

**MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE.**

**DESIGN, ACCESS AND HERITAGE STATEMENT  
FOR INSTALLATION OF PROPOSED BACK-LIT SIGNAGE**



**MAR 2025**

**ATG THEATRE GROUP**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This statement supports the application for the replacement of existing signage to the Quay Street and Byrom Street elevations of the Manchester opera house with new backlit signage.

This statement documents the key elements of the proposal in terms of design, access and heritage.

It will be used to support the application for Advertisement Consent and Listed Building Consent.

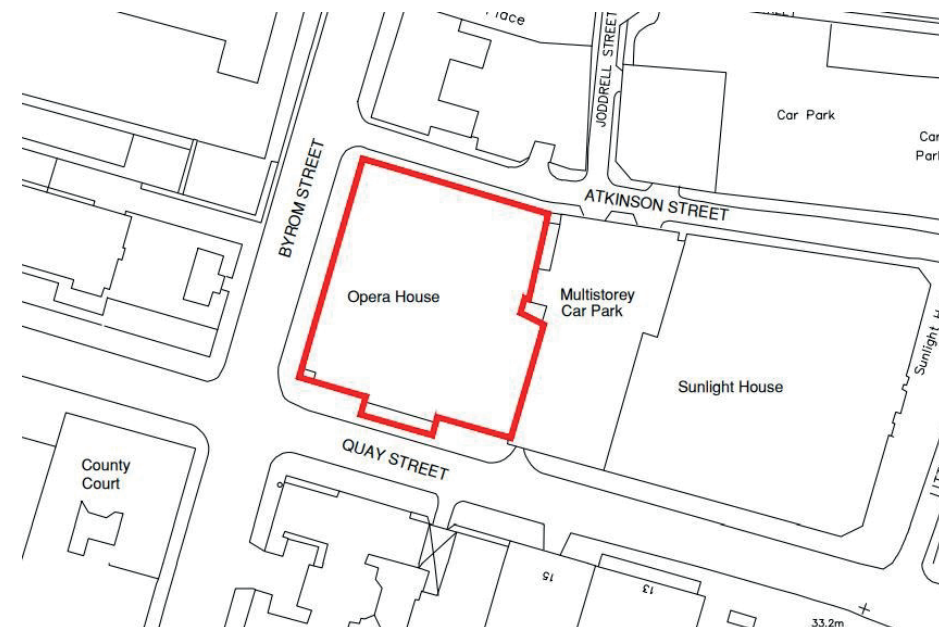
## 1.2 THE SITE

The site is located on Quay Street, Manchester. The frontage is more visible on the approach from the East. The recent addition of the Quay House development to the West has made the frontage less visible as the elevation of Quay house has moved further forward on the street than the previous building.

Permission has previously been granted as follows:

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 137808/LO/2023                   | 19/10/2023 Listed building consent for the removal of liquid plastic waterproofing and replace with lead to top of string course and other projections.                                                                                                                                 |
| 137221/LO/2023                   | 18/07/2023 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for redecoration of the Opera House façade.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 133917/FO/2022<br>133918/LO/2022 | 01/09/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT & PLANNING<br>Proposed work to repair the rendered facade of the listed building. Introduction of a lead detail to projecting sections and inspections and localised repair of cast iron rainwater goods to Byrom Street and Quay Street elevations. |
| 129126/LO/2021<br>129125/FO/2021 | 12/03/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT & PLANNING for replacement of existing corroded steels above an existing light well wall opening and above an existing gated entrance. Installation of new concrete pavement lights on Byrom Street.                                                 |
| 128613/LO/2020                   | 19/02/2021 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for refurbishment of the safety curtain including the removal of the asbestos cloth, replacement pulley brackets and steel wire rope, and installation of new fire rated replacement cloth.                                                          |

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|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 126635/LO/2020    | 06/07/2020 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT Repairs to external windows                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 118311/LO/2017    | 27/11/2017 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT Replacement of the Theatres Main Entrance Doors off the Quay Street Elevation                                                                                                                 |
| 092689/LO/2010/C1 | 31/01/2013 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for works to rooftop comprising installation of 2 no. new access ladders, installation of new edge protection, re-roofing of flat and pitched roofs and retention of existing edge protection |
| 091693/FO/2009/C1 | 20/04/2010 Replacement of the existing external lighting units with 16 no. lighting units, 2 to be located on the Byrom Street elevation and the remainder on the Quay Street elevation                                          |
| 087679/LO/2008/C1 | 11/09/2008 LISTED BUILDING CONSENT for the installation of bird netting to 9 No. windows on front elevation                                                                                                                      |

## 2.0 HERITAGE -

When it first opened its doors, the venue was aptly named New Theatre. The venue celebrated its opening day on Boxing Day in 1912. The venue struggled to compete with other establishments in the area, and was consequently sold to United Theatre Ltd three years after its opening. After being sold, the venue was renamed New Queens Theatre.

