

Great Northern Warehouse, Manchester – Staircase Removals

21 February 2025

Introduction

The proposed development of Great Northern Warehouse includes for the conversion of the first floor of Deansgate terrace into office accommodation. A number of existing ground floor retail units along Deansgate terrace benefit from vertical circulation to the first floor via a small staircase. The proposal is for these staircases to be removed as and when a unit become vacant to facilitate lettings ahead of the future development works. As a temporary measure access hatch the first floor void are to be constructed within the ceiling of the ground floor units.

The subject works are limited to the following units:

- Unit 237-239
- Unit 243
- Unit 241
- Unit 247
- Unit 249
- Unit 283

This document is set out to outline the considerations that are to be made for the safe procedure of accessing the ceiling access hatches using a ladder for inspections, maintenance, or other required tasks. If the access hatch is positioned directly above or in the vicinity of a staircase leading from the ground floor to a lower ground/basement level, additional precautions will be required, including the potential use of a crash deck.

Responsibilities

- Site Supervisor: Ensure compliance with safety protocols and oversee operations.
- Operatives: Adhere to this method statement and use equipment safely.
- Safety Officer: Conduct risk assessments and ensure hazard controls are in place.

Required Equipment

- Industrial-grade ladder
- Ladder stabilizers or non-slip feet
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Hard hat, safety boots, high-visibility vest, gloves
- Tool belt (to avoid carrying tools by hand)
- Task lighting (if required)
- Crash deck system (if required due to location over staircase)
- Temporary guardrails or fall protection measures (where necessary)

Risk Considerations & Control Measures

General Risks Associated with Ceiling Access via Ladder

- Falls from height: Potential risk of falling when ascending or descending the ladder.
- Falling objects: Tools, materials, or loose ceiling elements may pose a risk to personnel below.
- Overreaching: Leaning too far from the ladder can cause imbalance and falls.
- Inadequate lighting: Poor visibility can increase the risk of accidents.

Additional Risks Where the Access Hatch is Located Above or Near a Staircase

- Risk of falling down the staircase while working at height.
- Increased severity of injury if a fall occurs due to the extended drop.
- Limited ladder placement due to staircase geometry.
- Restricted access for operatives and difficulty in ensuring three points of contact.

Risk Mitigation Measures for Ceiling Hatches Above in the Vicinity Staircases

- Detailed Risk Assessment: A site-specific risk assessment must be carried out before work commences.
- Use of a Crash Deck System: Where the access hatch is located directly above or near a staircase, a crash deck system should be considered over the stairs to prevent falls and protect workers below.
- Alternative Access Methods: If ladder access is deemed unsafe, alternative methods such as a scaffold tower or mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) should be considered.
- Fall Protection Systems: If a crash deck is not feasible, temporary guardrails or personal fall arrest systems (harnesses and lanyards) should be used.
- Signage and Area Control: The staircase should be cordoned off with clear warning signs to prevent unauthorized access while work is in progress.

Safe Work Procedure

Pre-Use Checks & Preparation

- Conduct a detailed risk assessment, considering the location of the access hatch and staircase.
- Install a crash deck over the staircase if required, ensuring it meets weight and safety regulations.
- Inspect the ladder for damage or defects before use.
- Ensure adequate lighting in the work area and staircase.
- Clear and cordon off the work area below to prevent unauthorized personnel from entering.

Ladder Positioning & Setup

- Position the ladder on a stable, level surface away from the staircase where possible.
- If the ladder must be placed near the staircase, ensure the crash deck or fall protection measures are in place.
- Secure the ladder with stabilizers, a second person footing the ladder, or additional securing mechanisms if required.
- Extend the ladder at least 1 meter above the access hatch for safe handholds.

Safe Climbing & Hatch Access

- Maintain three points of contact while climbing (two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand).
- Use a tool belt or hoist system to transport tools—never carry them in your hands.
- Open the ceiling hatch slowly and secure it to prevent it from falling unexpectedly.
- If necessary, use a temporary support system to keep the hatch open safely.
- Ensure sufficient task lighting is in place before stepping into the ceiling space.

Working at Height & Descending Safely

- Do not overreach while working—descend and reposition the ladder if needed.
- Ensure the crash deck (if installed) is in place before stepping onto or near the staircase.
- When descending, maintain three points of contact and face the ladder.
- Close the access hatch securely after completing the task.
- Remove the ladder and clear all safety equipment from the work area.

Emergency Procedures

- In case of a fall, follow site emergency response protocols and seek medical assistance immediately.
- If an unstable access situation arises, halt work immediately and consult the supervisor for alternative access solutions.
- Report any damaged or defective equipment to the site manager.

Additional Considerations

- If work is prolonged, consider using a scaffold tower or MEWP instead of a ladder.
- Avoid lone working—always have a second person present for safety.
- Ensure all personnel are trained in working at height and familiar with emergency procedures.