Greg's Buildings: New Power Supply and Refurbishment of Entrance

Design and Access Statement

The following statement seeks to summarise the concept and context of the design for the proposal for the introduction of the new power supply and associated remodelling of the entrance to Greg's Building.

The statement covers how this part of the building area is used and why changes are necessary, the extent of the changes and how these will appear in the immediate context of the building. Access is both integral to much of this context and summarised under a separate section.

ASSESSMENT

Physical context

Appraisal of Surrounding Area

Greg's Building lies within the Upper King Street Conservation Area. Developed as a warehouse area in the early 19th century, during the latter half of the 19th century the character became more commercial and professional. Earlier buildings were replaced by grander offices for banks, legal chambers and similar functions. There was a great deal of variety in the architectural styles, height, materials and overall appearance; however they all had frontages directly on to the street, often with a different treatment for the ground floor compared with higher floors and a different treatment again at roof level. Many buildings have a similar form of entrance to Greg's, with steps at the entrance. The area continued to evolve during the early 20th century, with taller buildings in Art Deco style joining the mix. In the later 20th century this evolution has continued, both with completely new contemporary structures at ever greater heights and using different materials and with alterations at roof level. It remains one of the most vibrant commercial areas of Manchester City centre, while retaining its historic character.

The Application Site

Greg's Buildings is an 1846 Manchester warehouse built in the "palazzo" style for a single user, the Greg's family textile firm. An island site, its main elevation and entrance is on Booth Street, with formal elevations on Pall Mall and Chancery Place and the service elevation on the narrow Chancery Lane. The building was converted into suites of offices in 1906, at which time the entrance on Booth Street was significantly remodelled. It comprises an entrance lobby, split stairs to the basement on the narrower right-hand side and wider steps to the mezzanine hall; the lift is accessed from the mezzanine level. The entrance had both a straightforward access function for all users to the building (apart from two doors elsewhere giving direct access to the basement) coupled with a representational function, to provide an image of importance appropriate to the level of tenants the building owner's sought to and succeeded in attracting.

While no evidence remain of the appearance of the previous entrance, the gates, tiled panel, floor mosaics and tiled central balustrade (currently concealed and in poor condition), certainly date from this alteration. At some time after the 1930's the earlier stone stairs were replaced with the current carpeted timber stairs and in the 1970's the walls were panelled, the balustrade boarded over and the glass panelled doors introduced, replacing some earlier doors. This appearance remains largely unchanged after thirty years and no longer delivers against the secondary representational function of the entrance. The building aims to continue to provide high-quality offices in the secondary sector of the commercial market; its inability to be fully DDA-compliant (see below) effectively prevents it being in the primary sector.

Social, Economic and Planning Context

The building is let out as commercial office space and is therefore not directly accessible to the public; there is a dental surgery in the basement with its own separate access. This is in keeping with the commercial character of the area. The replacement of the power supply is essential to retain existing tenants while the refurbishment of the entrance is necessary to attract new tenants. Without these changes the building is likely to fall into a cycle of decline, which would be detrimental both to the Grade II listed building and to the surrounding area. The building is one of several listed buildings within the Conservation Area; the changes necessitate Listed Building Consent but as they are internal and do not involve a change of use, do not require planning permission, confirmed in a meeting with a representative of Manchester City Council. The planning issues are covered in detail in the PPG 15 Statement prepared by Kathryn Sather & Associates.

Background issues

Power Supply

The power supply to the building runs under the street and dates back to the 1920's. It recently failed for two days, with a complete loss of power to the entire building. The utility company established that the main cable had failed, its resin insulation was cracked due to age and no longer fit for purpose. A temporary repair was effected but the cable's complete replacement is an urgent priority. However the replacement of the main cable can only be achieved in combination with the installation of new switchgear in the building (and internal rewiring from the switchgear to the individual tenants' suites).

