Advice to the local planning authority

Advice to the local planning authority (LPA) from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as a statutory consultee for developments that include a relevant building.

To LPA	Manchester City Council
LPA planning ref no	142652/FO/2025
Our ref	25-0348
Site address	Chorlton Square Shopping Centre Barlow Moor Road Manchester M21 9AQ
Proposal description	Erection of 6 no. residential buildings of 10, 8, 6 and 4 storeys in height to provide up to 262 residential dwellings (Use Class C3) with ground floor commercial uses (Use Class E (a-e)); infrastructure works including electric substation and associated utilities works, basement and ground level car parking, service yard, vehicular and pedestrian accesses; together with public realm works and hard/soft landscaping following the demolition of the existing buildings and structures on site.
Date on fire statement	31/03/2025
Date consultation received	20/06/2025
Date response sent	04/07/2025

1. Substantive response for the local planning authority

Thank you for consulting HSE about this application.

Headline response from HSE
Headline Response from HSE **'content'**

Scope of consultation

1.1. The above consultation relates to the erection of a new residential development comprised of 262 residential apartments in six residential blocks, including the following relevant buildings:

- Block A: 10 storeys (ground and 9) and one basement storey, comprising residential flats on all floor levels, with associated ancillary accommodation

including, plant rooms, bin store, store room and entrance/amenity accommodation at ground floor level, with a height to top floor level of 29.3m.

- Block B: 8 storeys (ground and 7) and one basement storey, comprising residential flats on all floors above ground, with associated ancillary accommodation including, riser room, bin store, cycle store and entrance lobby at ground floor level, with a height to top floor level of 23.2m.

- Block C: 7 storeys (ground and 6) and one basement storey, comprising residential flats on all floor levels, with associated ancillary accommodation including, plant rooms, store rooms, bin store, cycle store and entrance lobby at ground floor level, with a height to top floor level of 20.1m.

1.2. It is understood that:
- a communal podium garden links residential blocks A, B and C at level 01, where access is provided from each of the residential blocks;
- a common corridor links blocks A and B at floor levels 01 to 07; and
- a car park links blocks A, B and C at basement and ground floor level.

1.3. Five commercial units will be included within the development (relevant buildings), Units 2A, 2B and 2C at ground floor level of block A, and Units 3A and 3B at ground level of Block B. All units are provided with imperforate separation from the residential accommodation.

1.4. It is understood that blocks D, E and F, are not relevant buildings. However, it is noted that these buildings, with heights below 18m and being of 6 storeys or less, are located within the curtilage of relevant buildings. Therefore, HSE has considered these buildings as part of its assessment.

1.5. Section 6(e) of the fire statement confirms that ancillary accommodation has been designed using British Standard 9999 ('BS9999'), and the residential accommodation has been designed using British Standard 9991:2024 ('BS9991'). HSE has assessed the application accordingly.

1.6. It is also stated in section 4 of the fire statement that: "*It is understood that no formal consultations with any approving authorities have been carried out for this scheme. However, where this is any deviation from BS 9991:2024, fire engineering justification is proposed to demonstrate the suitability of the current design to meet the functional requirements of Building Regulation*." This is noted.

Current consultation

1.7. Following a review of the information provided in the planning application, HSE is content with the fire safety design as set out in the project description, to the extent it affects land use planning considerations. However, HSE has identified some matters that the applicant should try to address, in advance of later regulatory stages.

2. Supplementary information

The following information does not contribute to HSE's substantive response and should not be used for the purposes of decision making by the local planning authority.

Means of escape – extended travel distances

2.1. Section 8 of the fire statement states: "*The internal layout of Block A/B results in there being a travel distance in single direction over 15m for occupants reaching storey exits. The maximum travel distance in a single direction is c.29.m. It is therefore intended to demonstrate that the common corridor will remain tenable for mobility impaired occupants by means of a MSVS. The performance of the MSVS is to be demonstrated as suitable by CFD modelling at a later stage*."

2.2. It is therefore noted that computational fluid dynamics (CFD) analysis has not yet been undertaken, such that it has informed the development design presented to the LPA.

