Rooms 41-51, Royal Exchange

Manchester M2 7EF

Historic Building Appraisal



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1.0 Summary

The proposed alterations will permit the reuse of Rooms 41-51 of the Royal Exchange after a considerable period during which it has lain empty. As Planning Policy Guidance 15 points out at Paragraph 3.8, 'the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use'.

In doing this the works will not affect the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building in any discernible or meaningful way – the works will not alter any element of the building that forms a real part of its substantive 'interest'. Indeed, ceiling features will be restored and revealed.

The Royal Exchange is an important listed building, but its special interest is concentrated in the exterior of the building, its overall planning, and its spectacular hall. Rooms 41-51 are plain, unadorned and devoid of any particular architectural feature that would distinguish them from very many commercial buildings from the same period.

The works will allow the space to be attractive to potential tenants, offering a standard of office accommodation that is likely to result in it being let.

When tested against national and local policies for the historic built environment, the proposals are clearly consistent with guidance and advice.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 This report has been prepared by KMHeritage on the instruction of Prupim in order to support an application for listed building consent. It relates to Rooms 41-51 of the Royal Exchange building in Manchester.

Purpose

2.2 The purpose of the report is to assess the alterations proposed for the office space in the area of the Royal Exchange against national and local policies relating to the historic built environment.

2.3 A similar application was made in 2008 for the northern part of the first floor of the Royal Exchange. That space and the area of Rooms 41-51 are very similar in terms of architectural quality and their condition. Significant parts of the KMHeritage report prepared to support that application are therefore used in justifying the proposals for the area of Rooms 41-51.

2.4 This report should be read in conjunction with the 'Supporting Listed Building Statement prepared by Drivers Jonas, and drawings prepared by E.C. Harris.

Organisation

2.5 This introduction is followed by a brief description of the building and Rooms 41-51, and an outline in Section 4 of the proposed alterations. Section 5 sets out the national and local policy and guidance relating to the historic built environment that is relevant to this matter. Section 6 assesses the proposed alterations, against that policy and guidance. Appendices contain a location map, the list description for the Royal Exchange, and internal photographs of Rooms 41-51.

Author

2.6 The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the

London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation. Kevin Murphy was included for a number of years on the Heritage Lottery Fund's Directory of Expert Advisers.

3.0 The building

History and architect

3.1 The Royal Exchange replaced three earlier buildings on or near the site of the present building. It was built between 1914 and 1921 to designs by the architectural firm of Bradshaw, Gass and Hope. Trading continued in the building until 1968, by which time new technologies and business practices had superseded the need for face-to-face trading.

3.2 After 1973, the building provided an interim home to the Sixty Nine Theatre Company. This temporary use became permanent when Levitt Bernstein Associates created a new 'pod' theatre within the hall.

3.3 The Royal Exchange was heavily damaged by the IRA bomb of 15 June 1996, which exploded at the southern end of Corporation Street. Levitt Bernstein undertook repairs to the building. The building had previously experienced rebuilding after war damage.

3.4 Bradshaw, Gass and Hope is a long-established Bolton firm that first undertook work as J.J. Bradshaw in the 1860s and 1870s, and by the early part of the twentieth century was a large successful practice. Their buildings include a broad range of civic, educational and religious buildings, as well as offices and shops. Listed buildings by the practice include Luton Town Hall, Chesterfield Town Hall, the former Leysian Mission in Islington, Farnworth Baptist Church, and the Methodist Central Hall in Liverpool.

The building

3.5 The building occupies the space between St. Ann's Square and Exchange Street to the West and Cross Street to the east. The hall, which is located at the southern end of the building, was truncated in post-rebuilding. It has three glass domes supported on massive columns. The

Levitt Bernstein theatre is beneath the largest, central dome and suspended form its columns.

3.6 The northern part of the building is occupied by shops at ground level, and by offices at each of the upper levels. These are arranged around three light wells.

3.7 The Royal Exchange was added to the statutory list of buildings of special architectural and historic interest on 3rd October 1974, at Grade II.

The special architectural and historic interest of the building and nature of Rooms 41-51 at present

3.8 The Royal Exchange is undoubtedly of profound special architectural and historic interest. However, while the historic and social significance of the building can be assumed, the architectural interest of the building is not uniform. The exterior of the building and the hall are certainly architecturally magnificent, and at this overall level the building is an impressive example of early twentieth century civic/commercial architecture in a neo-classical style.

3.9 However, it is clear from even a cursory acquaintance with the story of the building that it has changed continuously since its completion in the 1920s. War damage, bomb damage, changes in the shops at ground level, changes to the common parts, the insertion of the theatre in the 1970s and alterations to the offices have altered the interior of the building very significantly.