Between 1916 and 1920, Sir Thomas Beecham performed on several occasions. In his honour, the theatre was renamed The Opera House in 1920.

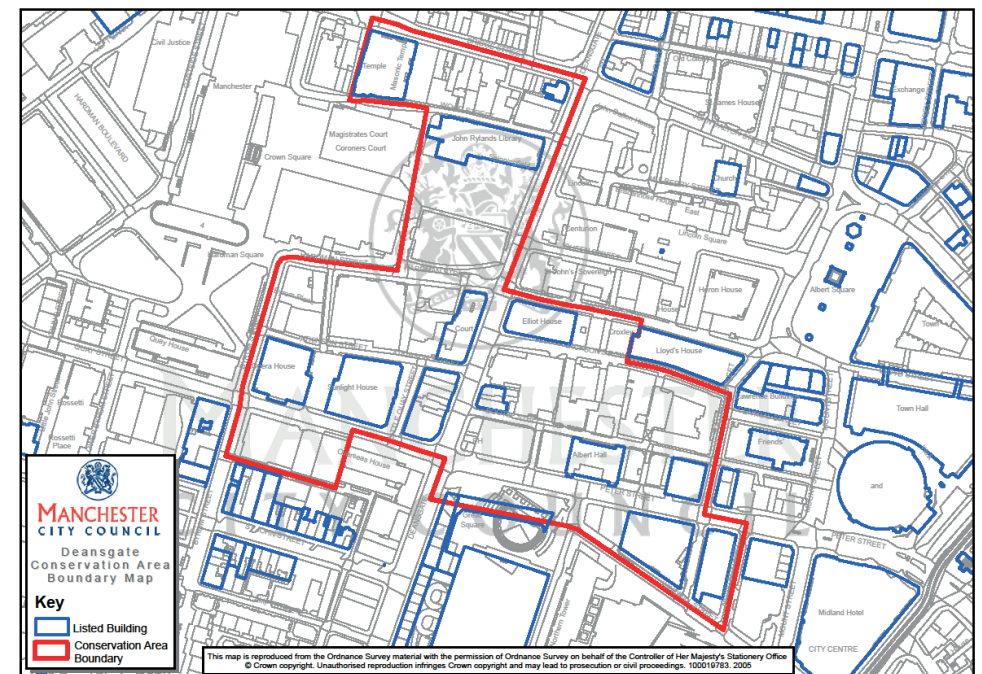
Throughout its history, the venue has adapted to the world around it. The Opera House survived the Second World War and even served as a cinema and bingo hall for some time. It wasn't until 1984 that the venue would once again operate as a theatre. Since this time, the theatre has played host to several famous shows, including Phantom of the Opera, Bar-nu-m and Oliver.

In 2003, the venue was refurbished and still continues to attract some of the best in entertainment.

The Manchester Opera House has a very large auditorium with two cantilevered balconies, each with a capacity of around 500, but because of their size they have rather restricted sight-lines to the rear. The Theatre's current capacity is 1,920. The Theatre was bought by the Ambassador Theatre Group in November 2009

The Manchester Opera House features a 15 bay facade and was designed in the Classical style. A relief of a horse-drawn carriage is situated above the central bays. An entrance canopy was added during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The opera house features a seating capacity of 1,920. Two cantilevered, curved balconies inside of the auditorium hold 500 seats each. The spacious stage and orchestra pit makes the theatre a great venue for musicals and orchestral performances. The theatre's stage is 37 feet wide and 42 feet deep, and the orchestra pit can hold up to 80 musicians. Although the theatre was redecorated in March of 2011, the green and gold colour scheme inside of the auditorium was preserved.



The Opera house is situated on the edge of the Deansgate conservation area.

## MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE

## 2.1 HERITAGE - Significance

### Significance

Construction as described in the listing, is of a classical style, the front block of three storeys with Attic 1:1:11:1:1 bays symmetrical, the first and last bays set back with plinth, banded rusticated stucco to all levels; giant order to first and second floors consisting of a five bay centre with engaged fluted ionic columns.

The first and fifth bays breaking forwards and each containing lettered pedestal at the foot and mask roundel at the top, flanked by three pilastered bay each side, these and the three centre bays having windows at the top with geometric glazing. There is an entablature with frieze letter "THE PLAY MIRRORS LIFE" in the centre and decorated in Wedgewood style in the other bays, dentilled cornice carried round and surmounted in the centre by a large semi-circular tympanum with allegorical relief.