2.3. Design changes, as a result of a supplementary analysis regime, may affect land use planning considerations relating to the layout of the development. It will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages and seek advice from the LPA as necessary.

Means of escape – evacuation lifts

2.4. Section 8 of the fire statement states: "*Block C has a floor level over 18m from the external ground level. As such, it has two escape stairs as per the recommendations of BS 9991:2024. However, only the firefighting shaft is afforded with an evacuation lift. The other escape stair at the other extreme end of the corridor doesn't have an evacuation lift. A solution will be provided at a later stage to demonstrate that mobility impaired occupants are provided with a level of safety which is in accordance with the functional requirements set out by the Building Regulations (2010)*."

2.5. Notations on the general arrangements plan for the ground floor, drawing number 104-FCBS-ZZ-ZZ-DR-A-0601-P01 states: "*An additional evacuation lift is to be provided to Block C, or the building will be reduced so that the top floor is less than 18m from the ground. This will be developed in the later stage of the design and will not lead to land use matters*."

2.6. It is therefore noted that confirmation about the proposed evacuation lift to block C has not yet been finalised, such that it has informed the development design presented to the LPA.

2.7. HSE would disagree with the applicant's statement quoted in paragraph 2.5 above. The inclusion of an evacuation lift is likely to affect land use planning considerations such as the layout and configuration of storeys, and the space available for dwellings.

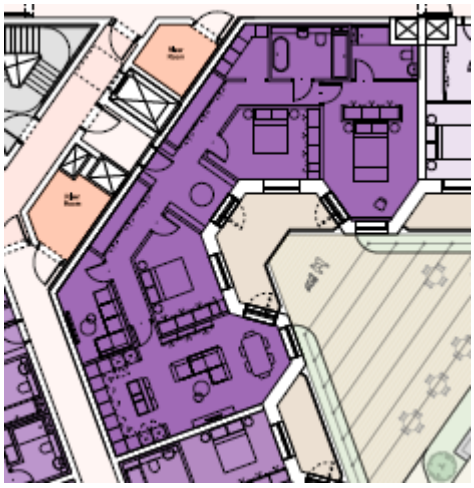
2.8. The reduction in height by one storey level would also affect land use planning matters relating to the appearance of the building and the number of dwellings in the development.

2.9. The applicant should seek the advice of the LPA about the materiality of the design options described before pursuing this as a strategy.

Means of escape in apartments

2.10. It is noted that flat entrance hallways in flats designed as 3 person flats located in block A, adjacent the podium garden, are larger in size than those in other flat types. Initial

measurements of the entrance hallways, suggests a floor area of around 24m^2 and in excess of 11m^2 stated in the cited fire safety standard.



2.11. Clause 5.2 of BS9991:2024 states: "*An entrance hall, lobby or corridor within a dwelling should be treated as an access room if it is greater than 11 m^2 in area, or if there is a reasonably foreseeable fire risk*".

2.12. It should be considered that where the entrance hall is treated as an access room, an inner, inner room scenario is created from the balcony.

2.13. For clarity, it is noted that the balconies span both the lounge, bedroom and entrance hallway of the flats, access to the balcony is provided from both rooms and the entrance hall. The applicant should consider that it is unlikely that all doors to the balcony from the lounge/kitchen, bedroom and hallway will be unlocked simultaneously, therefore, a secondary means of escape cannot be achieved should the balcony be accessed from the bedroom or lounge/kitchen. Therefore, escape from the balcony, in order to achieve reasonable safety in the common corridor, is via two access rooms, the bedroom and entrance hallway, or the lounge/kitchen and entrance hallway.

2.14. Annex E3 of BS9991:2024 states: "*The escape route from the balcony or terrace (open or enclosed) should not pass through more than one access room*".

2.15. Design changes in this instance, comprising internal alterations only, are unlikely to affect land use planning and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Means of escape – podium terrace

2.16. Block A and B plans show a podium garden at Level 01. An amenity area is illustrated with access to the podium via two adjacent doors. The internal layout of the amenity area is not shown and it is also unclear how the amenity area is accessed via the common corridor of block A.

