Historic England

Ms Jennifer Atkinson
Manchester City Council
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M60 2LA

Direct Dial: [redacted]

Our ref: L01593177

19 June 2025

Dear Ms Atkinson

Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2021

SISTER PLOT C, FORMER UMIST CAMPUS, ALTRINCHAM STREET, MANCHESTER, M1 7JA
Application No. 143060/LO/2025

Thank you for your letter of 30 May 2025 regarding the above application for listed building consent. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Historic England Advice

Significance

The proposals will affect the Grade II Listed Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway Viaduct. The viaduct was constructed between 1846 and 1849 to carry an almost two-mile stretch of the Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway line through the southern part of Manchester city centre. This was one of the country's first suburban railways and was the first in Manchester. The viaduct is an impressive feat of engineering, spanning many pre-existing roads and water courses, with often ornate and well-detailed arches and bridges. The skew arch giving access to Vimto Gardens originally spanned the River Medlock.

The viaduct has remained in good condition, although many arches have been bricked up in the 20th century. The easternmost arch within the site (Arch 13) was infilled in the 19th century.

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Impacts

The proposals involve removing the 19th and 20th century brick infills to six of the arches and replacement with modern, free-standing retail units. Arches 5 and 6, which are not currently infilled, will also be filled in with new units.

The proposed construction of the new units will have minimal physical impact on the fabric of the viaduct. There will be an improvement to the appearance of the viaduct due to removal of mis-matched brickwork and shutters currently in situ in some of the arches.

Policy

National policy relating to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment is articulated in section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024). These policies state that assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (para. 202) and that applicants should describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting, to a level sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance (para. 207).

When considering the impact of a proposed development, great weight should be given to an asset's conservation, and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be (para. 212). Paragraph 219 of the NPPF states that new development within conservation areas and within the setting of heritage assets should look for opportunities to enhance or better reveal significance. Any harm to significance requires clear and convincing justification (para. 213).

In practice that means that less harmful alternative solutions should be explored through the pre-application and application processes. Para. 215 instructs that the

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Council should eventually weigh harm against the public benefits of proposals in judging the planning balance.

Position

We welcome the proposals, which will be a positive intervention to the street scene and to the setting of the listed building. The activation of the arches will help to provide a sustainable future of the viaduct and to ensure its ongoing maintenance.

Recommendation
Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds.

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. You should also bear in mind section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]
Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas
[redacted]

SUITES 3.3 AND 3.4 CANADA HOUSE 3 CHEPSTOW STREET MANCHESTER M1 5FW

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