

Planning

Growth & Development

Delegated officer report for planning application

Application no. 143013/LO/2025

Date registered valid: 23 June 2025

Proposal: Listed Building Consent for the fit out of the ground floor and basement and external signage.

Address: Basement And Ground Floor, 131-133 Portland Street, Manchester, M1 4PY

Ward(s): Piccadilly Ward

Applicant: Mrs Nora Nilson, Blank Street Coffee

Agent (if any): Mr Chris Bradley, Bradley Architecture

Case officer: Jack Naven
Tel: 0161 219 2095
Email: jack.naven@manchester.gov.uk

Recommendation: Approve

Date of recommendation: 12 August 2025

Application Details

Type of application: Listed Building Consent

Development type: Listed building alteration

Date of site visit: 30 June 2025

Standard consultations:

Printed: 26 June 2025 Expired: 17 July 2025

Neighbour notifications

Printed: 26 June 2025 Expired: 17 July 2025

Site notice

Posted: 26 June 2025 Expired: 17 July 2025

Press advert

Published: 1 July 2025 Expired: 22 July 2025

Departure from Development Plan: No

Environmental Statement: Not required

Description of Site/Area

Listed building: Grade II

Conservation area: Whitworth Street Conservation Area 1985

Tree Preservation Order: Not applicable

It is a part of 127–133 Portland Street, a striking and architecturally rich mid-19th century commercial block, designed by P. Nunn for Louis Behrens & Sons in c.1860. Built as a shipping warehouse, the building now houses a range of commercial uses, including a bank at the Portland Street/Oxford Street corner. Although not individually listed in its entirety, the building is of clear townscape and group value within the Whitworth Street Conservation Area and forms part of a significant architectural composition alongside 61 Oxford Street (Grade II listed). The structure features an irregular footprint with a distinctive rounded corner, and is constructed primarily of red brick with sandstone detailing. Its composition is defined by a giant two-storey arcade that spans 23 bays along Portland Street, creating a visually rhythmic and classically inspired elevation.

The Portland Street elevation is distinguished by its continuous vertical bays with arched sash windows at first and second floors and smaller portrait_format sash windows at the third floor, all framed by decorative brick and sandstone details. Ground floor treatments vary, incorporating historic loading bays, iron gates, and recessed entrances set within richly detailed sandstone surrounds. Original keystones, scrollwork, and impost mouldings remain evident across much of the ground floor. The ground floor frontage has been partially adapted with modern glazing and access points, including car park access and doorways reconfigured from former loading bays. Despite these changes, the architectural language remains coherent and expressive of its warehouse typology.

The Oxford Street return continues the building's stylistic language, with matching arcade windows and decorative detailing. The elevation includes four bays, two of which feature original structural columns and iron beams at ground level, while the others have been subtly adapted for contemporary use. The building's robust classical proportions, richly modelled façades and historical association with Manchester's textile trading history all contribute to its heritage significance. Any signage or alterations proposed for this building have been developed with sensitivity to these defining characteristics, maintaining the architectural integrity of both street elevations and reinforcing the building's role as a key component of the Portland Street frontage.

Description of Development

The proposal seeks Listed Building Consent for the fit out of the ground floor and basement and external signage.

Related Applications

143168/AO/2025 - Installation of 1no non-illuminated fascia sign.

Approved in tandem with this application.

Consultations & Notification Responses

Publicity - Neighbour notification letters were sent to surrounding properties. A site notice and local press advert were also produced. At the time of writing this report, no representations have been received because of this publicity.

Policy

The effect of the proposal on the affected heritage asset has been considered under the following criteria.

The Adopted Core Strategy for the City of Manchester (2012)

SP1 (Spatial Principles) advises that development in all parts of the City should protect and enhance the built environment.

EN1 (Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas) advises that developer's will be expected to consider the City's heritage, including its listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeological remains and historic street pattern.

EN3 (Heritage) advises that throughout the City, the Council will encourage development that complements and takes advantage of the distinct historic and heritage features of its districts and neighbourhoods, including those of the City Centre and that proposals which enable the re-use of heritage assets will be encouraged where they are considered consistent with the significance of the heritage asset.

CC9 (Design and Heritage) advises that development in Manchester should preserve or enhance the heritage assets affected.

