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Bridgewater House-Listed Building Application, Ground Floor Suite

1. Introduction

1.1 This document is to accompany our application for listed building consent for the fit out of the part ground floor at Bridgewater House, 58-60 Whitworth Street, Manchester.

1.2 Following review of the planning policy guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment No. 15 (PPG 15) this document provides the justification for the proposed works.

1.3 Proposals have been tailored to suit the individual suite and are detailed on the accompanying drawings prepared by Bruntwood Estates Limited.

2. History

2.1 Bridgewater House, built in 1913, is a good example of an early 20th century packing warehouse, a distinctive building type in Manchester.

2.2 The warehouse was listed Grade II in 1994 and is also an important building in the Whitworth Street Conservation Area, first designated in 1974.

2.3 The, 8 storey, 11- bay exterior of the building has a major presence on the street with the white faience used to face the building distinguishing it from the red brick and terracotta warehouses on the same street.

2.4 Internally the buildings special interest includes the constructional detail of riveted steel beams and steel and concrete columns of which can be identified in the basement areas and within the window reveals. In the instance the ground floor suite does not have exposed riveted beams, however has steel columns, which as part of this refurbishment will remain exposed.

2.5 The special interest of the interior particularly includes the vertical circulation to the front of the building: stair wells with glazed tiling, mahogany handrails and terrazzo floors (below modern carpet), and the lift lobbies with mahogany doors, panelling, mirrors, architraves and brass door furniture (not affected by this application).

2.6 The internal planning of the building expresses the warehouse function, originally designed with service hoists, service stairs, separate passenger lifts, large floor plates and a double basement.

3. Reasons behind Application

3.1 Seetec is one of the UKs leading providers of employment, training and IT services. Seetec have won a new contract and are looking to expand there business premises in Manchester City centre and have identified the ground floor space at Bridgewater House as the location they wish to take a long term lease in. The application is to be submitted due to the requirement to refurbish and fit out the space to suit the requirements of Seetec.

4. Proposals

4.1 The intention of the proposals is to refurbish and fit out the ground floor at Bridgewater House to form new offices, training rooms and a breakout area. In its existing format the suite is open plan with exposed concrete soffit and floor slab. To the rear of the suite there is currently 2 roller shutters leading onto a balcony overlooking the rear service yard.

4.2 The balcony and roller shutter to the rear of the suite was installed by the previous occupier a nursery school. This area is now surplus to requirements and is not practical for the new proposed tenants. As part of the refurbishment it is proposed to remove the roller shutter and balcony area and infill the area with new brick work and windows to match the external rear façade of the building. This is shown in drawing ref Existing and Proposed Plan and Elevations

4.3 A new 600x600 suspended ceiling grid and tiles is proposed. The incoming tenant has requested that the suite be fully air conditioned and therefore a suspended ceiling has been specified to allow for mechanical and electrical equipment to be fixed within the ceiling void rather than exposing the services which would have a negative aesthetic impact on the suite. The suspended ceiling grid will be set back away from the external windows to allow for full appreciation of the ceiling heights within the suite. 600x600 Whitecroft Cascade modular light fittings have been specified to sit within the grid.

4.4 Raised access floors have been specified to allow for incorporation of power and data provisions within the suite.
Due to the requirement for disabled access ramped areas will be incorporated around all entrances. Throughout the suite Desso Scape carpet tiles have been specified.

4.5 Due to Seetecs requirement to create training rooms, offices and a breakout area it is proposed that the existing suite is subdivided using both metal stud plaster boarded partitions and single glazed polar screens. The partition layout has been designed in a manner which is sympathetic to the building, terminating them centrally onto original piers and columns ensuring no original structure will be lost within new partitions.

4.6 All existing external windows throughout the suite will be retained.

5. Justification

5.1 *Suspended Ceiling*
In Bridgewater House, suspended ceilings have been granted listed building consent as part of refurbishments in recent years, as recently as 2005 on the 2nd floor.
The building interiors were originally finished with plain plastered ceilings, with beams exposed in the warehouse areas, however since office users have occupied the building, the demand for services has increased and suspended ceilings have been introduced. This has enabled services to be easily concealed above a continuous soffit and also provide space for thermal and acoustic insulation.

We understand the council's view that suspended ceilings should be removed from listed buildings to allow the appreciation of the original volume, however would comment that in this instance it will still be possible to view the original height of the ceiling as this will remain exposed around the perimeter of the suite.

5.2 *Internal Subdivision of Spaces*
With reference to the historical report compiled by AHP in September 2007, where new partitions are required by new or existing tenants, these will be installed according to the designs recently agreed for the 2nd floor listed building application, for part glazed, glazed or solid partitions.

During the buildings original use as a warehouse the use of light weight partitions enabled flexibility for different tenants in a similar manner to the proposals for the Seetec refurbishment in keeping with the characteristics of historic warehouse plans.

The building owner has generally adopted an open-plan approach to office refurbishment, in agreement with the City Council, and some large office areas within the building have been successfully let with open-plan spaces. However most businesses or building users do not operate in a totally open-plan office environment and have a requirement for cellular rooms. This is the case for the Seetec refurbishment to the ground floor where training areas will need to be created similar to that which has recently received approval on the 1st floor of the building.

The partition layout has been designed in a manner which is sympathetic to the building, terminating them centrally onto original piers and columns ensuring no original structure will be lost within new partitions.

The proposed new partitions are essential to allow Seetec to offer the training services they require. We would note that the installation of partitions will not cut through mouldings or enriched plaster decoration or impact on any of the original features of the building. The installation of the partitions is fully reversible without damaging the original structure.

Seetec will not be able to operate their service without the amount of cellular training rooms and ancillary offices etc. If the council take the view that the proposed layout is fundamentally not acceptable they will locate the service within an alternative building where this type of layout is possible. In line with PPG15 clauses 3.8 and C.1 we would suggest that it is better for an historic building such as Bridgewater House to be used and appreciated by tenants rather than it remaining unoccupied (Bridgewater House historically has been a difficult building to let).

We would ask the council to take on board the fact that without continued occupation of the suites there will not be the funds to maintain the building externally and internally to the current highest standard. For these funds to remain available we would request that the council relaxes its requirement to maintain the open plan layout of the floor in this instance as they have done previously to other floors within the building.

5.3 *Ramp*

Disabled users of Bridgewater House access the building through the main entrance, there are two main lift landings which are higher than street level in the reception with platform lifts made available for those who are unable to negotiate the steps. When on the ground floor (Seetec proposed fit out) there will be a proposed 150mm deep raised access floor. Due to this change in level, ramps will be required for those who cannot negotiate these areas.

5.4 *Economic Justification*

As Bridgewater House is peripheral to the main city centre, it has been difficult to attract tenants in the past. This proposal will enable Seetec to occupy the space within the city centre adding to this regenerated part of the city.

PPG15 paragraph 3.8 states that "generally the best way of securing the up keep of historic buildings is to keep them in active use" If the application is not approved it is our opinion the space would remain vacant for some time. This would mean reduced income into the service charge providing fewer funds for expenditure on maintaining the building.