

24th February 2025

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Dear Mr Griffin,

Former Co-operative Department Store and above vacant office units, Wythenshawe Civic Centre, The Birtles, M22 5RF (ref PP: 13670193); Change of Use application from Use Class E to F1.

We refer to the above site and the application in respect of a change of use planning application including associated elevation and internal changes to the existing building to create a new Culture Hub. The application is submitted via the Planning Portal ref PP-13670193. This application is made on behalf of Manchester City Council's (MCC) Development & Investment Estate Service. The fee of £648 (including planning portal service charge) has been paid internally to Manchester City Council.

Introduction

The site comprises the first and second floor of the former Co-operative Department Store/Select in Wythenshawe Town Centre, south Manchester. The building, along with the wider Civic shopping centre were acquired by Manchester City Council in 2022. Whilst the change of use will apply to the first and second floor of the building, along with some elevational changes, the ground floor comprises a retail unit and this use is being retained; the ground floor is therefore not included within this change of use application. Existing images of the building can be seen in Appendix 1.

The site location plan, and wider geographical context of the site are shown below in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1: Site location plan (Source: Architectural Emporium).



Figure 2: Site context, site = red outline (Source: Google maps).

The first and second floor of the building comprise office space, which is currently vacant, with a total of 2,916 sq.m gross internal area, which has been vacant for an extended period.

Part of the building will be retained as creative studios covering 608sq.m on the first floor, which has a total max occupancy of 149 people and the potential for 20-30 studio stations.

Wythenshawe Town Centre is the recipient of £20m of Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) funding, providing an opportunity to transform the 1960's shopping centre and surrounding areas. This funding is being complemented by other significant capital investment by MCC and its joint venture partner, Muse Places, who also being invested into the town centre which is likely to leverage over £500m of investment over the next 10 years.

The regeneration plans include a new public square on the Birtles/Hale Top, refreshed contemporary shops and carbon commercial units, new community, cultural spaces and new food and beverage units. This will be framed around 1,750 new homes that will be built across the town centre, offering a mix of tenures and typologies that will offer residents high quality new housing and allow the town centre to grow and reinvent itself. The new homes will be delivered over a ten-year period.

Wythenshawe's position in the delivery of housing and economic growth was subsequently re-imagined, in the Wythenshawe Town Centre Development Framework (July 2022), with public consultation taking place between October-November 2022.

This application follows the first phase of the project, which includes the demolition of the former Peacocks store to facilitate the new and improved public realm area that will sit at the key nodal point of Birtles and Hale Top.

Proposed change of use

The description of development includes the following:

“Change of use of first and second floor from Use Class E to F1 (Community Facility) together with associated elevational alterations.”

This application is to amend the current use class of the vacant office space (E(g)(iii)) to a ‘Culture Hub’ (F1) which will also include the ground floor retail unit (current retail use to be retained). The Culture Hub will include the following elements:

- 3x ‘Community Rooms’ i.e. exhibition space, workshop;
- 2x Communal Workshops (First floor);
- Flexible Performance Space with 232-tiered seating (Second floor);
- Large Classroom and rehearsal room;
- Atrium and Foyer (first floor);
- 4x Meeting rooms (across First and Second floor);
- Management Office (First floor);
- Faith room (First floor);
- Kitchen/ dining room (First floor);
- Cycle store (First floor); and
- 4x WCs (across First and Second floor).

In addition to the internal changes, the proposed development will also include external changes aimed at improving the shop frontage, façade and access to the development. These external changes include:

- The removal of the canopy to form a new double height opening;
- The refurbishment of the canopy where retained;
- The removal of front elevations and creating of more glass glazing;
- Replacement windows at upper floors; and
- Installation of Photovoltaic panels and service plant on the roof.

All waste will continue to be deposited at the rear of the building and the current bin store will be improved to accommodate extended facilities should they be required. The operator will be responsible for the management, access and collection of their waste and will be required to take out a private commercial waste contract.

Change of Use Requirement

The site, along with a large number of similar properties within the Civic Centre, comprises vacant office space on the first and second floor with majority of the ground floor retail units currently in use, including Costa, Select, JD Sports, Superdrug and NW Jewellers.

