious textile warehouse aesthetic. This original building dates from 1876 and was designed by Manchester architects Pennington and Bridgen in an eccentric gothic style. The building is constructed in ashlar sandstone with a slate roof having 5 symmetrical bays (plus corner) to Deansgate and 7 asymmetrical bays to John Dalton Street. Its original use was as offices. A Goads insurance plan shows these individual business units and a restaurant in the basement.

The group of buildings was damaged in the Second World War, particularly the Pennington and Bridgen building, and a great deal of the detail to Deansgate and John Dalton Street was lost or has been altered.

At some stage the various properties were linked together by a variety of internal openings and stairs. This process appears to have been piecemeal and carried out over an extended period of time. As a result, some internal detail (plaster cornices, skirtings, etc) have been lost.



Image 03: Existing Lightwell

3.00 Significance

Queens Chambers is a good example of late 19th century commercial architecture within the city centre. The lightwell is an original feature, designed to allow natural light to penetrate the offices within the deep block. It is a feature of significance within the building and has evidential and historical value, giving an insight into how the building was used historically. It is a space that has been subject to change however, particularly at lower level where M and E equipment has been sited, escape stairs inserted, and parts of the wall surfaces altered and refinished over time. The overall significance of the light well lies in its contribution to the plan form as a distinct area, and the use of light reflected off the wall surfaces to increase natural illumination. Whilst its individual elements are not all of significance (the alterations being of no heritage value), the lightwell as a distinct element is of medium significance to the whole.

The main internal space to Katsouris deli has historic features in the columns and decorative ceilings, which are of high significance. Those areas affected by the proposals are behind these more formal areas and plain in nature, typical internal walls, with no discerning features.

4.00 Proposals and Impact

4:01 Proposals

The proposals involve the insertion of a new deck within the existing lightwell area, to serve Katsouris deli and provide additional outside space for their customers. The proposed 'multideck' is a concrete on metal structure, finished with a decking surface. It sits on fire protected steelwork, with 5 columns supporting the horizontal deck. A process of design mitigation has ensured that penetration to existing fabric has been carefully avoided by the creation of a small perimeter gap separating new and existing fabric and the use of columns to support the deck from underneath. In effect, the structure sits on the supporting verticals like a tabletop. External access is via previously approved altered doorway to the rear of the café unit and there are no new changes to



mage 04: Existing Lightwell

the lightwell façade. Internal access is proposed by the forming of a doorway within an existing internal wall and re-configuration of the space to create a short corridor. An amendment to the already approved bin store is also proposed in order to allow for a passing route.

The relocation of various external pipes, ducts and mechanical AC units currently within the lightwell also form part of the application.

Details can be found in the accompanying drawings.

4:02 Impact

M and E

The existing space has air handling, ducting and escape stairs. These are new and of no heritage value. Their relocation or loss is not harmful and their further rationalisation will have a positive impact on the existing layout and in visual terms. Impact: Low, positive.

Columns and Decking

The proposed deck is at first floor level, creating a horizontal division within the lightwell. The spatial dimensions will therefore be altered to a minor extent. This division is mitigated by a 99mm setback around the perimeter, maintaining a distance between the existing fabric and the new. The key characteristic of the lightwell is its open nature. This quality is maintained with no roof proposed. The impact on historic fabric and significant characteristics is therefore minimal and any harm to significance is negligible.

The deck and glass balustrade are clearly modern interventions and are designed to be recognised as such, in line with good conservation practice. This is deemed appropriate and will avoid confusion in interpreting the historic, versus new, forms.

The creation of columns to support the deck will place new structure within the lightwell. These are limited in number and size and their location at lower level is within an area of lower significance, having already been much altered. Their presence will have a minor adverse impact upon the significance of the building.

When weighed against the benefit of better revealing the lightwell, creating public access and against the alternative proposal to penetrate the existing walls, any limited harm is considered to be outweighed.

Bin Store

The bin store was part of a previously approved scheme (application I20500/FO/2018). In order to create a passing route, the store is to be made slightly smaller. This minor change will have no impact upon significance.

Internal

A limited amount of historic fabric will be lost to create a doorway to access the new deck. This is an existing wall, displaying no special features and of limited heritage significance. The new opening is restricted in width and, in the consideration of the whole asset, its loss is not considered to be harmful to the understanding of the building, nor to its historical or architectural values. The provision of external amenity space for the current business will allow customers to access the lightwell and this is seen as beneficial both as a public benefit and for the ongoing viable use of the building.

5.00 Planning Context

Queens Chambers is a Grade II listed building. It is also within the Deansgate Conservation Area. Both these assets are covered by legislation within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This requires that 'special regard' be given to the 'desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'.

The relevant policy at national level is contained within the National Planning and Policy Framework. Local policy is set by Manchester City Council.

5:01 National Planning Policy Framework (revised 2021)

- Paragraph 194 requires an applicant to describe the significance of the heritage asset affected. This report fulfils that requirement.
- Paragraph 197 states the need for the local authority to take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation. Although the lightwell was not originally used for this purpose, proposals will make a positive contribution to the long-term viability of the listed building by creating useful external space, sympathetic to the existing character and carefully managed to create a high quality intervention with minimal harm to the historic fabric.
- Paragraph 199 states that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of the degree of harm. The proposals are considered to be of a high design quality, with an overriding consideration for the conservation of the existing fabric. They are not considered to be harmful to the significance of the whole. Where fabric is lost (wall converted to doorway) this involves fabric of lower significance and is limited in scale. The benefit of revealing a space previously inaccessible and giving it a viable new use outweighs any limited harm.
- Paragraph 202 states that any less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefit including securing the optimum viable use of the asset. The harm resulting from proposals is minimal. Access in to the lightwell will enable the public to experience the space in a new way, with minimal physical intervention through the use of a platform deck design. Provision of external space has become an important factor in commercial premises. There is limited scope

for intervention within deep city centre blocks without causing an unacceptable degree of harm. These proposals allow an outside platform to be incorporated within the existing footprint. The separate indoor/outdoor character is maintained and historic fabric protected. This is considered to be a good example of integrating new use, serving contemporary needs, without any significance degree of harm to the listed asset.

5:02 Local Policy

Manchester's Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, adopted July 2012, contains local policy and the council's vision for the city from 2012-2027.

- Policy CC9 states 'design in Manchester City Centre should preserve or enhance the heritage assets that have been identified, including listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments.'
- Policy EN3 concerns heritage and notes that 'proposals which enable the re-use of heritage assets will be encouraged where they are considered consistent with the significance of the heritage asset.'

The proposals are a continuation of the enhancement of the listed building, ensuring its viable re-use. They are entirely consistent with national and local policy.

6.00 Conclusion

This document has set out the significance of the building and specifically that of the area subject to the application. The proposals and their impact have been described. The decking proposals have been carefully designed to avoid damage to historic fabric. They will allow access to the lightwell and form a recognisably modern intervention within the space. Any degree of harm caused by the limited loss of original wall is considered to be outweighed by the benefit of providing external amenity and creating a high-quality addition to secure viable ongoing use. The proposals are deemed to meet the requirements of both national and local policy and will be an enhancement to the building. There will be no impact upon the wider conservation area, other than the contribution of the proposal in ensuring the asset remains in viable use.



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