Access

During the period 2004-2006 the owners sought to find a solution to make the building wheelchair-accessible and fully Disability Discrimination Act compliant. The lift was not wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair; the size of the lift cabin and its doorway is determined by the dimensions of the staircase and stairwell which is part of historic structure and forms part of the building's significance. Furthermore the lift is accessed from the mezzanine floor which is reached by a flight of 10 steps up from the lobby. Various approaches involving an external tower, providing the secondary benefit of a secondary fire exit, were developed in consultation with the Conservation Officer, English Heritage and Architects Austin Smith Lord but no consensus was found; approaches and proposals were not acceptable to Manchester City Council Planning Officers.

Access from the main entrance to the basement was closed off following a decision by Building Regulation Officers in 2006 in the context of the refurbishment of the basement. This has resulted in an unsightly blocking up of the doorway and the redundancy of this part of the staircase.

EVALUATION

The proposal has taken into account comments made during the pre-application meetings with representatives of Manchester City Council, including the Conservation Officer. These were:

- to consider how best to incorporate the historic masonry balustrade into the design of the entrance;
- to consider how significant elements of the building can be retained, including alternatives approaches the loss of the redundant staircase;
- to review opportunities to optimise disabled access, recognising the constraints inherent in the building.

The current scheme demonstrates that the comments received from those consulted have been duly considered and there are no constraints from relevant planning policies to be considered with the proposals.

DESIGN CHANGES

Locality
In keeping with it's location in the heart of Manchester's business district, the alterations to the building are intended to enhance the building as a quality commercial space. While clearly modern in approach, the essential historical qualities and features of architectural and historic special interest as described below, are retained and allowed to be fully appreciated. It is not intended as a full historical restoration.

Historical Features
Within the entrance hall the most interesting features are the decorative wall and mosaic floor tiling, the central balustrade, and the general layout of the space whereby the fire-fighting scheme for the building is fundamental.

Decorative tiling
At the beginning of the 20th century tiling was a popular and practical material for public areas with a high level of wear and tear. Greg's Building entrance has a full-height decorative moulded panel on the left of the entrance and mosaic floors in the entrance and mezzanine areas. The interior walls have been first painted with epoxy resin and later panelled in the 1970s; according to the tile conservator who assessed the entrance hall, these are likely to be of low interest and in poor repair.

Masonry balustrade
The central balustrade is of masonry and covered with tiles; this is currently covered up but would previously have been the major feature. It is approximately 45cm wide and the top is made of large curved green tiles. In contrast the upper balustrade, while tiled, appears to be only about 10cm wide and of lesser interest. It is covered in epoxy resin paint.

Fire-fighting concept
The lift occupies the space which would originally have contained the fire-fighting hoses and equipment from the cistern on the roof. This was intended to provide a permanent supply of water in case of fire – the major problem for warehouses in the 19th century.

Proposals
All currently exposed original wall and floor tiles including the green tiles to the left of the vestibule and the mosaic floor tiles, will be cleaned, repaired and restored.

The existing timber stair treads are to be replaced with limestone and extended across the full width of the entrance. This has two implications:

1. it allows the space for the electrical units to fit below, accessed from the dentist's space.
2. it closes off the now redundant staircase down to the basement, and provides the space created with a valuable new function.

During pre-application meetings, several options for this redundant staircase were discussed, but none allowed the accommodation the electrical equipment, which must be contained in a Fire Rated enclosure. The removal of one of several historic access routes into the basement is not considered significant, particularly when the one in question has undergone such a degree of change such that no historic material remains.

The original tiled central balustrade which is currently concealed by a large amount of boxing out, will be exposed and fully restored, and will therefore sit within the new staircase. Where the balustrade returns and narrows, at the top of the flight, it will be removed. Compared with the central balustrade, it is a minor feature and is in poor condition. Its retention is incompatible with the proposal.

The stairwell now containing the lift shaft is fundamental to the original building concept, as noted above. Since it was closed in as a lift enclosure, it is now considered to be a modern insertion into the historic space, and it is treated as such, being clad with modern glass panels with vertical joints referring to the historical use to which the shaft was put. The wall to the right will be recessed 150mm minimum to enhance the feeling of the lift shaft being a 'stand alone' vertical object.

