Manchester Town Hall Carpets – Inspection Details

22nd October 2018

Kate Stockwell
Crosby Stevens
Glyn Charnock

Eight carpets were examined to assess the probable dates and condition, plus treatment and costing options. The aim was to document the carpets and if possible do a sample clean of 1m square.
In the event there were limitations for the inspection and testing. Our RAMS did not include lifting the carpet fixings and so the reverse, seaming and underlay could only be viewed where the edges were loose, and wet cleaning was not advisable.
We met with Helen Walker and her team and walked through the rooms together to raise issues and establish a way forward.
This summary report gives an initial description and it documents our findings and suggestions.

1. Banqueting Room 245

1.1 Description

1936cm L x 745cm W
Probably an Axminster construction with a jute and cotton ground weave and a wool pile
Laid in five sections. Four of these are 402cm wide and one is 330cm wide.
The seams run across the width of the carpet and the edges of the seams are probably glued to a tape. There is no border pattern.
The edges are fixed to an aluminium gripper screwed to the floor, with a plastic cover.
We were able to lift a small section of the edge to look at the underlay and fixing.
The underlay is rubber crumb glued to the floor and the carpet is glued to the underlay: a double stick installation.
This carpet may be no more than 30 to 40 years old as this type of underlay has only been in production since the 1980s.
No further information was available to inform more accurate dating, although there may be records from the town hall or manufacturers' archives.

1.2 Condition

The carpet was in basically sound condition although the edges may be damaged under the gripper strips and trim. There were extensive sections covered with duct tape and this is likely to have transferred adhesive to the carpet and may also cover further damage.

The carpet was very dirty with general ingrained soiling and various stains and marks including deposits of chewing gum.
The pile was not significantly worn or crushed and the colours were still good.
There was no sign of insect damage.

1.3 Issues

The double stick installation will make lifting, turning and rolling the carpet extremely difficult. Removal of the underlay and glue from the back of the carpet poses a significant cleaning challenge.
This procedure would involve:

- Separating the carpet into strips at the seams
- Covering the carpet with a protective layer of polythene to prevent the carpet sticking to itself
- Rolling each section separately, scraping it from the floor and probably bringing up parts of the underlay with it. This will be messy and create significant dust.
- Removing the adhesive on the back and the duct tape on the edges (with its adhesive residues)
- Adhesive removal will require specialist skills and the use of solvents. This procedure would have to be done in a suitable place (probably off site) with fume extraction.

We are advised that the room is to be opened to the public in future, receiving heavy footfall, and it will also be used for hospitality. Any assessment of how long the carpet will remain fit for purpose and what cleaning treatments are suitable should reflect this end use.

If left in place with the current fixed gripper rods and double stick installation, there is no access to the floor underneath. If this is desired now and/or in the future an alternative is needed.

If lifted it may prove necessary to trim the edges of the carpet if they are damaged, and so the carpet may be smaller when reinstalled. This could have issues for the marks on the floor left by previous layers of varnish.

1.4 Options

- Clean in situ

  a) Conservation clean. This would involve detailed vacuum cleaning, adhesive removal at the edges and wet cleaning to conservation standards. Adhesive removal on the face would be very limited and the treatment would not tackle the reverse of the carpet, including the underlay. It would therefore have significant limitations.

  b) Commercial clean. This would involve the use of industry-approved products and commercial carpet cleaning equipment. The structure of the

carpet is probably strong enough for this approach. The appearance of the carpet is likely to be improved but again adhesive removal on the face would be limited and the treatment would not tackle the reverse of the carpet, including the underlay. The use of a commercial cleaning solution may have long-term effects on the fibres and this would not be a conservation approach although given that the carpet is to be walked on, any long term effects of products used are unlikely to significantly reduce the carpet lifespan. This should be balanced against the superior cleaning results of a commercial clean which will reduce wear to the carpet when in use, potentially extending the life of the carpet.

- Lift, thoroughly clean (probably off site) and reinstate. This is likely to be time-consuming and expensive and the adhesive removal from both the face and back of the carpet may not be completely successful. The procedure may not significantly extend the life of the carpet.

