



Max Dunbar
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Manchester Jewish Museum
190 Cheetham Hill Road
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Max

Letter in support of planning application

Background

Manchester Jewish Museum is currently undergoing a £6million capital development. A major two-storey extension is being built with a façade inspired by the architecture of the synagogue it sits next to. The extension will include a new entrance, café, shop, gallery, archive store and learning studio. The Museum's Grade II* listed synagogue is also being repaired and restored.

Challenges

We have been working with the team at Manchester Jewish Museum as they develop their ambitious plans for the new Museum, focusing on audiences and marketing communications. As a museum, the site has definite kerb appeal – a stunning new extension to a historic former synagogue.

However, that appeal only works if passers-by and potential visitors spot the Museum in the first place. There are no places to stop, let alone park. As a result, signage at the front of the site is critical to enable the investment in this culturally significant attraction to be realised. The Museum does not intend to be a 'hidden gem'. So,

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signage can make a huge difference to the fortunes of the Museum as it re-opens to the public.

The Museum is located on Cheetham Hill Road, one of the main commuter roads into Manchester city centre. In a road full of depots, showrooms, takeaways, restaurants, glowing signage, billboards and retail parks, the Museum's historic building has always been lost within the urban landscape in which it sits. The Museum team has reported that visitors often struggle to find the Museum, driving past a number of times before actually finding it.

In addition to this, when the Museum reopens in 2021 operational costs will significantly increase due to a larger building and a larger staff team. To cover these increased costs, the Museum needs to attract three times as many visitors (24,000 per year) to generate income through admissions and secondary spend.

Ultimately the new building needs to stand out more on Cheetham Hill Road to attract more visitors to secure the Museum's future.

Solution

The development of the signage scheme to date has sought to be both impactful but sympathetic to its surroundings and neighbours, as well as to the heritage of the Museum buildings themselves.

We have been working closely with staff and designers on Museum signage. The external signage needs to work hard, balancing the need to stand out whilst also complementing the architecture of a historic site. Working with the team, we have helped developed the following strategy for the external signage:

Main Entrance Sign

The Museum's name needs to sit prominently above the main entrance. Sitting on a busy road, surrounded by commercial signage, this Museum sign is essential to define the building. This sign will also play an important navigational role, ensuring visitors enter the Museum through the new extension and not, as they have done over the past 36 years, through the synagogue doors.

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Totem Sign

Over the years the Museum has undertaken extensive audience research, gaining a better understanding of the barriers preventing people from visiting. One of the main barriers has been a lack of understanding about what the Museum is, who it's for and what it does. Many think the Museum is only for Jewish people. This totem sign has been designed to address this issue. Not only will it help visitors find the Museum on the busy Cheetham Hill Road but the words 'Exhibitions, Events, Café, Shop' will establish the Museum as a cultural attraction for everyone. The sign also communicates a new café to local residents, workers and commuters – a café for everyone, regardless of whether they are visiting the Museum or not.

Modular Sign

We have explored a number of signage options to promote the Museum's changing programme of activities. It was felt large banners or billboards publicising Museum events would not only be costly but would detract from the architectural splendour of the synagogue. A smaller, but equally effective solution is being proposed, with a modular signage system, sitting on the Museum's front wall. This playful system will give the Museum the opportunity to advertise forthcoming events in a quick, low cost way. Designed to catch the eye of commuters driving past, this signage uses the Museum's new visual identity to promote events through short words and phrases. Following concerns from Greater Manchester Police about people loitering on the Museum's front wall, this modular system has also been designed as an essential security element, preventing anyone from sitting on the Museum wall.

In conclusion

All of the above elements serve different purposes – defining the building, navigating visitors, attracting passers-by, strengthening the new brand and promoting the Museum offer and events programme. However, all three elements have been designed to complement one another. All will be produced in Corten steel, the same material being used on the Museum's façade. The totem sign will also include the same pattern as the façade. As such, we believe this signage will enhance the historic site, whilst also establishing the Museum as an exciting and dynamic cultural attraction on the busy Cheetham Hill Road.

Yours sincerely

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