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Corn Exchange, Manchester. Proposed Roomzzz Signage and Wayfinding Totems

Background:

Stephen Levrant Heritage Architecture have been appointed by AVIVA (owners of the building) since 2011 to provide heritage advice on the Grade II listed Corn Exchange.

A full significance assessment of the building has been undertaken and used to inform the range of proposals that have come forward since 2012, to extend the building's food offer and provide hotel usage.

The proposed works have the potential to impact the fabric and the setting of the Grade II Listed Corn Exchange.

It is considered that the current proposals will not have an impact on adjacent listed buildings, within the immediacies of the subject site, and or the character and appearance of the Cathedral Conservation Area.

Assessment of the impact on the heritage assets has taken into account, and is proportionate to, the significance of the asset and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.

This note has been prepared by Kirsten McKnight, Senior Associate.

Significance:

The Former Corn and Produce Exchange building was listed Grade II on 30 March 1973 and sits within the southern boundary of the Cathedral Conservation Area.

A grocery and provision market has been established in the area since medieval times. A permanent building was first erected in Hanging Ditch in 1837. Construction work on the present building, to meet the growing requirements of the North West's Grocery and Provision Traders, began in 1891 in a piecemeal fashion and continued for a period of 12 years. The existing building is largely designed by Edward Potts and his various collaborative practices. The 1837 Exchange, which was located on the site in Hanging Ditch, was first extended through to a building on Fennel Street in 1891 by the architects Ball and Elce. Following street widening to the west of the island site, along Cathedral Street (then called Half Street), in 1895, Potts, Dixon and Pickup were appointed architects to the Corn and Produce Company. Property along the remaining west side of Fennel Street and the corner of Cathedral Street was also acquired and Potts, Son and Pickup

were commissioned to make the two ranges harmonious, thereby altering Ball and Elce's original design. Following further street widening to Hanging Ditch, by the City Corporation in 1900, Potts, Son and Henning were then tasked with designing the third frontage to the building. Over the entire course of construction the markets and trading within the Exchange did not cease; building work took place around the existing buildings within the site. The building was finally completed in 1903 and contained over 300 offices, shops and warehouses, a 40 bedroom hotel and a central Exchange Hall with a domed glazed roof. In 1922 3 properties to the west of the site were acquired and the Exchange Hall was extended, as was the provision for office and warehouse space. Following severe bomb damage in December 1940 the interior of the building was largely reconstructed and internally sales offices were added around the periphery of the Exchange Hall. The interior was completely destroyed following the IRA bomb attack in 1996 and very little original fabric now remains internally. The restoration project was completed in 500 days and a new interior, designed by the Ratcliffe Partnership, provided 55 retail units on three floors. 800 window frames were replaced and 1,700 metres squared of glass was needed for the dome. It was rebranded as 'The Triangle' and opened in 2000.

The building yields evidential and historical values through its association with commercial trading practices dating back to medieval times. The fabric of the building also allows for an appreciation of the former use of the building. Aesthetic and communal values are yielded through the townscape value of the building and its prominent position within the centre of the city.

The building is triangular in plan occupying a large island site. The two areas of public space, south and north of the building, allow the building to be experienced within a setting that includes a number of large standalone buildings; the Cathedral, the south-east wing of the Chetham's School, the Urbis, Victoria Train Station etc. The building is experienced within more intimate surroundings along Cathedral Street, to the west, adjacent to the Cathedral, where the denser urban grain gives a feeling for the former medieval layout of the area. The continuum of the public realm along Corporation Street, Withy Grove, and New Cathedral Street allows the building to be experienced from more distant views in which it is read as being part of the retail provision of the city centre.

Corn Exchanges, as a typology, are a significant building type as they convey a great deal of information about a town or city's economic and social history. Despite there being over 50 listed Corn Exchanges in England, the Corn Exchange building in Manchester is unusual due to its large size, architectural style and relatively late date.

The building is of historic interest due to the fact that the site has been connected to commercial trade in the City since medieval times. The associated economic and social interest this brings is also of interest and adds to the special interest of the building and its function as a place for trading goods. In modern day history the site is also of interest due to the connection with the IRA bomb attack in 1996, which has become an integral part of the city's and the building's history.

The Corn Exchange largely dates to the early 20th century which makes it a rare example of a building of this type from this period. It is also one of only a few buildings of this type to be designed and built in a debased Baroque style rather than a classical style.

The areas of the building subject to the current proposals were largely rebuilt following the works undertaken in the late 1990s, after the bomb damage.

Proposals:

The current proposals are for:

- an additional totem wayfinding sign to Cathedral Street (in addition to the ones consented for Hanging Ditch and Fennel Street). This will be free-standing within the pavement area (affecting non original fabric);
- Remove X4 existing light fittings from the principal entrance to the Hanging Ditch elevation and making good any fixing points (affecting original historic fabric);
- X2 circular projecting signs to the Hanging Ditch elevation, X1 to the Cathedral Street elevation; and X1 to the Fennel Street elevation. Each sign will be fixed to the stonework using X4no. 75mm long M10 Rawlbolts (affecting original historic fabric);
- A large entrance sign to the Hanging Ditch elevation. This sign will be top fixed to the underside of the exiting entrance using X2no. polished mirror stainless steel 40x40mm box section rails. Each rail will be fixed to the stonework via a flat plant and x4no. 75mm long M10 Rawlbolts (affecting original historic fabric);
- A vinyl film sign ("ZZZ") to the existing shopfront, located left of the main entrance on Fennel Street (affecting non original fabric); and
- Painting the modern plasterboard to the ceiling of the recess behind the principal entrance to Hanging Ditch (affecting non original fabric).

Impact:

The proposed fixings of the signage will impact on the historic fabric of the external elevations to the building.

Whilst the installation of the signage will require fixing to the external stone work of the Grade II Listed Building, consideration has been given to ensure the number of units is kept to a minimum and thereby reducing the number of fixings required. The necessary sizes for the fixings have also been kept to the minimum possible to reduce the impact on the historic fabric and thereby allowing for reversibility should any of the elements be replaced/ removed in the future. The development of the design and location of the signage has been informed by the articulation of the architecture of the building to ensure that it is enhanced, which in turn will allow for an increased understanding and appreciation of the Listed Building.

The impact of the proposals on the fabric of the building is therefore considered only to have limited instances of minor adverse impact.

Removal of the existing X4 modern light fittings, to the principal Hanging Ditch entrance, and making good the fixing points, and repainting the existing plasterboard to the ceiling of the recess is considered to have a negligible impact.

Considerations regarding the potential for visual impact on the special interest of the Grade II listed building need also to be given.

It will be clear that the design, scale and materiality of the proposed signage has been designed to clearly respond to the aesthetic values of the historic building, in order that they are clearly read as modern interventions, and retain a level of subservience.

Consequently, the development will not affect the heritage values of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate those values and will have a negligible effect.