As described in the 2022 Wythenshawe Town Centre Development Framework, there is an opportunity within Wythenshawe to capitalise on the vacant and under-utilised sites, to provide

diverse and high-quality amenities within the Centre and strengthen key connections and improve public realm, to regenerate Wythenshawe into a more diverse and desirable location.

With this in mind, there is a clear argument therefore, that the change of use of vacant office space (E(g)(iii)) to a 'Culture Hub' (F1) should be considered positively.

The proposed development is in line with MCC's Cultural Ambition (Always, Everywhere: Manchester's Cultural Ambition 2024 to 2034), which sets out Manchester's strategic direction over the ten- year period to enhance the culture within the city. Particularly, the development will aid in fulfilling the third pillar of the strategy, '*everywhere*', by providing spaces and places where culture can happen through integrating it into major urban renewal programmes and utilising the city's underutilised assets.

Additionally, MCC prepared a Feasibility Study in 2024 on delivering a new neighbourhood 'Cultural Hub' within Wythenshawe Civic Centre. The response from the public emphasised the importance of creative and cultural development of young people within Wythenshawe. The feasibility clearly demonstrated demand for Creative and Cultural spaces, particularly artist spaces, maker spaces and rehearsal spaces across Manchester, including Wythenshawe. The need for these types of spaces is emphasised through the lack of current spaces for local bands, theatre groups, amateur drama groups, visual artists and dance groups to practice and make work. Furthermore, the demographic is significantly younger and diverse within a 10km radius from the proposed development compared to the wider Northwest area which highlights the relevance and suitability of a culture hub to reflect the needs and diversity of the area. The feasibility study emphasised significant positive feedback from the public engagement process.

Further to pre-application discussions on the 22nd November 2024 with MCC and key officers covering the Wythenshawe area, the submitted drawings and technical reports have been agreed as part of these consultations. Consultation with officers has been undertaken through to February 2025.

- Drawings and elevations, prepared by Architectural Emporium:

Drawing	Reference	Date
Site Location Plan	45848-AE-01-00-D-A-0001-S3-P02	27/02/2025
Existing Ground Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-00-D-A-0100-S3-P03	27/02/2025
Existing First Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-01-D-A-0101-S3-P03	27/02/2025
Existing Second Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-02-D-A-0102-S3-P04	27/02/2025
Existing Roof Plan	45848-AE-01-RF-D-A-0103-S3-P04	27/02/2025
Existing Elevation (Birtles)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-0200-S3-P03	27/02/2025
Existing Elevation (Hale Top)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-0201-S3-P02	27/02/2025
Existing Elevation (Rear)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-0202-S0-P03	27/02/2025
Existing Elevation (Side)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-0203-S0-P02	27/02/2025
Proposed Ground Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-00-D-A-3100-S3-P08	27/02/2025
Proposed First Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-01-D-A-3101-S3-P08	27/02/2025
Proposed Second Floor Plan	45848-AE-01-02-D-A-3102-S3-P08	27/02/2025
Proposed Roof plan	45848-AE-01-RF-D-A-3103-S3-P05	27/02/2025
Proposed Elevation (Birtles)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-3200-S3-P05	27/02/2025
Proposed Elevation (Hale Top)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-3201-S3-P05	27/02/2025

Proposed Elevation (Rear)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-3202-S3-P05	27/02/2025
Proposed Elevation (Side)	45848-AE-01-XX-D-A-3203-S3-P02	27/02/2025

- Design and Access Statement prepared by Architecture Emporium;
- Completed forms and notifications;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal produced by TEP;
- Ecological Desk Study by TEP;
- Economic Impact Statement by LSH;
- Transport Note and Servicing Note prepared by Mode;
- Noise Impact Assessment prepared by MZA Acoustics;
- Waste Management Strategy and Proforma;
- Crime Impact Assessment prepared by GMP; and
- Sustainability Report by TACE.

This application forms part of a first stage of wider regeneration works that will seek to transform the town centre environment, in line with Policy C7 (Wythenshawe District Centres – Baguley (West Wythenshawe), Northenden and Wythenshawe Town Centre) of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012-2027), which confirms that:

There is capacity for a substantial quantity of additional retail development within Wythenshawe, and further retail and commercial development will be supported in Wythenshawe Town Centre. The Council will also support the development of non-food retail and other commercial uses in Wythenshawe, and new development should focus on creating a strong sense of place. Residential will be appropriate in Wythenshawe Town Centre as part of mixed-use schemes, most likely beyond the retail and commercial core.