3.10 This is clearly evident in Rooms 41-51, which is characterised by modern partitions, doors, suspended ceilings, heating and ventilation. The layout of this part of the building is defined by relatively recent partitioning. Rooflights above the existing suspended ceiling are covered by asphalt. Photographs in Appendix C illustrate the present (November 2008) situation of the accommodation.

3.11 The special architectural and historic interest of the Royal Exchange does not lie in this space or the corresponding

spaces on the floors above, but rather in the exterior of the building, its overall planning, and its spectacular hall. The area of Rooms 41-51 is plain, unadorned and devoid of any particular architectural feature that would distinguish it from very many commercial buildings from the same period.

4.0 The proposed alterations

The need for alterations

4.1 It is proposed that Rooms 41-51 of the Royal Exchange be refurbished so as to provide modern office accommodation. The scheme is simply an internal fit out: there is no work to the external parts of the building. The 'Supporting Listed Building Statement prepared by Drivers Jonas and drawings prepared by E.C. Harris explain the proposals and there is a detailed description below.

4.2 Rooms 41-51 are not presently in a condition in which they could be rented to a commercial tenant. Rooms 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 51 and the inner parts of Rooms 43, 45, 47 and 49 are entirely without natural light or windows of any kind. The purpose of the scheme is to make what is effectively unusable space suitable for occupation so as to permit the building to continue to generate a rental income for its owners.

The quality of office space required

4.3 The owners of the building have been advised by professional property letting and managing agents DTZ. Their opinion is that any potential tenant of office space in the Royal Exchange will require greatly improved accommodation over that which exists at present. DTZ have analysed the central Manchester office market and tenant expectations.

4.4 The overview provided by DTZ is as follows:

As the consistent growth in take-up over the last fifteen years has shown, Manchester continues to expand as a base for business. This is due to a wide range of initiatives within the city, led by Manchester City Council and also the excellence of schemes such as Spinningfields. However it is unlikely that all of the supply which will be delivered over the next three years will succeed. There will undoubtedly be winners and losers with the best schemes

prospering. Those that do not offer the right location, specification or configuration of floor plate, will struggle.

4.5 A large amount of new office space has already become available, having been commenced in recent years. Though there is demand for office space, potential tenants have a choice. There is a lot of office space available to potential tenants that is new and purpose-designed. In this environment office space such as Rooms 41-51 of the Royal Exchange is at a distinct disadvantage.

The proposed alterations

4.6 The proposed alterations are illustrated in drawings by EC Harris: Nos 4069.34/001, 002A, 003, 004, 005, 006 and 007.

4.7 The proposals show that individual ceiling rafts will float clear of the existing downstand beams, within the bays formed by the grid of beams. These beams will be revealed by removing the later partitions and opening up the space. Existing plaster (including decorative detail where it exists) to beams, cornices and soffits will be repaired or reinstated. The beam layout will thus be clearly visible throughout the floor. The new ceiling rafts will contain lighting and fire alarms.

4.8 The works will reveal, and cause to be repaired, decorative plasterwork cornices that have been hidden by the present suspended ceiling.

4.9 No raised floor is proposed; new carpet tiles will be laid on a levelling screed applied to the existing hollow-pot floor once the existing floor finish has been removed, the floor level remaining the same. Walls will be repaired and re-wallpapered. Skirtings and other retained joinery will be repaired, and decorated to match new joinery.

4.10 Room 51 will be retained as a kitchen, with the existing internal sub-dividing partition removed to create a single space. The kitchen fittings will be replaced.

4.11 The bulky existing perimeter radiator enclosures will be removed and replaced with modern slimline radiators against the outer wall beneath the existing windows and along the inner wall parallel to the street.

5.0 The policy context

National policy: Planning Policy Guidance 15

5.1 National policy regarding the impact of new development upon listed buildings and conservation areas is contained in Planning Policy Guidance 15. The legislation governing listed buildings and conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and Planning Policy Guidance 15 makes reference to this throughout.

5.2 Paragraph 1.4 and 1.5 of Planning Policy Guidance 15 provide a relevant discussion of conservation and economic prosperity. Part 3 of the PPG deals with the control of development affecting listed buildings, and of particular importance are the four 'issues...generally relevant to the consideration of all listed building consent applications' set out in Paragraph 3.5. Also relevant is the guidance concerning use contained in Paragraphs 3.8 to 3.11, and that on alterations and extensions contained in Paragraphs 3.12 to 3.15. The proposals affecting the listed building do not involve any 'total or substantial' demolition, as defined in Paragraph 3.18, and the proposals should therefore be assessed in the manner that Paragraph 3.18 suggests: in terms of the guidance regarding alterations and extensions contained in Paragraphs 3.12 to 3.15. Paragraph 3.13 states: 'Many listed buildings can sustain some degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate continuing or new uses'.

