Union
(formerly Commercial Union House)

Refurbishment of existing offices, modified facade and enlarged reception to Albert Sq corner, modified fenestration to all elevations, 15.6m² change of use retail to office at ground floor

Design and Access Statement
Sept 2016

rev B



bridge
architects

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Examples of Bruntwood refurbishment schemes completed with Bridge Architect directors Russell Bridge and Victoria Kirkpatrick

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Design and Access Statement

This Design and Access Statement statement has been prepared by Bridge Architects in accordance with CABE's 'Design and Access Statements – How to Write, Read and Use Them' document. The statement acts as a description of the design process to accompany the drawings submitted in conjunction with this application. This statement demonstrates that the proposed development has emerged from a full assessment of the site's circumstances and characteristics.

Union (formerly Commercial Union House) is an existing six storey office building which sits facing the Town Hall on Albert Square in Manchester city centre. The building lies within the Albert Square Conservation Area and also borders the St Annes Square Conservation Area - please refer to the separate Heritage Statement by PBA. The proposals involve the refurbishment of the existing offices, a modified facade and enlarged reception to the corner facing Albert Square, and modified fenestration to all elevations.

1.2 Architectural Commission

Bruntwood tabled previous schemes to MCC late 2015 following their purchase of the building in Autumn 2015. A pre-app meeting was held May 2016, and the points which emerged from this meeting were incorporated into planning application ref 112382/FO/2016/C1, which was approved July 2016 by MCC. Following this, a re-design exercise was undertaken by the design team in order to rationalise a number of aspects of the design, including the front corner elevational treatment, lift works, a/c strategy, and window replacement. This re-designed scheme has been positively received in informal discussions between Bruntwood and MCC. The re-designed scheme forms this application.

1.3 Development Team and Relevant Experience

Client:	Bruntwood
Architect:	Bridge Architects
Structural Engineer:	ROC Consulting
M&E Consultant:	Crookes Walker Consulting
Heritage Consultant:	Paul Butler Associates
Acoustic Consultant:	DBX
Quantity Surveyor:	Bruntwood
Building Control:	Aedis

Relevant Experience:
Bruntwood have vast experience in the successful refurbishment and renewal of commercial building stock in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham.

Bridge Architects is a young Manchester based architectural practice and is committed to producing architecture of the highest quality. Victoria Kirkpatrick and Russell Bridge (Directors) have won many architectural awards for work completed in collaboration with Bruntwood, such as Square One on Travis St, and Piccadilly Plaza on New York Street (completed whilst at previous employment at Stephenson Bell). Bridge Architects has recently completed the refurbishment of Manchester One, Portland Street and York House, York Street for Bruntwood, and were commended at the Manchester Society of Architects Awards 2014 for the Best Young Practice. We are currently working with Bruntwood on the *neo* office tower on Faulkner Street.









Existing site photographs



Existing aerial photograph

2.0 Assessment

2.1 Assessment

2.1.1 Physical Site Assessment

Site Description

Located opposite the Grade 1 listed, Alfred Waterhouse designed Town Hall on Albert Square in Manchester city centre, the 6 storey block of Union occupies an enviable position in the heart of city centre Manchester. Along with Heron House, the building forms the western boundary of Albert Square, with the vehicular road (known as Albert Square / B6042) running in between the building and the pedestrian civic square.

The building is a six storey red-brick block, U-shaped on plan with a heavy colonnaded single storey base, a 4 storey middle, and a mansard roof at fifth floor. At the rear of the building an additional storey is afforded by an additional lower ground floor, such that the rear of the building is seven storeys. The four storey centre section is predominantly red brick, with vertical, 3 storey high buff stone window reveals topped by projecting red brick bay windows at fourth floor level. The mansard roof is slate, with arched stone and lead-capped windows facing Albert Sq, to all other elevations the windows within the mansard roof are set back within the roof pitch. Rooflights set into the mansard admit additional light in to the fifth floor. The building has been given expression at the key corner of Albert Square and Brazennose St, in the form of double triangular brickwork and glass projecting bays, although it is felt that this is not entirely successful architecturally. The internal office space set behind this heavy corner is particularly poor and dark given the potential aspect facing the Town Hall - it is felt that there is definitely room for improvement in this location. The rear elevation of the building is similarly vertically proportioned, but executed in a simpler manner without the stone window surrounds or projecting bay windows.

