


# Kitchen Extension & minor refurbishment (external timber cladding option)

## Unicorn Grocery

Design & Access Statement

24 January 2012


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RIBA Chartered Practice

arb Architects Registration Board
The architects within this company are registered as such under the Architects Act 1997.

AECB the sustainable building association
Member of the Association of Environment Conscious Building

CO-OPERATIVES UK Member

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Design & Access Statement is in support of the planning application submitted to Manchester City Council (MCC) on behalf of Unicorn Grocery Limited (Unicorn) for the refurbishment and extension of the property at 89 Albany Road, Chorlton.

The main aim for this project is to create a minor extension of the existing property to address Unicorn's increasing need for improved kitchen facilities for the commercial production of delicatessen food on site to build on Unicorn’s excellent reputation within the local area. In parallel with this is Unicorn's acknowledgement that this may be an opportunity to improve some of the existing fabric of the building in terms of heat loss.

The client and council planners have been involved in the development of this design for approximately 2 years with the aim of arriving at a solution that makes the existing building more accessible and increases it's capacity without detrimental effect to the main frontage within the development area. This has resulted in a subtle design that responds to the current building frontage and respects its setting.

Those involved in the design proposal seek to emulate the client's ethos by improving their presence as a local landmark that will also attract interest from potential users.

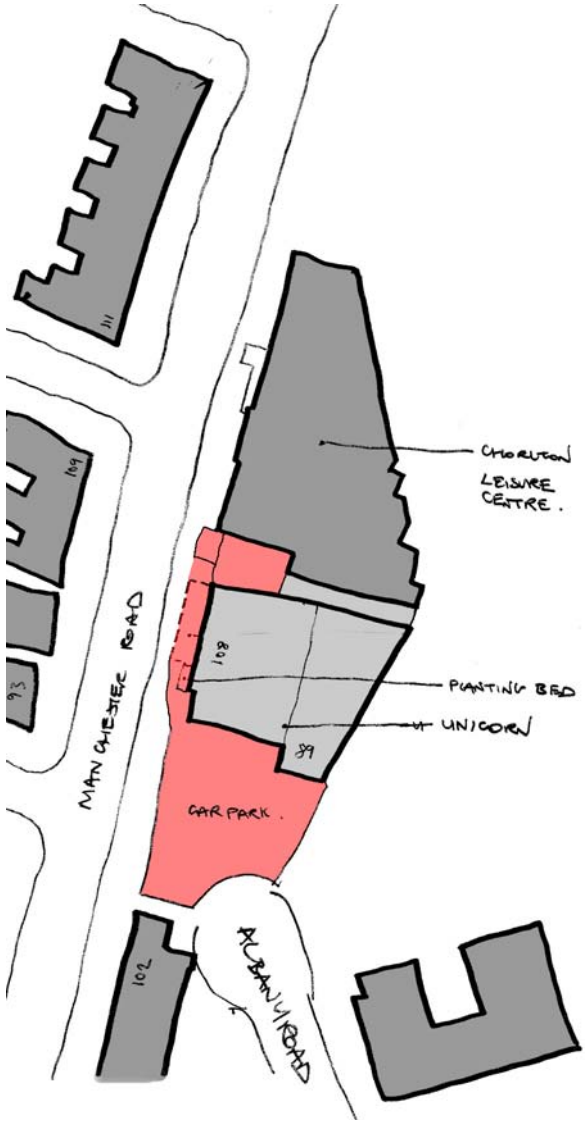
It has been agreed that materials should be selected carefully and the building should demonstrate commitment to sustainability and minimise its carbon footprint. The refurbishment and extension includes additional accommodation and some much needed refurbishment of the existing masonry and windows.

This report has been prepared in parallel with the planning application and refers to information included as part of the Planning Application.

Through a process of continual design development and pre-planning discussion, we believe that the proposal that is now being submitted for Planning Approval is an appropriate resolution of the clients aspirations and the site.