Local Policy

5.3 As would be expected, Manchester City's Unitary Development Plan (the Manchester Plan) echoes Planning Policy Guidance 15 in terms of the historic built environment. The Environmental Improvement & Protection Policy E2.7 states that 'the Council wishes to ensure that buildings and areas of special architectural or

historic interest are retained, maintained and, where necessary, restored. It will seek to preserve and enhance the setting of such buildings and areas by appropriate control over the design of new development in their vicinity, control over the use of adjacent land and, where appropriate, by the preservation of trees and landscape features'. Policy DC19.1 deals with listed buildings: 'The Council will have regard to the desirability of securing the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use of such buildings...' and will (amongst other policies):

- 'not permit a change of use of a listed building, where it would have a detrimental effect on the character or appearance of the building;
- not permit any external or internal alteration or addition to a Listed building where, in its opinion, there would be an adverse effect on its architectural or historic character;
- not permit alterations to a listed building which would prevent the future use of any part of the building, in particular upper floors or basements, or where poor maintenance is likely to result'.

6.0 The effect of the proposed alterations

6.1 The proposed alterations would permit the reuse of Rooms 41-51 of the Royal Exchange after a period during which they have lain empty. As Planning Policy Guidance 15 points out at Paragraph 3.8, 'the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use'.

6.2 In doing this the works will not affect the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building in any discernible or meaningful way – the works will not alter any element of the building that forms a real part of its substantive 'interest'.

6.3 However, the works will reveal, and cause to be repaired, decorative plasterwork cornices that have been hidden by the present suspended ceiling.

Planning Policy Guidance 15

6.4 At Paragraph 1.4, Planning Policy Guidance 15 points out that 'economic prosperity can secure... the continued use and maintenance of historic buildings, provided that there is a sufficiently realistic and imaginative approach to their alteration and change of use, to reflect the needs of a rapidly changing world'. That is what is proposed for Rooms 41-51. Its refurbishment and reuse would certainly bring what is referred to at Paragraph 3.5 (iv) of Planning Policy Guidance 15: 'substantial benefits for the community, in particular by contributing to the economic regeneration of the area or the enhancement of its environment (including other listed buildings)'.

6.5 It is clear that the proposed alterations are acceptable in terms of each of the four criteria contained in Paragraph 3.5 of the PPG:

- *The importance of the building, its intrinsic architectural and historic interest and rarity, in both national and local terms*: As discussed above, the special architectural and historic interest of the

Royal Exchange does not essentially lie in the interior of Rooms 41-51, and they contain no singular or 'special' physical or architectural features.

- *The particular physical features of the building*: the works will not significantly alter the underlying structure or appearance of the space.
- *The building's setting and its contribution to the local scene*: the works will significantly improve the present external appearance of the building by removing the unsightly suspended ceiling, the level of which is beneath the window heads facing Cross Street.
- *The extent to which the proposed works would bring substantial benefits for the community*: the works will enable the reuse of a presently inactive economic asset, and thus contribute to business and employment.

6.6 Paragraph 3.10 of Planning Policy Guidance 15 states that 'The best use will very often be the use for which the building was originally designed, and the continuation or reinstatement of that use should certainly be the first option when the future of a building is considered'. That is precisely what is proposed for Rooms 41-51.

6.7 The Royal Exchange is certainly the type of listed building that Planning Policy Guidance 15 refers to when, at Paragraph 3.13, it says that 'many listed buildings can sustain some degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate continuing or new uses' and that 'the merit of some new alterations or additions, especially where they are generated within a secure and committed long-term ownership, should not be discounted'. It is certainly not that type of listed building that is 'sensitive even to slight alterations' nor does it have 'important interiors and fittings'. It is definitely the type of listed building that has suffered from 'minor works of indifferent

quality, which...can cumulatively be very destructive of a building's special interest'. The proposed alterations are entirely 'compatible with the fabric, interior, and setting of the historic building' (Planning Policy Guidance 15, Paragraph 3.9).

The Manchester Plan

6.8 In positively addressing the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance 15, the proposals also meet the policy requirements of the Manchester Plan in relation to listed buildings. They would certainly *not* 'have a detrimental effect on the character or appearance of the building', nor would there be 'an adverse effect on its architectural or historic character'. The alterations will clearly allow, rather than prevent 'the future use of... the building. In overall terms, both in terms of physical works and the reuse of the space, the proposals do exactly what Policy DC19.1 is concerned with: they will secure 'the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use' of the listed building.