

Subdivision Justification for Planning Application: 143519/FO/2025

Location: Rear Part Ground Floor, Hope Mill, 113 Pollard Street, Manchester M4 7JA

Applicant: Hope Mill Partnership Llp, 5th Floor Hope Mill, 113 Pollard Street, Manchester M4 7JA

Introduction

Over the previous 20 years Hope Mill has been transformed from a semi-derelict, partly occupied light industrial building, into one of the largest independent centres for the arts and creative industries in Manchester. Current tenants include, amongst others, Comme Ca Art Gallery, Ajoto Design Studios, Hope Mill Recording Studios and Mindful Acting. The largest occupiers are AWOL Studios, which has almost half the floorspace, and the award winning Hope Mill Theatre, based at the front part of the ground floor.

The recent vacating of the rear part of the ground floor provides the perfect opportunity for AWOL Studios and Hope Mill Theatre to capitalise on their success and provide further valuable space for the arts in Manchester.

Hope Mill Theatre Community Space

NEED: Hope Mill Theatre is operating at capacity. When community activities started to build in 2020, our theatre took a lease on space in an adjacent building, allowing programmes to overflow next door. In 23/24, financial pressures meant HMT had to give up this space: since then we have hired rooms locally as needed for community activities e.g. Hope Mill Theatre School (c. 60 children and young people aged 2 – 18) meets in a nearby school. This is far from ideal. Community participants and theatre school students love to be physically part of the daily life of HMT, with the many opportunities this brings for developing new skills, contributing to our wider programmes, and forming new friendships.

BENEFITS: Developing the new creative and community space in this area directly adjoining our theatre/café area will benefit our Hope Mill Theatre community in many ways. Existing participants – c. 200 attendees each year attending our community choir, community orchestra, playreading group and theatre school (many from neighbouring areas of severe disadvantage where access to culture/the arts was previously scarce) will enjoy creative activities in high-quality, properly equipped spaces, where their skills and talents can flourish. This is particularly important for theatre school students, for whom HMT plays a vital part in creating inclusive, accessible pathways into creative careers (up to 50% of students attend free of charge, on full bursaries, where local families are unable to afford fees). Receiving training from industry professionals, in a venue shared with working professional crews and artists, makes all the difference in building aspirators and confidence for these young people: this year, 4 students are applying for vocational/further education training in the performing arts and 72% of students have reported increased confidence, largely thanks to their experiences of presenting live performances on our stage, with professional support.

The new spaces will also allow us to expand our offer for local people. In response to requests from parents/guardians and young people themselves (more than 1 in 4 young people attending theatre school have SEN or a disability), we plan to introduce additional weekly creative activities for young people with SEN, including neurodivergence. There is also interest among older, local LGBTQ+ residents in regular shared activities close to home: there is no local provision of this kind. These new activities will not be possible without additional space on site: the sense of safety/belonging that participants value so highly in our venue is an important part

of the offer, and even more important for groups such as these. New activities planned for the space, including a programme of vocational training planned for Autumn 2026, will create substantial new freelance work opportunities for industry professionals over the coming years.

More generally, the extra space will improve access and working conditions, by creating an accessible toilet/dressing room and improved staffroom facilities for staff, artists, freelancers and volunteers.

By enabling HMT to strengthen its offer in this way, the extra space will help to ensure we remain valued and meaningful for our community of audiences, participants, creative professionals and volunteers, continuing to expand our reach and impact in line with our charitable objectives.

AWOL Studios Extra Studios

Comprising of 83 studios, workshops and offices spread over 4 floors at Hope Mill, AWOL operates at 100% capacity and has a waiting list of well over 100 people.

Since opening in Hope Mill in 2005 with an initial 26 studios, AWOL has gone from strength to strength and is now home to a host of creatives including fine artists, photographers, filmmakers, jewellers, fashion designers, printers, upcyclers, publishers and art teachers. Our philosophy is very simple; we're here to accommodate and support creatives from all backgrounds, no matter what discipline, practice or level of experience.

Studios range in size from 12m² to 85m² and all are secure and warm and make the most of the natural symmetry and light of Hope Mill. Each studio is self-contained with high, vaulted ceilings, 2m high windows, central heating, smoke detectors and sprinklers and everyone has access to free WiFi service. We try to keep things as simple and affordable as possible for our creatives, with all studios licenced on a rolling monthly basis with prices starting at £155 per calendar month fully inclusive of all bills and utilities and with 24 hour access 7 days a week.

The success and reputation of AWOL has led to approximately 20 enquiries for space each month and our huge waiting list which we are unable to service due to the lack of space. It has also allowed AWOL to support the arts by fully funding the £3,000 prize for the AWOL Studios/Comme Ca Art Open Call competition held each May, hosting our annual Open Studios event and showcasing our artists by taking a stand at The Manchester Contemporary Art Fair.

Justification For Subdivision

Hope Mill Theatre and AWOL have been an outstanding success and both need space to grow and enhance their offerings to the creative and artistic communities of Manchester.

The very nature of Hope Mill Theatre's and AWOL's business models calls for individual units as set out in our plans. Artists in particular require a private and secure area for their work, much of which is confidential and personal. The theatre's community work involves workshops, classes and rehearsals for children, especially those from marginalised or vulnerable groups where a safe space is essential.

Though it is necessary to subdivide the floor, the reinstatement of windows and opening up of the bricked up door will help to restore the mill's original form. The removal of redundant conduit, electrical trays and suspended strip lighting will also help to give the floor a more open feel.

Whilst in recent years the area has lost valuable creative hubs like Crusader and Brunswick Mills to residential development, Hope Mill Partnership are proud to support the arts by offering an affordable home to Manchester's creative community. We are fully behind the plans.

(It should be noted that the existing floor is not fully open-plan as it is already divided into 3 sections with further subdivisions for offices, entrance foyer, kitchen and toilet.)