Stephen McCusker
Director

Loop Systems Limited




## 2.0 The Process

### 2.1 Assessment

The existing building is located at 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN and appears to have been constructed as a stock depot and offices in 1969. According to images from Manchester libraries photographic archive, the site was vacant and for sale in 1958 as can be viewed in the following links:

- Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester Road, East Side: Land adjoining Chorlton Baths, Chorlton telephone exchange in background
  http://images.manchester.gov.uk/web/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=38835&reftable=ecatalogue&refirn=16367

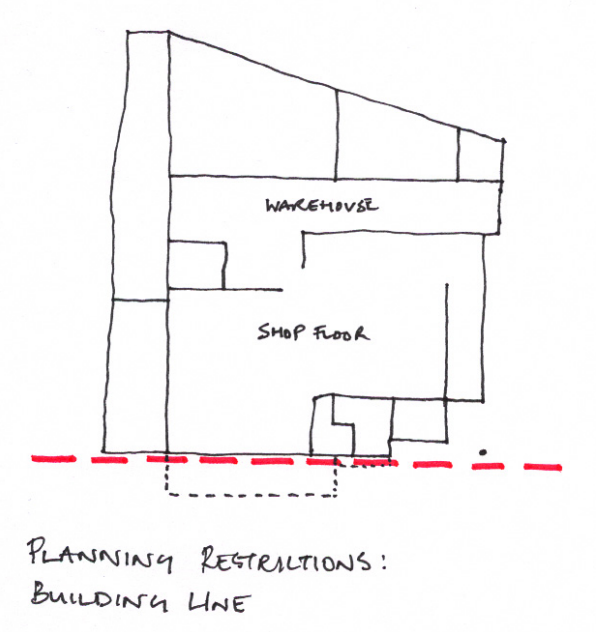
- Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester Road, East Side: Chorlton Baths looking north east from Richmond Road corner
  http://images.manchester.gov.uk/web/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=38834&reftable=ecatalogue&refirn=16358

Unicorn opened at the site in September 1996, renting just a part of the premises until purchasing the building in 2003 thanks to investment by Unicorn customers and members of the local community buying loanstock bonds. Since then they have developed the site, adding solar panels in 2005 and a rooftop pond and wildlife garden in 2007.

The existing building is adjacent to Chorlton leisure Centre and is walking distance from Chorlton Tram Station on Wilbraham Road. The surrounding area is mixed residential and local businesses with a good variety of amenities within walking distance.

Unicorn has advised that the land owned by them is restricted to the area shaded in red to include the parking areas and strips of land to the Manchester Road frontage, beyond the existing building footprint. We are not aware of any existing rights of way for neighbouring buildings or owners across the site.

The building (see photos in Appendix 1) is a 2 storey reinforced concrete structure highlighted in light grey within the red area on the adjacent diagram and generally appears to be formed of the original materials. It has single storey extensions both to the north (storage area alongside the leisure centre) and to the south (Public porch/entrance area facing the car park) and has a number of pedestrian entrances/exits at ground floor locations.




After initial discussions supported by Co-operative North West in early 2010, Unicorn appointed architects to investigate the possibility of extending the premises to include a new commercial kitchen for their delicatessen. A number of designs have been developed and costed and the current proposals were agreed by Unicorn's membership in November 2011.

## 2.2 Physical Context

The building is not listed and is constructed using an expressed reinforced concrete frame, in-filled with masonry and glazing panels between. The local context is on the East side of Manchester road is of mixed quality and style compared with the terraced and semi-detached brick buildings on the West side of the road immediately opposite which are generally 2-3 storey with active frontage of the ground floor. These display a consistent building line at the back of the pavement and similar ridge and eaves heights.

Other significant buildings in the immediate vicinity are:

- Chorlton Leisure Centre ( Manchester Road): single storey brick & concrete building
- Manchester Learning Disability Partnership office building (102 Manchester Road): 3 storey brick & concrete office building
- Telephone exchange: 2/3 storey brick & concrete building

All of these buildings are adjacent to the Unicorn site and have flat rooves. There is a strong building line across the front of the buildings fronting Manchester road with the unicorn car-park introducing a 'gap site' and separating the Unicorn building from the office building. There is no consistent eaves line or height across these buildings and there is a significant amount of plant and antennae in and around the roof of the telephone exchange.

## 2.3 Social Context

Chorlton is a popular residential area approximately five miles from the city centre. A cosmopolitan area with a vibrant shopping and entertainment centre at the junction of Wilbraham Road and Barlow Moor Road and along Beech Road. Chorlton is made up of a diverse community with many active interest groups. The number of festivals that take place throughout the year highlights the diverse make up of the area.