The scheme will generally remove all recently added plaster detailing, dados and ceiling mouldings. New plasterboard will line the existing walls and ceiling alongside and above the new stairs on both sides, allowing a Fire Rated zone behind, which provides the route for the new electrical cabling to the rest of the building, and the possibility of recessing new tread lighting as well as ambient wall lighting. The existing original cornicing will remain in the upper and lower lobbies, and run into the side of the modern bulkhead over the stairs, enhancing the fact that the stair is a truly modern insertion into the historic space, as is the lift shaft. New handrails will continue the theme, in stainless steel, mounted on the plasterboard lining wall.

Materials

In order to respect the original materials, new materials have been selected to sit alongside the original in a timeless way, without competing for attention. The palette is cool and calm, replacing green carpet with limestone stair treads, brass for stainless steel, and reducing detail in a simple clear way. The walls will be plain off white allowing the historic materials, new lift shaft cladding and the space itself to be the focus. The stair limestone will also be used for skirtings. The doors leading to the office space at upper lobby level will be timber veneered, flush doors.

The lift doors and floor indicators will be renewed, using stainless steel, and the lift car will be fully refurbished with limestone flooring, mirror panels and details of the buildings history incorporated into decorative panels.

The Fire Panel and Building Access system will be replaced with a new stainless steel purpose designed enclosure, CCTV cameras to be replaced with new globe style. The entrance matting will be replaced with coir matting and the glass doors with new glass sliding automatic doors with minimal stainless steel surround. New light fittings will be installed, to be contemporary chandelier style. The existing wrought iron gates will be fully prepared and re-painted and a new tenant's sign board to be installed.

ACCESS

The proposal is only concerned with pedestrian access. Due to the existing nature of the building and its listed status, options for DDA compliance are limited. The entrance constitutes the only access for the building, with the exception of the separate entrances to the self-contained dental surgery in the basement.

Lift

The Gerald Honey Partnership (lift and escaltor consultants) report of 2004 does assess the ability to accommodate wheelchair access. To improve on lift access fundamental alteration or replacement of the existing shaft would be needed and this would have consequential impacts on historic building fabric and current tenancies. Further investigation was carried out this year, as to options for widening the lift doors, car etc, and it was re-confirmed, that without complete rebuilding of the lift shaft, escape stairs and central core of the building, there is no scope for increasing either the lift doors or car size.

- **This would constitute a catastrophic loss of not only historic features but the fundamental building layout.**

However, although the lift cannot be altered to admit a wheelchair, it can nevertheless be improved. The proposals include the renovation of the lift cabin and provision of new controls within, to current specifications, including voice and Braille capabilities, and new access systems at the front door of the building. These improvements will enhance access to the building for those with visual and hearing impairment. The owners are happy to give an undertaking that as part of the works the lift will be upgraded to the maximum possible, including disabled controls etc.

Access to the Building

In spite of the problems with access within the building once inside the entrance hall, options for access into the building have been investigated.

The approach to the building is via steps up from pavement level. Options to provide wheelchair access to the building which have been investigated are as follows:

Option 1: Platform hoists from street level to lobby and second from lobby to mezzanine

From street level the platform hoist would have to cover a height difference 450mm and two steps. The minimum width of the hoist, including equipment is 1150mm. The overall width of the arch is 1700mm but the real opening is 1600mm, due to the presence of the original decorative iron gates when folded back. These are both of historic interest and a necessary security feature.

The street and pavement are sloping, so that a wheelchair must approach the proposed lift from the uphill side, temporarily restricting access to the only entrance to the building. The width of passage available for other building users would be restricted to 670mm.

A platform hoist would obstruct the movement of the folding iron gates, making them redundant, and affecting the security of the building. When that is taken into account, no hoist or lift could work, and still leave room for movement of non disabled people

The hoist up to the mezzanine would rise a height of 2050mm and is a minimum of 1150mm wide. Thus it can not be accommodated on the left hand side of the staircase, due to the lack of any tolerance to the central balustrade, which is required to be retained and restored. (see sketch A below) To introduce a hoist on the right hand side would require the staircase to be reversed, and therefore change the configuration of the entrance hall completely, and impact the tenancy of the dentistry clinic below..