There is a pedimental gable with moulded cornice on the brackets. At street level there is a five bay entrance at ground floor with canopy. The left side of the elevation is less ornate however the entablature extends to this elevation at the second floor level, forming the eaves detailing through without the Wedgewood styling. The plinth extends along the left elevation. The left elevation is divided into three bays with the first and last of banded stucco appearance, the central bay is mostly facing brick.

The inside of the theatre also holds much significance. The large auditorium has two very deep, slightly curved cantilevered balconies of approximately 500 seats each, which overhang to an excessive degree, evidence, perhaps, of the architect's unfamiliarity with theatre design, producing poor sight-lines at the rear and a feeling of oppressiveness.

The space between the balcony fronts and the stage is architecturally impressive. It displays an assured handling of Neo-Classical motifs. Flanking each side is a stack of superimposed boxes between pairs of giant fluted Corinthian columns. The upper boxes are a later insertion, following the removal of heavily-draped canopies over the dress-circle

### MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE



Photograph 1

The theatre is ingeniously planned to take maximum advantage of the site, with the stalls below street level and the main entrance foyer formed within the void of the first balcony - the rear wall of the auditorium thus forming the wall of the street façade.

### Architectural Significance

The Theatre once held a significant position on Quay St with land to the West of the site largely vacant affording better views of the front corner and side of the theatre from this approach. The photo opposite shows the vacant plot opposite to the West of the theatre.

Some sketches of the proposed Theatre, originally to be called His Majesty's Theatre, were published in the Academy Architecture and Architectural review of 1912, both long standing publications.

There is a consistent design to the windows within the primary front elevation of the theatre overlooking quay street. The windows are casement style windows with a cross detail formed by glazing bars. These decorative windows are in contrast to the Byrom Street elevation where plain sash windows are located. The inside of the windows have a decorative bead detail whilst the external frames are simple square section. The decoration

## 2.1 HERITAGE - Significance

hints that the upper areas may once have been accessible to the public although the historic plans of the building do not support this.

The principal and most decorative elevation of the theatre fronts on to Quay Street and is largely unchanged from the original building save for a new link extension to the right hand side forming an access onto the main road and housing a bar area above.

Internally the plan of the building again stays true to the original although uses of spaces has been adapted in some areas and decoration has been added and updated over the years, perhaps most significantly in the entrance foyer.

Historic photos of the building show that the main façade remains largely unchanged.

Some of the windows to the frontage have been altered particularly on the front West corner of the façade. The original decorative lights set above the canopy have also now been removed.

The Byrom Street elevation is more utilitarian in its appearance with decorative render reserved for the ground floor section only. Windows are simple non decorative sashes and walls above ground floor are finished with facing brick.

### Historical Significance

The ERA reported on the opening of the New Theatre in their 4th of January 1913 edition saying:- 'After tremendous efforts to keep faith with its undertaking to open on Boxing Day, the New Theatre, Quay-street, Manchester, duly threw open its doors to the public for a matinee performance of "Kismet."

The reporting of the opening of a Manchester Theatre in the National publication shows the prominence of the building at the time of opening.

## MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE



Photograph 2—Historic photograph



Photograph 3—Current façade (Google Street View)

## **2.2 HERITAGE - Development**

### **Brief Summary of Architectural development**

#### **1912**

The Opera House on Quay Street, Manchester was designed by Farquharson, Richardson & Gill and originally opened as the 'New Theatre' with a production of 'Kismet' on Boxing Day, the 26th of December 1912.

#### **1915**

The Theatre was renamed the New Queen's Theatre in 1915, as an homage to the former Queen's Theatres on Spring Gardens and Bridge Street.

#### **1931**

In 1931 the Theatre was bought by Howard & Wyndham Ltd, led by A. Stewart Cruikshank from its headquarters in the King's Theatre, Edinburgh.

#### **1979**

The Theatre was Manchester's main Touring House until 1979 when it closed and was converted for Bingo use but this lasted for only five years and in 1984 it was bought by the Palace Theatre Trust. During the 80's a large scale refurbishment of the Opera House was undertaken and some of the windows to the front elevation are believed to have been replaced during this time.