The colonnaded base is set behind heavy red brick columns, and together with the similarly colonnaded base to the adjacent Heron house, forms an important elevation surrounding Albert Square and provides a relatively simple foil to the neo-gothic extravagance of the Town Hall opposite.

Retail units sit at the rear of the colonnaded facade along both Albert Square and Brazennose St elevations, with outdoor seating working successfully in front of the 'Duttons' bar & restaurant adjacent to the wide, yorkstone-paved pavement.

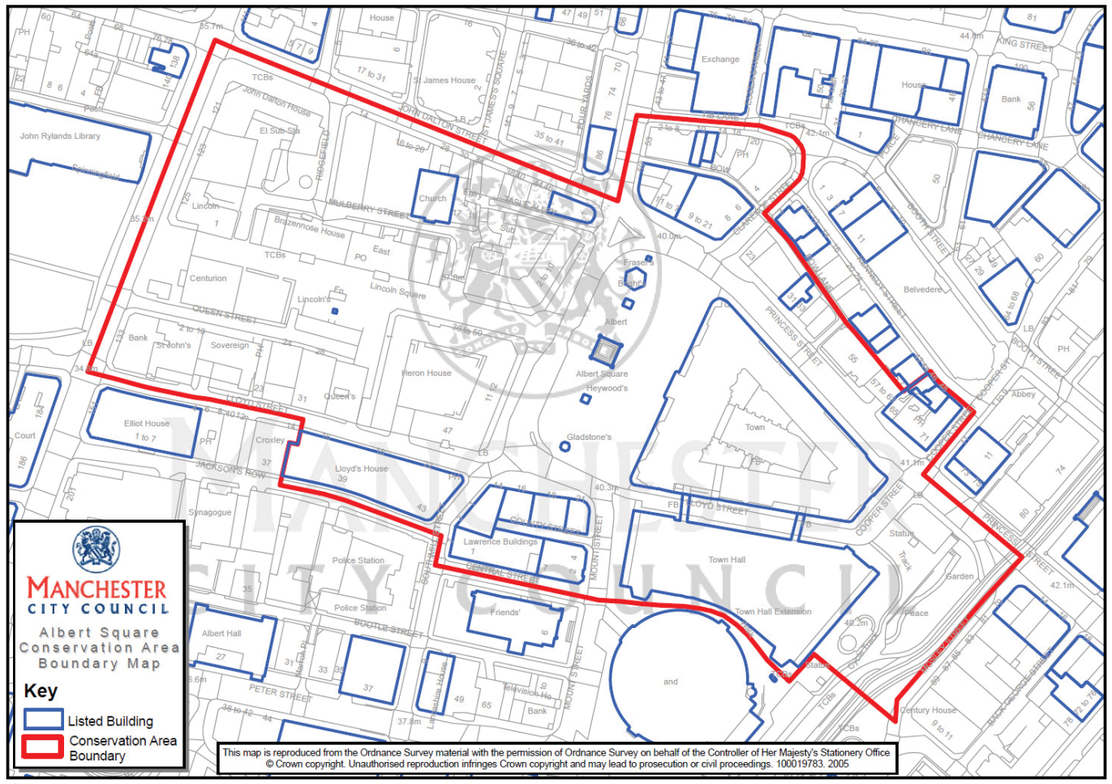
The existing office entrance is located below the double triangular corner element, with a single planar glazed door set back into the rear elevation of the colonnade leading into a tight reception space. It is felt that this is a particularly poor building approach sequence and offers much scope for improvement.

Plant space is located in two plant rooms sat at level 6 above the central core of the building. These two blocks rise above the main mansard roof, and are slate-clad with louvres set into both front and rear elevations. One of these plant spaces is currently open to the sky, the other has a slate roof.

To the rear of the building is an open car park and delivery area accessed from the head of Mulberry Street, adjacent to the Hidden Gem presbytery. The car park allows for 31 car parking spaces including 2 disabled spaces, as well as housing the bin store area, and a brick-clad substation. To the north of the car park, above a line of car parking spaces, sits a green-roof structure / boundary wall to Tasle Alley.