2.17. Block C plans show access to the podium garden via a protected corridor. It is not clear if residents of blocks A/B and C will be afforded access to the adjacent block.

2.18. Initial measurements of the travel distance from the podium garden to each residential block suggest travel distances are excessive. Annex E of BS9991:2024 states: "*Balconies, terraces and roof gardens that are used as a common amenity and have a travel distance exceeding 18 m should have an alternative escape route. The travel distance for the alternative escape route should be not greater than 45m*.

Single-direction escape routes from a terrace should be into either:
a) a protected stairway; or
b) a protected corridor meeting the recommendations for travel distance given in Clause 7, measured from the door of the terrace to a stair enclosure."

2.19. Design changes, to address this matter, are unlikely to affect land use planning. It will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Penthouse flats

2.20. It is noted that two penthouse flats located at Level 07 of block B, are large and initial measurements of their footprint suggest a floor area of around 200m^2 . Clause 8.5 of BS9991:2024 states: "*NOTE 1 Open-plan flats larger than 16 m × 12 m are outside the scope of this British Standard*."

2.21. No information relating to the design analysis of penthouse flats has been provided by the applicant, such that it has informed the development design presented to the LPA. However, it is stated in section 4 of the fire statement that: "…*where this is any deviation from BS 9991:2024, fire engineering justification is proposed to demonstrate the suitability of the current design to meet the functional requirements of Building Regulation*".

2.22. It is also noted that the entrance hallway is illustrated as a habitable room, a seating/lounge area is present, and a room located off the kitchen has an illustration of a bed. Therefore, an inner, inner room situation is present in the flats design. Escape from this bedroom would be via the kitchen and a seating/lounge area in order to reach a place of reasonable safety in the common corridor. The balconies serving two bedrooms and the kitchen would also be classed as inner, inner rooms.

2.23. Care should be taken when designing open plan flat arrangements, it will be for the applicant to demonstrate that the means of escape is capable of being safely and effectively used at all material times.

2.24. The applicant should note that if the assessment/analysis of an engineered approach does not support the design, then this may affect land use planning considerations, and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages and seek advice from the LPA about the materiality of any consequential changes.

Basement separation – stairways

2.25. Section 8 of the fire statement states: "*It is proposed for the two firefighting stairs and lifts serving Blocks A/B to continue down to basement level with no separation at ground floor. One is proposed to have 120-minute fire resisting with a similar level fire door (FD120S) separating the basement storey section of the stair at ground level*."

2.26. This is noted. However, particular care must be taken in the design of basement access. If a fire occurs at basement level there is a risk that, because fires in basements burn intensely and allow the build-up of smoke and heat, access routes to ground level tend to act like a chimney. Operations to fight fires in the basement would require both lobby and stair doors to be propped open by hose, therefore it remains to be seen how the proposal will ensure smoke will not enter the firefighting stairways, effecting means of escape.

2.27. It is considered that the proposal shows a lower level of safety than that of the cited fire safety standard. Clause 11.1 of BS9991:2024 states: "*Where there is more than one common stair from an upper storey or part thereof, at least one such stair serving the upper storeys (or parts thereof) should terminate at ground level.*
Any other stair connecting with the basement storey(s) should be separated from each basement level by a protected lobby."

2.28. Design changes, comprising internal alterations, are unlikely to affect land use planning. It will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

External separation of openings between dwellings

2.29. Section 7 of the fire statement states: "*Many apartments have external walls that are less than 135° with one and other. As per the recommendations of Clause 23.2 of BS 9991:2024, these will be protected by no less than 1000mm of fire resisting construction*." This is noted and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Smoke ventilation system – car park

2.30. Section 7 of the fire statement states: "*The car park is covered and spans between the basement and ground. The ground level is covered by a podium deck on the 1st floor. The car park will be provided with a mechanical heat and smoke clearance system OR a combined natural and mechanical ventilation in accordance with BS 7346-7. The suitability and specification requirements of the system is to be demonstrated by CFD modelling at a later stage*."