DM1 (Development Management) advises that all development should be appropriately sited, scaled, formed, massed, and detailed with appropriate layout and materials and should have regard to the character of the surrounding area and effects on built heritage.

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for the City of Manchester (1995)

DC18.1 (Conservation Areas) states that the Council will give particularly careful consideration to development proposals within Conservation Area. The Council will seek to preserve and enhance the character of its designated conservation areas by carefully considering; the relationship of new structures to neighbouring buildings and spaces; and the effect of major changes to the appearance of existing buildings.

DC19.1 (Listed Buildings) states that the Council will have regard to the desirability of securing the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use of such buildings and to protecting their general settings by; not permitting any external or internal alterations or addition to a listed building where, in its opinion, there would be an adverse effect on its architectural or historic character; and seek to preserve and enhance the setting of listed buildings 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.

Places for Everyone

The Places for Everyone Plan is a Joint Development Plan Document, providing a strategic plan and policies, for nine of the 10 boroughs which make up Greater Manchester.

JP-Strat2 (City Centre) states that the role of the City Centre as the most significant economic location in the country outside London will be strengthened considerably. The City Centre will continue to provide the primary focus for business, retail, leisure, culture and tourism activity in Greater Manchester, but the increasingly important residential role of the City Centre will be expanded. It will be a priority for investment in development and infrastructure. This will include addressing current network capacity issues in the City Centre which will enable the future expansion of the rapid transit public transport network across Greater Manchester. Improvements in the public realm, walking and cycling facilities, and green infrastructure will help to enhance the local character and environmental quality of the City Centre so that it can rival city centres across the globe, enabling it to compete effectively at the international level for investment, businesses, skilled workers, residents and tourists. A broad range of commercial accommodation will be delivered, helping the City Centre to capture growth across key economic sectors. The new functions within the City Centre will be delivered in a way that complement, rather than displace the area's non-residential functions and will seek to protect and enhance the city centre's historic environment and assets.

JP-P1 (Sustainable Places) states an aim to become one of the most liveable city regions in the world, consisting of a series of beautiful, healthy, and varied places, each having the following key attributes that all development, wherever appropriate, should be distinctive, with a clear identity, visually stimulating, socially inclusive, resilient, adaptable, durable, resource efficient, safe, supported by critical infrastructure, functional and convenient, incorporating accessibility, legible easy to move around, well connected, comfortable and inviting, incorporating high quality and well managed green infrastructure and public realm, well served by local shops, services and amenities.

JP-P2 (Heritage) aims to proactively manage and work with partners to positively conserve, sustain and enhance its historic environment and heritage assets and their settings. Opportunities will be pursued to aid the promotion, enjoyment, understanding and interpretation of heritage assets, as a means of maximising wider public benefits and reinforcing Greater Manchester's distinct identity and sense of place. The policy requires development proposals affecting a designated heritage asset (or an archaeological site of national importance) and a conservation area to conserve those elements which contribute to its significance including those identified in any conservation area appraisal as making a positive contribution to the area.

Harm to such elements will only be permitted where this is clearly justified and outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal.

Shopfront and Signage Design Guide (2024)

The shopfronts and signage SPD sets out the detailed guidance for shopfront alterations in Manchester.

The SPD states that shopfronts:

- should reflect and respond positively to the architectural expression and proportions of the existing building. Any alterations should relate to upper storeys in terms of siting, scale, alignment, including windows, doors and elements of the frame
- in the context of Listed Buildings, conservation areas and non-designated heritage assets, the overall design and detailing of new shopfronts should be appropriate to the building and the local context in which these are located
- Where there is evidence of an original or historic shopfront, the reinstatement of a traditional design will be encouraged. Modern design will generally only be supported when there is no evidence of the original shopfronts and where the new design can be successfully integrated into the historical façade through its architectural form, design, proportions, materials, craftsmanship and detailing.
- Where poor-quality shopfronts have been installed in the past, works to replace these with high-quality and well-designed traditional or modern examples, depending on what is considered most appropriate, and which improve the appearance and appreciation of a building and the area.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)

Development decisions should, therefore, accord with the requirements of the **NPPF**, in particular to **section 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment)**.

It is a fundamental requirement of the NPPF that planning proposals contribute to the achievement of "sustainable development". In order to meet this key planning objective, in this instance, the development should sustain and contribute to the stimulation of a thriving historic environment.