Impact of hoist intervention - historic fabric:

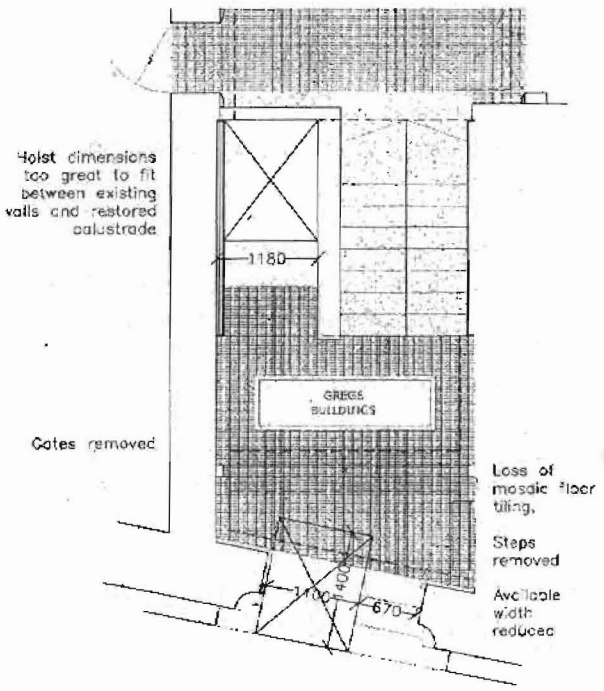
- **Loss of character to main entrance of building**. The hoist would significantly detract from the character of the entrance. The conversion of the building to offices in 1905 is considered, as described in the PPG15 report, an important source of the building's significance.

- **Loss of mosaic floor.** The hoist would obscure or damage the mosaic floors, if not require the removal of them completely
- **Loss of steps.** The hoist would require over half of the steps to be removed.
- **Loss of gates.** The position of the hoist would make the gates redundant. Also no hoist could work unless the iron gates were permanently removed.
- **Damage to central balustrade.** The attempted introduction of the hoist to the mezzanine would pose a significant risk of damage to the central balustrade which will have just have undergone a costly restoration.

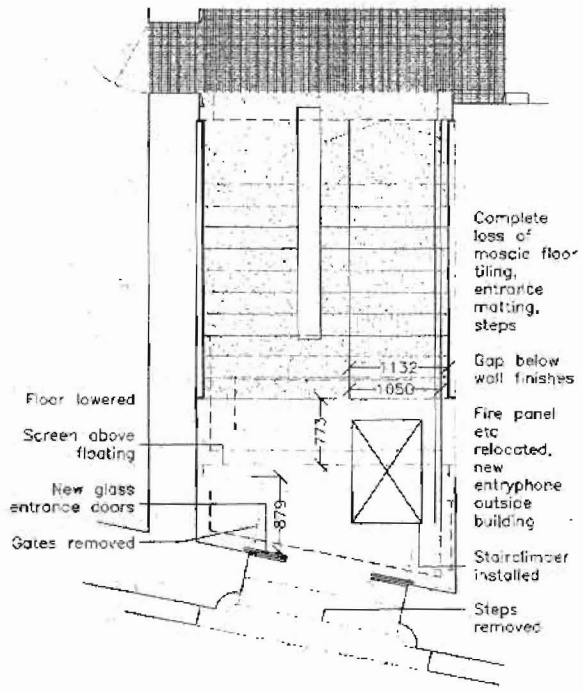
Impact of hoist intervention - other factors:

- **Width of entrance diminished to below allowable dimensions.** It constitutes a significant restriction to the only entrance to the building and a potential hazard, both at the entrance level and given the presence of the central masonry balustrade.
- **Security:** From a management perspective, it would necessitate some controls at street level, outside of the security features.
- **Unsatisfactory solution from DDA point of view.** From an access perspective it is less than satisfactory as it is clearly imposed on the existing structure rather than a designed approach providing dignified access as was intended with the solution offered by the separate tower. Furthermore, as has been discussed, access beyond the mezzanine is not possible.