Unicorn has a strong public profile both locally and beyond. This project therefore aims to use this extension and improved thermal performance as an opportunity to re-vitalise and unify the existing building's facade to improve its visual appearance for the local community.

## 2.4 Economic Context

The area is served, at Chorlton, by the largest shopping centre outside the City Centre which stretches along Manchester Road, Wilbraham Road and Barlow Moor Road. Over the past two years Unicorn have been increasing the amount of food prepared on site by using a small kitchen behind the deli. A bigger kitchen in the extension would allow Unicorn to cook more on site and increase sales while meeting customer demand for more consistent supply of “homemade” lines. Unicorn would also reinstate popular lines that were recently lost when suppliers ceased to trade or scaled down their operation. Further, they would replace some or all of our prepared food lines brought from near London, decreasing food miles and transport costs while increasing their margin and value added on site.

Increased food prep on site also means Unicorn buy more ingredients from local growers and other suppliers, in addition to requiring more labour – there are currently 42 member/directors and probationary members, plus approximately 20 casual workers who provide 15-20% of our labour needs. Unicorn  expect the extensions to require them to recruit four more people in the first year (two of whom would be members), and more in subsequent years as the food prep area of the business grows.

## 2.5 Planning policy

Although the local council has produced guidance specific to local conservation and wildlife areas within Chorlton, these are not relevant to the referenced location within this application. We have therefore referred to the Manchester Unitary Development Plan 1995 (UDP), specifically subsection Area 13 – Chorlton and Barlow Moor.

The UDP highlights that there is some scope for new employment opportunities in Chorlton and Barlow Moor, generally confined to locations such as main road frontages adjacent to existing commercial areas, or other identified commercial sites, where there will not be a detrimental impact on nearby housing. The existing Unicorn site is located in such an area, within Chorlton's shopping centre. This is the largest in Manchester outside the City Centre providing a wide variety of goods and services and the UDP emphasises the potential for improving the attractiveness of the existing centre.

The UDP also refers to the environmental protection and enhancement of specific wildlife habitats. Although these are outside the scope of the Unicorn Planning Application, it should be noted that as part of their site development, Unicorn Grocery have added to their roof in this regard with the addition of solar panels in 2005 and a rooftop pond and wildlife garden in 2007. The first living roof of its kind in

the UK it is a mixture of sedum, wetland (a pond with water plants) and brownfield elements (rubble left to self-colonise) aimed at creating suitable habitat for the black redstart, a small robin-like bird which breeds only in cities. Since completion, the roof has been naturally colonised by over 20 species of plants and a variety of insects.

## 2.6 Involvement

Following an options appraisal delivered in December 2010, Loop Systems have been working with Unicorn staff over a period of months (approx since the end of March 2011) to develop the preferred option for the location of the deli on the 1st Floor. These options have also included indicative cost advice.

It has been clear from the beginning of this project that the solution arrived at would probably require Planning Consent. As part of our appointment we therefore undertook to issue design proposals to the Local Planning Authority for comment, as part of a pre-application process, before returning to the client/membership. MCC Planning have therefore been approached a number of times as the design has developed. These discussions can be summarised as follows:

April 2010

These initial discussions explored the potential for extending at the front of the existing premises on the main street frontage as either a 1 or 2 storey extension. The primary aim of such an extension was to improve deli/kitchen space on site, but it was also an opportunity to improve the street frontage/presence to that elevation.

However Planning advised that an application for an extension in that location would not be supported. They considered that building in the proposed location would be overbearing in the street-scene where back of pavement development is not a feature and there is a distinct building line along this stretch of Manchester Road.

This led to further conversations considering alternative uses of the same location as follows:
- Provision of a street take away counter
- Provision of an outdoor seating area adjacent to this with a railing/guarding around it
- Provision of a canopy or awning structure to weather protect users of outdoor seating

Although Planning considered that, in principle, both uses would be acceptable, (subject to design), Unicorn decided not to progress with these options at that time.

April 2011

Following development of alternative extensions, we approached MCC Planning to seek their advice on the possibility of adding further accommodation on top of the existing building to create a 3rd storey. This was well-received as Planning believed that a lightweight structure set back from the original roof could be acceptable in principle. However, Unicorn have decided to progress a more modest scheme.