Section 12 (Achieving well-designed places) advises that the government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

Section 16 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment) states the following:

Paragraph 202 advises that heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Paragraph 207 advises that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected. The level of detail should be sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

Paragraph 208 advises that LPAs should ensure that any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal is avoided or minimised.

Paragraph 210 advises that in determining applications, LPAs should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality.
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

Paragraph 213 advises that any harm to or loss of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm or loss should be exceptional and substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including grade I and II* listed buildings should be wholly exceptional.

Paragraph 214 states that where a development proposal will lead to substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

Paragraph 215 advises that proposals of less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should be assessed against the wider public benefits of the proposal.

Paragraph 219 advises that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Other Legislation

Sections 16, 66 and 72 of the **Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990** require that special consideration is given to the preservation of the significant fabric and setting of listed buildings and conservation areas.

Issues

In determining whether the proposed works are acceptable, the main issue to consider is the impact these proposed works will have on the historic character and fabric of the listed building itself and to establish whether the public benefits, including heritage benefits, of the proposal will outweigh any harm to the significance of the heritage asset.

Principle of the development

Signage is considered to be appropriate to provide wayfinding and to advertise the premises.

The other internal works will help facilitate the occupation of the unit by a new commercial provider.

The principle of the development is considered to be acceptable for these reasons.

Assessment of significance

The building in question derives its significance from its Red brick and sandstone exterior dressings and the strong horizontal emphasis which fronts onto Portland Street.

The interior commercial space which this application refers to, has a modern lower ceiling with cornice installed on the ground floor. It retains the original cast iron columns but most of the interior is a modern fit out and retains very few historic features.

Impact on heritage asset

The refurbishment proposals primarily relate to the ground floor and comprise new fit out for a café.

Works to the basement require fixing new services and associated pipework runs. These will be re-using existing service trays and penetrations. Works to the basement are considered to be negligible.

Alterations to the ground floor proposed are considered to be modest. Re-opening obscured windows on the ground floor would also have a positive visual benefit and retain the prominence of the original cast iron columns is considered to be a positive.

The internal floor and wall finishes proposed would have a neutral impact on heritage significance as they affect existing modern finishes.

Proposed tiling around existing entrance would add some visual clutter but is reversible element and thereby as proposed in a neutral colour would have negligible harm.

The face illuminated entrance sign on metal raceways fixed to this historic fabric of the building, is correctly sited at fascia level, above a corresponding entrance. The use of individual letters results in a less cluttered appearance to the elevation, as opposed to a solid fascia sign. The use of rails instead of a solid backplate also helps to reduce this clutter.

The main concern of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) has been the new proposed bulkhead to the space. Originally, this bulkhead was to be much larger, as it was to extend all the way across to the seating area. The LPA Had concerns that this bulkhead took up far too much floorspace and would lead to a cluttered feel which has already been compromised by the existing lowered ceiling.

The applicant has carried out investigations and confirmed that the existing suspended ceiling only provided 400mm of space in which to install services. The previous occupier of the space, Phil Potts, had a large AC unit affixed to the back wall, which created an unsightly appearance that detracted from the interior appearance of the space.

In order to locate an AC unit in the ceiling, a deeper suspended ceiling was required.

Through discussions with the applicant, the footprint of the suspended ceiling has been reduced significantly. It shall now mirror the layout of the serving counter below, therefore creating an appearance that seems more clearly defined.

Whilst the additional bulkhead will be sited close to one of the existing columns, it is considered that being able to hide the required services within the additional bulkhead will result in an overall reduction in clutter.



Proposed individual letter sign

The sign is similar in nature to the previous sign that existed when Phil Potts occupied the unit.



Previous individual letter sign

The signage will re-issue the fixing points from the previous signage installed.

There will be a low level of less than substantial harm caused as a result of the proposed works to install the individual letter signage.

Public benefits

The proposed works will result in the occupation of this commercial unit in a historic building. The occupation of the unit will help the long term preservation of the historic building, which will be a benefit to the public.

Conclusion

In view of the above, this application is considered acceptable, as the works are considered to cause a low level of less than substantial harm to the special interest and the historic character of the Grade II listed building which would be outweighed by the public benefits outlined above.