Site History

Please refer to separate Heritage Statement by Paul Butler Associates.



Albert Square Conservation Area map

2.0 Assessment

2.1 Assessment

Status of Site

Bruntwood acquired the building October 2015 with the existing occupier (Aviva) coming to the end of their lease. Aviva vacated Feb 2016, and the office space is now unoccupied. The ground floor retail units are let apart from one unit, formerly Bridgfords, which is currently vacant. The retail units are let to Duttons (bar / restaurant) on Albert Square, and Veeno (bar / restaurant) and Breakout (team building / activities) on Brazennose St. The car park at the rear of the site, accessed off Mulberry St, is used by all building users, and serves to additionally provide refuse storage and accommodate deliveries to the office space and Duttons bar / restaurant.

Surrounding Context

Please refer to separate Heritage Statement by Paul Butler Associates.

2.1.2 Contribution of the development to the Local Economy

The building is currently vacant but when fully occupied could accommodate 588 people across the upper office storeys, in addition to the retail space at ground floor. These users would significantly contribute to the local economy and atmosphere around the Albert Square area. The refurbishment works and improvements are considered vital to attract a high quality single customer, or mix of customers, benefitting both Bruntwood and Manchester city centre.



Existing Albert Square elevation

2.2 Involvement

2.2.1 Local Community

Considering the limited nature of the proposals, consultation with the local community was not thought to be necessary.

2.2.2 Planning Department

Please refer to separate planning statement by Paul Butler Associates for details of pre-planning correspondence between PBA and Manchester City Council, and details of the previously approved application.

2.3 Evaluation

2.3.1 Opportunities and Constraints

There is an opportunity to improve the building and its setting within the street scape. This will benefit both building users, and improve the quality of the immediate city context.

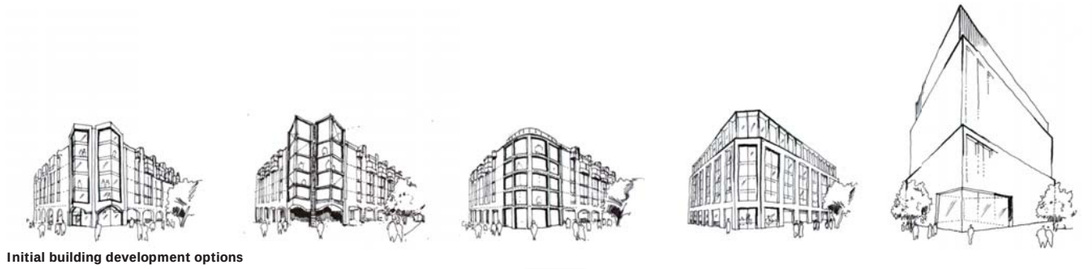
Facade improvements will improve the exterior appearance of the building and serve to give the building an improved identity and admit additional light into the dark interior, albeit limited by the existing fabric.

The existing double-triangular bay corner feature is poor architecturally both internally and externally, and offers real potential for improvement given it's location facing Albert Square and the Town Hall. Equally the small reception located below this feature is very small and offers potential for changing the public 'face' of the building.

Interior refurbishment will serve to meet future building occupiers' needs for contemporary workspace, and revitalize the life of the building for the future.

2.3.2 Design Process

The above constraints have been taken into account when considering the structural and architectural solutions. The design solutions encompass facade improvements, and wholesale refurbishment of the interior.



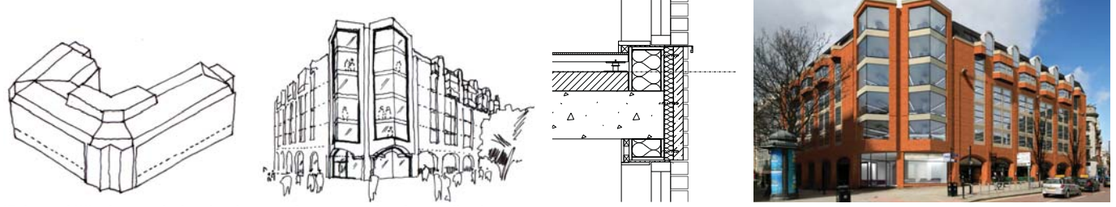
Initial building development options



Study sketches & CGI's for developed design



Previously approved 'bullnose' scheme 112382/FO/2016/C1



'Enhanced W' scheme - design development for current planning application

3.0 Description of Proposals

3.1 Design Objectives

- Improve the setting of the building within the street scape
- Improve the aesthetic of the building facades where feasible, and complete necessary refurbishment and maintenance works
- Upgrade the existing reception area and improve the entrance sequence.
- Upgrade the building interior, upgrade and renew services installations in order to provide a better quality environment and facilities for customers

