



Emailed to: angela.leckie@manchester.gov.uk

29/07/2025

Dear Angela Leckie,

Site: Albert Bridge House, Bridge Street, Manchester, M3 5AH

Ref: 143164/FO/2025

The Twentieth Century Society is the National Amenity Society charged with the protection and appreciation of post-1914 heritage. We have been made aware of the above planning application which is for a mixed-use development and seeks to demolish the Albert Bridge House (ABH) complex in Manchester.

The Society objects to this application on the basis that the proposal involves the total loss of the building complex which we consider to be a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). The loss of the four buildings which make up the ABH complex would constitute substantial and unjustified harm in both architectural heritage and environmental terms. We believe that the application fails to provide adequate justification for this harm, as it does not adequately explore possibilities for its retention and retrofit.

We objected to a previous application on this site (135834/FO/2022) in 2022. This received a Resolution to Grant consent in 2023. The updated scheme fails to address the concerns we raised previously about losing ABH.

Background

Albert Bridge House was built in 1959 to house various government departments and is an example of official architecture in the early post-war years. It was designed by the Ministry of Works (MOW), the government's in-house architects.

The site on the banks of the River Irwell had previously been industrial in use. Following extensive bombing during the Second World War, a new vision for the area was created as part of Manchester's post-war reconstruction. The site, which had been designated for buildings of a major cultural or civic character in the Manchester Development Plan, sits opposite the courts. These were built in the early 1950s as a focal point of this new civic area in the west of the city centre.

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Spread across four buildings, Albert Bridge House is dominated by a central 18 storey office tower which was built first, and the three lower blocks were added in the second phase of construction two years after the tower. The complex was designed E H Banks, Senior Architect for the Ministry of Works, under the supervision of the MOW's Chief Architect Eric Bedford.

The central tower is the focal point of the complex, and its design was afforded care and attention in order that it had a comfortable relationship with the distinctive character of the surrounding area and nearby historic buildings, despite its tall height. The facades are clad in Portland stone which functioned as permanent shuttering for the concrete walls behind, meaning that the tower was constructed relatively quickly. Similar Portland stone cladding can also be found on the neighbouring Manchester Hall and Crown Court. The end walls feature a small recess between cladding panels to create a textured relief that resembles rustication. The end walls and stairwells feature small, framed, square windows that offer a contrast to the regular rhythm of the glazing on the main facades. The top floor of the tower features an open parapet facing east. The design of the tower facades was approved by the Royal Fine Art Commission. It is a confident and successful example of a hybrid architectural style that balances modernity with traditional civic respectability. The lower three-storey building facing the river was designed with a distinctive curving roof canopy.

In a survey of architectural development across Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester written in 1960 and published in *The Architectural Review*, the renowned critic Ian Nairn described ABH as one of only two 'decent big buildings' to be built across all three cities in the 15 years since the war, the other being the Ringway Centre in Birmingham. Although the ABH complex was turned down for listing in 2021, Historic England still noted the architectural merit and historical interest of the site, as 'part of Manchester's post-war regeneration.' Thus, the complex remains of value, not as a listed building, but as an NDHA that adds considerably to the character of Manchester.

Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) states at **Paragraph 203** that:

'Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. This strategy should take into account opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.'

And at **Paragraph 216**:

'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.'

The Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-2025, sets out seven key areas for urgent action in order to meet carbon and climate change objectives. Two of these key areas focus on existing buildings, and notes the pressing need to retrofit existing buildings. One of the key aims in the

Framework is to: *'To adapt the city's buildings, infrastructure and natural environment to the changing climate and to increase the climate resilience of our residents and organisations.'*

The Framework also states: *'We need to ensure that new developments in the city don't eat into our limited carbon budgets and add to the already significant retrofit challenge.'*

The Society's Assessment

The proposed demolition of the ABH complex, which we consider to be an NDHA, would constitute substantial and unjustified harm in both architectural heritage and environmental terms. We believe that the application fails to provide adequate justification for this harm, as it does not adequately explore possibilities for its retention and retrofit. The total demolition of the ABH complex represents the loss of an irreplaceable asset, and one which has not been shown to be structurally unsound and appears in generally good condition.

We believe that there is significant scope for the retention of the ABH complex and that it could be creatively and sensitively retrofitted. Although this option is briefly explored in the Design and Access Statement, it is dismissed.

The ABH complex site adjoins or is in proximity to Conservation Areas to the south and east - the Deansgate Conservation Area and the Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area. Although it does not fall within a conservation area, it is visible from multiple heritage assets and its demolition would impact the historic environment and character of this area of Manchester.

In summary, for the reasons outlined above, the C20 Society, objects to the application due to the harm caused to a non-designated heritage asset and we encourage the local authority to refuse the application and ask that the applicants further explore a retention and retrofit option.

We hope that these comments are of use to you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if the scheme is amended or if you require further advice. We would be grateful if the Society could be informed of your decision on this application.

Yours sincerely,



Head of Casework

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Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in the *Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications – Notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2021*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.