September 2011

Further discussions were progressed regarding the developed option for a minor extension and some re-ordering works to the first floor of the existing premises. In parallel to this, we raised an additional query about the possibility of cladding some or all of the building in timber as part of measures to improve the external envelope of the building both aesthetically and thermally (with insulation between the existing fabric and a new external skin). This proposal was also intended to reduce the level of maintenance required through redecorations.

Planning have responded, stating that a first floor extension to the car park elevation would, in principle, be acceptable and confirmed that, in principle, timber cladding would also be acceptable.

It has also been confirmed that a full Planning Application will be required to progress this project and this will need to be accompanied by a design and access statement detailing the design rationale.

Although the Planners find the proposed extension on the roof (at the rear of 1st floor level) more favourable than previous options, we have developed a number of options that could alter the overall appearance of the building as well as improve its thermal performance and reduce its maintenance.

## 2.7 Evaluation

In developing the design proposals, the following opportunities and constraints were explored:

### 2.7.1 Client Brief (Outline)

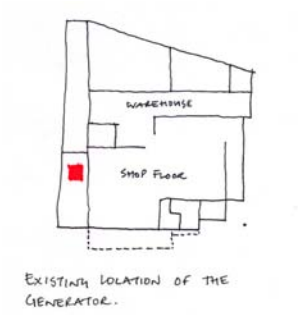
- To increase available accommodation by providing a dedicated kitchen area for delicatessen produce
- To improve toilet provision and welfare areas for staff and improve accessibility and circulation within the areas affected by the proposed extension works
- To improve electrical & mechanical services within the areas affected by the proposed extension works
- To refurbish the building and improve thermal efficiency and aesthetics where possible within the confines of the budgets
- Develop a design that is in keeping with Unicorn's ethos
- Limit carbon footprint and find solutions that involve sustainable systems/materials where possible to improve the environmental performance

### 2.7.2 Regulatory Requirements

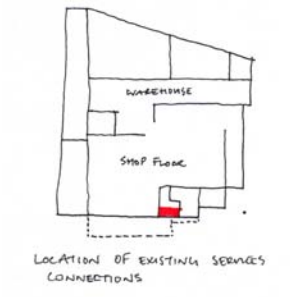
- To comply with Building and Fire Regulations.
- To improve accessibility
- To consider issues raised by the local Planning Team during design development

### 2.7.3 Aspirations

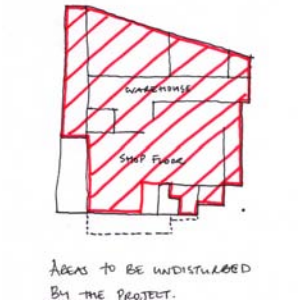
- To refresh the existing building by refurbishing the existing fabric where possible within the confines of the budgets
- To develop the building as a local landmark for Chorlton
- To respect and enhance the local setting
- Uphold Unicorn's other key objectives to
    - Provide secure employment for their members.
    - Provide all with an equal opportunity to undertake paid work.
    - Trade in wholesome foodstuffs and household goods of non-animal origin and which have undergone minimal processing
    - Trade in a manner which supports a sustainable world environment and economy.



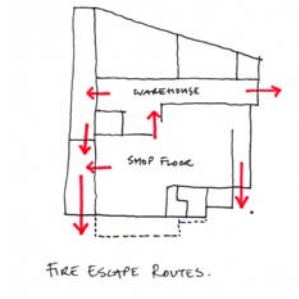

EXISTING LOCATION OF THE GENERATOR.




LOCATION OF EXISTING SERVICES CONNECTIONS




AREAS TO BE UNDISTURBED BY THE PROJECT.




FIRE ESCAPE ROUTES.

- Solidarity in Co-operation

2.7.4 Summary of Important design factors (See diagrams)

- Planning restrictions to the road frontage
- Existing location of the generator
- Previous structural assessment undertaken by others suggesting additional potential for extension on the roof
- Locations of existing services (e,g, drains/waste pipes, water, gas)
- Fire exit routes
- Areas of the business to remain undisturbed throughout the project

## 3.0 USE

Following production of a number of sketch designs and client meetings the client's project brief and requirements may be summarised as follows:

- To locate the Deli Prep kitchen on the first floor (current staff kitchen location) and extend this out over the existing roof as had previously been considered by Unicorn.
- To relocate staff kitchen to current locker area and provide new door opening out onto the roof terrace and re-locate lockers consequently.
- Provide worktop/unit space to staff area to be similar to existing staff kitchen.
- Replacement windows to existing kitchen area and toilets.
- New windows and wall panels to staff and deli-prep kitchen.
- Additional kitchen store required adjacent to deli prep kitchen but accessed separately to assist with circulation/delivery internally.
- Consider how thermal performance of staff/toilet areas could be improved.
- Site store required at first floor level.
- Provide toilet facilities to as good an accessible standard as possible.