3.2 Design Process

For the previously approved scheme (MCC ref 112382/FO/2016/C1) a number of radical options, including complete re-build, were examined before before a 'bullnose' corner solution was developed in further detail and submitted for planning. A number of factors, including financial reviews, led to the conclusion that the existing fabric and building form was viable for an extended life, albeit with certain modifications required to maximise the potential of the building.

Following planning approval, the design team were asked to re-examine an earlier option - an 'enhanced W' scheme which achieved many of the objectives of the approved scheme, but without the sigificant cost, services disruptions, and additional land acquisition that the 'bullnose' scheme entailed.

The double triangular bay (which forms a 'W' shape on plan) in its current configuration provides a heavy, poorly detailed corner in this important civic setting facing Manchester Town Hall. However, simple modification of the existing windows, including enlarged openings & revised cill details are possible - this design has been explored further in order to prove that a well proportioned, highly glazed corner can be achieved which respects the proportions and detailing of the original 1981 building.

A detailed study of the reception was progressed to ensure that the enlarged reception could be achieved with large panels of glass, all to vastly improve the appearance of the ground floor corner from the pavement, whilst also improving the entrance sequence to the building.

The design of the facade refurbishement, including the 'W' corner inparticular, was progressed in sketch , CAD and 3D software to ensure that the overall aesthetic and detailing could be successfully executed.

All of the solutions have been closely developed with the client in order to meet their aspirations for the building.



Proposed Albert Square elevation



Proposed Brazennose St elevation



3.3 Design Proposals

The design proposals aim to satisfy the design objectives and issues contained within the previous chapter.

The proposals include:
- modified 'W' corner windows to provide larger glazed areas, and better view over Albert Square
- enlarged reception with glazing brought forward to the front line of the existing brick colonnade, with reconciliation of external levels to ensure level access, all to improve the entrance sequence into the building
- revised brick detailing around the enlarged 'W' windows at the head and base of the projecting 'W' to improve the aesthetic, and allow the brick border to read as a clear and consistent 'frame' to the larger windows
- new stone cills between the new windows to the projecting 'W' element, in lieu of fired blue/black tiles
- glass replaced in all windows (frames retained) with clear glazing, including lower panels which are currently obscured glass
- enlarged rooflights within the mansard roof to all elevations
- new vertical strip windows to staircase openings which are currently open glass shutters
- removal of small section of existing plant room roof to allow M&E installation below
- extensive internal refurbishment to include enlarged ground floor reception area, core areas, and all floorplates
- upgrade of existing M&E services installations internally

It is noted that any building signage application proposals will be subject to a separate Advertisement Consent application at a later date.



CGI showing enlarged window openings and enlarged reception to Albert Sq corner



CGI - enlarged new reception



CGI - new enlarged corner windows overlooking Albert Square (internal view)



CGI - typical office floorplate



CGI - fifth floor office with vaulted roof space.



CGIs - new WC's and refurbished staircase



CGI - typical lift lobby

3.4 Principles of the Design

3.4.1 Use:

The existing Use Class of the building is B1 (Offices). The existing Use Class for the majority of the building is unchanged by the proposals. No works are proposed to the existing retail units, other than to re-allocate 15.6m² of retail sapce (currently the vacant ex-Bridgfords unit) over to the new reception area in order to increase the size of the new reception to improve the arrival experience. This 15.6m² will change from Retail (A1) to Office (B1)

3.4.2 Amount of development:

A small amount of additional floor area is created by the proposals - the enlarged reception at ground floor creates 55.5m² of additional B1 office space. 15.6m² of retail area (A1) is to be changed to office space (B1), so the net loss of retail space (A1) is 15.6m², and the net gain of office space (B1) is 71.1m².

