MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Planning

Growth & Development

Delegated officer report for planning application

Application no.	143788/FO/2025
Date registered valid:	21 August 2025
Proposal:	Installation of netting to the exercise yards
Address:	HMP Manchester, Southall Street, Manchester, M3 1JL
Ward(s):	Cheetham Ward
Applicant:	Jo Lewington, Ministry of Justice
Agent (if any):	Mrs Claire Walker, Cushman & Wakefield
Case officer:	Steven McCoombe Tel: 0161 234 4607 Email: steven.mccoombe@manchester.gov.uk
Recommendation:	Approve
Date of recommendation:	3 October 2025

Application details

Type of application: Full Application Consent

Development type: Minor Other

Date of site visit: 5 September 2025

Standard consultations:
No consultations have been printed and sent.

Neighbour notifications
No neighbour notifications have been printed and sent.

Site notice
Posted: 5 September 2025 Expired: 26 September 2025

Press advert
Published: 9 September 2025 Expired: 30 September 2025

Departure from Development Plan: No

Environmental Statement: Not required

Description of site/building

The application site relates to HMP Strangeways - a large brick built Victorian prison built circa 1868, which is Grade II listed. The building incorporates a panoptic layout and is bounded by Sherborne St to the north, Empire St to the east, Southall St to the south and Great Ducie St to the west. Adjoining the prison to the west is a single storey visitor's centre comprising a heptagonal building of a more recent architectural design. The prison was designed by Alfred Waterhouse – a prominent architect of his time and is dominated by a 71-metre-high ventilation tower. The prison comprises two main sections. The lower prison is of radial design with wings extending from a central rotunda. The upper prison is of a cruciform design, also with a central rotunda.

The site in this case specifically involves the exercise yards adjoining the main prison blocks.

Listed building: Grade II

Conservation area: No

Tree Preservation Order: No

Description of area

With the exception of the prison complex, the site is situated within the 'warehouse district' which is largely characterised by large warehouse buildings, cash and carry businesses, light industry and sporadic residential uses. The city centre is situated a short distance to the south.

Background

An Inspection report by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons published in January 20251 identified physical security as a priority concern at the prison, with physical weaknesses allowing large quantities of drugs, weapons and other illicit items to be delivered by drones or by being thrown over the wall.

An Urgent Notification was issued for HMP Manchester ahead of the report being published, which concluded that action was required to "reduce the supply of drugs and other illicit items which were so clearly undermining every aspect of prison life, particularly safety".

A review has been undertaken to identify and assess options for different physical mitigation measures that would prevent access by drones and improve prisoner, staff and public safety. The netting proposed under this application is the first of these measures to come forward.

Description of development

Planning permission is sought for the installation of netting to prevent drone deliveries. The proposed netting spans across all eight exercise yards, extending from just below the eaves of each building elevation to poles positioned around the perimeter of each yard. Poles would be installed both within the yards (where necessary) and along their boundaries. Internal poles would reach up to 6.5 metres in height to help distribute the netting's load, while perimeter poles would be attached to the existing yard fencing, raising the netting approximately 2.5 metres above the current razor wire.

The netting would be secured to the building's brickwork using anchor plate fixings spaced no more than 10 metres apart, with intermediate guide fixings installed at intervals of up to 1 metre. A plastic anchor and stainless-steel split pin are proposed for these fixings. To preserve the architectural detail, all fixing points will be deliberately placed below the dental brick feature on the elevation. The netting itself is to be made of 28mm matte black fire-retardant polythene.

The application is accompanied by an application for Listed Building Consent (Ref: 143789/FO/2025) which has been submitted in tandem.

Consultations & Notification Responses

Local residents/occupiers - No representations received.

Policy

The below policy and guidance is relevant to the consideration of this application:

-Policies DM1, EN3 and SP1 of the Manchester Core Strategy; -
-Saved policy DC19.1 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester;
-Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan – Policies JP-P1 and JP-P2;
-National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – Sections, 3, 4 and 16.

Issues

Principle

The proposed works are considered essential to allow for necessary upgrades in direct response to the findings of the most recent inspection report of the prison. These upgrades aim to enhance security measures, specifically to deter and prevent the entry of illicit items into the prison. The development aligns with the overarching objective of safeguarding public safety, as supported by Policies DM1 and SP1 of the Core Strategy and Policy JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone framework. Furthermore, it is consistent with national guidance outlined in paragraphs 101–102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which emphasises the importance of modernising public infrastructure and addressing broader security needs by reducing vulnerability, strengthening resilience, and ensuring the safety and security of the public. Planning decisions should therefore acknowledge and support development that is necessary for operational security purposes.