- Replace, possibly informed by research and historic photographs.

1.5 Recommendations

Cleaning in situ is a reasonable (if limited) and relatively low-cost option. Subject to any findings from historical research, we would suggest that a commercial clean would be suitable for the carpet and more cost effective than a conservation clean.

Lifting, cleaning and reinstatement is not recommended due to the probable cost, uncertain success and logistical issues.

The life expectancy of the carpet cannot be accurately predicted. It may wear out relatively quickly with heavy footfall, and replacing it now while other works are in progress is probably prudent. Lifting the carpet will be a messy procedure whenever it is done because of the aging crumb underlay and double stick installation.

Our recommendation would be replacement with a new carpet and new underlay. The carpet and underlay can then be fixed in such a way that it will be straightforward in future to lift the carpet for access to the floor. This will assist routine cleaning (including after any large spills) and pest inspections.

2. Reception Room 244

2.1 Description

1310cm L x 680W
Wilton construction

The carpet is made up of 27” wide strips, sewn together. The strips run along the length of the room. The centre is made up of 8 strips of the field pattern and there are additional border pattern strips along each side.
The carpet is resting on a composite underlay (probably jute and hair) and it is fixed along the edges with a gripper rod screwed to the floor and a plastic cover (as for the Banqueting Room above).
It was not possible to date this carpet. More research is required.

2.2 Condition
There is structural damage to the seams with some splits where the underlay can be seen. The pile of the carpet is significantly reduced in some areas of the pattern – one light blue and one pale yellow colour are specifically affected – and in these areas the ground weave is exposed. The damage is likely to have been caused by UV light.
Duct tape has been stuck to the edges of the carpet.
There was no sign of insect damage.

2.3 Issues
Due to its poor condition the carpet is unlikely to be fit for purpose even after cleaning. With heavy footfall you can expect a rapid deterioration with splits and holes that will be unsightly and a trip hazard.
In a full conservation treatment, weak areas could be stitched to a support but this would be extremely time-consuming and expensive and not appropriate for the future use of the room.
The underlay is likely to be attractive to pests. A conservation-approved alternative is desirable.
The carpet is too weak to withstand a robust commercial cleaning treatment.
There are likely to be adhesive residues on the front face of the carpet when the duct tape is removed. An adhesive removal treatment would be needed (probably requiring fume extraction). This may not be entirely successful.
It may also prove necessary to trim the edges of the carpet if they are damaged, and so the carpet may be smaller when reinstalled. This could have issues for the marks on the floor left by previous layers of varnish.
The condition of the seams will make stretching during fitting problematic.

2.4 Options

- Lift, clean gently, support the seams, and reinstate with a new underlay. At least one lengthways seam would need to be opened to allow the carpet to be rolled in sections. This would make the carpet much easier to handle. Adhesive removal is likely to require fume extraction off site.

- Replace with a new replica carpet, possibly based on research into the original.

2.5 Recommendations

Lifting, cleaning and reinstatement is not recommended due to the probable cost, uncertain success, and logistical issues. In addition, the carpet could not be returned in a state where it is suitable for heavy footfall without introducing protection such as druggets.

The life expectancy of the carpet cannot be accurately predicted. It is likely to wear out relatively quickly and replacing it now while other works are in progress is probably prudent.

A new underlay is recommended. The new carpet and underlay can be fixed in such a way that it will be straightforward in future to lift the carpet for access to the floor. This will also assist routine cleaning (including after any large spills) and pest inspections.

3. Lord Mayor's Parlour Room 242

3.1 Description

1295 cm L x 740cmW
Wilton construction with a jute and cotton ground weave and a wool pile.
Laid in 27"strips, which appear to be stitched (though this was not easy to determine).
There are nine strips of field pattern plus strips of edging pattern on all four sides, two of which run with the weave at right angles to the field strips. The main seams run the length of the carpet.
The edges are fixed to an aluminium gripper screwed to the floor, with a plastic cover.
We were able to lift a section of the edge to look at the underlay and fixing.
The underlay is similar to that in Reception Room 244 (above).
Further research is required to date this carpet but the reverse is clean and relatively undegraded suggesting it is quite modern.