3.4.3 Layout

The existing configuration of the building is largely retained by the proposals.

The new glazing line to the ground floor reception effectively fills in the existing colonnade at the corner of Albert Sq and Brazennose Street. The reception doors are brought forward to the new facade line, resulting in an enhanced reception area and enabling improved access to the lifts and staircase, and providing a lounge area clearly visibly through the new large panes of reception glazing.

At the upper levels, the internal configuration is unchanged bar the re configuration of the WC's to provide a simplified and more accessible arrangement, with an ambulent disabled WC cubicle provided in each block.

3.4.4 **Scale**

There is no apparent change to the scale of the building, bar the line of glazing being brought forwards at ground floor by 2.7m along a 16m section of the front elevation.

3.4.5 **Appearance**

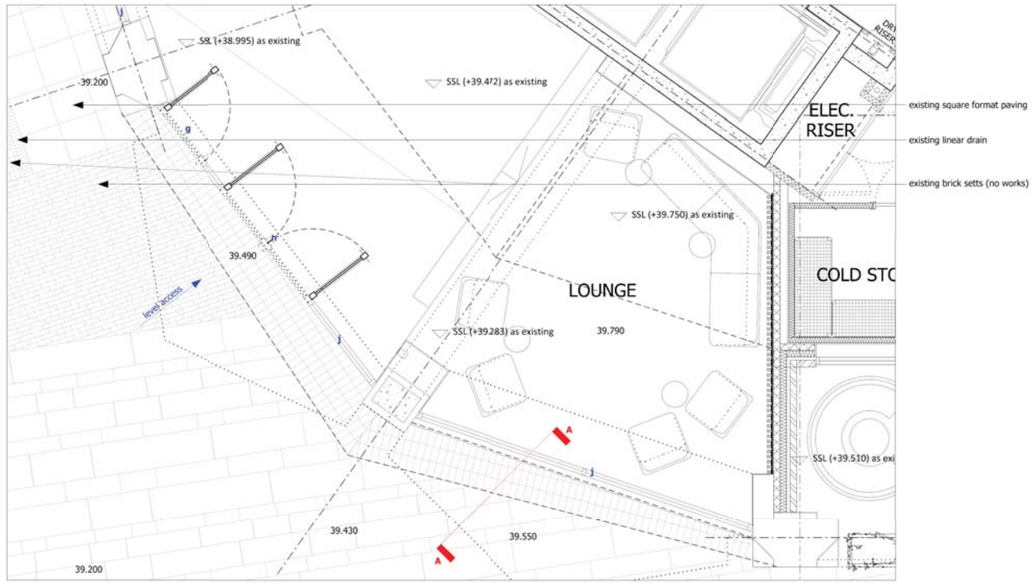
The revised design of the 'W' corrects a poor design feature of the original building, simplifying the appearance of the surrounding brickwork into a clear 'frame', with high quality stone cills. The re-design of the corner changes a clumsy, heavy corner with poor detailing into a feature which successfully unifies the two facades of Albert Sq and Brazennose Street, and acts as a marker for the building entrance below. The chamfered, arched, pre-cast brickwork elements at the base of the 'W' are removed, replaced with straight brick cills, with a brick-clad soffit returning to the line of reception glazing. The brick 'keystone' features at the head of the 'W' are removed, and in between the enlarged windows, new cut-stone cills with projecting aluminium drip details will ensure that the building maintains it's appearance over time.

At ground floor level, the reception glazing is brought forwards, with large panels of glass providing clear visibility into a large, bright, well designed reception, instead of into a small dark reception tucked away at the back of the colonnade. Bronze anodised frames will match the existing buildings glazing, and that on the adjacent Heron House.

The existing windows to all elevations are retained and cleaned, with the existing obscure-glazed lower panels replaced with clear glazed panels in order to let more light into the building interior.

The staircore windows, currently open glass louvres of low-quality appearance, are to be replaced with aluminium framed, opening double glazed units. This will make very little difference to the overall appearance of the building, but will remove an element which has aged particularly poorly.