This solution is not recommended for the reasons stated above, where the loss of historic fabric would be unacceptable.



Sketch A



Sketch B

Option 2: Extending the main flight down to street level, removing the first steps, and installation of a stairclimber or hoist

The two versions of this comprise:

a) extending the flight on the right to meet the level of the pavement, and the addition of a hoist on the left hand side to transfer from street level to mezzanine, or

b) extending the stairs full width and down three steps to meet the pavement level and installing a stairclimber hoist.

As discussed above, the width remaining on the left for a platform hoist is insufficient, hence the first option is not feasible. A stairclimber would impact the remaining width for able bodied users.

The second option, like the first, would require the complete loss of all the vestibule mosaic flooring, steps into the building, an awkward relationship with the central balustrade, loss of gates and internal doors.

Impact of stair extension intervention - historic fabric:

- **Loss of character to main entrance of building**. The steps from the pavement would be removed completely. The change in level from street to vestibule would be removed. The lowering of the floor level would impact the sub-floor, and the visible wall finishes in the vestibule and entrance, requiring patching of new finishes to match original.
- **Loss of mosaic floor**. The mosaic floor would be removed completely, including the matwell with the name of the building.
- **Loss of evidence of the conversion from warehouse to offices**. Part of the building's significance is the physical evidence of how the owners adapted to changing economic pressures; this is most obviously present in the entrance and lobby.
- **Loss of inner doors, and resultant loss of purpose for the upper screen**. The dimension between the inner glass doors and the bottom step would be 773mm and as such there is not enough space for the inner doors to be on the line of the glazed screen at high level.
- **Loss of gates**. The gates would be 450mm too short with the floor level lowered, and as such would be non-sensical.
- **Diminishing of central balustrade**. There would be steps running across in front of the balustrade. The balustrade would stop short of the lowest step, with Building Regulations implications.

Impact of stair extension intervention - other factors:

- **Security:** The security arrangements would need to be moved to the outside façade of the building.
- **Relocation of entrance features such as Fire Panel**,
- **Unsatisfactory solution from DDA point of view**.

Furthermore, as has been discussed, access beyond the mezzanine is not possible.

Summary of proposals for altering the entrance for wheelchair access

Although consideration has been given to providing wheelchair access to the building, the consequences for the historical fabric of the building are such that they have been discounted, as not acceptable for the following reasons:

- almost complete loss of the historic features of the 1905 conversion to offices (the mosaic entrance floor, including the name of the building, the tiled masonry balustrade , the iron gates and the entrance steps) and
- significant impact on the character of the entrance of the building, creating a further issue for the character of the streetscape. As noted above, part of the building's significance is the physical evidence of how the owners adapted to changing economic pressures; this is most obviously present in the entrance and lobby. The options represent unacceptable losses of elements of architectural and historic interest.
- functional issues whereby the removal of steps at pavement level would not leave sufficient step width for these to be usable by others
- the inappropriateness of taking people to a lift that cannot accommodate a wheel chair

Provision for temporary access

On such occasions when wheelchair access is needed to the small office area at the mezzanine level provision will be made via a "stairclimber" machine which is mobile, and can be stored in the service room behind the lift. Concierge personnel are available at the neighbouring Clarence House and contact will be possible via the entryphone.

SUMMARY
The building's layout and dimensions create fundamental problems for providing access within the building.

Although access into the entrance hall could be physically altered to accommodate lifting platforms or other alternatives, the consequences for the historical fabric of the building are enormous.

Access into the building due to it's historical nature, and within the building due to the constraints of the lift shaft, (also with historical fabric implications) have resulted in limited options for DDA compliance, without compromising the historical value of the building.

Temporary access provision and upgrade of the lift car and controls will significantly enhance access to the building for those with visual and hearing impairment.