Initial space analysis highlighted the comparable floor areas required by different functions so that each function could be reviewed alongside other spaces in the building. Following this, Unicorn undertook a number of reviews of the accommodation brief and omitted some of their original requirements to arrive at a much reduced internal floor area, now illustrated by the current plans. The largest dedicated internal areas (including associated spaces) within the areas affect by the works are:

- Staff Kitchen/locker/seating area (83m$^2$) including Meeting room area
- Deli-prep areas (38m$^2$) - This includes the proposed extension at an approx area of 19m$^2$

The remaining spaces are office, toilet and storage areas as described in the proposed drawings.

## 4.0 DESIGN

For all following text, please refer to the Plan, Section and Elevation drawings alongside the 3D visualisation (Appendix 02).

### 4.1 Layout

We have developed the design in response to the client requirements and can summarise our approach as set out below:

- Design progressed using Structural information/advice previously provided to Unicorn regarding additional loading on existing roof and previous drawings produced by others
- We have focused provision of natural light from north side to reduce solar gain and simplify new build construction. We have also added a roof light to the new kitchen area to maximise free wall space and provide top-lighting to the working area.
- We have allowed for replacement windows and panels where substantial new works are taking place in the interests of best-value. This prevents areas that have been modernised being further disrupted later during enveloping/window replacements upgrading.
- New kitchen & store facilities have been located to take advantage of existing soil pipe connections at rear of property.
- While we have altered the existing roofs, we have minimised the works required to pick up existing drainage falls and locations without extensive re-building of the roof. We recognise that there may be significant energy savings to be made by upgrading the roof insulation but it has been agreed not to develop this within these works due to budget constraints.
- While we could save space by reducing the size of toilet areas to the minimum Building Regulations requirements, we have allowed for higher accessible standards such as those recommended by Manchester's Design for Access guidance (larger than the customer toilets on ground floor).

### 4.2 Scale

We have reviewed options within the context of some technical, fire, structural and thermal envelope strategies in resolution of the design, with regards to scale and appearance of the proposals prior to submitting the Planning Application. This has resulted in:

- A limited extension within the existing building footprint (extension on to an existing roof area)
- Provision of Accessible WC and Disabled Refuge in accordance with the best practice guidance set out in Manchester City Council's Design for Access 2 document.

- Placement of the new 1st floor extension towards the rear of the property so that its presence within the setting is not always visible and has minimal visual impact for neighbouring premises.
- Maintenance of the existing active frontage building line along the Manchester Road elevation
- Maintenance of the existing building height
- Use of existing openings

### 4.3 Appearance

As much of the proposed work involves refurbishment, we have focused on the extension and works to existing building elevations separately.

The revised design utilises the same materials as proposed during pre-application discussions.

As the existing building is generally detached from adjacent buildings by some distance, the use of similar materials and decoration to that of the existing fabric, maintains a similar level of contrast to the existing context.

It is proposed that the appearance of the existing building is generally improved through the application of a timber rain-screening to the first floor area. While this is a significant departure from the existing fabric, as the existing building is generally detached from adjacent buildings by some distance, the use of contrasting materials and decoration to that of the existing fabric is not an issue and is a potential improvement aesthetically, emulating the exposed structural timber in the comparatively recent entrance porch addition.

Unicorn and Loop Systems are committed to ensuring that the development work will be undertaken, wherever possible, using sustainable building practices and should enable the improvement of the premises' energy efficiency.

#### 4.3.1 New-Build Extension to rear at 1st floor level

- New external timber frame walls and roof
- Single ply EPDM roofing membrane
- Rooflight Company 'Plateau' rooflight to deli prep kitchen
- New exterior board with Lime render system over timber frame to rear of property and external cedar cladding on vertical battens over insulation boards at the front, public elevations as indicated.
- Rainwater down-pipes to be internal, welded HDPE pipe-work.