While it is recognised that the proposed works would result in a degree of harm to the heritage significance of the host Listed Building, this impact is considered to be fully reversible. The harm is outweighed by the substantial public safety benefits, including the creation of a safer working environment for staff and the reinforcement of standards appropriate for a high-security prison. These considerations reflect a balanced and proportionate approach to heritage conservation in the context of pressing operational and security requirements.

Heritage Impact

S.66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that: 'In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses'.

Policy EN3 of the Core Strategy refers to the need for the consideration to be given to the impact of new developments on heritage assets, whilst saved Policy DC19.1 of the UDP seeks to preserve and enhance listed buildings and specifically states that listed building consent will not be granted for external or internal alterations or additions to a listed building, were in its opinion, there would be an adverse effect on its architectural or historic character.

Policy J2-P2 of the Places for Everyone makes reference to the need for development proposals affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets and/or their settings to be considered having regard to national planning policy.

Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at Paragraph 208 that in determining applications:

'Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Paragraph 214 advises further that:

‘Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use’.

Paragraph 215 goes on to state that:

‘Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use’.

Paragraph 216 state that:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset’

In this case, proposed netting is functional by design, however wherever possible consideration has been had to reducing its’ impact in visual terms, including the siting of the anchor plate fixings below the dental brick detail and a condition which requires the fixing plates to be painted black to minimise the visual harm, as opposed to a galvanised finish current proposed.

The application is accompanied by Heritage Statement which concludes that the significance of the heritage asset would be preserved. particularly as the original, historic and continuing function is as a prison, with the minor changes to the historic fabric considered to result in no harm. It is further considered that the significant public benefits of the proposed netting in reducing opportunities for crime, reducing fear of crime and the improvements to public safety more generally, are considered to outweigh any adverse design and heritage impacts.

The City Council considers however that that as the proposal would introduce significant levels of netting across all of the yarded areas, there would be cumulative impact on the Grade II Listed heritage asset. The combination of high-level netting, multiple fixings, increased height of fencing and the new supporting poles would obscure the facade of each of the wing elevations and would also impact their setting. Whilst it would be transparent, it would result in the effect of a veil effect over the facade. This would negatively affect the aesthetic heritage value of the original design. There would be further a visual impact caused by multiple plate fixings to the brickwork which could cause physical damage to original historic fabric.

Nevertheless, there is a compelling case for the installation as it would bring clear public benefits to public safety, which in this case are considered to outweigh the heritage impact which in this case are considered less than substantial.

On this basis the proposal is considered acceptable and the impact to the heritage significance of the Listed building and its setting can be sustained.

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 polices 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

Article 35 Declaration

Officers have worked with the applicant / agent in a positive and proactive manner to guide the application through all stages of the planning process and resolve any issues that arose in dealing with the planning application.

Condition(s) to be attached to decision for approval OR Reasons for recommendation to refuse

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 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings and documents:

16xxx 01.A3 (Site Location Plan), 16xxx 12.A1 (Proposed Site Plan), 16xxx 13.A0 (Proposed 3D ISO), 16xxx 14.A0 (Proposed Yard 1, Plan and Elevations), 6xxx 15.A0 (Proposed Yard 2, Plan), 16xxx 16.A0 (Proposed Yard 2, Elevations), 16xxx 17.A0 (Proposed Yard 3, Plan and Elevations), 16xxx 18.A0 (Proposed Yard 4, Plan and Elevations), 16xxx 19.A0 (Proposed Yard 5, Plan and Elevations), 16xxx 20.A0 (Proposed Yard 6, Plan and Elevations), 16xxx 21.A0

(Proposed Yard 7, Plan and Elevations), 16xxx 22.A0 (Proposed Yard 8, Plan and Elevations), 16361-CHA-XX-ZZ-SK-S-0001-R03 (Fixing Details), Hog Rings specification, Pro Netbolt Detail and Ecolab Netting Specification (including physical netting samples), received by the City Council as Local Planning Authority on 21 August 2025 and 2 October 2025 respectively.

Reason - To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans, pursuant to policies SP1, EN3 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy, saved policy DC19 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester, policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Appendix 1 – List of consultees & neighbours notified

Appendix 2 – Planning constraints

Article 4 Direction - City Centre PD Restriction - Class B1(c) To C3
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
Flood Zones Type 2 (low to medium risk) -
Flood Zones Type 3 (high risk) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Less) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Middle) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (More) -
Area Team Boundary - Name: NORTH AREA