This change of use is an early-stage enabler to facilitate wider re-investment in the town centre. This accords with the wider Wythenshawe Town Centre Development Framework and is therefore in line with Policy C7 of the Manchester Core Strategy. This will facilitate the start of an improved retail, culture, and commercial offering in the town centre.

As identified in other key technical reports, the proposal also fully sits with the Core Strategy, the NPPF and the Council's Culture Ambition Strategy.

Summary of Technical Reports

The Design and Access Statement confirms that design concepts, layout and appearances of the proposed development are appropriate and that all aspects of access to, from and within the building have been fully considered, which fully accords with Policy EC1 of the Core Strategy.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal confirms that there is very limited ecology on the site and within the property, there is no evidence of protected species present on the property, given the urban setting the ecological value of the site is negligible. The change of use is not eligible for biodiversity net gain as there is no increase in floorspace as set out under Paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Note that the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal encompasses details that extend beyond the area of the site.

The Ecological Desk Study confirms that neither the study site nor the adjacent land is allocated for biodiversity purposes within the Manchester Local Plan Development Framework and no protected or notable species were recorded from the past 10 years. Additionally, no notable habitats were identified on or within 250m of the study site. Note that the study site in the Ecological Desk Study encompasses details that extend beyond the proposed development site.

The submitted Economic Impact Assessment confirms that the proposal will lead to a net increase in job creation of 98 FTE from the Cultural Hub. Given the high level of retail and office vacancy around Wythenshawe Town Centre, the upper floors are no longer viable for economic office uses. Thus, the proposal will diversify Wythenshawe Town Centre which will positively contribute towards its vitality and viability in the long term. The proposal fully conforms with Policies SP1, EC1, EC2, CP7 and EC10 of the Core Strategy and Policy JP-P3 of Place for Everyone as the culture hub will provide mixed employment provision in an existing district centre, and the Council's own Culture Ambition (2024-2034).

The Transport and Servicing Note confirms that the site is accessible by a range of sustainable modes of transport which accords with local and national policy. The proposed development will not have a "severe" impact on the local highway network, which accords with the threshold stated in the NPPF (Paragraph 116). Therefore, the proposed development accords with Policy T1 of the Core Strategy by relieving traffic congestion and improving access to jobs and services.

The Noise Impact Assessment confirms that there is no significant threat in relation to noise pollution from the proposed development. The nearest noise sensitive receptor was identified to be located 180m north of the site and the noise emission limit during both daytime and nighttime is below the background sound level. Thus, cumulative plant noise emission limits have been determined to be in accordance with the guidance from Manchester City Council. The results from the Assessment accords with Manchester City Council's Planning and Noise Technical Guidance (2022) as the development achieves a rating level of 5dB (L_{Aeq}) below the typical background (L_{A90}) level at the nearest noise sensitive location.

The Crime Impact Assessment (CIS) prepared by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) confirms that the proposed development presents no significant issues from a crime prevention perspective when assessed against the principle of 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' (CPTED). Additionally, the development displays positive features that would make a positive contribution to the prevention and fear of crime, which therefore accords with Policy DM1 and Policy EC1 of the Core Strategy.

The Sustainability Report confirms that a sustainable approach has been taken to help reduce the building's carbon footprint and possible energy saving. The design parameters used within the building analysis is in line with the building regulations Part L approved document. The strategy for the proposed development follows the principles of the Energy Hierarchy, which accords with Policy EN4 of the Core Strategy.

Consultation

The Council procured a feasibility and initial design to RIBA 1 study, involving significant public consultation, as well as consultation with the cultural sector within Greater Manchester. The principles of the culture hub have been agreed, and the Council is currently looking for a tenant to

operate the culture hub. An operator will be identified in early 2025; more detail will be provided in the subsequent planning application for this facility.

We trust that the Council can promptly validate and determine this change of use application to facilitate the wider ambitions of the Culture Hub of MCC investing in the town centre and the local community. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact myself or my colleague Melanie (mchan@lsh.co.uk).

Yours Sincerely,



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Appendix 1- Existing Photos of the site