3.2 Condition

The carpet was in basically sound condition although the edges may be damaged under the gripper strips and trim. Sections were covered with duct tape and this is likely to have transferred adhesive to the carpet and may also cover further damage.
The carpet was dirty with general ingrained soiling.
The pile was not significantly worn or crushed and the colours were still good.
The seams were sound.
There was no sign of insect damage.

3.3 Issues

We are advised that the room is to be opened to the public in future, receiving heavy footfall, and it will also be used for hospitality. Any assessment of how long the carpet will remain fit for purpose and what cleaning treatments are suitable should reflect this end use.
There are likely to be adhesive residues on the front face of the carpet when the duct tape is removed. An adhesive removal treatment would be needed (probably requiring fume extraction). This may not be entirely successful.

The underlay is likely to be attractive to pests. A conservation-approved alternative is desirable.
It may prove necessary to trim the edges of the carpet if they are damaged, and so the carpet may be smaller when reinstated. This could have issues for the marks on the floor left by previous layers of varnish.

3.4 Options

- Clean in situ. Please note the carpet will need to be released from its current fixings to allow replacement of the underlay and to repair any damage caused by the gripper fixings.

  a) Conservation clean. This would involve detailed vacuum cleaning, adhesive removal at the edges (probably with fume extraction) and wet cleaning to conservation standards. At least one seam would have to be cut and later resewn to assist handling.

  b) Commercial clean. This would involve the use of industry-approved products and commercial carpet cleaning equipment. The structure of the carpet is probably strong enough for this approach, subject to tests. The appearance of the carpet is likely to be improved but the use of a commercial cleaning solution may have long-term effects on the fibres and this would not be a conservation approach although given that the carpet is to be walked on, any long term effects of products used are unlikely to significantly reduce the carpet lifespan. This should be balanced against the superior cleaning results of a commercial clean which will reduce wear to the carpet when in use, potentially extending the life of the carpet. Thorough adhesive removal may require fume extraction.

  After cleaning: roll, store and reinstate. Either of the cleaning options above can be followed by rolling and storage of the carpet which could then be reinstalled at the end of the works. The end borders would need to be unstitched and rolled separately as they cannot be rolled width wise without damage. As there would be stitching required to replace these end border sections, unstitching one lengthwise seam as well would make the rolling and handling of the carpet much easier. It would, however be a fairly expensive procedure. As the carpet appears to be relatively modern with little intrinsic monetary or historical value it may be preferable to clean it without rolling it.

  Note - if the underlay is to be replaced the carpet will need to be rolled whether or not it is stored and reinstated. In addition, if it is not rolled there will be no access to the centre of the floor for inspections during the current works.

- Replace, possibly with a carpet close to the original 1877 item informed by historical research, and a new conservation-approved underlay.

3.5 Recommendations

Cleaning in situ is a reasonable and relatively low-cost option. We would suggest that a commercial clean would be suitable for the carpet (unless research shows that it is of particular historic significance) and more cost effective than a conservation clean.
Depending on what works are required to the rest of the room, taking the carpet apart, rolling, storing and reinstating may be more practical but will be expensive.
The life expectancy of the carpet cannot be accurately predicted. It may wear out relatively quickly and planning for cyclical renewal would be prudent.
A new underlay is recommended if and when the carpet is rolled for storage, access or replacement.
The carpet and underlay can be fixed in such a way that it will be straightforward in future to lift the carpet for access to the floor. This will assist routine cleaning (including after any large spills) and pest inspections.

4. Committee Room 3 Room A 2.13_1

4.1 Description

657cm L x 553cmW
Either Wilton or Axminster construction with a jute and cotton ground weave and a wool pile.
Laid in two pieces, probably with the join adhered to a tape. The seam runs the width of the carpet, near the centre. There is no border.
The edges are fixed to an aluminium gripper screwed to the floor, with a plastic cover.
We were not able to lift a section of the edge to look at the underlay and fixing.
The underlay could not be inspected.
Further research is required to date this carpet but it appears to be relatively modern. Anecdotal evidence suggests up to 20 years old.