At roof level the rooflights are widened to admit more natural light into the height-and-a-half fifth floor office space - these are split vertically to maintain the vertical emphasis of the building on all elevations.



Ground floor plan showing minor amendments to hard landscaping around new reception entrance



Matching brick for brick repairs - Forterra Old Trafford Red

3.4.6 **Materials**

The revised 'W' corner uses new glass-to-glass corner glazing in the enlarged window openings, in bronze anodised aluminium window frame to match the existing windows. Cut stone cills are to be used as horizontal bands in between the windows; these match the existing stone window surrounds.

The new glazing and entrance doors at ground floor reception area use bronze anodised glazing system to match the existing windows.

A matching brick has been sourced (Forterra Old Trafford Red) in case any brick repairs are required throughout the course of the works.

3.4.7 **Landscaping and external works**

The works enclose the existing colonnade at the corner of Albert Square and Brazennose St with an enlarged reception area. This requires very minor modifications to the hard landscaping around the front entrance:
Level access is retained to the new main entrance, with minor hard landscaping works required to the existing surface finishes to ensure that level access into the new reception is maintained - see diagram left. Brazennose St has an existing 1:13 gradient and this is retained.

3.4.8 **Sustainability**

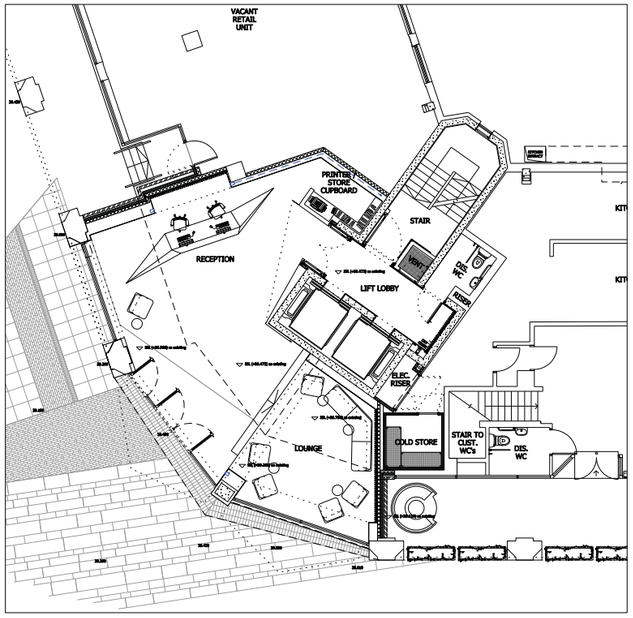
The proposal extends the usability and lifetime of a large, steel and concrete framed building. The most sustainable use for the site / building is continued, adapted re-use with improvements to the building fabric.

The refurbishment of the building will incorporate a number of energy efficiency measures to reduce the overall carbon emissions from the building.

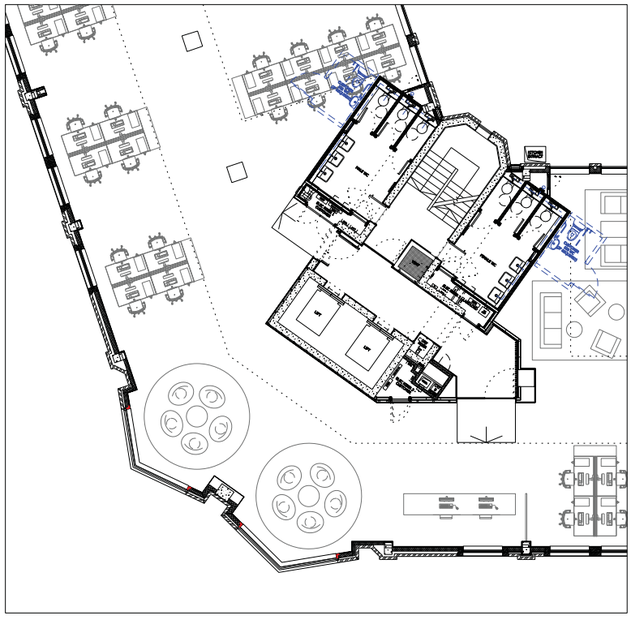
By utilising a strategy of improved fabric performance, and increasing the efficiency of the building services, significant carbon reductions can be achieved. The following measures will be incorporated into the scheme:

- Improved thermal envelope using increased insulation in roof and walls and a much reduced air infiltration rate
- Improved fenestration performance both in heating mode (double glazing) and to reduce heat gain (solar control glass)
- Improved boiler efficiency
- Significantly improved heating, ventilation and air conditioning system efficiency
- Significantly improved lighting and lighting control efficiency using LED lamps and occupancy sensing lighting control
- Metering of electricity consumption of individual office suites, plant and equipment to allow greater monitoring and control

New, indoor, secure cycle storage is being provided (20 spaces) in the lower ground floor of the building, along with 5No showers, also at lower ground floor level.



Proposed ground floor plan showing level access and disabled WC



Proposed typical upper floor plan showing level access (internal ramps are as existing)

4.0 Access

4.1 Movement Through and To the Site

The existing reception currently has level access via the main entrance off Albert Square. Albert Square is roughly level across the front of the building, with Brazennose St sloping down away from the main entrance, leading around into Mulberry Street and then into the rear car park, which is set one storey lower than the entrance off Albert Square.

The proposals bring the line of the front doors forward to the front of the old colonnade. Level access is retained with localised minor hard landscaping works required to ensure that level access into the new reception is maintained. Brazennose Street has an existing 1:13 gradient and this is retained. To the rear a small external pedestrian ramp is proposed within the car park adjacent to the rear exit to overcome a 100mm step in the hard landscaping, and then internally a platform lift is required to overcome a 1m level difference to the lowest lift position.

4.11 Internal Layout

The proposals do not affect the existing internal access arrangements. The existing and proposed entrance off Albert Sq provides level access into the building reception. From the building reception, access is gained to all other levels via a 1200mm wide accommodation and FE staircase, or via 2No 13 person lifts. Access is then level into the office floorplates via an existing 90mm ramp to deal with the existing raised access floor (raised access floor and ramp retained from existing).

The programme of proposed interior refurbishment works includes a refurbished Disabled WC at ground floor (reception level), and the potential for the inclusion of disabled WC's within each refurbished core area, should the office customer require this facility. An ambulant disabled WC cubicle is provided within every male and female WC block at all levels.

4.2 Inclusive Access

The proposals do not impact upon the existing arrangements for inclusive access. The new entrance doors to the building consist of a pair of manual swing doors, together with a single, powered pass door for wheelchair access.

4.3 Consultants

It has not been deemed necessary to appoint an access consultant.

5.0 Client

5.1 Client Statement

"Union is an important asset to Bruntwood and Manchester. It is our intention to complete a comprehensive full refurbishment of the building to ensure that it can attract quality customers into the building and the surrounding area. The key drivers are to improve the building's external corner which faces Albert Square, including the reception at ground floor, and to re-furbish the office suites & common parts areas within the building. We are committed to ensuring that this work is carried out to the high standards required by both ourselves and the City, and have appointed an appropriate design team to deliver this project. The works will place the building in a position to act as a positive landmark within Manchester, appropriate to its important civic setting on Albert Square."