### **MANCHESTER OPERA HOUSE**

## 2.3 HERITAGE - Listing Information.

HARVARD HOUSE

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1247470

Date first listed: 03-Oct-1974

Statutory Address: THE OPERA HOUSE, QUAY STREET

Location

Statutory Address:

THE OPERA HOUSE, QUAY STREET

District: Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

National Grid Reference: SJ 83414 98041

Details

MANCHESTER

SJ8398 QUAY STREET 698-1/16/348 (North side) 03/10/74 The Opera House

GV II

Formerly known as: The New Theatre QUAY STREET. Theatre, now opera house. 1912, by Richardson and Gill with Farquarson; altered. Stucco on brick, slate roof. Rectangular plan at right-angles to street. Classical style. Front block of 3 storeys with attic, 1:1:11:1:1 bays, symmetrical, the first and last bays set back; with plinth, banded rusticated stucco to all levels; giant order to 1st and 2nd floors, consisting of a 5-bay centre with engaged fluted Ionic columns, the 1st and 5th bays breaking forwards and each containing a lettered pedestal at the foot and a mask roundel at the top, flanked by 3 pilastered bays each side, these and the 3 centre bays having windows at the top with geometric glazing; entablature with frieze lettered "THE PLAY MIRRORS LIFE" in the centre and decorated in Wedgwood style in the other bays, dentilled cornice carried round and surmounted in the centre by a large semi-circular tympanum with allegorical relief; pedimental gable with moulded cornice on brackets. Five-bay wide entrance at ground floor, with later C20 canopy.

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### 3.0 HISTORIC SIGNAGE

Reviewing historical photographs of the Quay Street elevations of The Opera House, it is evident signage has existed in some form throughout the life of the building since its construction.

Photograph 2 which appears earlier in this document shows signage at the main entrance of the building. With no show signage on the canopy or above.

Later photographs show that the first poster signs to street level outside of the main entrance area were installed at some time between opening and April 1956, although it is difficult to ascertain from the photographs whether these were lit. V-shaped signage was also installed above the canopy by this time. Although no show signage appears on the upstand of the canopy itself, there is an 'Opera House' sign which is likely a later addition following the change of name to the building. The canopy itself also has a different appearance compared to older photographs, suggesting replacement at some point in time before this photograph was taken. This means that the current canopy is unlikely to be original, or it has had much of its historic fabric replaced.

1988 photographs of the façade show further developments to the signage to the Quay Street elevation. It appears by this point that signage had been located in current positions. By this time show signage was added to the canopy upstand along with additional poster signs along the whole of the façade at street level, these appear to be un-lit compared to the V-shaped sign and the canopy signage which are both illuminated.

Once again in the photograph it appears that the canopy itself had been changed from the 1956 photograph suggesting further replacement or that it had undergone large alterations. This puts into question how much of the existing canopy is historic fabric as opposed to more recent additions/ alterations.



Photograph 4—Historic photograph 1956 (Arthur Lloyd)



Photograph 5—Historic photograph 1988 (Arthur Lloyd)

### 3.0 HISTORIC SIGNAGE

As it exists today the signage to the Quay Street elevation show little change to the 1988 photographs in terms of positions, with the exception of additional poster signs underneath the canopy around the entrances. These are however in similar positions to show posters that were evident on the earliest photographs of the building.

The signage on top of and to the face of the canopy remain a similar size to the 1988 arrangements.

The poster signs at street level are now all light-box type signs with in-built backlighting. This is as compared to the, possibly unlit signs in 1988. This is evident in photograph 7 opposite.



Photograph 6—current façade (google street view)



Photograph 7—current façade at night (manchesterhistory.net)

## 5.0 PROPOSALS

The proposed works will involve the removal of the front sections of the existing two fascia signs on the Quay Street elevation.

The existing signs are at 'end of life', hence the need for them to be replaced.

The signs will be replaced one a like-for-like basis. The new signs will be the same size with the same level of illumination. The only proposed change is the background colour. The proposal is for colour to match the detail on the facade of the building (see image).

The existing backtray will be retained and the new signs installed onto those existing back trays. Therefore, there will be no new drilling or fixings into the facade of the building.

### Sign 1

Aluminium tray sign 9250 x 480 x 50mm, powder coated, with built-up aluminum LED illuminated letters mounted on the face, 4500 x 370 x 50mm.

### Sign 2

Aluminium tray sign 8960 x 480 x 50mm, powder coated, with built-up aluminum LED illuminated letters mounted on the face, 4500 x 370 x 50mm.



*Photograph Existing painted feature*

## 6.0 HERITAGE IMPACT

It is anticipated that the proposed removal and replacement with new signage will have a positive overall impact on the historic fabric of the building, and no detrimental impact on the building as a whole.

The signs to be replaced are NOT original and have no significant historical importance.

## 7.0 ACCESS

The replacement of the existing signage itself has no impact upon access and use of the building day to day, however carrying out the works will mean the use of a scaffold and blocking off areas of the pavement to facilitate the works.