Other Legislative Requirements

Equality Act 2010

Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty) of the Equality Act 2010 requires due regard to the need to: Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act and; Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The Equality Duty does not impose a legal requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. Compliance with the Equality Duty involves consciously thinking about the aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

Human Rights Act 1998 considerations

This application needs to be considered against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under Article 6, the applicants (and those third parties, including local residents, who have made representations) have a right to a fair hearing and to this end the local planning authority must give full consideration to their comments.

Protocol 1 Article 1, and Article 8 where appropriate, confer(s) a right of respect for a person's home, other land and business assets. In taking account of all material considerations, including Council policy as set out in the Core Strategy and saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan, the Director of Planning, Building Control & Licensing has concluded that some rights conferred by these articles on the applicant(s)/objector(s)/resident(s) and other occupiers and owners of nearby land that might be affected may be interfered with but that that interference is in accordance with the law and justified by being in the public interest and on the basis of the planning merits of the development proposal. She believes that any restriction on these rights posed by the recommendation given is proportionate to the wider benefits of and that such a decision falls within the margin of discretion afforded to the Council under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Recommendation: Approve

Condition(s) to be attached to decision for approval

1) The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason - Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings and documents received by the City Council as Local Planning Authority on 22 May 2025:

- Location Plan
- Proposed Section AA & BB
- Proposed Section CC & DD
- Proposed Elevations

- Proposed Merchandise Unit
- Proposed Ground Floor - Wall Finishes Plan
- Proposed Ground Floor - Floor Finishes Plan

The following drawings and documents received by the City Council as Local Planning Authority on 27 June 2025:

- Proposed Basement Floor Plan Rev A
- Proposed Ground Floor Plan Rev A

And the following drawings and documents received by the City Council as Local Planning Authority on 06 August 2025:

- Proposed Reflected Ceiling Plan Rev B
- Proposed Section EE
- Design & Access Statement Rev A
- Heritage Statement Rev A

Reason - To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans. Pursuant to policies SP1 and DM1 of the Core Strategy.

3) Notwithstanding the details as set out in condition 2 above, prior to the commencement of any internal wall or floor finishes being applied, physical samples of these finishes shall be submitted in writing to and be approved in writing by the City Council as the Local Planning Authority.

The approved details shall then be implemented as a part of the development.

Reason - In the interest of visual amenity and as the proposed works affect a building which is included in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest so careful attention to building work is required to protect the character and appearance of this building in accordance with saved policy DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester and policies SP1, EN3 and DM1 of the Core Strategy.

4) As stated in the application form, the individual letter signage shall be constructed out of descaled stainless steel.

Reason - In the interest of visual amenity and as the proposed works affect a building which is included in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest so careful attention to building work is required to protect the character and appearance of this building in accordance with saved policy DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester and policies SP1, EN3 and DM1 of the Core Strategy.

Appendix 1 – List of consultees & neighbours notified

Heritage & Urban Design

Advertising Right JC DeCaux Outside 33 - 35, Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 4BH
Bundobust, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
34 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5EL
Eden & Co Solicitors, 26 Oxford Court, Manchester, M2 3WQ
Eighth Floor, St James Buildings, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6FQ
Fifth Floor, St James Buildings, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
44 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5EJ
46 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5EJ
Column 11 Opposite Portland Hotel, Portland Street, Manchester, M1 3ZZ
Seventh Floor, St James Buildings, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
Sixth Floor, St James Buildings, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
131 Portland Street, Manchester, M1 4PY
Ground Floor And Basement Elemental, 47 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
47 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
61 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
116 Portland Street, Manchester, M1 4RL
Unit 3A, 116 Portland Street, Manchester, M1 4RL
Ground Floor, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
Third Floor, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
Fourth Floor, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
St James Buildings, 61 - 73 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6EQ
36 - 38 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5EJ
133 Portland Street, Manchester, M1 4PY
William Hill, 40 - 42 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5EJ

Appendix 2 – Planning constraints

Article 4 Direction - City Centre PD Restriction - Class B1(a) To C3
Article 4 Direction - Removal Of PD Rights Change Of Use From Class C3 To Class C4
Coal Authority - Development Low Risk - Name: DEVELOPMENT_LOW_RISK_AREA
Conservation Area - Whitworth Street Conservation Area 1985
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Less) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Less) -
Area Team Boundary - Name: CENTRAL