### 4.3.2 Existing Building

- Replace all existing first floor windows and external fire escape door
- External windows to be replaced with painted softwood framed windows complete with opening lights.
- New external doors to staff kitchen and offices fire escape to be high performance timber with double glazing with toughened glass, full height sidelight and external electronic key-pad secure access for staff.
- New Mechanical extract vent to kitchen to terminate externally (position to be confirmed)

## 4.4 Environmental Impact

A key aim of the project is to focus on the sustainable redevelopment of an existing building rather than demolition and new-build options. The design has been carefully considered to reduce any negative impact on the global and the local environment, and to promote a healthy indoor environment. We have therefore focused on conserving energy by considering how the areas affected by the works could be improved. This generally relates to the window and panel replacements (particularly to existing staff, kitchen and toilet areas). There are other elements to consider such as the existing roof which may impact on the overall energy efficiency of the building but these do not fall within the current scope of the project. We have considered this as part of improving the comfort of staff rest areas and facilities as well as trying to ensure efficient use of funds.

We have developed these options with a ‘green’ 'low embodied energy' specification and environmentally friendly building products where possible, in keeping with Unicorn’s ethos. For example, the proposed costs allow for timber frame and wood fibre infill that locks up carbon in the construction unlike alternative products which may be highly polluting and energy intensive in their manufacture.

The following key measures have been agreed within the design team and are incorporated into the current proposals:

### 4.5.1 Thermal Insulation

The existing building will be thermally upgraded to reduce heat losses on the first floor through the installation of new windows with high-performance double glazing and work to the existing panels below which will be replaced with new insulating frames in some instances while a level of air-tight,

insulated timber frame construction will be specified for the new-build construction to keep heat-losses to a minimum.

Discussions with Building Control are ongoing regarding the work that may be required to the existing fabric in association with the new-build extension works.

### 4.5.2 Healthy Environment

The design criteria provided above aim to provide a comfortable and healthy internal environment whilst keeping the carbon footprint of the building low. Building materials and finishes will be selected to avoid those with known pollutants, such as paints with high VOC's (volatile organic compounds).

## 5.0 Access

Accessibility, and consequently long-term sustainability, have always been features of the brief for this project. Unicorn aim to respect diversity and promote inclusion in everything that they do. Their Principles summarise this as follows:

'*We believe that all should have an equal opportunity to undertake paid work. Ignorance and prejudice should not be an obstacle to this*.'

The building is conveniently located near a busy bus route and close to the tram station and can be easily reached by public transport by staff and visitors. Unicorn do not have an explicit transport policy but does offer many incentives for staff to cycle to work, including free labour from a bike mechanic who attends regularly, the Bike to Work Scheme, and a secure bike lock up with 26 spaces (most staff cycle to work). For customers they likewise encourage cycling, public transport and pedestrian trade. In addition, they offer to ring taxis for foot passengers, occasionally have special events where they offer cycle delivery and offer access to information, and a mobile cycle mechanic to works outside the shop on regular days in fine weather.

There is currently 1 accessible car parking provided within the car park. However, the client intends to improve this and has obtained a copy of Design For Access 2 by MCC and is using this to inform the provision of a new accessible car parking space and has met with MCC officers to discuss the placement and requirements of this. It is their intention to provide 1 new accessible car parking space in accordance with the MCC guidance. This is to be located adjacent to the existing single storey entrance ramp that provides level access from street level.

Once inside there is level access throughout the ground floor and a platform lift within staff areas providing wheelchair access to first floor level.  There is currently some accessible WC provision on the ground floor and it is intended that this will be extended with the addition of a first floor accessible WC as indicated within these proposals.

New ironmongery will contrast with doors, where possible, and should be large enough to hold easily and not be circular in design. New internal fire doors with full height, glazed vision panels to all new door locations (except toilets where doors are to be solid)

**Appendix 01:** Photographs




Overview of building in context along Manchester Road









Approach along Manchester Road from the South




Continued approach along Manchester Road from the South







View from Manchester Road (Opposite side)



Approach from Albany Road



Approach along Manchester Road from the South





Opposite context

**Appendix 02:** Photo montage



**Existing**



**Proposed**