HERITAGE STATEMENT
PART BASEMENT, ST JAMES'S BUILDINGS
OXFORD STREET – MANCHESTER

Listed Building Entry

Commercial building. 1912, by Clegg, Fryer and Periman. Steel frame with façade of Portland stone; green slated mansard roof. Very large rectangular plan. Neo-Baroque style, eight storeys plus dormers, 3:6:3:6:3 bays, symmetrical, the centre and the ends breaking forwards slightly; ground to 2nd floors treated as rustic, with channeled masonry, ground and 1st floors set in arcaded round headed openings with massive polished granite plinths to the piers, shops at ground floor and lunettes at 1st floor, triple keystones to the arches. The centre and ends have balustrade balconies to recessed 2nd floor windows, and above this level are treated as giant pedimented aedicules (to the 7th and 6th floors respectively), with paired Ionic pilasters framing the windows (projected canted bay windows in the centre at the 1st level), and open pediments (triangular in the centre and segmental at the ends); and the centre has a square tower with stepped Baroque spire. Main entrance in centre bay with massive round headed archway. Otherwise, the 2nd floor window of the main ranges have aedicules with small balconies, engaged columns and alternating triangular and segmental pediments, and the other floors have 2 smaller windows per bay, all with architraves. Dormer windows to 7th floor. Moulded chimney stacks. Rear and interior not inspected.

BACKGROUND

When St James's Buildings were constructed in 1911-12 it was on the site of earlier, lower buildings. Some were commercial, some were leisure uses; a theatre, a cinema and a skating rink for instance. There were also a number of existing streets and the one at the very north of the site was Gilbert Street, a short lane providing access to St James's Theatre.

The section of basement that constitutes this application appears to sit on the site of this street and was constructed to have a café at street level, at the rear of the building, and there was also an entrance to basement level, which was said to be used as a billiard room. It may have been a provision for tenants of the building, but the fact that it had a separate entrance suggests that it may have been a commercial venture adding another source of revenue.

Although the actual floor plans are not available to us, there are sections of the ceiling, which have heavy, plaster coving and timer/plaster protection to the steelwork. This forms a substantial coffering to the structural frame and is a far better quality feature than would be expected if this area did not have a significant, public use.

Sadly, recent uses for this basement, particularly by Jilly's Rock World and The Music Box, have not respected the building and much of the coving is missing or is extensively damaged. A reflected ceiling plan E(110) shows that this feature was, without doubt, visible between gridlines A and C and from gridlines 3 and 10. To accompany this, drawings E(111) shows the photographs are included as part of this report. We have also produced enlarged drawings of each of the 7 ceiling panels with the areas of damage or missing plasterwork indicated. There is no evidence that any of the other areas of the basement were finished to this standard.

PROPOSALS

A private music college, access to music, intends to use this basement for their business. Most of what they propose is achieved by forming enclosures to create classrooms in areas where there are no remaining features. The rehearsal rooms are noisy but are mitigated by using some of the

existing storerooms, together with the incorporation of short sections of the access corridors. These areas are of heavy masonry construction which will absorb a great deal of the sound, especially the higher notes, but the rooms will also be fully soundproofed being, in effect, acoustic boxes set within the existing structures.

There is a 'live-room', which provides a large rehearsal space, but this will be an independent structure, heavily soundproofed and not reaching the existing ceiling structure.

As part of this proposal, the coffered ceilings (where they still exist) will be carefully repaired so that this central section will be readable as it was originally. Unfortunately, the plasterwork on gridline 'C; is almost totally missing, only the section between gridlines 9 and 10 remaining and in need of some significant restoration/repair.

Between gridlines 7 and 8, is the most elaborate section, having 3 coffered panels, and it is proposals that this bay be fully restored, including re-creating the section on grid-line 'C'. The college will have no physical interruption below this section so that it will remain fully visible at all times. There are no other significant areas of structure remaining and the occupier will undertake a normal fit out to meet the needs of this new function. Interventions will be capable of removal at a future date without resulting in any loss to the understanding of this building.

ACCESS

The college will be accessed via the existing stairs and lifts, through the North Entrance. From the lifts the entrance is level throughout the subject area. Disabled compliant toilet facilities will be included within the demise.

APPENDIX

Reference should be made to the 'General Principles Document' for St James's Buildings, produced by Lindsay Cowle, Conservation Consultant, in April 2004 and submitted to Manchester City Planning Department on 24 May 2004. This contains a broad view of the key features of St James's Buildings although there is limited commentary on the basement spaces.