4.2 Condition

The carpet was in basically sound condition although the edges may be damaged under the gripper strips and trim.
The carpet was dirty with general ingrained soiling.
The pile was not significantly worn or crushed and the colours were still good.
The seam was sound.
There was no sign of insect damage.

4.3 Issues

Any assessment of how long the carpet will remain fit for purpose and what cleaning treatments are suitable should reflect its end use. We are advised that it will receive moderate footfall.
The underlay may be attractive to pests. It could be inspected and perhaps replaced if necessary.

If the carpet is lifted for access it may prove necessary to trim the edges of the carpet when it is relayed - if they are damaged. The carpet may therefore be smaller when reinstalled. This could have issues for the marks on the floor left by previous layers of varnish.

4.4 Options

- Clean in situ

  a) Conservation clean. This would involve detailed vacuuming and wet cleaning to conservation standards. For maximum effectiveness the carpet would have to be lifted for tamping of the pile and cleaning the reverse. The seam would have to be cut and later re-stuck or resewn, to assist handling.

  b) Commercial clean. This would involve the use of industry-approved products and commercial carpet cleaning equipment. The structure of the carpet is probably strong enough for this approach, subject to tests. The appearance of the carpet is likely to be improved but the use of a commercial cleaning solution may have long-term effects on the fibres and this would not be a conservation approach although given that the carpet is to be walked on, any long term effects of products used are unlikely to significantly reduce the carpet lifespan. This should be balanced against the superior cleaning results of a commercial clean which will reduce wear to the carpet when in use, potentially extending the life of the carpet.

  After cleaning in situ: roll, store and reinstate. Either of the cleaning options above can be followed by rolling and storage of the carpet which could then be reinstalled at the end of the works. New fixings allowing easy access in future could be installed.

- Replace, possibly informed by historical research

4.5 Recommendations

Cleaning in situ is a reasonable and relatively low-cost option. We would suggest that a commercial clean would be suitable for the carpet (unless research shows that it is of high historic significance) and this would be more cost effective than a conservation clean.

The life expectancy of the carpet cannot be accurately predicted. Planning for cyclical renewal would be prudent.

Inspection of the underlay is recommended if the carpet is lifted. A conservation-recommended underlay would be desirable.

5. Committee Room 2 Room A 2.16 and Committee Room 1 Room A 2.17

The types of carpet, probable ages and condition of these carpets are very similar to those of the carpet in Committee Room 3 (above).
Assuming they will have only moderate footfall and research does not show high historic significance, the recommendations would be the same.
It should be noted that the carpet in Committee Room 1 has come loose from the gripper plate at one side and needs to be re-stretched and re-secured.

6. Ante Room, Room 241 and Conference Hall Room 239

Only a very brief examination of these two carpets was possible on the day due to the rooms being in use during the day.

6.1 Description.

From the limited access available, these appear to be either Axminster or Wilton constructions with a jute and cotton foundation with a presumably wool face fibre.
The carpets are fitted to the edges of the rooms but the installation method is unclear as there are gripper rods at the edge of the rooms, but the carpet also appears to be glued to the underlay and the underlay glued to the floor in a double stick installation.

6.2 Condition.

There were signs of heavy wear in the doorway to the Conference room, with exposed jute foundation fibres evident, suggesting the carpet is nearing the end of its useful life.

6.3. Recommendations.

It is difficult to make recommendations for these carpets with the limited information available. However, if there is no particular significance to the carpets in relation to the building (which is likely), and they are found to be double stick installed, our recommendations would be replacement, possibly with a carpet closer to the original 1877 items informed by historical research.

Final Comments.

We would also like to highlight the need for a planned maintenance regime for carpets in a building such as Manchester Town Hall.
Whatever route is taken regarding the current carpets, be that replacement or cleaning and reinstatement, maintenance of carpets is essential to extend their useful life and for them to retain their appearance during that period.

We can assist in the preparation of a suitable planned maintenance programme and sourcing a local contractor with the required skills knowledge and experience for the job if required.