2.31. It is therefore noted that confirmation about the proposed smoke ventilation system has not yet been completed, such that it has informed the development design presented to the LPA.

2.32. It is noted that the applicant intends to conduct 'Computational Fluid Dynamics' (CFD) analysis to demonstrate the suitability and specification requirements of the proposed system. The applicant is advised that should CFD modelling demonstrate that the design is not acceptable, consequential design changes are likely to affect land use planning considerations and may require further HSE consultation.

2.33. Where active performance-based solutions are proposed, guidance requires a 'what if' study to assess the consequence of issues such as system failures.

2.34. It will be for the applicant to demonstrate that the means of escape is capable of being safely and effectively used at all material times, including during firefighting operations, and that an equivalent level of fire safety to that of code compliance is provided.

Fire curtains

2.35. Section 8 of the fire statement states: "*There are various ancillary accommodation accessed directly from the evacuation lift lobbies at ground levels of all Blocks A, B and C. It is intended to provide a fire/smoke curtain to the evacuation lift lobby access from the ancillary accommodation side. This is to create full fire and smoke separation between the evacuation lift lobby and ancillary accommodation. Such fire/smoke curtain is to be provided with a manual override button for the Fire Service*."

2.36. It is also noted that the general arrangements plan for the ground floor, drawing number 104-FCBS-ZZ-ZZ-DR-A-0601-P01 states two options that could be employed to address matters, stated in 2.17 above. The notations on the plan states: "*Entrance lobby to be free from a fire load, or the lift lobby entrance should be protected by a fire/smoke curtain as shown*." The LPA may wish to clarify this matter with the applicant.

2.37. It should be considered that when performance-based solutions are proposed, e.g. use of fire curtains and mechanical smoke ventilation, an assessment of "what if" events, made to identify system failures or foreseeable events that might have a significant influence on the outcome of the study, would provide explanatory information to support the planning application.

2.38. The applicant should note that if the assessment/analysis does not support the design, then this may affect land use planning considerations, and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages and seek advice from the LPA about the materiality of any consequential changes.

Photovoltaic panels (PV)

2.39. Plan drawings illustrating roof levels show the proposed installation of photovoltaic panels (PV panels). Where the roof top installation of PV panels is proposed, it should be noted that fire safety standards require suitable support of cabling to avoid obstruction of escape routes and firefighting access due to the failure of fixings and consideration should be given to ensure that all power supplies, electrical wiring and control equipment is provided with appropriate levels of protection against fire.

Green roofs – podium garden

2.40. Plan drawings illustrate a podium garden located at Level 01 of blocks A, B and C.

2.41. The external envelope of a building should not provide a medium for undue fire spread. A green roof may constitute a fire hazard as it requires a regular management and maintenance regime. Where green roofs are proposed the roof construction will need to provide sufficient fire resistance to prevent fire spread to any adjoining wall(s). This document Fire Performance of Green Roofs and Walls (publishing.service.gov.uk) will provide guidance on the fire performance aspects of green roof and wall construction and maintenance.

2.42. It will be for the applicant to establish that the proposed green/planted roof is viable in relation to fire safety and to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Hydrants

2.43. It is noted the response to the question on the fire statement, section 13, about the reliance on the use of existing hydrants and whether they are currently usable / operable is given as "*don't know*". Whilst the response "don't know" is a valid response on the form, in circumstances such as this, the state of the existing hydrants should be checked with the water authority. Without knowing their operability, the proposal might be relying on a disused water main or faulty hydrant. Resolving this issue is unlikely to affect land use planning and it will be for the applicant to demonstrate compliance at later regulatory stages.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]
Fire Safety Information Assessor

Guidance on Planning Gateway One is available on the Planning Portal: Planning and fire safety - Planning Portal.

This response does not provide advice on any of the following:

- **matters that are or will be subject to Building Regulations regardless of whether such matters have been provided as part of the application**
- **matters related to planning applications around major hazard sites, licensed explosive sites and pipelines**
- **applications for hazardous substances consent**
- **London Plan policy compliance**