Peter Crowther
Director of Property
Bruntwood

Appendix 1

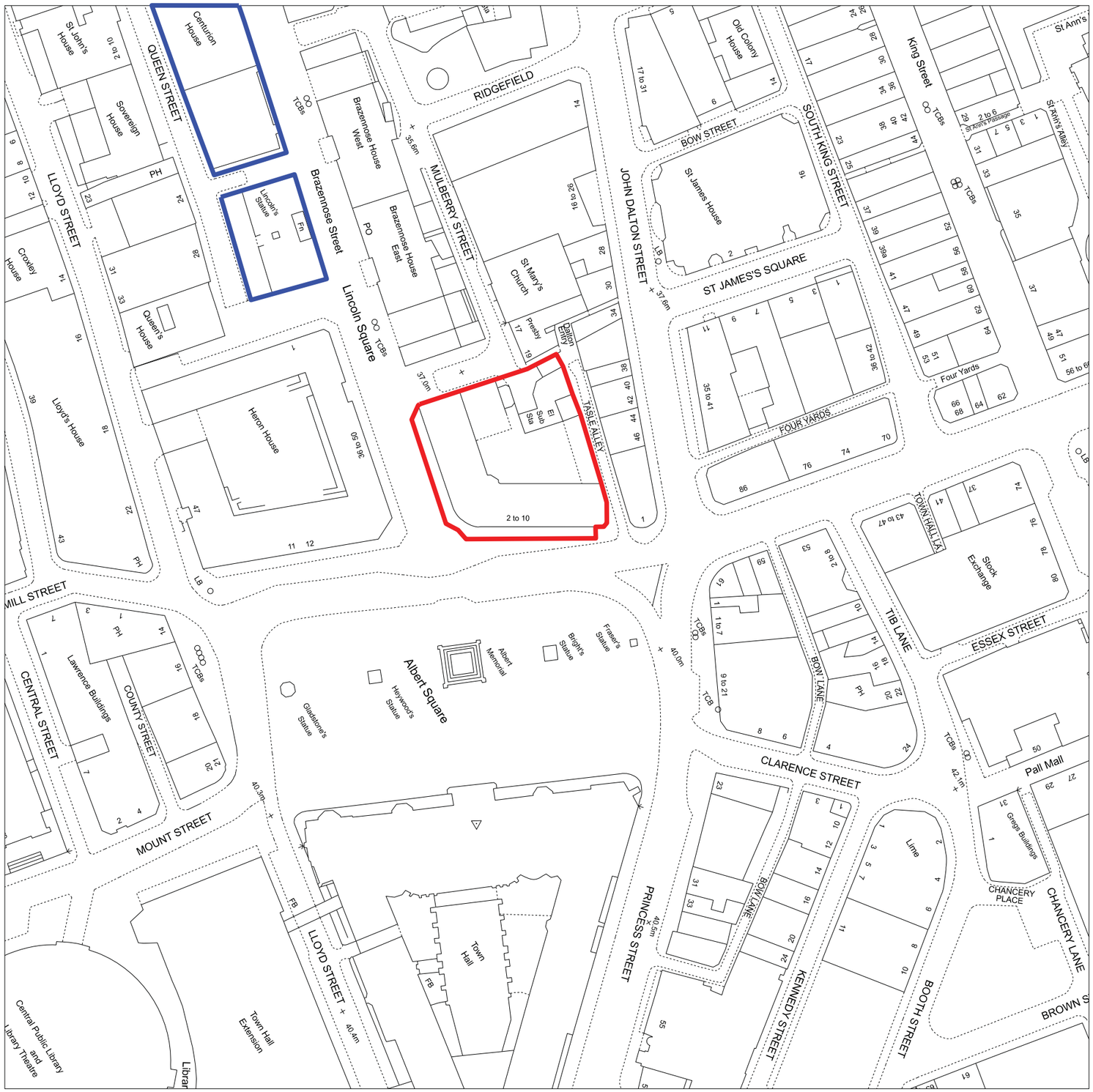
Bridge Architects Planning Drawings

Existing Drawings

Existing location plan		al(05)100
Existing site plan		al(05)101
Existing building plans - all levels		al(05)102
Existing building / context elevations	S&E	al(05)103
Existing building / context elevations	N&W	al(05)104

Proposed Drawings

Proposed site plan		al(05)201
Proposed building plans - all levels		al(05)202
Proposed building / context elevations	S&E	al(05)203
Proposed building / context elevations	N&W	al(05)204
Details of new corner facade facing Albert Square		al(05)205
Existing and proposed window details		al(05)206
Proposed CGI - corner facing Albert Sq		al(05)207
Refuse, deliveries and car park strategy		al(05)208



Existing location plan

Key

Application boundary

Other sites within same ownership

bridge architects

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revision notes

project	Commercial Union House
client	Bruntwood
job no.	0212
drawing no.	al(05)100
drawing title	Existing Location Plan
drawing scale	1:1250 @ A3
drawing created	May 2016
drawing rev	-

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revision notes

project	Commercial Union House	**drawing title**	Existing site plan
client	Bruntwood	**drawing scale**	1:100 @ A1
job no.	0212	**drawing created**	May 2016
drawing no.	al(05)101	**drawing rev**	-

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